

Imagine you are on a cruise and fall overboard into the ocean. You do not know how to swim.

The only way to stay alive is by floating.

Unless you trust the water to support you, you will drown.

Knowing the properties of water can help you

– telling the difference, for example, between an oil spill that will not help you live

and salt water that will keep you buoyant.

But even if you don't know the details of the water,

it is certainly true that

if you do not trust the water to hold you up, you will surely perish.

The catholic – or universal – Christian faith is the water in this image

- because it is faith in the God of the Bible –
- the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

And belief is not so much cognitive agreement as utter trust in the truth.

This ancient creed describes the properties of the God who saves humanity from sin and death.

It tells us the truth of who God is and why our trust in him is essential for our life.

Read first part of creed.

Some people misread this as a threat –

that if we aren't theologically perfect, we are doomed.

But it is not a threat,

Rather it is a simple statement of fact.

Just as it is a statement of fact that if we do not trust water to keep us afloat, we will surely drown.

**The fact is, the God of the Bible, whom this creed confesses,
is the only one who can keep us afloat
and those who do not trust him, perish forever.**

But why is this creed necessary at all? What does it really matter?

The short answer is this:

We want to be floating in water,
because if we are not, it means we are drowning in something else.

We are either living in the love of God in Jesus Christ, or we are perishing, as John 3:16 announces.

The long answer is because after Jesus' resurrection,

there were many different ideas circulating about who Jesus is and who God is,

most by people who had no direct knowledge of Jesus or the apostles.

And of those who were using their imaginations to explain things, a number of them claimed to have the authoritative truth, even though they were not apostles or taught by apostles.

They were teaching as if their teaching were saving water, but in reality it was crude oil or alcohol, in which people cannot float, but surely drown and die.

If these ideas remained ancient, this creed – indeed all the creeds— would be irrelevant for us.

But the false teaching that sparked the creeds are still around today.

And some are very hard to avoid.

- Perhaps the most troublesome of these false teachings is the idea that God exists in 3 modes = e.g. creator is one mode, redeemer is one mode, and sanctifier is one mode, and God switches back and forth among them. This is also the problem with comparing the Trinity to water, ice, and steam.
- Another false notion thinks of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as independent divine beings, three separate gods. This is a fundamental misunderstanding that divides Christians and Muslims, as well as some branches of Protestantism from others.
- Some falsely believe that Jesus the Son is a creature, not fully God, but only a half god or part God.
- Still others believe that Jesus is purely divine and only “appears” human, only “appeared” to suffer, but didn’t really do so.
- Some believe both the Son and the Spirit are created beings – really good ones, but still created.
- And others think Jesus was born human but later adopted by God in a special way.

- Finally, there are those who believe the Father, Son, and Spirit are each just a part of God and that they are only fully God when together. This is the problem with the image of the apple, core, and seeds.

Truly, no analogy can rightly describe the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

In the face of these – and other false notions of God,
**the creed states the truth as revealed to the apostles
in Holy scripture
and by personal experience of Jesus and the Spirit.**

It is important for us to be able to articulate who it is we worship and why.

It is important for us to be able to talk with others and to speak the truth to those who may have misunderstandings or not know at all about God.

In our day, it is important that we recognize that we are not saved by our own truth, by our own thoughts about God,

But rather we are saved by the God of the Bible,
revealed as the Father of Jesus the Son and their common Spirit,
whom the creeds confess as giving us life and salvation.

As we read this ancient text, bear these two concepts in mind:

The term “Person” relates to the personal identity of the relationships: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The term “substance” relates to the shared divinity of each of the persons.

With all of this in mind, Let’s read part 2.

After going to such great lengths to establish the triunity of God, it remains to clarify **who Jesus is in relation to this triune God.**

This is important because **Jesus is God visible in history,**

- the physical human presence of God on earth – God with us
- and the divine presence of God in humanity – God in us.

If Jesus were only a half-god or just a really good man, John 3:16 could not be true.

Only when the love of God becomes human,

takes our enemies to the grave, and,

leaving them there, destroyed forever,

rises from the dead as the first of all people to enter eternal life,

only then can the Gospel be true.

Only then is there any hope for us in the challenges and sorrows of this life.

As John 3 clearly tells us – Jesus came so that the world might be saved through him,

that is, by trusting him and uniting with him in Holy Baptism.

By living as those in whom the Holy Spirit of Jesus and the Father dwells, making us holy, loving, and new.

- When someone asks you if you have been born again, you can say “Yes” –I have been baptized by water and the Holy Spirit;
- I know Jesus died for me and rose to give me life eternal.
- And if someone asks you, “Have you taken Jesus to be your personal Savior?”

you can say, “Yes”, every day when I remember my baptism,

confess my sins,

and put on the righteousness of Jesus Christ my Savior;

and every time I receive his body and blood in Holy Communion for the forgiveness of my sins.

For my salvation does not depend upon my weak faith, but on Christ’s strong deeds on my behalf. I trust in him.

- And if someone asks you, “Do you believe in hell?” you can say “Yes”,
- but only those who trust themselves instead of Jesus need to be afraid of it.

And heaven is for those whose deeds are done through love for Jesus. For apart from Christ, we can do nothing good, as he tells us.

Read Part 3.

Truly, this triune God in whom we trust and revel is a mystery we cannot fathom.

Our intellect cannot grasp this amazing God.

No symbol or analogy gives a true picture of the immensity of this love that holds all things together and knows each of us by name:

The Love made real as the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

A song for you: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6qJlh0ItAo>

ATHANASIAN CREED ---

I

Whoever wants to be saved

should above all cling to the catholic faith.

Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable

will doubtless perish eternally.

pause

II

Now this is the catholic faith:

We worship one God in trinity

and the Trinity in unity,

neither confusing the persons

nor dividing the divine being.

For the Father is one person,

the Son is another,

and the Spirit is still another.

But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

is one, equal in glory,

coeternal in majesty.

What the Father is,

the Son is,

and so is the Holy Spirit.

Uncreated is the Father;

uncreated is the Son;

uncreated is the Spirit.

The Father is infinite;

the Son is infinite;

the Holy Spirit is infinite.

Eternal is the Father;

eternal is the Son;

eternal is the Spirit:

And yet there are not three eternal beings,

but one who is eternal;

as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings,

but one who is uncreated and unlimited.

Almighty is the Father;

almighty is the Son;

almighty is the Spirit:

And yet there are not three almighty beings,

but one who is almighty.

Thus the Father is God;

the Son is God;

the Holy Spirit is God:

And yet there are not three gods,

but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord;

the Son is Lord;

the Holy Spirit is Lord:

And yet there are not three lords,

but one Lord.

As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge

each distinct person as God and Lord,

so catholic religion forbids us

to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made

nor created nor begotten;

the Son was neither made nor created,

but was alone begotten of the Father;

the Spirit was neither made nor created,

but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Thus there is one Father, not three fathers;

one Son, not three sons;

one Holy Spirit, not three spirits.

And in this Trinity, no one is before or after,

greater or less than the other;

but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal;

and so we must worship the Trinity in unity

and the one God in three persons.

Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.

pause

III

**It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe
that our Lord Jesus became flesh.**

For this is the true faith that we believe and confess:

**That our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son,
is both God and man.**

He is God, begotten before all worlds

from the being of the Father,

and he is man, born in the world

from the being of his mother—

existing fully as God,

and fully as man

with a rational soul and a human body;

equal to the Father in divinity,

subordinate to the Father in humanity.

Although he is God and man,

he is not divided,

but is one Christ.

He is united because God

has taken humanity into himself;

he does not transform deity into humanity.

He is completely one in the unity of his person,

without confusing his natures.

For as the rational soul and body are one person,

Day
Date
St. Peter's
Text

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so the one Christ is God and man.

He suffered death for our salvation.

He descended into hell

and rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

At his coming all people shall rise bodily

to give an account of their own deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life,

those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith.

One cannot be saved

without believing this firmly and faithfully.

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