

Reflection for the Feast of the Holy Trinity

This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. This Feast was introduced to the Church in the 9th century, and in the 14th century Pope John 22nd inserted this Feast into the general calendar of the Church. This Feast is a teachable moment in the life of the Church. All Feasts that we celebrate in the Church are teachable moments but some might be more instructional in nature than others. The Feast of the Most Holy Trinity by its very nature is a Feast that provides a teachable moment.

This teachable moment in the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity can and should start at the moment we celebrate the Mass for the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. We as Catholics traditionally start our public and private prayers with the sign of the cross saying “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. The earliest way of making the sign of the cross appeared in the 5th Century, but reference to making the sign of the cross appears in Christian writings as early as the 2nd Century. The Monophysite heresy of the 5th century that denied the two natures in the divine person of Christ and thereby the unity of the Holy Trinity brought about the formalized sign of the cross in an effort to correct this error.

The sign of the cross originally was made from forehead to chest and then from right shoulder to left shoulder with the right hand. The thumb, forefinger, and middle fingers were held together to symbolize the Holy Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three fingers were held together in a way that they represented the Greek abbreviation for Iesus Christus Soter, which is translated into English as Jesus Christ Savior. This original way of making the sign of the cross was universal for the whole Church until the 12th century. It was Pope Innocent III that stated that “*This is how it is done: from above to below, and from the right to the left, because Christ descended from the heavens to the earth, and from the Jew (right) He passed to the Gentiles (left).*” Pope Innocent noted that the custom of making the cross from the right to the left shoulder was common in both the Western and Eastern Church, he stated “*Others, however, make the sign of the cross from the left to the right, because from misery (left) we must cross over to glory (right), just as Christ crossed over from death to life, and from Hades to Paradise.*” In the Western Church, the Roman Catholic Church, with all the challenges of the Middle Ages, including wars, famine, and plagues, many started to make the sign of the cross from left to right and in time this became the norm in the West while the right to left form of making the cross, remained the norm in the East.

Every time we as a people pray, be it as an individual or as a community, be it for devotional prayer or for a sacrament, we start with the sign of the cross. This simple introduction to prayer has been a part of our faith tradition from at least the 5th Century, and some scholars would claim the sign of the cross goes as far back as the 2nd Century. This simple prayer that is a part of our daily lives reminds us of our Triune God, the two natures of Jesus Christ, that Christ came into the world not only for the chosen people but for all peoples, and because Christ crossed from Hades to Paradise.

On this Feast of the Most Holy Trinity our readings this Sunday along with the prayers at Mass remind us of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May we be mindful of what the Holy Trinity has bestowed on us. Every Sunday we should reflect on the fact that the Father creator of heaven and earth created us and predestined us, with His creative work starting on the first day of the week. The Son redeemed us, with His resurrection on the first day of the week. The Holy Spirit sanctified us and descended upon the infant Church on the first day of the week. Sunday is the Lord’s day, on this day may we take time to pray making the sign of the cross and remembering Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.