

What's In A Name?

How many different names do you go by in your life? For example, the dads in the congregation on this Father's Day go by their given name, a form of their given name, "Dad", and, Uncle something, or, if you are a grandfather or great-grandfather, you may also have some sort of grandfather name. Maybe you had a different name for your father besides "Dad." Are any of the men feeling brave today? How about the women? We don't want to leave you out.

On Trinity Sunday, we recognize "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." We make references in prayers and theological discussions about a Triune God, using the prefix "tri" to denote three. The concept of a Triune God had been considered for some time, but was formalized at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Here, the Council affirmed the divinity of Jesus and his relationship with "the Father" as "one in being with the Father." With the Creator God as "Father", they then established the original "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Some denominations referred to the Holy Spirit as the Holy "Ghost." My quick research determined that older Catholics, Anglicans,

or King James only fundamentalists still use the term “Holy Ghost.”

These days, we attribute or use the word “ghost” to some part of someone who comes back after a person has died. It conjures up images of haunted houses, Casper, and any other ghosts (The Ghost and Mrs. Muir) that are portrayed in movies or television. But still, does it truly matter if we say 'Holy Spirit' or 'Holy Ghost'? But wait, there's more!

In some religious circles, people will debate the gender of the Risen Christ. We know that the historical Jesus was a man who broke some cultural and religious barriers through his interactions with various women. But some folks wonder if the Risen Christ has any gender at all? Therefore, instead of calling the Second Person of the Trinity the “Son”, some people choose to refer to the Second Person as “Redeemer”, “Savior”, “Sustainer”, or simply “Christ.” Again, I ask the question, does it matter by what name we call Jesus in the Second Person of the Trinity?

The largest debate seems to be in how we refer to God. For centuries, Christians have referred to the First Person of the Trinity as “Father.” (How fitting for us today as we celebrate Father's Day!) I

learned songs and even taught songs to children that used God as Father with traditional masculine pronouns. During my first round in the seminary, I first learned that not everyone was comfortable referring to God as “Father” or didn’t see God as “He, Him, or His.” Some of this stems from less-than-great relationships with their own fathers or simply letting “God be God.” Sometimes you will see God in the First Person referred to as Creator, Source, or even Mother. Does it matter by what name we give the First Person of the Trinity?

In the same way that we don't have to call every grandparent the same name or afford them the same title, we are not bound by what we call or how we refer to God. You want your grandchildren to say your name with respect; we must always do the same for God. There are so many more important things to dwell on this day. What is our relationship with God? Does this improve through our following the teaching of Jesus Christ? Do we call upon the Holy Spirit to be with us when we make decisions?

We will continue to use various titles for God in our prayers, including Father, especially since so many have grown accustomed to it.

We have, however, branched out in the past three and one-quarter years as we sometimes—not always—make some changes to our prayers. When we sing our Doxology, we may sometimes use alternate titles for God, but we mostly will use our traditional versions. Some people may sing out and change the words on their own; they are not hurting anyone by doing so. It is their way of speaking to God. I will not ask you to stop referring to God, the First Person of the Trinity, as something you are not comfortable. This becomes very important for people as a matter of faith. If you sing out “Father”, do it with conviction! Just don’t be surprised if the person next to you may use a different term every once in a while.

May the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—be with all of us this day. May we revel in our relationships with the Blessed Trinity, One God in Three Persons, as we enjoy the coming summer months and weather. Amen!