

Sermon – May 30, 2021 – Trinity – St James

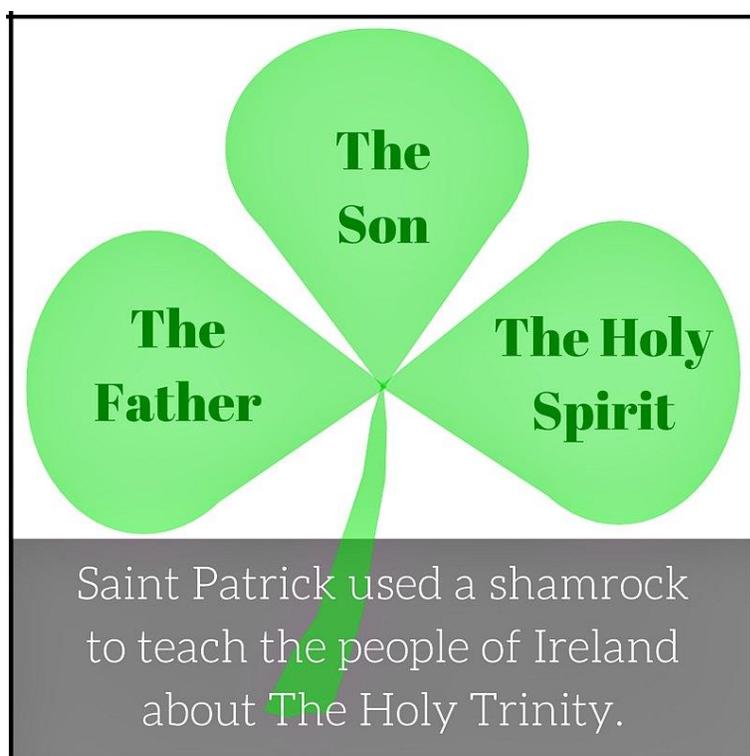
John 3:1-17

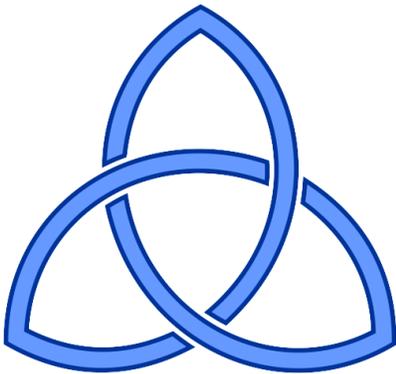
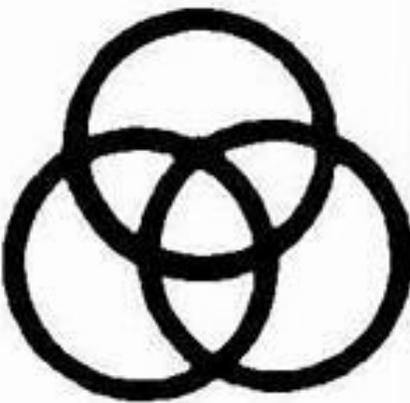
³Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

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Good Morning! This is Trinity Sunday! the last major Feast until Advent! On Trinity Sunday we celebrate our Three in One God.

Jan Richardson, in her book ‘Sacred Journeys’, writes that ‘The Trinity tickles the mind: Three-in-one, one-in-three; three ‘persons’ yet not divisible.’ To be honest, the Trinity is tricky. We usually resort to everyday symbols to understand its meaning: shamrocks, fleur-de-lis, three interlocking circles. We use these symbols because ‘three in one’ and ‘one in three’ is difficult to grasp.





Jan Richardson in her 'Painted Prayerbook' suggests such symbols point us toward two notions that lie at the heart of the Trinity.

First, ... God ...dwells in community. God's ...nature is relational, and God seeks to draw us into that divine community.

Second, our doctrine of the Trinity ...falls short of completely...explaining God. And so they should.

We Christians worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together equally.

We also deny two things, we do not worship **three separate gods**; and neither the Son nor the Spirit is subordinate to the Father.

Rublev's Icon



In the 15th century, Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev created, “The Hospitality of Abraham,” also known as “The Trinity,” one of the most well known and well loved icons in Christendom. In it, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are depicted as the three angels who appeared to Abraham near the great trees of

Mamre. They sit around a table, sharing food and drink. Their faces are nearly identical. As a whole, the icon communicates intimacy —the three persons around the table love and enjoy each other, inclining their heads to one another. But there is openness. There is space at the table for the viewer of the icon; for me, for *you*; as if to say, the Three-in-One is not exclusive — God is not a clique — there is radical hospitality. The point of the Three is always to add one more, to extend the invitation, to make the holy table *more* expansive and *more* welcoming. The closer we draw to the adoration of the Three, the wider and more hospitable our hearts grow towards the world.

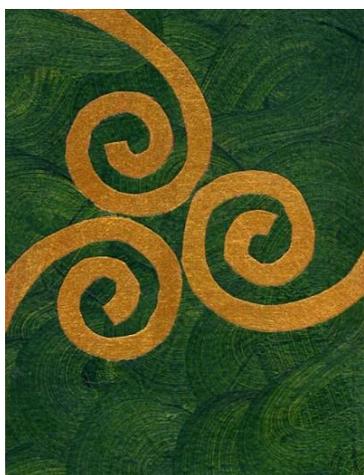
Eastern theology emphasizes adoration of the mystery. It has always been wary of the inadequacies of human language, the limitations of the human mind, and the infinity of God.

The desert father and intellectual **Evagrius of Pontus** (345–399), spent the last sixteen years of his life among unlettered Coptic peasants in the harsh Egyptian desert. He once observed: "God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped he would not be God."





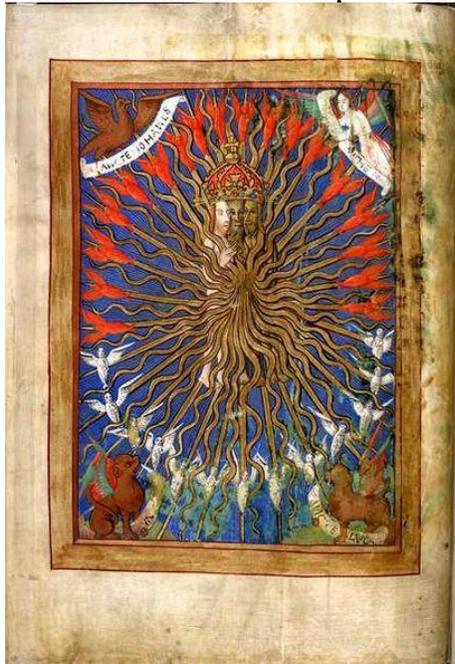
Also, the Syrian monk and bishop John of Damascus (676–749) wrote in his *Exposition of the Christian Faith* (I.4): "It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what he is in his essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable. God then is infinite and incomprehensible;..."



The symbol of the triple spiral is prevalent in Celtic lands, where, in Christian times, it came to signify the Trinity. Evoking the energy, interconnection, and mystery of the triune God, the triple spiral graces medieval Gospel books such as the **Book of Durrow** and the **Book of Kells**.

On Trinity Sunday, we celebrate both God's triune nature and also acknowledge its great mystery. Throughout the centuries, theologians have tried to define just how it is that God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwell together and with all of creation. Symbols of the Trinity abound, evidence of our desire to describe a being that comprises a community within itself. Attempts to convey the nature of the Trinity in images have produced some curious artwork, as in [this image](#) from a medieval

Book of Hours that depicts three fellows sharing a single crown,



and [this image](#),



added to a medieval English Psalter, that shows Abraham adoring a three-headed Trinity.

Celtic Christians had no theology to explain the Trinity. They did leave artistic depictions of the Trinity as in the Book of Durrow, and the Book of Kells. They also left prayers and poetry that show us how they connected the Trinity to their daily lives. In their poems and prayers, Celtic Christians moved from the abstract

to the actual; for them, the triune deity was deeply embedded in daily life. In the Celtic imagination, God, Christ, and Spirit are intertwined with one another and with all of creation.

The **Carmina Gadelica**, is a collection of prayers, poems, and blessings that Alexander Carmichael gathered in the Scottish islands and highlands in the 19th century. It offers many examples of this rich relationship with the Trinity, as in this prayer:

I am bending my knee
 In the eye of the Father who created me.
 In the eye of the Son who purchased me.
 In the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,
 In friendship and affection. (Carmina Gadelica, 1, p.35)

Here's another:

I lie down this night with God,
 And God will lie down with me;

I lie down this night with Christ,
 And Christ will lie down with me;

I lie down this night with Spirit,
 And the Spirit will lie down with me;

God and Christ and the Spirit
 Be lying down with me. From Carmina Caedica

So today on Trinity Sunday, we bow in awe before the great mystery of our Three in One God. Knowing it is beyond any simple explanation, we can relax. We do not need to 'make sense' of the Trinity. We can be like the Celtic Christians and simply say the prayers to invoke the Holy Trinity. We can imagine binding the Trinity to ourselves for protection like a breastplate. Or as in the prayer, we can pray at bedtime that God, Christ and Spirit will lie down with us.

Mostly let us celebrate this mystery that is always beckoning us to join the loving divine community. Amen

<https://youtu.be/yH4ToVxtn9A>