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THE MYSTERY OF ETERNAL LOVE

A RETREAT GUIDE ON THE
BLESSED TRINITY

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This booklet is a part of RC Spirituality's *Retreat Guide* service, which includes free online videos and audio tracks available at **RCSpirituality.org**.

INTRODUCTION

The Mystery of Eternal Love



RETREAT OVERVIEW

According to Pope Benedict XVI, as human beings we have imprinted upon our spiritual DNA a profound mark of the Trinity, of God as Love. For we are created in the image and likeness of God, and, as the First Letter of John puts it, “God is love.”

But who is this God in whose image we’re created? What difference does it make to say God is a Trinity of Persons? What kind of relationship can we have with the Blessed Trinity? These questions are central to any Christian’s life.

Because, although the Holy Spirit is the divine architect of holiness, we need to allow him to shape us into the masterpiece we were created to be. And if that’s going to happen, we need to be familiar with the raw material and have a sense of where this whole adventure is headed: for only then are we able to fully cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work.

In this Retreat Guide on the Blessed Trinity, *The Mystery of Eternal Love*, we’ll contemplate exactly that.

- In the First Meditation we’ll consider what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches about the Blessed Trinity. We’ll also examine the experience of two friends of God to help guide us deeper into the mystery.
- In the Second Meditation we’ll look at the response of Abraham, our father in faith, to the “Theophany” at Mamre in the book of Genesis.
- And finally, the Conference will explore Saint John Paul II’s teaching on the Trinitarian shape of prayer,

FIRST MEDITATION

The Very Structure of Being



INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Faith is full of mysteries. A mystery doesn't mean irrational—it means that something surpasses our finite capacity of analysis. As G.K. Chesterton observed, every mystery contains something that we don't understand, and something that we do understand. Take human friendship for example. It's impossible to fully explain the alchemy that draws people together in friendship, and yet we know it when it's there—and we can see the results.

Of all the mysteries of our faith, one stands out. Number 234 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God himself.” After this powerful introduction, the *Catechism* continues:

☞ It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truths of faith ... whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin.

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 234

In other words, the Blessed Trinity is at the core of our faith as Catholics. It's easy to get accustomed to hearing the term “Blessed Trinity,” but there's a revolutionary power in affirming that God is a communion of persons. For Aristotle, perhaps the greatest pre-Christian

philosopher in history, God was Absolute Thought thinking Itself; God was a distant, isolated force; God was not love. The Old Testament, on the other hand, offers hints and guesses at the reality of the Blessed Trinity (we'll reflect on one of them in the Second Meditation), but only Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, revealed that God is not a solitary principle but a communion of life and love, three persons in one God, who desires to pour out this love into our lives.

HOW CAN GOD BE LOVE?

Only if God is a communion of persons can we say that God is love. The Book of Genesis reveals that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, and our own experience demonstrates that we can't love unless there's someone else to love. And love has to bring forth more love. You see this mirrored at weddings. When the bride and groom are really in love with each other, it seems as though they're impelled to share this with the guests. Nothing would be stranger than for them to remain huddled together in a corner. And their love for each other must ultimately be open to the gift of a third person, a child. Their love flows from their union and becomes an ever-greater union.

This human experience is a faint reflection of the Blessed Trinity. God the Father loves the Eternal Son, and is loved by him, with a love so intense that it's another person, the Holy Spirit. We were created by this eternal love, we were redeemed by this eternal love, and we are called to participate in this eternal love.

Now let's turn towards two guides who will help us enter more profoundly into this mystery.


ST. AUGUSTINE

Our first guide is St. Augustine, who received the grace to enter deeply into the mystery of God's love. After a dissolute youth (he is famous for his prayer, "Lord, grant me chastity—but not yet!") he was baptized by St. Ambrose in 387 and became bishop of Hippo—now Annaba, Algeria—in 396. He was deeply sensitive to the human person's longing for love, a longing that crystallized in his famous statement to the Lord: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." And that longing flows directly from our essence as image and likeness of the Blessed Trinity.

Drawing on this, St. Augustine offers a helpful analogy for the Blessed Trinity. He said that we can draw near the mystery if we consider a Lover, a Beloved, and the Love between them. In some sense, the Father is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the Love between them.

And this love is offered to us. Jesus was crucified, died, and rose from the dead so that we could be restored to communion with God. The more we reflect on this truth, the more it changes our hearts, our minds, and our actions.

Our sins have marred our love, but they have not destroyed it. Our entire life is a chance to be made new in Christ, in order to enter more deeply into the union of being with the Blessed Trinity for which we were made. St. Augustine prayed for this:

 When at last I cling to you with my whole being there will be no more anguish or labor for me, and my life

will be alive indeed, alive because filled with you. But now it is very different ... See, I do not hide my wounds from you; you are the physician and I am sick; you are merciful, and I am in need of mercy.

As we ask the Holy Spirit to anchor that conviction within us, we can pray with St. Augustine to the Blessed Trinity:

☞ Late I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new, late I loved you ... You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness ... I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burn for your peace.

SAINT ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

This tremendous love that is the Blessed Trinity is not distant from us. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom of God is within us; and, as Pope Benedict XVI stressed, the Kingdom of God is God himself. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that the Father will love those who love the Son, and they will take up their abode with that person. Let's move ahead now to the dawn of the 20th century, when a young Carmelite nun received a special experiential knowledge of the presence of the Blessed Trinity in her soul.

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity was born in France in 1880. She entered the Carmelite convent in Dijon in 1901, and died 5 years later of Addison's disease with these words on her lips: "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life."

At the center of her spiritual life lay the realization that through grace the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are

present within our souls. This growing realization filled her with a conviction of her union with God that was already an experience of heaven. She wrote:

☞ It seems to me that I have found my heaven on earth, because my heaven is you, my God, and you are in my soul. You in me and I in you—may this be my motto. What a joyous mystery is your presence within me, in that intimate sanctuary of my soul where I can always find you, even when I do not feel your presence. Perhaps you are all the closer when I feel you less.

Because God is Love as a Trinity of Persons, and because the Lover seeks the Beloved, he has broken through the barriers of sin to bring us back into union with him. Saint Elizabeth understood this, and it gave her the courage to live each day with a growing love for God. And so she warmly encourages us:

☞ Let us live with God as a Friend. Let us make our faith a living thing, so as to remain in communion with Him through everything. This is how saints are made. We carry our heaven within us, since He ... is giving Himself to us in faith and mystery ... The day I understood that, everything became clear to me, and I wish I could whisper this secret to those I love in order that they also might cling closely to God through everything.

CONCLUSION: A FRIEND OF GOD

In the next Meditation we'll reflect on one of the great friends of God in Sacred Scripture. But now let's bring

everything we've discussed to prayer, confident that the Blessed Trinity is closer than we can imagine. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What difference does it make for me to say that God is love?
2. Where could I still be attached to some sin or attitude that prevents me from closer union with God? How much do I want to allow God to purify that, and how committed am I to cooperating?
3. In which situations in my own life is God asking me to cling more closely to him? In what ways could he be asking me to do that?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

“And Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will send you another Counselor, to be with you for ever ... the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you ... In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you. If anyone 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.”

—John 14:15–23
RSVSCE

“To all three belong the same eternity, the same unchangeableness, the same majesty, the same power. In the Father is unity, in the Son equality, in the Holy Spirit the Harmony of unity and equality. And these three attributes are all one because of the Father, all equal because of the Son, and all harmonious because of the Holy Spirit.

—St. Augustine
On Christian Doctrine

“O my Three, my all, my Blessedness, infinite solitude, immensity in which I lose myself, I surrender myself to you ... Bury yourself in me that I may bury myself in you until I depart to contemplate in your light the abyss of your greatness.

—St. Elizabeth of the Trinity
Act of Oblation

NOTES

SECOND MEDITATION

Welcoming the Trinity



The Oak of Mamre

INTRODUCTION

The 18th chapter of the Book of Genesis presents the following event.

☞ And the Lord appeared to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, “My Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make cakes.” And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

—Genesis 18:1–8
RSVSCE

This is the Theophany at Mamre, when God appeared to Abraham and told him that within a year he and Sarah would have a son. God appeared here as three men, yet Abraham addressed him in the singular as “Lord,” which corresponds to the dogma of the Blessed Trinity: One God, Three Persons. Now let’s ask the Holy Spirit to

give us the grace to listen to whatever he wants to tell us in this Meditation.

READINESS

First of all, Abraham was ready for this visit. And here a little background is helpful. Twenty five years earlier, Abraham had been a successful gentleman in Haran (located in present day Iraq), when the Lord called him to go forth. “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation” (Gen 12:1).

Keep in mind that Abraham was seventy five years old when God told him to do this—the age when most people are enjoying retirement and thinking about IRA’s and medical bills. God doesn’t tell him where he’s going: he says “Go to a land that I will show you.” Furthermore, Abraham and his wife were unable to have children, so God’s promise to make of him a great nation must have seemed far-fetched, to say the least. And yet Abraham didn’t cling to whatever security he had in Haran: despite the uncertainty, he trusted God and he went.

Then, eleven years later, God spoke to Abraham in a vision. He brought him outside his tent and showed him the sky. Notice how God brought Abram outside his tent, outside of his safety net. God will always do that with us; he will call us to a deeper and deeper trust in him. God called Abraham outside and said “Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them . . . So shall your descendants be.” And then Genesis tells us that Abraham believed the Lord. But there’s one detail we only learn about a few lines later—it was broad daylight

when Abraham looked up into the sky! God told him to look into a blue sky and number the stars, when he couldn’t even see the stars. God asked Abraham for a tremendous act of faith, and Abraham said “yes.”

It’s obvious, then, that Abraham’s whole life was a preparation for this encounter with God at Mamre. There had been moments of weakness and distrust, as when Abraham doubted God’s promise that he and Sarah would have a child, and took Sarah’s maid Hagar as a concubine in order to have at least one descendent. But God did not abandon him, and Abraham repented and renewed his trust in God.

And so, on that hot day by the Oaks of Mamre, Abraham sat at the door of his tent, ready to receive God.

LIFT YOUR EYES

It says that Abraham lifted his eyes and looked. Why were Abraham’s eyes downcast? Perhaps he was drowsy. But maybe he was discouraged. After all, God’s promise to give him a son had not yet been fulfilled. How long would he have to wait? And yet something impelled him to lift his eyes and look. And when he looked, he saw God standing in front of him.

We believe that by grace the Blessed Trinity dwells within us. We are living temples of God, who is present and active in everything that happens at every moment. If we lift our eyes and look, we begin to sense His loving presence, and we receive the strength to keep trusting and trying to say “yes” to his plan of love for our lives.

HE RAN TO MEET THEM

God's self-revelation awaits our response. The initiative is God's; the response is ours. And the true biblical response is to run to meet him, in prayer and in our service to others. After the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived the Son of God in her womb, she went in haste to help her cousin Elizabeth. In the Song of Songs the bride says to the bridegroom, "Draw me after you, let us make haste." And here Abraham also runs to meet God. Once again, he goes out from his tent in response to God's visit. Let's not forget that Abraham isn't exactly in the flower of youth either—he's 99 years old by this time. And yet he's constantly running in this scene. In fact, a short while later he hastens into the tent to tell Sarah to prepare bread; then he runs to the herd to pick out a calf for lunch, and tells the servant to hasten to prepare it.

This readiness to hasten towards God is a vital part of the spiritual life. By our baptism we are brought into the life of the Blessed Trinity. If we remain in God's grace we continue in that life, and God calls us to an increasingly deeper communion with him. If we hasten to receive His inspirations, we're following Abraham's footsteps and opening up new space for God's creative action in us and through us.

CONCLUSION: WELCOME THE LORD

And that haste points to Abraham's fundamental desire to welcome the Lord. With a few exceptions, the history of his ancestors was one sorry catalogue of rejection: God knocked, yet no one answered. Abraham welcomed

God, and served him with the best hospitality the ancient world could muster; in fact his plans changed from simply preparing a morsel of food for the guests to drumming up a gourmet meal. His eagerness to receive God foreshadowed Revelation 3:20, when Christ declares:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

The Blessed Trinity visits each of us every day: in the Mass and the other Sacraments, in our prayer, in the people God gives us to love and care for, in the good books we read, in the inspirations to loving action that come to us throughout the day.

As we take all this to prayer, we renew our belief that the Blessed Trinity is a communion of life and love, and God wants us to share in that. Every time we entrust ourselves to God's loving plan for our lives and hasten to welcome him, his life within us grows and we begin to experience that foretaste of heaven which St. Augustine described so movingly in his *City of God*.

“Then we will rest and we will see; we will see and we will love; we will love and we will praise. Such will be the end, without end.”

The following questions and quotations may help you enter into that communion more deeply in your own personal prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Where is the Lord calling me to leave my “tent” and trust in what he’s asking me to do?
2. In my own life, where could God be calling me to hasten to meet him?
3. What are some situations in my life where I’ve been aware of welcoming the Lord?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

“For thus says the Lord ... I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes ...

—Jeremiah 29: 10–14
RSVSCE

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babies and infants, you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him little less than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

—Psalm 8
RSVSCE

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer ... Practice hospitality.

—Romans 12:9–13
RSVSCE

NOTES

CONFERENCE

Praying with the Blessed Trinity



INTRODUCTION

In the First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul declared to the early Christians—and to all of us—“This is the will of God, your holiness.” Holiness is not a hobby reserved for an elite group of Christians: it’s at the heart of Christianity.

Holiness means participation, through Christ, in the Blessed Trinity’s life. It’s an increasing union, in love, of our will with God’s will. Holiness is God’s gift, yet he asks for our cooperation.

Saint John Paul II developed this theme in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which he wrote at the close of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 as a coordinate for the Church’s mission in the New Millennium. In that Letter’s section entitled “Starting Afresh From Christ” he stated that all Christians need a training in holiness—and prayer is a special key to holiness.

THE TRINITARIAN SHAPE OF PRAYER

Prayer, St. John Paul II says, develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends. In this wonderful reciprocity we listen and we speak; we are loved and we love. He reminds us:

“Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father’s face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully ... is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life.

When Saint John Paul II gives a recommendation on prayer, it's a good idea to listen. So what is this Trinitarian shape of prayer we're called to learn, and how do we enter more deeply into it?

It flows from our baptism. By baptism we become, in Christ, beloved sons and daughters of the Father through the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian prayer means that our prayer is directed to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. These aren't three different types of prayer; rather they're like the different facets on the one diamond of prayer. Let's unpack that.

PRAYING TO THE FATHER

When the apostles ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, he offers them the "Our Father." Every moment of Christ's life was a prayer to the Father. He spent long hours in prayer with his Father. Before his miracles he prayed to the Father: the raising of Lazarus is a prime example, when Jesus prayed:

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you sent me.

—John 11:41–42

When his soul was torn apart with suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus turned to the Father. In the agony of Calvary, Jesus turned to the Father.

Through Christ, we can also pray to the Father. Jesus came to reveal the Father's love—and to actually give us

that love. St. Charles de Foucauld has a beautiful prayer to the Father that sums all this up, and shows us how intimately we can relate to our Heavenly Father.

“Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures—
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul:
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without
reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.

PRAYING THROUGH CHRIST

The second element of the Trinitarian shape of prayer is praying through Christ. In John 14:6 Jesus says: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth; we can only pray to the Father through him. And we have the immense confidence of knowing that he is praying for us, since he lives to make intercession for us (cf. Hebrews 7:25).

Sometimes we put all the burden of prayer on ourselves, and we forget what St. John Paul II called the primacy of grace. Prayer is God's gift; he asks that we create space in

our lives and carve out the time, but prayer is his initiative. Christ wants to spend time with us in prayer. He wants to teach us to pray as he taught the apostles to pray. He wants to teach us to pray as he taught Saint John Paul II and so many friends of God over the centuries how to pray. He wants to bring us to the Father.

PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The third element of the Trinitarian shape of prayer is prayer in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. In Saint John Paul II's words, the Holy Spirit is Person-Gift. And he's given to us in our baptism: as St. Paul put it, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

As we become more familiar with the Trinitarian shape of prayer, we start to realize that there's a beautiful unity to prayer. The Father sends us the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son reveals the Father, and sends us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sent to us as the Person-Gift who makes the Father and the Son present in our souls. And our entire life then gradually becomes a hymn of praise to the Blessed Trinity, in whose image we are created and in whose love we are redeemed.

TRINITY ICON, TRINITARIAN PRAYER

Since a picture speaks a thousand words, now let's look at one of the most famous depictions of the Blessed Trinity, Andrei Rublev's *Trinity Icon*, to glean its lessons about Trinitarian prayer.



The icon dates from early 15th century Russia, and depicts the Theophany at Mamre which we contemplated in the Second Meditation. It exemplifies several of the themes we've seen in this Retreat, and helps us grasp how our prayer participates in the Blessed Trinity's eternal dialogue of love.

The three figures are distinct, yet the faces are identical. Rublev thus points out that the three persons in the Blessed Trinity are one God. The Father is on our left,

gazing into the Son's face. His inner garment is blue, symbolizing divinity; his outer garments are a mysterious color, indicating that no one has ever seen the Father; the only begotten Son, who is in the heart of that Father, has made him known (John 1:18). The Son is seated in the middle, and returns the Father's loving gaze. His garments are blue and brownish-red, symbolizing divinity and humanity. His right hand is pointed towards the third figure, the Holy Spirit, who is depicted in blue and green garments, signifying divinity and new life.

In the background we see Abraham's tent behind the Father (the Father is the Creator), the oak of Mamre, which also symbolizes the Cross, is behind the Son (the Redeemer), and the indistinct hill behind the Holy Spirit indicates that the Spirit leads us up the mountain of holiness.

REVERENCE AND WONDER

The look between the Father and the Son is filled with reverence and wonder at the beauty and goodness of the other. It's also fully open to the third, the Holy Spirit. The Father's eyes and the position of his body are inclined towards the Holy Spirit, and the Son's hand and the position of his knees also point towards the Spirit. Love is always a pouring out for another.

Prayer is our participation in the Blessed Trinity's eternal look of love. When St. John Vianney asked an old farmer in Ars what he did in the many hours he spent before the Blessed Sacrament, the man replied: "I look at him, and he looks at me."

TRUST

Prayer is a living conversation with the Blessed Trinity. It's not just an exchange of ideas; it's an exchange of persons, in which we give ourselves to God and he gives himself to us. It demands trust from us, and, as we enter into it, our trust grows. The three figures in this icon exemplify trust. There's a sense of peace: the Son and the Spirit know they're loved by the Father, and they return his love. The trusting words we speak in our own prayer are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and, through Christ, reach the Father. Sometimes these words are filled with consolation; sometimes they may be more like Christ's "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" What's important is that we share them with God.

MISSION

Love seeks union with the beloved, so prayer is also mission. The dialogue of love between the Three Persons extends towards us: in fact "mission" actually means to be sent. The Holy Spirit's outward-pointing staff signifies that he is given to us. And the Paschal Lamb on the table reminds us that the Son became man and died to redeem us from sin and bring us into union with the Father. In the same way, our own prayer must lead us to mission.

GROWING IN HOLINESS

Here are a few ideas to help us grow in holiness through the Trinitarian shape of our prayer.

MASS AND THE EUCHARIST

The Mass renews the sacrifice of human redemption. In the Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we offer Christ's sacrifice on the Cross to the Father—and so the Mass is the greatest Trinitarian prayer of all. Let's renew our commitment to prepare well for Sunday Mass, by praying with the readings beforehand, for example, and arriving early.

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

All our prayer is prayer in the Holy Spirit. Yet we may not be particularly aware of his presence. In fact Pope Benedict XVI said that for many Christians the Holy Spirit is still the “Great Unknown.” How does our prayer in the Holy Spirit grow?

- First of all, by asking for it. Saint John Paul II used to pray for an increase of the gifts of the Holy Spirit each morning (the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a good explanation of these gifts). During the day, it's vital to have the simple prayer “Come Holy Spirit!” in our heart and on our lips before important decisions or in tricky situations. The Holy Spirit doesn't want us to just wing it—he wants to be our trusted Guide.
- The second way to grow in our prayer in the Holy Spirit is by welcoming his inspirations: as St. Paul admonishes us, “Do not quench the Spirit!” Every time we're inspired to love more, to be kind, to pray, or to go out of our way for someone else, it's vital that we accept that inspiration and act on it.

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

St. Francis De Sales encouraged all lay Catholics to pray at least part of the Liturgy of the Hours. This is the official prayer of the Church to her bridegroom, Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and with Christ to the Father. Excepting the Mass, no prayer is more powerful. The *Magnificat* magazine (magnificat.com) is a good introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours, since it breaks it down into simple sections.

MISSION

A pervasive activist mentality can insinuate that prayer is a waste of time, but actually it's the most important thing we can do. As we grow in union with the Blessed Trinity, we enter more deeply into that dynamic relationship of love. And, since love goes outside of itself, a virtuous cycle is formed. Our prayer becomes a mission and our mission becomes a prayer.

In the end, our mission is faithfulness to the vocation to which the Lord has called each of us. And within that calling, the Holy Spirit will show us how we can share the tremendous gift of friendship with Christ. He will show us how we are to reveal Christ's kingship, and invite others to follow him on the path to life with the Father, in the Spirit.

CONCLUSION: THE BLESSED TRINITY

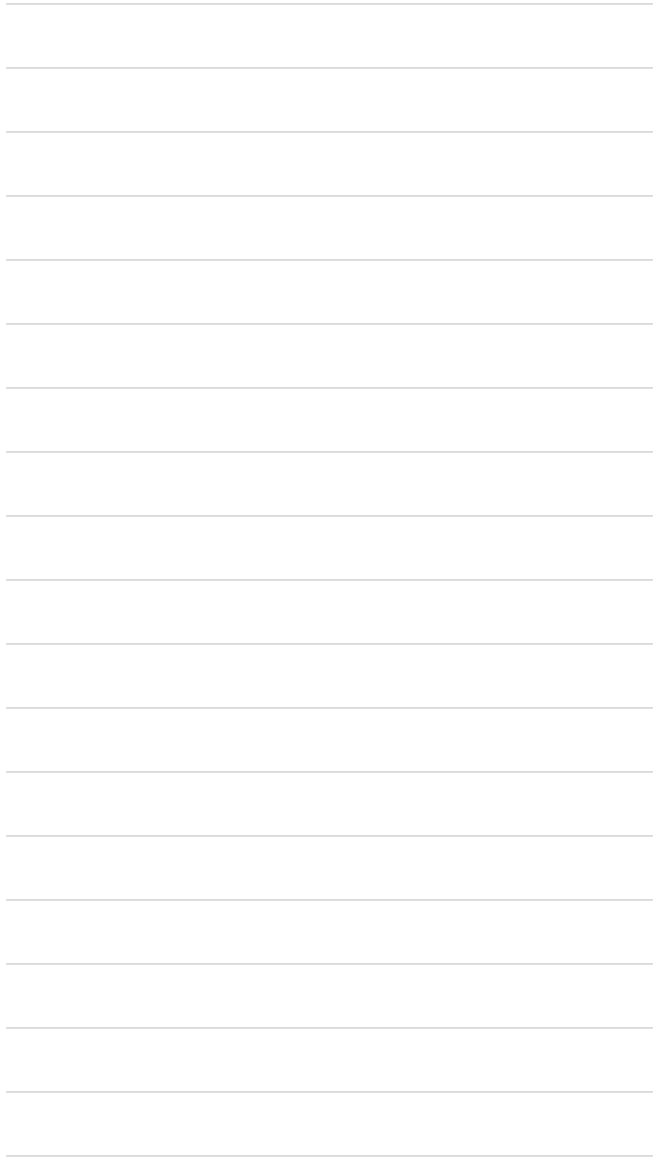
This Retreat draws to a close, but our relationship with the Blessed Trinity can always grow. As we deepen in the Trinitarian shape of our prayer, we become ever-more radiant witnesses to the God who is Love, and we help to bring that love into the world in new and wonderful ways.

The following personal questionnaire may help you discern what attitudes and practical resolutions Our Lord is inspiring in your heart.

PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What idea or ideas resonated the most with me today? What could the Lord be telling me with that?
2. Which person of the Blessed Trinity (the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit) do I feel most drawn towards in prayer? Why?
3. What are one or two simple ways that I can I create more silence in order to recognize the Blessed Trinity’s presence and action in my life?
4. God is love, and Christ’s great commandment is to love one another as he loves us—without limits. What are a few simple ways I can share that love with someone else?
5. Finally, list two or three practical resolutions from this Retreat. For example, I will create more silence in my life in the following way_____.
 - I will be a missionary of God’s love today by praying for and reaching out to someone who is suffering (be very specific here).
 - I will read *Novo Millenio Ineunte* by Saint John Paul II (it’s free online) and reflect on my call to holiness and its link with Trinitarian prayer.
 - I will make a habit of saying “Come Holy Spirit” as soon as I wake up in the morning.

NOTES



FURTHER READING

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

Novo Millennio Ineunte: Into the New Millennium
by St. John Paul II

Contemplating the Trinity
by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

The One Thing Is Three
by Fr. Michael Gaitley

EXPLORING MORE

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