

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity: The Way We Begin and End Our Prayers

There are many practices that we Catholics have which we do so often, we can easily forget their meaning. One of these practices is the way that we begin and end our prayers. We hardly think about it, but we begin all our prayers by invoking the Trinity and signing our bodies with the sign of God's eternal love for us, the Sign of the Cross. Whether those prayers are the Mass, the central prayers of the church, or simply grace before dinner, we always begin with, "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit." In Church, we make the sign of the cross, even before we enter our pews. We do that at the Holy Water Font, reminding us of how we entered into God's family, by being baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. In the same way, all our prayers end with our invoking the Trinity. The Mass concludes with the people being blessed in the name of the Trinity. We leave Church once again blessing ourselves at the Holy Water fonts, blessing ourselves invoking the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We make the sign of the cross as a statement of faith. We are open to the mystery of God. Our belief in the Trinity encompasses who we are.

The distinguishing characteristic of the ancient Hebrews was their belief in one God. The rest of the world looked to stories about various gods to explain their questions about life. We have copies of the elaborate creation stories of the Romans, Greeks and even the stories of Gilgamesh from the ancient Babylonians. The pagans also used these stories to justify their own immorality, attributing their immorality to this or that god, such as Bacchus for wine, and Pan or Juno for orgies. There are modern day pseudo churches that also do this, like the Church of Marijuana that began a while ago in Miami, or as I like to call it, the First Church of the Wacky Weed.

The ancient Hebrews were distinct in their world. They were the only ones who believed in one God, a God who was spiritual, a God who was just, a God who created mankind in His image and likeness, the image and likeness of love. God gave mankind the ability to return love to Him, but that meant that mankind had the ability to reject Him. Mankind's rejection of God resulted in disaster, in lives without love. So the first reflection we make when we invoke the Trinity is that we believe in that Person of the Holy Trinity who created us and loves us, the Father.

We make the sign of the cross as an affirmation that we have been saved by the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the One who was crucified for us. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. Perhaps we use that term Savior too freely. Perhaps it has lost its meaning for us. Without Jesus Christ we would be in the grips of hatred, sin and death. With Jesus Christ, we are engulfed in love and life. When we say "He frees us from sin," we mean that he frees us from the misery that makes existence intolerable. With Jesus Christ, there is no situation in life that cannot lead us to his Peace, Presence and Happiness.

He became one of us, Christmas. He died for us, Good Friday. He conquered death and restored eternal life for us, Easter. He ascended to the Father, but His Spirit

and the Spirit of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was given to us on Pentecost and remains the Life Principal of the Church as well as the spiritual drive within each of us. We each have the Presence and Power of God within us. We can make God Present to others. This is the Third Person of the Trinity.

And so we begin our prayers in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We begin our prayers in the name of the Father who loves us unconditionally, and of the Son who made this love concrete by becoming one of us and dying for us and bringing God's forgiveness to us, and the name of the Holy Spirit, who is God dwelling within us, empowering us. The sign of the cross is an affirmation of our faith. It is a declaration of whom we are: people God loves, forgives and empowers.

As we grow in the knowledge that God loves us, as we experience His Love more and more in our lives, we are transformed by His Love. We want nothing more than to nurture this Love. We want to spread this Love.

When we recognize that God forgives us, we realize that His Love is infinitely greater than our sins. We need to stop beating ourselves up and let His forgiveness into our lives. So many people in the world, so many of us, give up on life because we have given up on ourselves. When that happens we get into a downward cycle. We continue to do things that lead to spiritual disaster because we think God will not forgive us. Jesus Christ is our Savior, He saves us from ourselves. He forgives us. He calls us to spread the Good News, the Gospel to others. He challenges us to let all know that if they are committed to God, He will forgive them also. "Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand," is the ancient proclamation of the Church.

God gives us the Power to lead others to Christ. Every one of us has a unique ability to reflect God's love in the world. Every one of us is capable of instilling the seed of God's love in others. He works through each of us, and we can lead others from a meaningless life to a life of eternal fulfillment. We have the Power of God within us. We possess the Holy Spirit.

And so we begin and end our prayers with a statement of whom we are. We are people who are loved, forgiven and empowered. We find our meaning in life in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.