

A Meditation on Our Faith

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Jesus Christ revealed to us that in the one God there are three divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For this reason God is called the Trinity.

How are we to understand the Trinity? For instance, how is it that there is more than one person in God, but still only one true God?

We might begin to understand God a little better if we think about love; for we often say that God is love. So let's think about his for a moment.

We will start by thinking about human love and work our way up to God's love.

The Nature of Love

While we know that we can and should love ourselves, we also know that our love is meant to be given. Deep down we know that Love means giving oneself as a gift to another person.

Human persons have a great capacity for giving and receiving this love. We don't want our love to be just a momentary feeling either; we want it to become visible, tangible, lasting, and always more real. It is good that we have such desires.

Persons do not disappear in the midst of real love; the opposite happens: when we give ourselves in love, we become *more ourselves*. When we love, we become more alive, and we realize more truly the meaning of our lives.

The human family helps to illustrate this important point. When a child is conceived, the man continues to be a man, but now he expresses in a deeper way what it means to be a man: he is now a father. So too, the woman expresses more deeply what it means to be a woman: she is a mother now, as well.

Love causes us to *realize* and come to *be our own selves* in deeper ways: when love becomes more visible, tangible, mature, lasting and real, so do we.

Of course, something else happens as well. Where there was no person before, there is now the new life of the child. So real love tends also to be fruitful.

Love brings fresh encounters with others, encounters that are in some way fruitful; the conception of a new child is an especially *revealing* example of love's fruitfulness. But you can probably think of many other ways love reveals its fruitfulness.

Three Persons in One God

Now think about our original question: why is there more than one person in God?

Answer: because God is love, and where there is love, there tends to be others. Love involves more than one person, and this is eternally true of God.

When we speak of God, the word *persons* is actually as important as the word *love*. In God there are certain personal relationships of love that are eternal.

So we know that there is more than one person in God because God is love. But why are there three persons in God? Why not just two?

The answer is that real love between persons is never isolated from others. It tends to be fruitful. In a way, this is what the Holy Spirit represents: the fruitfulness of the Father and Son's.

Just as the bond of love between the man and the woman bears the fruit of a child; so too the bond of love between the Father and the Son brings about in an eternal way the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a child; He is an eternal person who proceeds from the bond of love between the Father and the Son.

The oneness of the Father and the Son is so real and true that it is *in itself* another divine person. While another person is added to God here, he does not detract from God's oneness; he actually expresses it.

So these three persons do not detract from the oneness of God, they are the dynamic expression of that oneness.

We must admit that human persons cannot attain intimacy of God's love. There are limits to how close human beings can get to one another.

In God's love, however, there is no limit to the intimacy of the divine persons; there is no limit to the unity and oneness of the divine persons, no limit to the oneness that is the very nature of God.\

God is three persons, and they are each fully God; but to an infinite degree, God is also one. So we say there is one God.

They are so close that in a very profound way, these divine persons actually dwell within one another. **God is three, God is also dynamically one.**

The Trinity is the ultimate mystery. By mystery we don't mean a puzzle to be solved, or something that makes no sense. We mean something in which there is always more to discover, always more to experience; we mean something whose meaning can never be exhausted.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most important mystery of our Faith. We teach it this way: there are three persons in the one God; they are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Now, you don't have to totally understand a mystery like this, but it is very good when we notice that it makes its own kind of sense.

One way to do this is to get a sense of how beautiful the Truth about God really is, and how much it corresponds to what we most deeply desire and need.

What we most deeply desire is a love which is intimate, fruitful, and lasting, and one which presents itself to us without any conditions. We also want to be awakened considerably by this love, so as to take up the cause of this love, bringing it into our relations with others. We want this love to be woven deeply into our lives. We want the occasions of our lives to be enlarged and intensified by this Love.

We could never provide such love for ourselves, but we do long for it, and we do have the capacity to receive it. *We have the capacity to receive infinite love.*

Yes, we desire quite a lot, but God created us this way, and it is God the Trinity, who corresponds with our huge desires. God is the kind of Love we long for, and God's plan is to fulfill our deepest desires and include us in His life of Love.

This is the truth about the Trinity, our God, and nothing is more worthy of our contemplation. Such contemplation can change us completely.

The Trinity and Baptism

But how do we receive such a lasting love?

God communicates this Love to us. God's communication of his life and Love to us is called Grace.

This communication begins at Baptism. When we are baptized, we are welcomed into the life of real love, the life of the Trinity. Baptism is the way we enter into and begin to celebrate this eternal life and love.

A person is only baptized once in their life because the effects of baptism are lasting. The effects of this kind of love are lasting. But this doesn't mean we automatically notice this love or automatically feel compelled to act lovingly all the time.

An exchange of love is never automatic: it calls for a decision.

We are called to recognize the life of love that we were given at baptism, to go deeper into this love, and to decide on it again and again.

We are called to express, without conditions, this love to God and to others.

But most of all, we are invited to *believe* in such love. Really responding to Love means having faith in it.

Do we allow ourselves to believe and have faith in God's unconditional love. The love we were given at our baptism?

Do we allow ourselves to believe in it in a mature and decisive way?

When we lack faith, this is the time to pray for it. The Spirit of God is allowed to move at the deepest levels of our being when we pray; this where God reveals himself the most, this is where He can change us.

God longs to give us the gift of faith, but we must give Him permission to change us.

Jesus' Baptism

It is interesting to note that at Jesus' baptism we see in a very beautiful way, the life and love of the Trinity.

On the day of his baptism, just about Jesus' head, there appeared the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. So too, the Father manifested himself just above the dove, when clouds were suddenly parted, and a voice declared, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Thus, the Father and the Spirit were revealed to us at the baptism of the Son.

The Creeds

Early Christians tried to express their belief in the life and love they received during baptism, and their hope in eternal life. Their expressions of belief were called Creeds.

When we pray one of the Creeds, we too are expressing our belief in and gratitude for God's gift of eternal love.

The most well known and important Creeds are the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

These Creeds tell us something about the Trinity and about us. They tell us of God's plan for infinite love to enter our world and **reveal** itself to us; they tell us of God's plan to live with us and be with us.

Revelation

We have used the word **reveal** enough times in this document. We ought to define it since it is important.

We believe that our God is a **revealing** God. **Revelation** is the fact that God makes himself know, and gives himself to us. He communicates himself in creation, in history, in Scripture, and in the Tradition; but most of all he reveals himself in the life of his Son. God reveals himself to us in order to call us to a relationship with him. **Faith** is an affirmative response to God's call.

Salvation History

The story of God revealing himself to us and inviting us to share a life of love with him, and our response of faith is called **Salvation History**; this is the story of God's call and our response.

There is a great high point to this story.

Infinite love entered so deeply into our human history that, in the *fullness of time*, something quite surprising happened: *God became a human being*.

By becoming one of us, like us in all things except sin; by making our lives, our history and our destiny a part of his own life, part of his own story, in this way, God saved us.

This is the great and unique claim of Christianity.

This is the Truth! This is the truth about God and about human beings, and this is the meaning of history itself, God became human, and this human being is the meaning of history, he is the Lord of History. God the Son became a human being in Jesus Christ.

The more we realize the truth of this claim, the more serene we become, and the more are filled with wonder.

So let's take a look. What follows is a brief account of what God has revealed about himself and us, how he became one of us and saved us, what our purpose is in this world, and how our destiny is an eternal life of Love with God.

We will rely on the Nicene Creed to guide us.

1.

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty

The word creed comes from the Latin word Credo, which means ~~%believe+~~. Thus, it is appropriate that the Creed begins with, ~~%We believe+~~.

God is one. There are ~~n~~ many Gods, there is one God, and God is unity itself.

God is whole, he is complete in himself.

God is the Father in two senses:

First, according to his Son, God is ~~%Our Father+~~.

There is something like a family resemblance between God and human persons; there is a closeness or intimacy between God and human persons similar to the way family members are close; and the fact that God created us in his image expresses this closeness. In this sense we can call him ~~%Our Father+~~.

Second, God is the Father of his ~~%only Son+~~.

God is the Father of his Son in a much deeper way than he is Father of us. We are children of God because he created us in his image, but the Father and Son are united in a divine way.

Of course, we will see that by becoming one of us, the Son adopted us into his own relationship with the Father; as members of Christ's body, we actually partake of the love that the Father expresses to his divine Son.

God is the Almighty because he is all powerful; God used his freedom and power to express unconditional Love.

Two examples of this power and freedom in action are the *creation* of the universe and the *salvation* of human persons. Only some who is all-powerful could do these things.

2.

maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

God always existed, he is eternal. God was there before there was anything else.

When he created the universe, God created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). God didn't need any materials with which to make things. God himself is the ultimate resource, complete in himself. God is truly creative, he is truly the Creator.

God did not need creation. It wasn't necessary for him to make anything. God wasn't lonely (remember God is a Trinity of persons). Rather, God created out of pure love.

Creation is orderly

God created out of pure love.

Pure Love is not an accident, it is the result of a deep decision; and deep decisions reflect *order* not chaos.

Creation was not born from chaos; nor was creation an accident or a chance occurrence. God created *cosmos*, something harmonious, whole and beautiful. Creation expresses God's vision.

Creation is good

God created with Love. This means is that he created everything with a vision of completeness and wholeness in mind. Each thing he created contributes to that whole, helping to evoke the harmony that is there, helping to complete the whole picture. Thus, each and every thing he created, he created good.

What does it mean to say that everything is basically good? It means that everything and everyone has a place in the universe, a unique contribution to make in creation, in the web of life, and a unique way of expressing God's vision and plan.

Imago Dei

In human persons the impulse toward life is expressed with a new dignity and dynamism. The tendency towards order, goodness, and harmony that is found in all creation, is found to be expressed or *recapitulated* in the human person with a profound and unrivaled depth. The *crowning* of creation, God's masterpiece, therefore, is the human person.

There is more. Some of God's own qualities are reflected in our nature. We sense, with some trepidation, that in our depths, dwells the very life of God, and that each of us is capable of expressing his life to others.

Thus, the human person is the *Imago Dei* (Latin for image of God). This means we are a reflection of the very life of God (Genesis 1:26).

We make visible in a limited way, what the invisible and unlimited life of God is like. Thus we are the image of God.

In what ways are we like God? First, we are created with the ability to know right from wrong, and to choose what is right. The best action we can choose is to love without conditions; we know this and we have the freewill to do this. Thus, we have knowledge and freewill, two essential posers of the soul. Second, our souls are immortal, and God has in mind for us an eternal destiny.

The Value of the Human Person

We should recognize that each of us is an end to him or herself, and not a means for something else. Our value does not come from how useful we are. Our value comes not from what we do or what we have, but from *who we are*. We did not have to earn this value and dignity, we were created this way.

We were created, each of us, as a *unique* and unrepeatable image of God. Each of us has a unique response to make to God's invitation to a relationship of love. Therefore, no one can make that response for anyone else. God waits on this response from each of us. Thus, the value of each of us to God is measureless.

Finally, we each have an incomparable dignity and worth from the moment of conception, *from the moment we are capable of being loved*.

God made all that is seen and unseen. This means God created the visible universe . trees, mice, human beings, planets, stars, galaxies, etc. It also means that there are unseen creatures that exist, namely angels.

Angels are an unseen reality. Though angels have the power to appear in visible form, and they are persons, they are ultimately pure spirits, and do not possess actual bodies.

It is important to point out here that human persons are not and never will be angels. We are a different type of creature. The human person is created with a soul and a body. This soul/body unity is part of who we are, part of what makes us the unique creature that we are.

The Fall

Sin was brought into the world when the first couple abused their freedom. Because of this, our human natures have been wounded, and we are inclined to sin. We have inherited Original sin. **Original Sin** is not personal sin; it is the inclination to sin and the deprivation of God's grace, which has been passed on to us.

We need to be saved from Original sin and from the personal sin which follows from it. We cannot save ourselves.

3.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,

There is one center of unity, order, and meaning in our universe. This one center brings all things into harmony with one another. This one center is a person.

This person in himself is not part of creation, for he was never created, He always was, He is God. But He is also the God who entered our history, and saved us.

This person is God the Son.

God the Son is an eternal person who entered into time and history, He entered into our history, our story, and he went so deeply into our story, that *He made our story part of his own story.*

He made the story of sin and fallen humanity his own.

In this way, He gave the universe and the whole of history, *our history*, meaning and coherence *from within.*

In this way he is the center and source of all meaning. Thus, He is **Lord** of history and **Lord** of the cosmos.

When we call him %Lord+, we are indicating that this person is the center and meaning of *our* lives.

By %Lord+ we are also attesting to the fact that this person is God. Just as the Father is God, the Son is also God.

Now, we must try to do something. We must try to understand who God the Son is from all eternity, who he always was and will always be, before we can grasp the fact that he also became man in Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago. So let's pay careful attention to this.

Begotten no made

A special term is used to describe how the only Son of God exists; that term is %begotten+. This means he always existed, he always had a relationship with the Father as his %only Son+. He was not born, He was not created, but he was %begotten+ or *generated* from the Father's *own being*. And since the Father's being is infinite and eternal, the Son's existence and *being* is also infinite and eternal.

The Son received the *being* or nature of the Father, but not the personhood of the Father; he is a separate person.

All that is true of the Father . his power, his love, his eternity, his freedom . is true of the Son, except that the Son is a different person.

This is what eternal and divine love did: He **begat** another eternal and divine person.

The same eternal love that exists as the Father, *as the one who begets*, exists in a different way as the Son; it exists as the person *who is begotten*.

So, the mystery of the Son of God is not easy to grasp; it slips through our fingers a little.

Actually, it is more a matter of letting the mystery grab hold of us; allowing ourselves to be caught up in the adventure of love, allowing ourselves to see that there is a whole other horizon to our world, the horizon of total love.

We long for this deeper unity, we long to enter the mystery of total love.

The Nicene Creed is trying to capture some of this mystery, the mysterious relationship between the Father and the Son when it says:

**God from God, light from light,
true God from true God, begotten not made,
one in being with the Father,
through him all things were made.**

So, the Son came from the Father, has the same divine nature as the Father, but is a separate divine person.

He is also the word the Father spoke to create the universe.

4.

For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and become man.

This is what we mean about letting the mystery grab a hold of us rather than trying so hard to figure it out.

God actually came to us, **He came down from heaven.**

Why did God the Son become human?

Answer: to save us.

There were many moments where God reached out with his love towards human beings in order to save them. In the Old Testament God often delivers his people from trouble and calls them back to his love:

- saving Noah and his family from the flood;
- delivering his people from a terrible famine through Joseph;
- leading them from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land through Moses;
- bring them out of the Babylonian exile.

The history of Salvation includes many such moments.

Incarnation

The difference here is that God did not send an angel, or a priest, or a prophet, or a King; He sent himself.

We call this event the **Incarnation**, which literally means *%made in flesh+*. In order to take away our sin, and make us partakers of God's eternal life and love, God the Son was sent by God the Father to become fully human in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

So deeply does the Son enter into our history, that he is actually *%present+* in it more deeply than we are. He is *%present+* to us more deeply than we are to ourselves. He stands beside us and within us in the deepest possible way. We can actually say that part of Christ's identity is to be the deepest kind of **presence**. We can say he is **presence** itself.

Since He was born of the Virgin Mary, Mary is known as *Theotokos*, the **Mother of God**. The source of Jesus's humanity is Mary, but the *person* she gives birth to is a divine person.

Mary's **virginity** is part of the inner logic of the Incarnation. She is the one who is totally for God. God does not enter humanity without the assent of that humanity. She is the one who responds totally to God, so that God actually dwells within her.

5.

**For our sake
he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died and was buried.**

For our sake, meaning for our salvation. **Salvation** is God's delivering of us from sin, and uniting us to him and to others.

The Son of God's death on the Cross, as well as his *Incarnation*, both contribute to our salvation.

Jesus Christ

- 1) took our sins to the cross.
- 2) freely gave his life for us all.

So there are two consequences to Jesus' death on the Cross:

1. Jesus took our sins away.

The image of God which had been defaced and distorted by sin, was once again made visible and intelligible in us when Jesus took our sins. The way we were created, in the image of God, is made *recognizable* again from Jesus' saving death.

2. Jesus gave his life for us.

The gift of his life to us on the cross is a gift and an offer of eternal life for us all.

6.

On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the scripture.

The Resurrection is the crowning truth of our faith.

The Resurrection showed that Jesus conquered sin and death.

In the Resurrection, Jesus rose up and was alive in a new and transformed way. He rose in his divinity and his humanity. Resurrection is not resuscitation. In the Resurrection, Jesus' body was glorified and immortal.

Jesus' conquering of death reveals to us our own ultimate destiny. Just as Jesus' humanity came alive in a glorified and immortal way, our humanity will have a glorified and immortal destiny as well.

7.

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father

Jesus Christ entered into heaven with his humanity. This means his humanity, including his body, was brought into the eternal and infinite relationship of love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This *reveals* to us our destiny as well. We will follow Christ, as members of his body, and be brought into life of Trinitarian Love. *This life already has begun with our baptism*, and we are actually fed by his body and make it most visible when we partake of the Eucharist.

Paschal Mystery

From the sorrowful and brokenhearted mood of his Passion, to the stark reality of his Crucifixion, to the surprise of the Resurrection, to the glorious horizon of the Ascension: these moments express such a profound range of feelings and such a depth of human experience, a new and transcendent depth, that we are brought by these events into the vital center of our faith . into the heart of the Good News.

The Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ are meant to be taken together, for at a deeper level they are actually integrated and form a single mystery; it is called the **Paschal Mystery**.

The freeing of the human race from sin was accomplished by Christ principally through this **Paschal Mystery**.

Old Testament

The term **Paschal** is related to the Jewish feast of Passover. Passover recalls how the angel of death saw and **passed over** the doorposts of the Hebrew slaves because they were sprinkled with the lamb's blood. The Lamb's blood save the Hebrew slaves from death.

Eventually they would *pass over* the Red Sea. The feast of *Passover* celebrates the Hebrew people passing over from slavery into freedom.

New Testament

In the **Paschal Mystery**, Jesus **passes over** through his Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension to his Father.

Jesus is not just the one who passes over into resurrected life. He is also the Lamb whose blood allows other to *pass over* into new life.

He is the **Lamb of God** who takes away the sins of the world. His blood allows us to **pass over** from slavery to sin and death to the freedom of eternal life.

The Paschal Mystery and its saving effects are *made present* in all the sacraments of the Church, most especially the **Eucharist**.

8.

he will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Jesus Christ will come a second time. At this time, all creation will recognize his Lordship.

The General Judgment

On this day the Lord will judge all people, the living and the dead. The term we use to describe this event is the **general judgment**.

All people will be faced with the person who is Truth and Justice itself.

There is in our hearts a deep desire for perfect justice, for the reign of justice.

We long for that horizon where all the Truth comes out. This longing is like a seed in our hearts.

So too is the kingdom of God a seed waiting to blossom forth in the world. This will one day happen, and when it does, the whole of creation will be changed in an instant.

It sounds funny to say such a thing. But on some level we know the truth of this.

Sometimes we feel our own hearts could change in an instant; sometimes we long for this to happen.

All things will change when faced with the coming in the glory of Christ. Nothing could stay the same in the face of such an event. There will be a great dawning of Truth.

We should not suppress our desire for Christ's second coming. We should pray with this desire, *thy kingdom come*, and allow it to become part of our vision. The Father's kingdom will come with the second coming of Christ.

This kingdom of perfect justice, mercy and truth will be established in the end, and this kingdom will not end.

Some will experience this as a terrible judgment, others as a vindication. But once thing is for sure, evil will be defeated once and for all. And when Jesus comes again, there will be an end to suffering.

The Particular Judgment

There is also a **particular judgment**. This is different than the general judgment. Each person receives a *particular judgment*, this occurs after an individual dies.

We ourselves will, on the day we die, come face to face with the Lord; we will come face to face with the Risen One with the One who is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*.

We will come face to face with a person whose very nature is truth and love. Though we should not dread this moment, still, every day we come closer to this moment of truth, and we should be making ourselves ready for it.

In the end, the truth of our lives will come out. The particular meaning of each of our lives, what our life amounted to, will be revealed. *It will be revealed by the light of an eternal person.*

We will encounter a person whose very nature is infinite Love, and infinite Truth.

Do we believe that this love is real?

It is amazing what happens to us when we begin to suspect that this kind of love is real, and that there will be such a significant moment in our lives, such a moment of truth. It is amazing when we see that Truth and Love are the same mystery.

The point is that our actions, if they are to be measured at all, ought to be measured with this Love, and judged according to this Truth.

This is why we should be concerned with what we do and how we think. We have a great dignity. Human action matters. Our actions have an impact on who we are and who we become. Our actions have consequences; they affect our very being, and our destiny, and what our particular truth will be.

We actually determine with our decisions who we are and what our destiny will be.

The fact that we are created this way, with such dignity, is a sign of how much we are loved.

How we are judged will be a reflection of our decisions and our actions.

So how do we know if right now we are on the right track?

Even today I can come to hear Christ's judgment of my actions through the voice of my conscience+
(CCC 1777)

God shows us all the time what we should and shouldn't be doing, and if we are listening, he evokes from us a deep sense of mercy and justice. Every hour there are chances to give others the experience of God's justice and mercy and decide to act on the promptings of his grace. It calls for us to be listening to what is going on inside us, in our hearts.

By **heart**+, we mean not only our feelings, we mean the center of our souls, where the various powers of a person come together, the very center of our own unity.

God's Law is actually written on our hearts, inscribed in our nature. Deep down, we know right from wrong. This Law was revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and was preserved in Sacred Scripture and passed down from generation to generation. This Law has come to be called the **Ten Commandments**.

Our Lord actually connected the **Ten Commandments** to eternal life (Matthew 19:18).

We are called to keep these commandments in our hearts and let them inform our decisions and action. More than anything else, we should follow the Lord in all things.

Morality is responding faithfully to God's commandment to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as oneself.

9.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son**

The third person of the Trinity, the Holy **proceeds** or comes from the bond of love between the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit can be called %Lord+ because he is God.

The Holy Spirit is the %giver of life+, he is the %wah+ (Hebrew for breath, wind or spirit), which animates the life of all creatures.

Notice how all three members of the Trinity are integral to the act of creation. The Father is called the %Creator+ in the Creed; the Son is the one %through whom all things were made+, and the Holy Spirit is the %giver of life+.

The Holy Spirit is involved in the Incarnation. The Son was %conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit+.

10.

**With the Father and Son
He is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets**

The third person of the Trinity is equal in dignity to the Father and Son. He is as much God as they are. For this reason, He too is %worshipped and glorified+.

The Creed says that the Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets. We are to understand that truly our scriptures were *inspired* by God, and are a privileged source of authentic *revelation*.

Ten days after Jesus ascends, the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles and Mary there in the upper room. Many consider this the birthday of the Church. This day is known as **Pentecost**.

11.

**We believe in one holy catholic and
apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

Remember our original comparison of a human family to God? Here is another analogy with the human family. Our Tradition sometimes invokes a beautiful phrase when speaking of the human family, it calls the family: **the domestic church**.

But this is not just an analogy. A family is a fundamental expression of what the Church is. A Christian family is a smaller version, a microcosm, of what the whole church is.

Just as love is not private, neither is our life of faith.

So how are we to understand the Church? God calls each of us in a deeply personal way. Nonetheless, our relationship with God is not private. It is personal, but it is not private. There is a difference. Just as the persons in a family don't exist separately, so too our faith life is personal, but it is not separated from others.

Persons are found in community. This is an essential dimension of human existence.

As persons in a community, we resemble God (remember God himself is a communion of three persons).

So the Church manifests God's image when it convokes, or *calls together*, those who believe in Christ.

The Church is a gathering of persons who profess belief in Christ, and are baptized in his name.

The Church is a communion of persons so closely united by God's grace, that it is made into one body, which we call the **Body of Christ**.

This body requires food for sustenance. The food for this body is the Eucharist. *We are made into the body of Christ by receiving the body of Christ.* The Eucharist builds up this body, builds up its unity.

We also need this food for the journey we are making. We are a Pilgrim Church: a people making the ultimate journey. We are passing over from death into life through the **Paschal Mystery**. The graces of this mystery flow through the Church, having been made present in the seven sacraments of the Church, most notably the Eucharist.

We identify the Church by its distinguishing marks. These are the four marks of the Church.

One . We are made one most especially by the Eucharist. We are a communion of people who believe and worship God with one voice. This one voice is heard very clearly in the Creed we are studying here. We believe in the same basic mysteries, and we worship together with one liturgical action.

Holy . We are holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in this body, the Church, and because God's holy graces are communicated to the members of the body, who are themselves channels of God's graces. We are a communion of saints.

Catholic . The word Catholic means *universal*; the one Church is called to offer Christ's salvation to all the world.

Apostolic . The Church is called to hand on the faith of the apostles from generation to generation. What is handed on is the Faith. We call this the Tradition. The Creed is an important piece of that Tradition. The Church affirms the importance of both Scripture and Tradition.

One baptism

When we are baptized our sins are forgiven. The life of infinite and eternal love begins for us with this sacrament.

This does not mean we can do whatever we want. We still have a tendency to sin, and to turn from God, and we still have freewill.

We can turn towards God or from him. We can decide. The promptings of God's grace are available to us, and we can deepen the life of those graces within us, and even try to communicate them to others.

At every hour of our life, and at every stage of our life, we can respond to God's grace.

Infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age . these are the natural stages of life. Each of these in its own way provides a unique opportunity to respond to God's grace.

Our supernatural life actually builds upon our natural life.

God's graces approach us *where we are at*. This is part of the logic of the Incarnation.

Love wants to become visible and tangible in every phase and dimension of our existence.

A Sacrament makes God's graces visible right *where we are at* through everyday signs like water, bread, wine and oil.

The seven sacraments actually correspond in a general way to all those natural phases of life.

The **Seven Sacraments** are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Marriage.

Each **Sacrament** is a visible sign of God's invisible grace.

Since we are free, and God honors our freedom, we are free to reject the graces of baptism, or can deepen it by living morally and celebrating worthily the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

12.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

The great drama of being a human person . how does the story end?

Answer: it doesn't. In the end, there is no end.

Our story, our lives, enter into the horizon of eternity. Our lives continue there in a different and deeper way.

We should awaken to the fact that our eternal life does not begin when we die, **it has already begun within us**.

It is a seed in the here and now waiting to blossom forth in a glorified way. The next life is this life glorified.

So in eternity, our story will become more of what it already is . the drama of a dynamic and eternal love in whose presence occurs the profound flourishing of the human person.

Last Things

The Church's tradition speaks of the **Last Things** that remind us where the journey of life is leading.

These ***Last Things*** are: death, judgment, heaven, hell, purgatory, the second coming, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Death: the meaning of death has changed because of Christ. Jesus transformed death itself from a curse to blessing when he died and rose. In Christ, our death becomes the door to eternal life.

Purgatory: a place to purify souls who are not ready for heaven, but aren't destined for hell. Purgatory will cease to exist after the Last Judgment. Human persons are destined to live forever, some in heaven and some in hell.

Resurrection of the Body: the Lord will unite the soul of every person who ever lived to his or her own *glorified* body. We will not be pure spirits.

Heaven: beyond anything we can describe. Scripture uses these images to speak of Heaven: life, light, peace, wedding feast, heavenly Jerusalem+(CCC 1027).

Judgment: we have already spoken at some length about the second coming and judgment; Here is one last word on this subject, which allows us to end where we began . with love: At the evening of life we shall be judged on our Love.+ (St. John of the Cross, Dichos 64)

Conclusion

It is good when we know the truth in our hearts, for then we are on the verge of prayer.

It is good when we see that other hold the same things in the hearts, and trust in the same ways, and have found the same things to trust.

To believe together, to say ~~%we believe+~~, and not just ~~%o believe+~~, is to share with others what you hold most dearly and deeply to be true: your story and your destiny.

To share a creed with others is an intimate act, it is an act of love.

Let~~s~~ not just think about these mysteries; let~~s~~ enter into them; and with them, let us worship together.

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Feast of St. John Chrysostom