

Homily John 16:12-15

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Making the Sign of the Cross may be one of the most common actions that we do. We make the Sign of the Cross when we begin and end our prayers; when we enter or leave a church; at the beginning and end of Mass; and for many other special times with family and friends or just in our private prayer life. In fact, because we make the Sign of the Cross so often, we may be tempted to rush through it, to say the words without listening to them, to ignore the profound symbolism of tracing the shape of the Cross.

In the 13th century Pope Innocent III, gave us clear instructions on how to make the Sign of the Cross. The Eastern Church adopted his instructions of using three fingers because the signing is done with the invocation, the calling upon, the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He instructed that we go from above to below and from right to left because Jesus descended from heaven to earth and passed from the Jews (represented by the right side) to the Gentiles (represented by the left side).

By the end of the Middle Ages the Western Church (that would be us) adopted the practice of making the Sign of the Cross from the left to the right. In this tradition the left shoulder represents Christ's suffering on the Cross. The right shoulder represents that Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. It is common for us to use our five fingers recognizing the three persons of the Trinity and the two Natures of Jesus Christ: human and divine. This is the standard method for making the Sign of the Cross in the Western Church. Jesus descended from heaven to earth, suffered on the cross for us, and ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father.

We know when we make the Sign of the Cross, but do we know why we do it? The answer is both simple and profound. In the Sign of the Cross, we profess the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith...the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The combination of the words and the action are a sign of faith... a statement of belief. We mark ourselves as Christians

through the Sign of the Cross. This is a radical statement...a statement that in many parts of the world would get us into serious trouble, possibly get us imprisoned. For some traditions, to suggest that another person stands beside God is heresy and punishable by death. To others, the idea of Jesus being the Second Person of the Trinity is a completely unfamiliar concept. Sacred Scripture reminds us that one of the charges brought against Jesus was that He blasphemed by stating He and the Father were one.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rolls off the tongue so naturally and we rush through the motion so quickly that we hardly give it a second thought. Every time we make the Sign of the Cross, we profess our belief in the Trinity; but in truth, the Trinity is a belief that is almost as difficult for us to understand as it is for non-Christians.

On this feast of the Most Holy Trinity, we could spend hours talking about the complexity of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could talk about all the ways we might be able to understand it. Still, in the end, we'd have to admit that we cannot fully grasp the mystery of God's Being. To grow into an appreciation of the Trinity involves continued study and reflection. It is important to keep in mind that the Trinity, like all other mysteries, cannot be solved like a math problem; the mystery must be lived and experienced in order for us to grow in appreciation of it.

Throughout the Bible, God slowly revealed Himself: first as Father, then as Son, and then as Holy Spirit. The revelation of the Trinity is one of the greatest proofs of God's love for us. In the Trinity we realize that God is a family and in His great love He has opened His family to us. In the persons of the Trinity, we discover God's extreme and far-reaching hospitality. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God enjoys a relationship of unconditional, self-giving love. This is a love He wishes to share with others. He created the world for no other reason than to open His very Being to share love with others. He creates us out of pure love so that we can be part of His family. The Church teaches that the Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son... but this is only a simplified understanding of God. In revealing the Trinity God revealed His very nature, His most intimate life.

The Book of Proverbs tells us before all things existed, Wisdom was present to God the Creator. The text tells us that from of old, Wisdom was formed. Before the beginning of His works, Wisdom was "poured forth." Before all things existed, Wisdom was present to God the Creator. And what was Wisdom doing? In chapter 8 verse 30, Wisdom was beside God as His craftsman. Wisdom was His delight day by day, Wisdom was playing on the surface of the earth and found delight with human beings.

If we associate Wisdom, as the Church does, with the person of Jesus, we have an exciting insight into the life of the Trinity. The Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, was "poured forth" from God the Father before God the Father began His work. Christ was God's craftsman, shaping creation to the delight of God the Father. The Son took such delight in this activity that it is spoken of as play. Not work...but play! What a beautiful image, the Father and the Son eternally at play, with their mutual delight coming forth in the Holy Spirit.

When I was studying at the Seminary, one of our textbooks was "The Spirit of the Liturgy" by the famous Catholic theologian, Fr. Romano Guardini. In his book he referred to the liturgy as "play." He said the greatness of the liturgy is to accept God's invitation to play, to celebrate, and to exist in the peaceful presence of the Eternal Father. He added that during the liturgy, like children at play, time is irrelevant. Pope Benedict XVI referenced Fr. Guardini in his own collection of works titled, "The Theology of the Liturgy."

My liturgy professor suggested that those at the altar not wear a watch when celebrating the Eucharist. He drew the conclusion that liturgy, when done well, gives us a living experience of the Trinity. He challenged us to think of the moments at a great liturgy such as Christmas Midnight Mass, or the Easter Vigil. We completely forget ourselves and get swept away by the sheer delight of the experience. He described this as being like what the Second Person of the Trinity knows in the eternal play...we find ourselves playing in the presence of God and God the Father is delighted in our liturgical playing. The heavenly Jerusalem that opens to us at these special liturgies opens to us at every Mass and deserves the same reverence, respect, and participation. We need to allow ourselves to play, to

actively participate in every liturgy because God delights in our playing, our active participation. What passes between us, and what unifies us with each other, is the Holy Spirit. If we are only passively present, if we are preoccupied with other things, if we are not wholly present, if we view the Mass as boring, then a wonderful opportunity for realizing the beauty of the Blessed Trinity will pass us by.

The Church is the place where we experience the family of God—where we live as His family. We welcome people from every race, nation, and economic status. We are all sinners who gather at this table to be transformed by God’s merciful love. Here all are invited to join our family for a meal. We gather around the altar - the table of the Lord’s Supper. At this table we recall how Jesus suffered, died, and rose again from the dead so that we could become members of God’s family. At this table, we are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. We are nourished in our mind, heart, and soul. We are transformed by the love of God given to us in the Eucharist.

So, on this Sunday, this Trinity Sunday, we celebrate the mystery of our God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, who is a communion of love—a family. And He opens His family up to us so that we can be real partakers in His divine love. Saint Paul tells us, “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Now it is up to us to pour out that love we have received to others so that they can join us around this table to celebrate with our Triune God and receive the Bread of Life.