

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

There is no doubt. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is difficult—difficult to know, impossible to understand. It is a mystery. We proclaim it, yet it remains a mystery. We believe it; we confess it. This is the God we worship: “one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance”; We worship the great “Three in One”—“the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another. But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal” (Athanasian Creed, 4-6). “[T]here are not three Gods, but one God. ... [T]here are not three Lords, but one Lord” (Athanasian Creed, 16, 18).

And this is not just some esoteric doctrine of little importance to our lives as Christians. No! We must believe in this God in order to be saved, as we just confessed: “Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith”; that is, believe it ... confess it. “Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally” (Athanasian Creed, 1-2).

And what is this catholic faith? It is not that one must become Roman Catholic in order to be saved. Rather, in the words of St. Jude, one must believe and confess “*the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). Or as the 5th century Gallic monk Vincent of Lérins wrote: “all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been **believed everywhere, always, by all**. For that is truly and in the strictest sense ‘Catholic.’”¹ “Catholic” — sometimes we say “catholic” with a small “c” to distinguish it from the Roman Catholics ... “catholic” means universal. The catholic faith is the universal faith by which we are called “Christian.”

And interestingly enough, it is what we confess about Jesus that makes us Trinitarian. Who is Jesus? God’s Son? So God has a Son? So God is a Father? That’s a big deal, and it sets Christians apart from the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Islam. They both assert: God has no son. For example, the Quran (Sura 23:91) says, “Never did Allah [that’s God in Arabic] take unto Himself any son, nor is there any god other than He.” And the Jews understand themselves as the children of God — thus God is their Father — but they say that God has no son like the Jesus we Christians confess, the eternally begotten Son of God, our God and our Lord, the Savior of the world.

What’s happening in our Gospel, and in much of John chapter 8, is that the Jews are engaging with Jesus, trying to figure out who He is. “*Where is your Father?*” they asked Him (John 8:19). And a bit later, they asked: “*Who are you?*”

¹ Vincent of Lérins, Commonitorium, Chapter 2:6, www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm.

Of course, they knew what Jesus could do. He could heal, as He did with the man who had been an invalid for 38 years, whom He healed on a Sabbath. He could feed the multitudes, as He did with the 5,000. He could walk on water, as the disciples saw Him do. And they knew what Jesus was claiming. He was claiming authority over the Sabbath and the Pharisees' Sabbath rules — who could do that but God? He was *"calling God his own Father."* He was *"making himself equal with God"* (John 5:18).

And Jesus had made other outrageous claims — outrageous, that is, were He not God Himself. He was the one who descended from heaven (John 3:13). He was the one who would give water that wells up to eternal life (John 4:14). He claimed to have life in Himself (John 5:26). He called Himself the bread from heaven and the bread of life, and claimed that by eating of this bread, one has eternal life (John 6:50-51). He claimed to speak with the authority of God (John 7:17).

Some thought He might be the Prophet like unto Moses. Others thought He was the Christ (John 7:40-41). He was both of those, but more. Jesus would claim to be sent by the Father (John 8:16, 18, 42), to speak with the Father's authority (John 8:28), and to have first-hand knowledge of the Father (John 8:38).

All these wonders and outrageous claims were unacceptable to the Jewish leaders. And they were outrageous for anyone not God's Son. Because of these, in our Gospel, the Jews accused Jesus of having a demon. Jesus denied it, of course, and then continued His outrageous claims: *"[I]f anyone keeps my word, he will never see death,"* laying claim again to His authority to give everlasting life.

Again the Jews accused Jesus of being demon-possessed. Sounding exasperated the Jews looked to their great patriarch Abraham, who was declared righteous by believing God's word. Yet, Abraham died; if Jesus can promise eternal life by His own word, they reasoned, He must be greater than Abraham; He must be God. Was that His claim? *"Who do you make yourself out to be?"* they implored Jesus again to say.

Jesus answered them. Speaking as the Father's only-begotten Son, He pointed them to *"my Father"* — not "our" Father, but mine — *"of whom you say, 'He is our God.'"* Jesus here was claiming a special sonship from the Father, the sonship that comes from being "begotten of the Father before all worlds" (Nicene Creed). He would make it more explicit: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."*

"My day" that Abraham saw was the day when the Father glorified Jesus, namely, when the Son of Man, being *"lifted up from the earth"* (John 12:32), would fall like a grain of wheat to the earth and die (John 12:24); and then again, when the Son of God would rise triumphant from the grave. When did he see it?

When Abraham's only son Isaac was bound and sacrificed on the altar, but spared when God supplied a substitute ram, and again, when his son rose from the dead, as the writer to the Hebrews proclaims: Abraham "*considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back*" (Heb. 11:19).

The Father glorifies Jesus so that in His cross and resurrection, He might make the Father and His love for the world known, that through the Son, the world might have eternal life. As Jesus would later pray: "*this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (John 17:3).

Finally, Jesus made the ultimate statement: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*" Not every time that Jesus speaks the words ἐγὼ εἰμὶ — I AM — does He do it with reference to His being true God, the LORD, but here it seems likely He does. For if Jesus were merely making the point of His being eternal, one would have expected Jesus to say, "Before Abraham came into being, I already was." But He says the unexpected "I AM"; that is, I am the Lord, who was, and who is, and who is to come (Rev. 1:8).

The Jews wanted to know. They got their answer, and they didn't like it. It seemed blasphemous to them. They picked up stones to kill Him. But, it wasn't yet time, and Jesus hid Himself and exited the temple.

But the Jews got their answer, and so have we. Jesus is the Lord. He is God and the Son of God. As St. Paul confesses: "*in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*" (Col. 1:19), or as we say it in the Nicene Creed, He is "of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made." He is, as we confess, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who makes the Father known, the First Person of the Trinity, and in whose name the Father has sent "*the promise of the Holy Spirit,*" the Third Person of the Trinity, to bring us to faith and give us everlasting life.

The Jews rejected Jesus as the Son of God, their Savior. So, they reject the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. So do the Muslims. They worship a different god. Christians have the true God. We believe in and worship "one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity," God the Father who, through the incarnate Jesus His Son, true God and true man, "*reconcile[d] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross*" (Col. 1:20), and who, through the Holy Spirit, "*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*" (Col. 1:13-14).

This is the catholic faith. This is what we believe and confess. This is the God we worship with gladness, our access granted through the Son. And steadfast in this faith, we are saved. Thanks be to God, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit.