

God does not exist. God is no-thing—nothing. That is to say, God does not have existence in the way that you and I do. God is not a “being.” God *is* being. God does not *have* awareness or thoughts or consciousness; God *is* consciousness. God does not *have* life or love; God *is* love.

Taoists say: “The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao, and yet we must say something.” St. Augustine, writing about the Trinity, said: “When the question is asked 'what three?' human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given, 'three persons,' not that it might be spoken but that it might not be left unspoken.”

*All* the words we use must be symbols. They can only point to something that can be apprehended but not fully comprehended. We can never capture all of God’s truth, and so we must rely on symbolic language to describe God who utterly transcends and yet permeates all time and existence. As a consequence, whatever we can say is always exploratory, never exhaustive.

What we have available to is far too provisional and tentative for any kind of absolute certainty. All of our words fall short, but there *are* some ways of talking about God that help orient us toward the Divine and other ways of talking about God that can distract us. “Persons” as a term can be misleading. In a sense, even to say that God is “three persons in one substance” is not particularly helpful. The phrase provides almost no clarity and may instead just call to mind an image of three people sitting in a bowl of soup.

The best that most of us have been able to conjure are metaphors or analogies for what the *experience* of God is like—how the experience feels or what it reminds us of. Fortunately, our mothers and fathers in the faith have provided words that are rich and resourceful enough to inform our perception of the mystery of the Trinity; to guide our interpretation of God in action.

We experience God in Scripture, in worship and in nature. We experience God in the people we love, in the world around us and even in people who are strangers to us. The One God meets us in many different ways and that is

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exactly what leads to some difficulties. We rarely experience God in the same way twice in a row, let alone exactly like the person sitting next to us!

There are some who have met God as a drill sergeant, barking at them for their lack of discipline. Some have felt God as a gentle mother, holding them close and reassuring them through deep pain. Others have watched God blast through their lives—a hurricane that left their certainty in shambles. More than a few have experienced God as a relentless hound, pursuing them into the darkest recesses simply to offer them love. Maybe you've faced more than one of these and, of course, there are countless others.

God as rock. God as lover. God as fortress, shepherd or judge. How about God as thunder, midwife or fresh water? God as still silent voice. As governor, darkness or whirlwind. God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There's an ironic advantage to using icons in worship spaces. They are wrong. I've seen icons of Moses wearing a medieval European crown. Icons of Abraham, Isaac and the archangel Gabriel as white men and others that picture all three as black men. When I was at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, I was deeply moved by the dozens of icons of Mary depicting her in an impressive array of different ethnicities and in a wide variety of culturally specific clothing. None of them are *factually* correct, but all of them can provide a glimpse into the nature of the Divine.

The same is true of our language symbols. None of them is an accurate portrayal of God's totality, but any number of them can touch our hearts and awaken us to God's presence. The glory of God always goes beyond our words and images. No speech, no icons or symbol can fully capture the glory of God because it bursts every human construct. Every corner of creation is alive with God's activity, yet the entire universe is insufficient to contain God's glory.

God is positively present in creation and is also totally transcendent of it. And God's indwelling and transcendence illuminate one another. We catch glimpses of God's transcendence in intimate encounters with God's presence. The God who creates the star nurseries in the deep regions of space is the same God who animates the fluctuating quantum foam that forms the fabric of

space-time. That very same God empties into the darkness of each of our human lives and floods our hearts with light.

One way of probing this mystery is to say that God is Being-Itself; that is, the transcendent creative ground of all being, beyond human comprehension, the unlimited ocean of infinity, the abyss beyond all duality that gives birth to all that exists, the ultimate cause of all.

To that, we could add that God is Consciousness-Itself; the awareness within which all possibilities dwell much like thoughts in the supreme mind. Here all potentials and archetypes of being are rooted and ordered with perfect wisdom. Infinity swirls and dances as self-luminous awareness with eddies of the uncreated light of Divine wisdom giving form and intelligibility to all created entities.

We could say that God is also the dynamic energy of life and love that gives actuality to the forms conceived by the Divine wisdom, which values and affirms them, delighting in their particularity.

These three descriptions together do not fully define God. And they may even seem unnecessarily abstract or tangential because we have not come to consider God to be “one and three” because of even the most eloquent philosophical propositions. We have learned something of the nature of God through the life and teaching of Jesus who was an embodied image of God. Jesus, the Son, referred to God, once here in this Gospel reading, as “Father.” And Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit. For centuries, people have tasted the Trinity in their own lives as a life-changing, life-affirming reality; a reality that we can call upon and trust.

There are people in this parish carrying heavy burdens these days. Many people outside this congregation suffer every day. The church, our country and our planet home are suffering from polarization and division. There are those who try to coat the suffering with a veneer of optimism and others who find ways to numb themselves to the pain. Sadly, there are many who will lose hope and give up trying to create a better future.

But despite our difficulties, our experiences of the life-changing reality of God offer another alternative. We can try to lead a life formed by faith and hope, and grounded in the creative and redeeming work of the triune God.

Such a life is capable of walking toward suffering because God is there. With practice, we can participate in God's work of bringing life to its fullest truth.

God is One and God is Many. God is not Three, not One. God comes to people in many different ways as there are people to receive. That's the mystery. And we *can talk* about the mystery, but better to invite encounters—to open ourselves and others to God whose liberating imagination bewilders and expands the human mind and heart.

Each and every new day that we are given, we have the opportunity to support each other in reopening to the gift of grace—to feel the sacredness of life and to trust the connection of our oneness with God and with each other. Even in the most mundane challenges of our own lives, we can choose to participate in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

We have the option to be resentful of another or to let God expand our gratitude. We have the option to let our anger harden into bitterness or to ask God for a path back to love and forgiveness. We can choose to be right at all costs or we allow God to broaden our minds to consider the possibility that more than one perspective might be right. There is no moment too small to lean into the mysteries of the life of God—the great unknown vistas of life where God's grace entices us into ever deeper relationship.

God gave birth to 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone and to 100 billion galaxies in just the part of the universe that we can see. The same God lovingly gives life to tiny Bewick's wrens who sing at least 15 different bubbly little songs. Our most appropriate response is not to nail the perfect description of God, but to drop to our knees.

The point, after all, is *awe*, not clarity. The children of God are not a family of the flawless, but a community of the adequate. The movement of the Trinity within us individually and collectively is what nourishes and informs our mutuality with each other. The mystery of the triune God beckons each of us to let the undercurrent of God's grace become a part of our lived daily experience.

Give God your consent to let the light of eternity shine through the life that God has given you.