

## Speaking of God: Trinitarian Vocabulary

The ancient Church Fathers and early councils of the Church developed a basic vocabulary to express the mystery of God as one and three. While this mystery is really beyond words, it helps to have a place to start when we're trying to tell others—or just explaining it to ourselves.

**Substance:** Terms like “substance, essence or nature” describe what God is (CCC 253). They point to a single, infinite, all-powerful, all-holy divine reality, which is God. If asked, “What is God?” we answer in the singular: “God is one divine substance, nature, or essence.”

**Person:** The word “person” speaks of who God is. If asked, “Who is God?” we answer in the plural: “God is three divine persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

**Relation:** That which distinguishes one person from another. The Father's relation to the Son is described as an eternal generation or begetting. The Father shares his divinity with the Son. The Son is related to the Father as the eternal and only begotten Son, wholly receiving his divine nature from the Father, like “light from light.” The Spirit eternally proceeds from the union of Father and Son as their love. “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds” (CCC 254).

## Responding to the Love of the Trinity

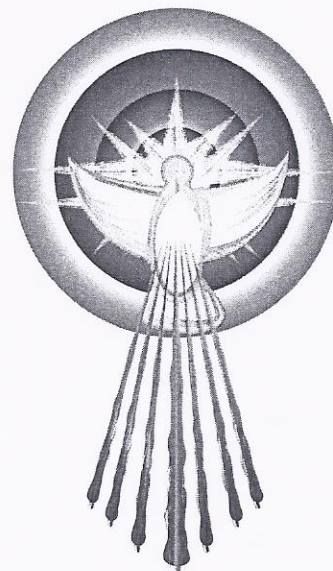
The goal of the Trinitarian actions in creation and history is to bring human beings to share in their love. “By the grace of Baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity” (CCC 265). Saint Paul expresses this experience of grace:

*“When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...to ransom [us], so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”*

Galatians 4:4–6

One special place where we encounter this activity and experience our relationship to the Trinity is the celebration of the Mass. In the Eucharist, we turn toward the Father in praise and thanksgiving. Our praise to the Father is offered in union with the Son and his perfect sacrifice offered on the cross. The priest asks the Holy Spirit to come upon our gifts of bread and wine and transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ. He also asks in prayer for the Holy Spirit to unite us to God and one another as the living body of Christ (CCC 1082, 1110).

We also grow closer to the Trinity through prayer. You can try ending every prayer with a brief conversation with each person of the Trinity like you're talking to a friend.



If you don't feel comfortable with spontaneous prayer yet, here are some other traditional prayers to the persons of the Trinity you can try on your own:

- The Our Father and **Glory Be**, also known as the Doxology
- The Jesus Prayer
- Come, Holy Spirit