

## **Most Holy Trinity**

A few years ago, I concelebrated a funeral of a young man in his twenties. He had battled cancer for about five years. The family was extremely faithful. His mother attended daily Mass and his father was very involved in the faith. As you can imagine, the funeral was huge (roughly 900 people). The parish was packed.

Prior to the funeral, I visited the family at the funeral home to spend some time with them. In doing so, I will never forget that after praying around the coffin, the mother said, "Fr., I normally give my children a blessing before they leave by making the sign of the cross on their foreheads. May I do that now?" I said, "Sure."

She took out some holy water, and one by one, she made the sign of the cross on the foreheads of each of her children. And last of all, she made the sign of the cross on the forehead of her son lying in the coffin. It was very moving.

In some sense, she was saying, "Lord, I thank you for my son. He was your gift to me. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you protected him by the cross. I now give him back to you. I trust that one day, we will meet again."

Think of all the times we make the sign of the cross. Before a child is baptized, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child, and parents/godparents are invited do the same.

This small gesture reminds us that the child is the fruit of Eternal Love: The Love of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It reminds us that the child is marked or consecrated to God, to live of self-giving love for Him.

Walking into the Church, you dip your finger into the holy water, making the sign of the cross. It's a sacramental, reminding yourself that you are baptized. "God loves me. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lives in with me. I am never alone. God is always with me."

We begin Mass "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In doing so, we invoke not just an abstract force or impersonal Creator as we worship together, but three Persons, each God: The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. We invoke three distinct Persons, yet one God who is love (1 Jn 4:8).

Before we eat meals, we make the sign of the cross and pray, thanking God for the food He gives us. In gratitude, we ask that it give us strength to do his will with great joy.

When you fall, with humility and courage, you approach Jesus in confession, the priest says those beautiful words, "I absolve you of your sins" and making the sign of the Cross, says, "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the of the Holy Spirit." Eternal love wipes away your sins and removes your guilt, setting you free.

Finally, at your funeral, a priest will sprinkle your coffin with holy water, symbolizing that you have been baptized. Your family will then put the pall on the coffin, or the large white cloth that symbolizes your baptismal garment. Many times, a crucifix is placed on the pall, reminding us that you were created out of love, sustained by love, and destined for love – the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At your funeral Mass, with your family and friends, in prayer we will commend you into an “Eternal Communion of Love,” or what we could call the “Great Exchange of Love,” an exchange where the Father loves the Son, and the Son, in turn, loves the Father, and their mutual love or shared love is the Holy Spirit. It is a love, we believe, that is stronger than death.

Practically, what does this mean? First, be intentional when making the sign of the cross! Last year I shared the story about that beautifully woman, Luella, in her 80’s who in looking at the Eucharist in Adoration, gazed at him with great love and said, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” She made the sign of the cross with great intentionality and love! Be intentional.

Don’t be a Catholic Ninja – swatting your hands in the air with no meaning. Know that when you make the sign of the cross, you invoke God’s presence – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are invoking love. In fact, by making the sign of the cross, you open your heart to grace and the gifts you need in that moment.

Second, make the sign of the cross often! In coming into the Church, make sure you bless yourself with the baptismal water. And leaving, bless yourself! You are asking that God's love be with you and all the graces be given to you for the week. Sometimes, you need those graces just to be patient in getting out of the parking lot!

Before you eat, and especially in public restaurants, make the sign of the cross and do your prayers. In my own family, there is a temptation to skip prayer before meals because of fear or embarrassment. My family looks at me and says, "Well, I guess. He's here. He's a priest. We better pray." We should never be ashamed of God's love or the cross! Instead, we thank God in gratitude.

Finally, parents, just as that beautiful mom blessed her children, and then her son lying in the coffin by making the sign of the cross on his forehead with holy water, you can do the same. Before your children leave home or go to sleep, you can make the sign of the cross and say, "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May His face shine upon you. Know that God loves you!" Be sure to have a crucifix in your children's rooms so they can often see the face of love.

In short, today we celebrate love, eternal love! Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who created us out of love and for love. And we celebrate that our lives are marked by this love, protected and sustained by this love. And one day, God willing, we will participate fully in this love!