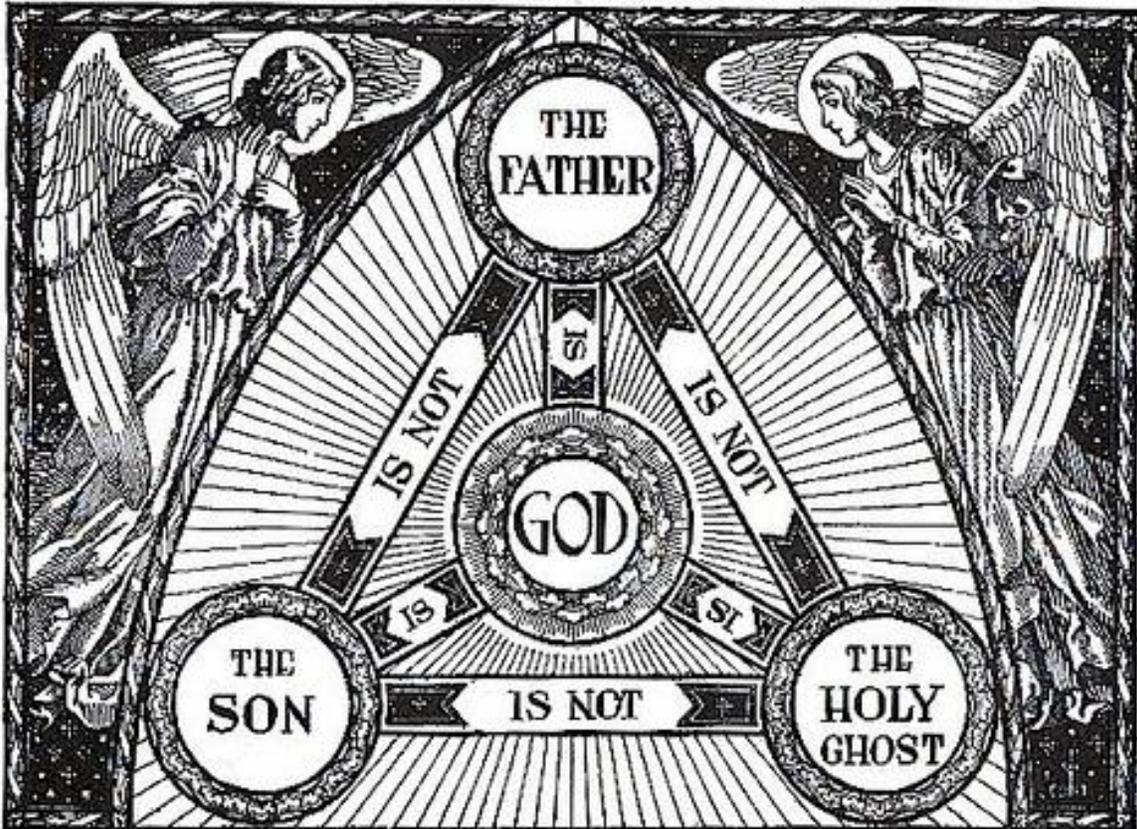




Introduction to Religion #1: The Most Holy Trinity

Introduction:



A good concrete illustration of the Blessed Trinity is an equilateral triangle. Such a triangle has three sides equal in every way, and yet distinct from each other. There are three sides, but only one triangle. As we see in this illustration, each Divine

Person is different from the other two, but all three are God. Each one is God, distinct from the two others, and yet one with them. The three Persons are equal in every way, with one nature and one substance: three Divine Persons, but only one God.

This is our very first lesson and we are starting with a belief that is inexplicable! The three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity are God the Father, the Son (also called by the name of Jesus) and the Holy Spirit (also called the Holy Ghost). Each of the Divine Persons is distinct yet there is only one God. There are not three gods. As Catholicism maintains, there is only one true God in the world.

How this can be? It is one of the greatest mysteries of Catholicism. St. Patrick is said to have used the metaphor of a three leaf clover — three leaves yet one clover. Others have likened it to a chord of music — three notes yet one sound. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are co-eternal and equal. Yet they are the same God.



The Baltimore Catechism (a catechism is a book that explains what the Church believes) tells us the following about the Holy Trinity:

By the Blessed Trinity, we mean, one and the same God in three Divine Persons. The three Divine Persons are really distinct from one another. The three Divine Persons are perfectly equal to one another because all are one and the same God. The three Divine Persons, though really distinct from one another, are one and the same God because all have one and the same Divine nature. We cannot fully understand how the three Divine Persons, though really distinct from one another, are one and the same God because this is a supernatural mystery. A supernatural mystery is a truth which we cannot fully understand, but which we firmly believe because we have God's word for it.

Baltimore Catechism Lesson #29-34

Although we can never understand this mystery, it is important to meditate on the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In art, the Father is shown as an older man (even though God the Father actually is completely spirit and doesn't have a human body), the Son is shown as a younger man (in the person of Jesus Christ), while the Holy Spirit is often shown as a dove (as a symbol of love and peace). Of the three, we especially know details of Jesus' life because He came down to earth to redeem us and His story is told in the Four Gospels which comprise the heart of the Bible.

Opening Prayer:





Before we begin our lesson, let us pray to the Holy Trinity:

I praise you, Father all-powerful. I praise you, Divine Son, our Lord, and Savior. I praise you, Spirit of Love and Consolation. One God, three Persons, Triune Unity, be near me in the temple of my soul. Draw me to share in your life and love. In your kindness grant to me and to my family the riches of your mercy and a share in your blessing, that we may come to the glory of your Kingdom and rejoice in loving you for all eternity. Amen.

Scripture:



The birth of a Messiah was greatly anticipated in the Old Testament section of the Bible. You may know the story of Adam and Eve from the first book of the Bible. This story tells of the disobedience of Eve and Adam in eating the forbidden fruit. For this sin, they and their descendants were banished from Paradise, forced to work in order to survive and condemned to eventually age and die. However, because God is merciful as well as just, God promised to send a Savior to redeem us. Isaiah, a Jewish prophet born eight centuries before Jesus, foretold His birth:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.

Isaiah 7:14



Isaiah continued:

Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and His look was as it was hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises, we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not his mouth: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer, and He shall not open His mouth.

Isaiah 53:3-7

The Jewish people had a special covenant with God. They received His Ten Commandments, they learned about God from their prophets and God guided them when they escaped from their slavery in Egypt and founded Israel. Throughout their history, the Jewish people anticipated the coming of the Messiah. God's promise was fulfilled in the small town of Nazareth when the angel Gabriel visited a young woman named Mary. This important event is known as the Annunciation:

And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.

Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David his father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

And behold thy cousin — Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: Because no word shall be impossible with God. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

The Blessed Virgin Mary could have said “No” to this tremendous responsibility but instead she agreed to risk everything for God. Fortunately, she would not do this alone — St. Joseph, her spouse, would support his small family and teach Jesus to be a carpenter. Blessed Mary and St.



Joseph would live chastely together until his death although the Bible does not mention his passing.

Jesus embarked on His teaching ministry when He was about 30 years old. Our Lord chose His twelve Apostles and gathered His disciples. He taught them through parables, miracles, and discourses. One of Jesus' most famous discourses was the Sermon on the Mount:

And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain, and when He was set down, His disciples came unto Him. And opening His mouth, He taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit ¹ for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men. You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.

So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Matthew 5:1-17

Jesus spoke of loving God and loving our neighbor. Jesus also showed the depth of His love for us when He fulfilled His mission to redeem us. On the night before He died, Jesus ate the Passover meal with His Apostles. Jesus taught them many lessons that night and initiated the Eucharist. The Eucharist is also a Mystery and one which we shall revisit when we learn about the Mass:

And taking bread, He gave thanks, and brake; and gave to them, saying: This is My body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of Me. In like manner the chalice also, after He had supped, saying: This is the chalice, the new testament in My blood, which shall be shed for you.

Luke 22:19-20

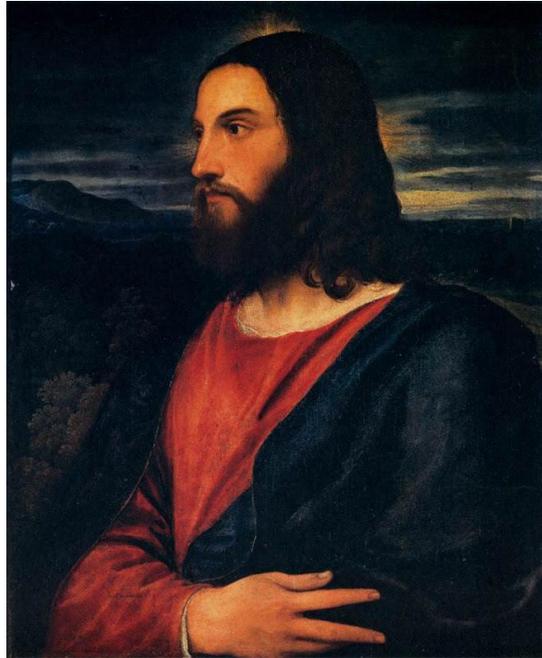
Jesus and His Apostles next went to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed:



And He was withdrawn away from them a stone's cast; and kneeling down, He prayed, Saying: Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me: but yet not My will, but thine be done.

Luke 22:41-42

Within a few hours, Jesus would be betrayed by Judas, one of the Apostles, tortured by His Roman captors and condemned to death. Weakened by loss of blood and forced to carry His cross through Jerusalem, Jesus suffered terrible pain when His wrists and legs were nailed to the cross.



And Jesus crying out with a loud voice, said: Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit. And saying this, He gave up the ghost. Now the centurion, seeing what was done, glorified God, saying: Indeed this was a just man.

Luke 23:26-27

Jesus had died and His disciples buried Him in a borrowed tomb. Since Jesus had died on the eve of the Sabbath, the women had not been able to bury Him properly. They returned to the tomb on the third day:

And on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled back from the sepulchre. And going in, they found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were astonished in their mind at this, behold, two men stood by them, in shining apparel. And as they were afraid, and bowed down their countenance towards the ground, they said unto them: Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here but is risen.

Luke 24:1-6



The women hurried back to the Apostles and told them what they had seen and heard. Then Jesus Himself appeared to the Apostles and some of His disciples, teaching them until His Ascension to heaven. Before He left, Jesus gave them one more command and the promise to be with His Church forever:

And Jesus coming, spoke to them, saying: All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.

Matthew 28:17-20

The last words of Jesus speak of baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — the Trinity. The Church Document section will examine the Trinity in documents of the Fathers of the Church.

☒ “The poor in spirit”: That is, the humble; and they whose spirit is not set upon riches. (Commentary by Bishop Richard Challoner) ?

Catechism References:

We have studied the life of Jesus — the second Person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ walked here on earth among us, the Apostles knew Him and the Gospels were written about Him. We know the most about Jesus’ life but He is only a part of the Trinity. The Trinity is a mystery but this has not stopped writers from trying to define or explain what is meant by this term. The early Greek and Latin Catholic writers from the second to the sixth century are called the Fathers of the Church. One of these was St. Athanasius (296 to 373) who was the Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt during the very tumultuous period of the Arian heresy. In fact, it was in one of his treatises against the Arians that St. Athanasius wrote of the Holy Trinity:

It is into the Name of Holy Triad that we are baptized; it is this which is the beginning and end of our worship; it is the one abiding Truth for all creation, for men and Angels from first to last. It is the One existing Life and Power from all eternity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is what the Catholic Church holds, and hands down.

St. Athanasius, pg. 174

Another Saint and Father of the Church was St. Augustine:

Thus the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of these by Himself, is God, and at the same time they are all one God; and each of them by Himself is a complete substance, and yet they are all one substance. The Father is not the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father nor the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not the Father nor the Son; but the Father is only Father, the Son is only Son and the Holy Spirit is only Holy Spirit. To all three belong the same eternity, the same unchangeableness, the same majesty, the same power.

St. Augustine, pg. 10



Other writers have shown how the Trinity works within us so that we may attain a particular virtue. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153), for instance, wrote how the Holy Trinity leads men to the truth.

Here I seem to discern a certain marvelous and individual operation of each Person of the Trinity – if indeed it is possible for the limited intelligence of man to conceive a difference such as cannot be expressed in words between persons who co-operate. On this supposition, the first degree appears to be due to the action of the Son, the second to that of the Holy Spirit, and the third to that of the Father. Would you wish to hear about the work of the Son? If saith He, I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, how much more ought ye to wash one another's feet (John 13:14). The Master of truth thus presented to His disciples a pattern of humility, that they might therein discern the first degree of truth. Mark also the work of the Holy Spirit, Love is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us (Rom. 5:8). Love is indeed the gift of the Holy Spirit, and this makes it possible for those who, under the instruction of the Son, have by humility already attained the first degree of truth, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to reach the second by sympathy with their neighbours. Hear also what is said about the Father. Blessed art thou Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 16:17). ...You see then how the Father at last receives into glory those to whom the Son first taught humility by precept and by practice, and on whom the Holy Spirit then shed love. The Son receives them as learners, the Comforter encourages them as friends, the Father raises them as sons.

St. Bernard, pg. 40-41

These beautiful words encourage us to grow in faith as we meditate on the Trinity.

However, the Trinity is not just an abstract concept or a subject for meditation. The Trinity is the One True God. Our entire life all depends on the Trinity. The Trinity is everything to us! And to Him be all the glory.

Lesson:

Every year the Catholic Church remembers certain key events – the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, His Resurrection and Ascension. The birth and death of Christ are preceded by a time of preparation – Advent and Lent respectively.

Advent is a four week time of preparation for the birth of Christ. It begins around the end of November. The Gospel readings at Mass speak of St. John the Baptist and his call for repentance as well as the Annunciation. We read about the Annunciation in the Scripture section (Luke 1: 26-38). The Annunciation is the first time in the Bible that all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are mentioned together:

“And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)



Christmas is always celebrated on December 25th. The Gospel readings are all about the birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds. The Very Reverend Dom Prosper Gueranger, the abbot of Solesmes from 1837 – 1875 AD, wrote a series of reflections on the different seasons of the year in fifteen volumes (although he did not live to complete his monumental work). Father Gueranger wrote about the characteristics of Christmas:

“It is twofold: it is joy, which the whole Church feels at the coming of the divine Word in the Flesh; and it is admiration of that glorious Virgin, who was made the Mother of God. There is scarcely a prayer, or a rite, in the Liturgy of this glad Season, which does not imply these two grand Mysteries: - an Infant-God, and a Virgin-Mother” (Gueranger. pg. 4)

After the Christmas and Epiphany seasons, the Church enters Lent, a time of repentance. The season starts with a few weeks of pre-Lent and then Lent officially begins on Ash Wednesday. This ceremony is on the Wednesday forty-six days before Easter and involves ashes – specifically the ashes of the palms from Palm Sunday. The priest traces the sign of the cross on each person’s forehead while saying either “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. It is a day of fasting and abstinence. This sets the tone for our Lenten season. As the Saint Joseph Sunday Missal urges us:

“The ashes on your forehead have only as much meaning as you are giving them. Make this symbolism a meaningful beginning of a time of penance, preparing to celebrate the paschal mystery of our Lord’s death and resurrection” (Saint Joseph Sunday Missal, pg. 233).

The Lenten season is penitential so we are asked to devote time to spiritual and corporal acts of mercy as well as prayer, fasting and the giving of alms. In all of these ways, we remember the great love Jesus showed for us as He died for our sins. Catholics often give up something for Lent such as candy or watching television. Catholics may attend Mass during the week or go to devotions like the Stations of the Cross on Fridays. This is also a particularly important time to confess our sins to a priest and receive God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Confession. Lent is traditionally forty days of fasting and forty days without meat.

Lent culminates in Holy Week which commemorates many of the last moments of Jesus’ life. Palm Sunday starts Holy Week and on that day we commemorate Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Many of the crowd who shouted “Hosanna” and placed palms before His path may have also called out for His death days later. On Holy Thursday we remember the Institution of the Holy Eucharist and on Good Friday there is a special service for Jesus’ death. Good Friday is also a day for fasting and abstinence and is the most somber day in the entire year. Yet Holy Week ends and Lent ends with it. We then arrive at the most joyous celebration of the entire year: Easter Sunday!

Easter bursts forth as we hear of Jesus’ rising from the dead, the greatest proof of His own divinity. Just as at Jesus’ birth, angels announce the good news – this time of His resurrection from the dead. Astonished, His Apostles and disciples first hear of His resurrection and then see His risen body. Their joy leaps off the pages of the Gospels. The Easter Season lasts for fifty days.

Jesus would not stay with His Apostles for long but ascended to heaven. We celebrate this forty days after Easter Sunday on Ascension Thursday. However, Jesus promised not to leave us



orphans but to send the Holy Spirit. The Apostles gathered in Jerusalem, waiting for the Holy Spirit:

“And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according to as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.” (Acts 2:1-4)



We celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost which is 50 days after Easter Sunday. Trinity Sunday occurs the Sunday after Pentecost to honor the Blessed Trinity. The Feast of Corpus Christi, commemorating the great gift that God gives us through the Eucharist, takes place shortly after Pentecost. This is the end of the movable schedule of liturgical feasts until Advent begins again.

The entire year helps us to commemorate Jesus' life and the work of the Holy Trinity. Through the Mass, meditation, prayers, acts of mercy and devotions, we become closer to God. The Mass and all prayer are ultimately for the sole purpose of the worship of the Trinity. Our purpose in life is ultimately orientated to the worship of the Holy Trinity. The Mass, the greatest act of Catholic worship, at its core is the greatest worship that can be given to the Trinity because the Mass is the re-presentation of Jesus Christ on the Cross to God the Father. We will cover this in much more detail later.



Activity:

The Franciscan Friars have created videos explaining the teachings of the Catholic Church. One of these is about the Trinity and it is very interesting. Let's watch it now:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHbLrvO8RBE>

This video contains some doctrines that non-Christians might find confusing but the explanations are done carefully, gently and thoughtfully. It lasts a little over 18 minutes. Spend some time now prayerfully watching and taking notes.

Closing Prayer:





God Eternal Father, bless me through the love with which You have begotten Your only Son from all eternity and shared with Him the fullness of Your Divinity. Bless me through the love which has adopted us as children, and made us partakers of the treasures of Your Divinity. Bless me through the love which sent us Your Son and the Holy Spirit to work the miracles of Your power and mercy in us. Grant that I may always revere and honor You as my great God, and love You with my whole heart as the best of fathers. Eternal Father, grant my petition:

(Mention your request)

God Eternal Son, image of the splendor of the Father, bless me through the love with which You surround us, Your poor creatures. You have become our Brother according to the flesh to make us Your brothers according to Your Divinity, and an image of Your splendor. Bless me through the marvelous goodness of Your Sacred Heart which chose death to bring us life. Bless me through the love with which You plead for us before the throne of God, in the Blessed Sacrament, and with which You give Yourself to us in Holy Communion. Grant that all this love and bitter pain may not be lost on me. Eternal Son, grant my petition:

(Mention your request)

God Holy Spirit, mutual Love of the Father and the Son, bless me through the love with which You proceed from the Father and the Son and unite Them in eternal unity. Bless me through the love with which You give Yourself to us as our greatest Gift, dispensing Your Divine graces to us and transforming sinners into children of God. Bless me through the love with which You dwell in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through Whose merits the earth is filled with grace, and made a dwelling place for the God of heaven. Grant that I, Your faithful servant, may always allow You to lead me so I may advance in virtue and reach eternal happiness. Eternal Holy Spirit, grant my petition:

(Mention your request)

Most Holy Trinity, Godhead indivisible, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our first beginning and our last end, You have made us after Your own image and likeness. Grant that all the thoughts of my mind, all the words of my mouth, all the affections of my heart, and all my actions be always conformed to Your holy Will. After having seen You here below in Your manifestations and by faith, may I come at last to see You face to face in the perfect possession of You forever in heaven. Amen.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Everlasting God, by the profession of the true faith, You have given us, Your servants, grace to acknowledge the glory of the Eternal Trinity, and in the power of Your Divine Majesty to worship the Unity. We beg You to grant that, by our fidelity in this same faith, we may always be defended from all dangers. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.