In a parish where I used to serve as pastor, one of our elderly and somewhat bombastic Vincentian priests stood up to preach on today's feast. He boldly announced to the congregation, "Today, I am going to explain to you the mystery of the Holy Trinity." People in the congregation smiled and rolled their eyes in disbelief. Even the brilliant St Thomas Aquinas writes that "because the Trinity is a mystery, no one can completely explain it." So I will provide a couple of comments in the humble spirit of “faith seeking understanding.”

You have noticed that we begin and end every Mass with the words and blessing, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We enter and leave every Catholic Church by taking holy water, and blessing ourselves, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We begin and end grace before meals, our morning and evening prayers, our rosaries, and all prayers with these words and actions, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Why do we do this? ...

Because the scriptures and Church tradition instruct us to do this. And we Catholics have been doing this for two thousand years. At the end of St. Matthew’s gospel, Jesus told the apostles, "Go forth and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." (My. 28:19). In the middle of the second century, St. Justin Martyr writes that he remembers his now deceased grandmother piously blessing herself, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Does everybody agree with this Trinitarian teaching of the church? No, ... because every century has its heresies. In the first few centuries of the Church, some theologians taught that either Jesus was fully God but not fully man, or the opposite that Jesus was fully man but not fully God. Notice that both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed from the 2nd and 4th centuries respectively, proclaim unabashedly in similar words, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, the maker of heaven and earth.... I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, ... who by the Holy Spirit became incarnate of the Virgin Mary.” This is our faith. Meanwhile, Judaism and Islam believe in monotheism but not in the Trinity. Our Protestant brothers and sisters all believe in the Trinity. They have many disagreements amongst themselves, and number now 44,000 Protestant denominations, all of whom believe in the Trinity. The Catholic Church accepts the baptisms of all mainline Protestant churches because they baptize their followers, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” By the same token the Catholic Church does not recognize the baptisms of Mormons or Jehovah witnesses because neither of those religious groups believe that Jesus was divine, just that Jesus was a good man.
How might we try to make rational sense of the Trinity? ... Attempts vary throughout Church History because cultures and language vary. Approaches may be described as Scriptural, Traditional, philosophical, metaphorical or experiential. E.g., for the first few centuries of the Church, believers accepted the various New Testament references to the Trinity, beginning with Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, with the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Traditionally, Church leaders taught and believers understood that the Trinity consisted of three persons in one God. By the fourth century, and for the next thousand years, people generally valued philosophy, with its distinctions of substance and accidents, essence and existence, unity in diversity. In fifth century Ireland, St. Patrick taught that just as one clover has three leaves, so the Trinity has three persons in one God. Today, what speaks to us? ... May I suggest that “human experience” serves as a good starting point. We value our experiences, especially the experience of love. We know that love has to express itself, has to go beyond itself, and has to be creative. Applying that experience to God, we say, “God is love.” God expresses love which is reflected in the Son, and the union of their mutual love is the spirit, the Holy Spirit. God created the universe and all that is in it. God loves his creatures. When we sinned, God sent Jesus to save us from our sins, so that we by our having been redeemed, and we having received the Holy Spirit who lives in the Church and through the Church, lives in us, that we might enjoy eternal love with God. God is Love, with the Father expressing it, the Son enjoying it, and the bond between them being the Holy Spirit. Let’s try to manifest our belief and hope in the Trinity, by developing with others a circle of love.

That circle of love begins and ends with our believing, saying and proclaiming in all that we do: "in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."