

II. WE BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY, ONE IN ESSENCE AND UNDIVIDED

71 The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—infinitely surpasses all possibilities of human understanding. "His divinity [i.e., Godhead] is completely unfathomable, and his essence, which is above all, is not what the mind conceives it to be."⁵⁰ According to the words of the apostle Paul, the depths of this mystery can be plumbed only by the Holy Spirit: "So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God" (1 *Cor* 2:11). However, that same Spirit, the Spirit of truth, descending upon people, reveals the inner life of God. The Holy Spirit teaches people to express the truth, inasmuch as this is possible, through the language of faith: "Now we have received ... the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed upon us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual" (1 *Cor* 2:12-13). And then, having thus taught, the Holy Spirit keeps vigil, that the faith, "the assurance of things hoped for," might grow into the contemplation of "things not seen" (see *Heb* 11:1); that humankind may see the invisible as if it were visible, and see what is obscure face to face. "[Christians of the East] perceive that one draws close to this presence above all by letting oneself be taught an adoring silence, for at the culmination of the knowledge and experience of God is his absolute transcendence."⁵¹

72 The presence of the transcendent God is expressed through the symbolism of the liturgy and of the church building: by the curtain behind the Royal Doors of the iconostasis, by the Holy Gifts covered by veils, by the raised *aer* (in Slavonic, *vozdukh*) during the Creed, and by the cloud of incense. "There is the transcendent unity of God and the fruitfulness of God, and as we prepare to sing this truth we use the names 'Trinity' and 'Unity' for that which is fact beyond every name."⁵² Even though we refer to God using these titles, we are fully aware that we do not thereby exhaust the mysteries of God.

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them [as Persons] than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three [Persons] I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me.⁵³

⁵⁰ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Oration on the Divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit*: PG 46, 553.

⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* [Light of the East], 16.

⁵² PSUEDO-DIONYSIUS THE AREOPOGITE, *The Divine Names*, 13, 3: PG 3, 981.

⁵³ GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, *Oration 40: The Oration on Holy Baptism*, 41: PG 36, 417.

73 In our liturgical and personal prayers, through the constant invocation and glorification of the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we simultaneously express our faith and communion with the Most Holy Trinity, which grants us "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁴

A. We Believe in God the Father

*I believe in one God, the Father...
(Symbol of Faith)*

*O Master, the One-Who-Is, Lord God, Father Almighty...
(Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)*

74 Basing itself on Divine Revelation and its interpretation by the Holy Fathers, in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith⁵⁵ the Church of Christ professes her faith in God the Father as follows: "I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen." The fatherhood of God is understood to mean that the Father eternally begets the Son; and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.⁵⁶ God has created everything and governs all things. The Father is the Creator and Pantocrator for all his creation. The universe came into existence because God the Father willed it. We believe in the one God, because there is only one God the Father.

1. God the Father Revealed in the Holy Scriptures

75 God reveals himself as Person: "I AM WHO I AM," or "THE ONE—WHO—Is" (*Ex* 3:14). This God-who-is-Person is the only one who really *is*. Everything else exists only inasmuch as God wills it to exist. God is holy, that is, totally different from all creation. There is no other like God. He is unique. Thus, it is not possible to imagine him with our thoughts, or to portray him in any material way: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (*Ex* 20:4). In contrast to lifeless idols, the true God *lives*. Lacking appropriate words to express the mystery of God's life, Holy Scripture often makes use of anthropomorphisms, thereby applying to God the behavioural traits of a living human being: God *loves, converses, assists, pities, is sad, becomes angry, does battle, punishes...*

⁵⁴ *Liturgicon*, The Divine Liturgy of our Holy Father John Chrysostom, Blessing prior to the Anaphora.

⁵⁵ CONSTANTINOPLE I, *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith*.

⁵⁶ See GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Against Eunomius*, 1, 32: PG 45, 389.