

## Reflection for the Feast of the Holy Trinity

This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. This Feast was introduced to the Church in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Pope John 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity by its very nature is a Feast that provides a teachable moment.

This teachable moment in the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity can and should start at the moment we celebrate the Mass. 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 description of making the sign of the cross appeared in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, but reference to making the sign of the cross appears in Christian writings as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. The Monophysite heresy of the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 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 seen as universal in the whole Church until the 12<sup>th</sup> 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 III 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. For the West as Pope Innocent III points out the cross from left to right became common due to the focus of moving from sorrow to joy.

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 since the second century. This simple prayer that is a part of our daily lives reminds us of our Triune God, the two natures of Jesus Christ, and that Christ came into the world not only for the chosen people but for all peoples.

In all our readings this Sunday on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we are reminded that we have a loving God that is here for His people. In our first reading this Sunday taken from the Book of Exodus we read, “*Thus the Lord passed before him and cried out, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.’*” Moses is clearly seeing a God who is embracing a stiff-necked people and this God is calling them His own. In our second reading this Sunday taken from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians we hear, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you. ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.’*” This statement by St. Paul, this greeting from the *Holy Ones*, clearly indicates the loving relationship that we have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our readings today on the Feast of the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity we are blessed to have Moses and St. Paul reminding us that we have a loving

God that is there for us in all ages and times, and we can count on our Triune God. So, the next time you make the sign of the cross may you take a moment or two to reflect on the fact that followers of Jesus Christ have been making the sign of the cross as far back as the second century. This sign speaks of the two natures of Christ, and the fact that Jesus came to save all humanity God's chosen people and everyone else. Let us never forget that the sign of the cross reminds us of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yes, this Solemnity truly is a teachable moment for all of us who pray.