

Does God Exist?

And [God] made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for "in him we live and move and have our being." ~ Acts 17:26-28

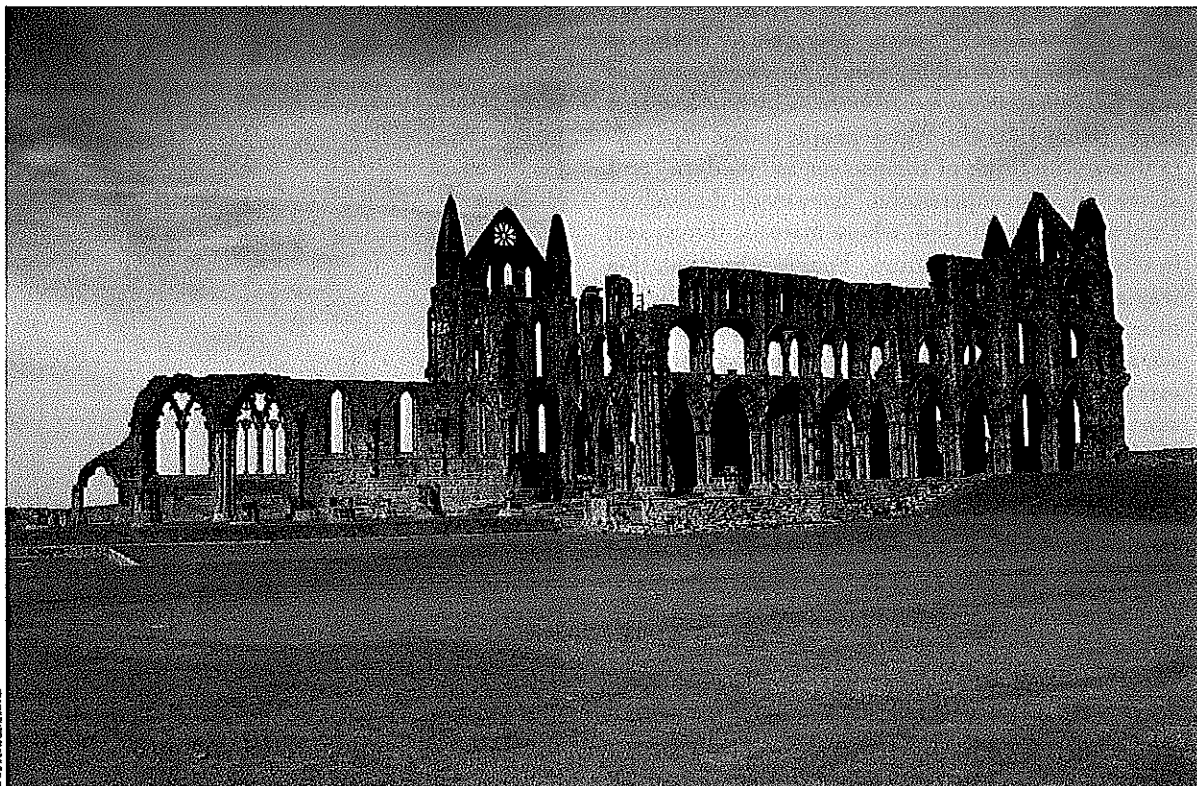
FOR ANYONE inquiring about the Catholic Church, the question of the

existence God is fundamental. In the modern world, the possibility of a Supreme Being who governs the universe and claims certain rights over his creatures is continually brought into question. Aside from downright atheism, many live as if God does not exist, thinking perhaps that he is *indifferent* to the concrete situations of men and women on earth. Others think he is either sleeping or dead, making true believers the objects of ridicule. Whatever the case, it is certain that God's existence is no longer something everyone takes for granted.

"Faith in God's existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise."

There are, however, ways of coming to know God and ways of speaking about him. These

ways are rooted in the very existence of the created world and especially in human beings. And, while God cannot be spread out on a table or examined beneath a microscope, faith in his existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise. In other words, we are capable of knowing — *with real certainty* — something beyond what we see and hear. We know, with certainty, that love, anger, joy and beauty exist, even if we are unable to measure or weigh them. We know, with certainty, that we yearn for happiness and everlasting life, even without public-opin-



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ion surveys to tell us how many agree, how many disagree, and how many "don't know." And it takes a deliberate kind of blindness to look at the material universe in its wonderful order and power and at its glorious abundance of living things and somehow not see their Maker.

Every human person is created with a fundamental *capacity* for God that is matched by a fundamental *desire* for him. This desire is expressed in our ongoing quest for truth, beauty, and love, and prompts us to ask the basic questions: "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" "What is the meaning of life?" Ultimately, these are profoundly *religious* questions and are so universal that we can be called *religious beings*.

With our capacity and desire for God, we can come to certain knowledge of his existence from the created world. In the world there is an order and beauty that is capable of being enjoyed by us. That is to say that the earth's majestic appeal, its natural glory, is not a cosmic coincidence. It was made to be cared for and governed by beings capable of taking delight in it (see Gn 1:27-30). St. Paul says: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19-20). Many people today, especially those who think of themselves as "modern" and above "religious superstition," have made themselves a universe without God, where material things are, in effect, their own creators. People who think this way are not wise at all, but foolish, as Sacred Scripture says of their counterparts long ago: "For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking

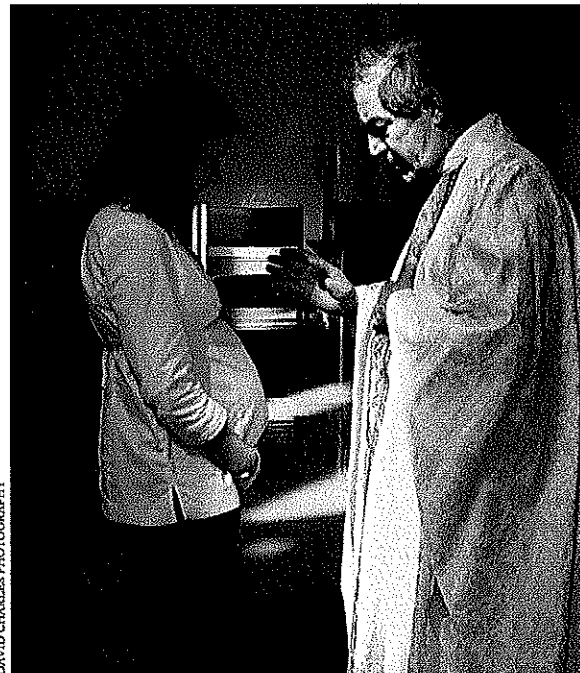
"With our capacity and desire for God, we can come to certain knowledge of his existence from the created world."

God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?" (Wis 13:1-9).

We can also arrive at knowledge of God by the natural light of human reason, and particularly through our *conscience*. Reason propels us toward God by continually prompting us to "make sense" out of everything. Through reason, we seek meaning for our lives and about the world in which we live. Human beings are seldom satisfied with "just getting by." We want to comprehend our

existence and the role we are to play in this vast universe which we did not create. Even more, our conscience, that persistent inner sense which enjoins us to do good and to avoid evil, reminds us continually of God's presence. In our pursuit of goodness, we know instinctively that there must be a Being who is goodness itself. By conscience, in a truly wonderful way, God's existence is made known to us. There, we are alone with him and can recognize his voice as it echoes in the depths of our being.

(CCC 27-43, 153-159, 222, 1776-1777)



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

A priest blesses a mother and her unborn child

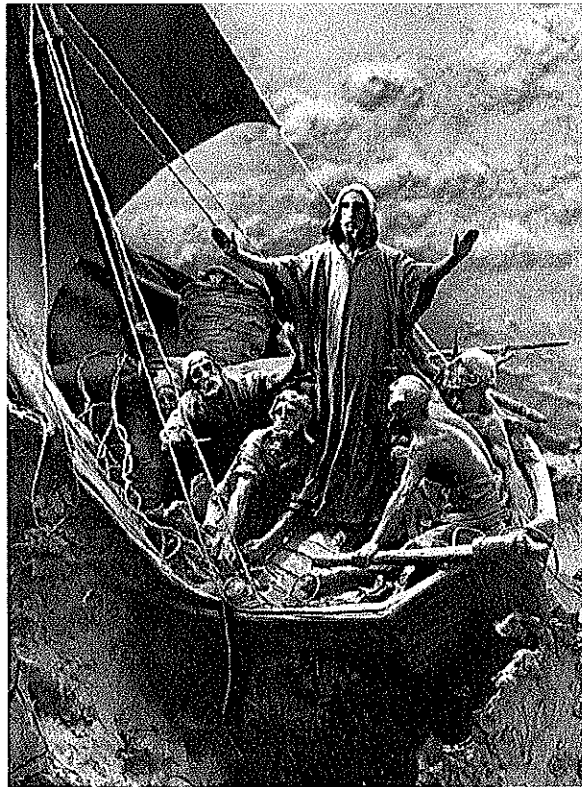
Attributes of God

*I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever....
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable....
The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made....
Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all
generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down....
Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is
just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call upon
him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfils the desire of all who fear him,
he also hears their cry, and saves them. ~ Psalm 145:1, 3, 8, 13-14, 16-19*

WHO IS GOD? While this question may seem obvious to some, after a phrase or two many of us begin scratching our heads and are at a loss for words. To know who someone is and to have a relationship with that person means knowing something about him or her. God is no different in this respect. In order to develop a relationship with him, we must learn who he is. Learning about his divine attributes certainly will not exhaust the mystery that he is, but it will open him up to us and allow for a deeper relationship with him as we grow in our understanding and faith. Faith in God is fundamental and at the foundation of reality.

God is One

God revealed himself to Israel as the one true God: *"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your*



Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

never was a time when he was not, nor will there ever be a time when he is not. God is transcendent, which means he exists outside of time. In fact, time is part of creation and so God is the creator of time. God simply "is"; he has no future or past.

His timeless nature was revealed to Moses when

soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:4-5). Israel's weakness was their desire to be like the other nations and seek after their gods. God's Revelation to them pulled them out of the darkness of idolatry and into the light of the one true God. While our idols today take on different forms than those of the ancient world, they are no less dangerous and deceptive. Jesus warned that money can become for us an idol and keep us from God.

God is Eternal

A second attribute of God is that he has always existed: *"Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?" (Hb 1:12). There*

Moses asked him for his name. *"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I AM... this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." (Ex 3:13-15). "I Am who I am" in Hebrew is "Yahweh" and is a name that is revered by Jews and Christians alike. It reveals God has no beginning or end. When placed before this revelation, we realize our own insignificance and praise God for his greatness.*

Also, God's eternity means he does not change. He is outside time: *"O eternal God, [you] discern what is secret, [you] art aware of all things before they come to be" (Dn 13:42). When he created us, he knew that we would fall and that he would save us. His will to save us has been in his mind for all eternity. God is ever faithful to his promises even when we sin against him. His love for us does not falter. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam 3:22-23).*

God is Almighty

God is the Lord over all things: *"Let all thy creatures serve thee, for thou didst speak, and they were made. Thou didst send forth thy Spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist thy voice" (Jdt 16:14). "In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical"¹ (CCC 271). His power is infinite and cannot be diminished or conquered by the power of evil. However, because he created us with freedom, he has made it so that the execution of his power in this world depends in part on our actions. Nothing is impossible for God; yet, it seems that when we need him most, he is powerless to help us. The apparent weakness of God is at the heart of*

"God permits evil, and brings good from it, but is not the source or cause of evil."



The Ascension of Christ, 13th century cedar panel from Egypt

his plan to conquer evil. Christ was exposed to the powers of evil and *"humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). But his apparent weakness revealed the mystery of his power and conquered sin and death when he rose again on the third day. The power of God manifested in the weakness of Christ is not something that we can understand apart from faith. Only in faith can we follow Christ, believing that nothing is beyond God's power even when its perfection is found in weakness (see 2 Cor 12:10).*

God is Holy and Good

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Rv 4:8) sing the angels in Heaven. "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18), Jesus tells us. God is the source of all holiness and all goodness: "Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God" (Bar 2:6). Throughout the history of God's dealings with humankind, he gradually reveals his glory and goodness to us. When we seek to be holy, we seek to imitate God. Although evil abounds in the world, God is not the source of evil. Our human freedom, our freedom to do the good, can also choose to do evil: "He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God" (3 Jn v 11). God permits evil, and brings good from it, but is not the source or cause of evil. "We know that in everything God works

for good with those who love him" (Rom 8:28). Our belief in an all-good God requires our belief in Satan — as a fallen angelic being, not as a "force" — whose choice against God brought evil into existence (see handout on Angels).

God is Truth

The revelation of God's love is manifested not only in his goodness and mercy but also in his faithfulness

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 25, 5, ad 1

and truth. God keeps his promises: "[S]o shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). The truth is God's wisdom clothed in radiance and beauty. Because of God's goodness and purity, his truth pervades and penetrates all things and governs all his actions. Truth is beautiful and one of God's greatest treasures. In praise of wisdom we read in Scripture: *It is an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction... [Wisdom] is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness* (Wis 7:14, 26).

God is Love

God declares to us: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you"* (Jer 31:3). As a reflection of his love and goodness, he created all things good. He created us in his own image and *"show[ed] his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). No one loves us more than God, and he will not be outdone by anyone in lavishing upon us his grace and mercy. In him we have nothing to fear because God is perfect love and *"perfect love casts out fear"* (1 Jn 4:18). Also, *"[w]e know that in everything God works for good with those who love him"* (Rom 8:28).

God loved us first and then created us; or to put it another way, we have been created out of love. As much as his love for us is as that of a father for his children, it is also that of a spouse for his beloved: *"And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, My husband... And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will*

"The only limitation to his power is our freedom. We can still refuse his love and the happiness he offers, but he never stops loving us."

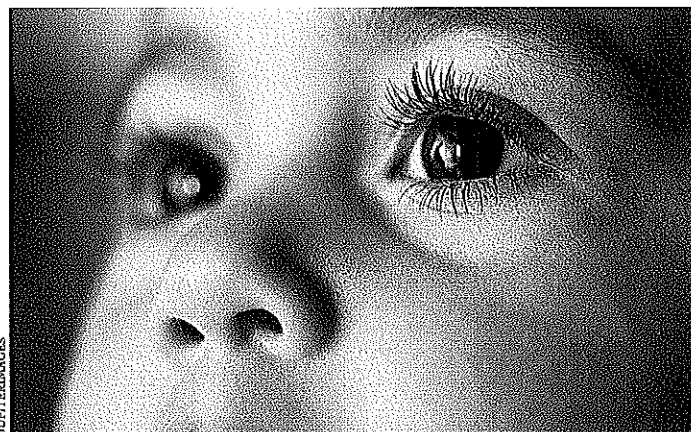
betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:16, 19-20). The power and intensity of God's love can be compared to that of the love shared between lovers whose hearts beat as one: *"I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me"* (Song 7:10).

Because he is love, he desires what is best for us. But his love does not stop there. The power of his love reaches beyond his desire for our happiness to the actual attainment of it: *"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins"* (1 Jn 4:10). He has secured our happiness and lasting peace through the death of his Son. The only limitation to his power is our freedom. We can still refuse his love and the happiness he offers, but he never stops loving us. His love is forever, even for those in Hell whose anguish is the result of God's love beating on the hearts of those who have rejected him.

Faith in God

Believing in the one true God who is transcendent, almighty, gracious, merciful and loving has many consequences for our lives. Because of his almighty power and sovereignty, faith means we have to put him in the first place in our lives and serve him. Because of his truth, it means we have to walk in the light of truth, recognizing the beauty and fullness it brings to life. And lastly, because of his mercy and love, it means we have to trust in his providence even during times of suffering and trials. *"Rejoice"* says St. Paul, and *"again I will say, Rejoice.... Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 4:4, 6-7).

(CCC 198-221, 268, 271-274, 385, 2465, 2809-2810)



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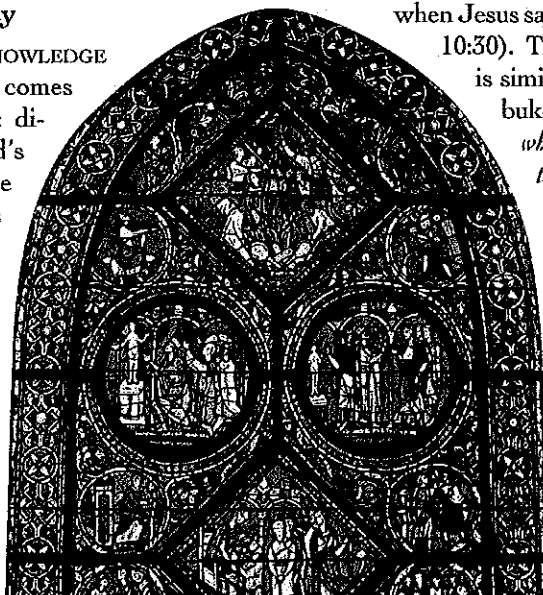
The Blessed Trinity

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ~ 2 Corinthians 13:14

The Revelation of the Trinity

OUR AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE of the Blessed Trinity comes from a reliable source: divine Revelation, God's own revealing of himself. The existence of the Trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament of the Bible and boldly proclaimed in the New Testament. Three events in the life of Jesus show us the Trinity: his conception, his Baptism, and his Transfiguration. When the angel came to Mary to invite her to be the Mother of God, Mary understandably asked how it was possible. Gabriel replied: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"* (Lk 1:35). At Jesus' Baptism, the Heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended upon him accompanied by the voice of the Father saying: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Mt 3:17; see also Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). During his public ministry, shortly before he began his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus took the apostles Peter, James, and John to a high mountain where he was transfigured before them. His appearance was transformed, his clothes became dazzling white, and with him appeared Moses and Elijah, symbolizing the Law and the Prophets — that, is the entire Old Testament. In the course of this astounding event — which, for a moment, revealed Jesus' own divine glory — a cloud, representing the Holy Spirit, overshadowed the three apostles, and a voice once again proclaimed: *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"* (Lk 9:35).

The Godhead of the Son is directly revealed



Vibrant stained glass in the Cathedral of Chartres, France, dating from the 13th century

when Jesus says: *"I and the Father are one"* (Jn 10:30). The Godhead of the Holy Spirit is similarly revealed when Peter rebukes a fellow Christian: *"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ...? You have not lied to men but to God"* (Acts 5:3-4). And Jesus himself reveals the relationship of the Father and the Spirit: *"But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me"* (Jn 15:26). Finally, Jesus' commission to his apostles at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew reveals plainly that the three Persons belong to a single Godhead: *"baptizing ... in the name of the Father*

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Jesus uses the singular "name," not "names," to show us that all three Persons are one God.

The Relationship of the Three Persons to One Another

The Father totally and eternally gives himself to the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son gives himself totally and eternally to the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit likewise gives himself totally and eternally to the Father and the Son. The Son of God is eternally begotten, not made, by the Father as his Word, "his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely"¹ (CCC 102; see also CCC 241). The expression of the love between the Father and the Son is so real that a third person, the Holy Spirit, proceeds from them both; the Holy Spirit's name gives rise to the understanding that he is the "spiration," that is, the "breath" of the Father

"The Trinity is a family of persons whose life is love."

¹ Cf. Hebrews 1:1-3

and the Son (see CCC 246). Hence, in his intimate life, *"God is love"* (1 Jn 4:8, 16); *God is self-giving*. God is a communion of love. *The Trinity is a family of persons whose life is love*. And who God is informs — that is, determines — what God does. He wants us to know him not as a blind and anonymous force but as a family of persons that knows and loves us infinitely. This divine family desires our total happiness and wants to dwell within us. As Jesus said: *"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"* (Jn 14:23).

The "Works" of Each Person of the Blessed Trinity

The actual distinction among the three divine persons is in their relation to one another. Divinity cannot be shared or divided up. Each of the divine persons is God, whole and entire. Although the divine persons are inseparable in what they are and do, it is possible and common to identify "works" that are proper to each. This is most evident in the way our salvation was accomplished. In his plan born of love, God created us to share his life forever. Sin, however, cut us off from God and from our destiny. Nevertheless, in his great mercy, the Father did not put an end to us or abandon us (see Neh 9:31). *"[W]hen the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman"* (Gal 4:4), to reveal his plan, to show us how to live, and to pay the price for our sins. When this was accomplished, the Holy Spirit came to activate the new and eternal life won for us by Christ's redemptive self-giving (see Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit empowers and guides the Church to fulfill her mission to preach the Good News of salvation to the whole world and to make God's life available to all men and women, without exception.

The Trinity as Mystery

The Blessed Trinity, three persons in one God, is a profound mystery. Because it reveals who God is *in his inmost being, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity "is the central mystery of Christian faith and life"* (CCC 234; italics added). This mystery is not illogical,



Baptism of a young child

"The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life."

contradictory, or unreasonable, nor is it opposed to belief in the one God. A "mystery" — a reality we cannot fully comprehend — implies neither falsehood nor contradiction; it merely signifies a lack of comprehensibility. In such cases as the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation (the "enfleshment" of the second person of the Trinity as Jesus Christ), we humans with finite minds try to understand a divine and,

therefore, an infinite reality. Our minds are wonderful creations but are still limited. A blind person must take it on faith when we say that the light in the kitchen is on. Throughout life, we are obliged because of our limitations to accept things on the testimony of reliable sources. Reason alone could never conceive of the reality of three persons in one nature, nor for that matter, of one person, Jesus Christ, having two natures (divine and human).

But all our human capabilities, aided by God's supernatural Revelation, do not enable us to grasp or comprehend the mysteries of the Infinite such as the Blessed Trinity. We will, in this life, only be able to *"see in a mirror dimly"* (1 Cor 13:12). The whole of our supernatural knowledge, just because it is of the very nature of *supernatural*, is beyond us. We experience in these matters an insufficiency, a sense of sad resignation. We feel inadequate, left out — and *this is right*.

We have, therefore, Heaven to look forward to and work toward. Our faith, as Christ himself so often emphasized, is of central importance to our lives (see Mt 21:21-22; Lk 7:50; Jn 3:16). Our faith gives us the strongest, most certain assurance that the world of the supernatural is not an empty dream. Our faith convinces us that the Trinity of God the Father who made us out of love, God the Son who came among us to save us out of love, and God the Holy Spirit who infuses us with love and who sustains us in the Church will be revealed to us at the very hour Jesus opens his arms to welcome us into Heaven with the words: *"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 25:34). This Kingdom is God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Blessed Trinity — our *true home*.

(CCC 102, 232-260)