

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – B
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Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
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Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Psalm 33
Romans 8:14-17
(Revelation 1:8) Matthew 28:16-20

The Sign of the Cross

*In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

The Sign of the Cross: the sacred gesture in which we invoke God, the Most Holy Trinity. We make this gesture often – perhaps several times a day and thousands and thousands of times in our lifetime. At the beginning and end of every Mass; in our personal prayers; at big moments in life: before a big exam or interview; before a first date; being thankful for good news; when taking off in an airplane or making a trip in the car; when we hear an ambulance siren or learn that someone is sick; when we are fighting off temptation. We even see baseball players making the Sign of the Cross before stepping up to the plate, and soccer players making the Sign of the Cross after scoring a big goal.

The Sign of the Cross is so recognizable and ingrained in us that we immediately notice it when we see it. Perhaps when we see it we instinctually join in the sacred gesture ourselves. Or, at the very least, for a moment we are reminded of the Most Holy Trinity's Presence in our life. It is both a simple gesture and a powerful prayer that calls down the Most Holy Trinity's Blessing and Peace upon us.

The earliest form of the Sign of the Cross was much smaller and simpler. Ancient Christians used their thumb to trace the Cross on their forehead. It was both a way to sanctify themselves, their loved ones, and their actions throughout the day – and also a way to give a discreet signal to fellow Christians during times of persecution.¹ This sacred gesture evolved

over time and by the Middle Ages had become the more visible act that we still make today: making the Sign of the Cross over the entire upper body. This greater gesture is both a more visible witness to others, as well as a stronger reminder to ourselves of our need for the Most Holy Trinity's Presence in our life.

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Today's Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity first appeared in the early part of the 11th century. It began to gain popularity, but the pope at that time refused to make it a universal feast for the whole Church for the simple reason that the Church *already* honored the Most Holy Trinity *every* day, and in *every* Mass. Nonetheless, Christians continued to celebrate the feast and it continued to increase in popularity until it was finally approved as a feast for the whole Church in the 14th century.²

A well-respected liturgical scholar wrote that a feast like this could only become popular at a time when there was a lack of recognition of the Most Holy Trinity's constant Presence throughout Sacred Scriptures and in every liturgy. Consequently, the emergence of this feast in the Middle Ages satisfied a desire in the human heart to become more aware of the Most Holy Trinity's Presence.³

If we take this scholar's opinion about the people of the past, and apply it to ourselves in the present, we might admit that perhaps we still celebrate this feast today for the similar reason that we, too, have a need and a desire in our hearts to become more aware of the Most Holy Trinity's Presence. Not only do we need to know that the Most Holy Trinity is present and active in each and every Mass – we also need to know that the Most Holy Trinity is present and active in every moment of our life. That we can – that we need to – call on the Power of the Most Holy Trinity to help us in every moment of our lives.

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Some of you may be familiar with the John Paul II Healing Center in Tallahassee, Florida.⁴ I've been down to Florida twice for a healing retreat, once as a seminarian and once as a priest; I've also been at three of the healing retreats they have given at parishes here in our archdiocese in recent years.

One of the spiritual exercises they usually offer at their retreats is something they call "sculpting." The purpose of sculpting is to help us recognize – to help us experience – that our healing will only come from being in Communion with the Most Holy Trinity. It goes something like this: a few retreatants are invited to come up and sculpt the various relationships between the Three Divine Persons of the Trinity and a human person.

The first three volunteers sculpt the relationship between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This usually results in a Triune Embrace that demonstrates the Love, Closeness, and Communion shared between the Three Divine Persons.

Next, a volunteer enters the sculpture to demonstrate how the human person relates to the Trinity. Before the Fall, the person is sculpted as part of the Embrace of the Trinity. Then, after the Fall, a volunteer representing Satan enters the scene and does something to break the human person out of the Embrace of the Trinity.

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I'm not sure how this sculpture exercise sounds to you all as I describe it – or if you are even able to visualize it. When they introduced and explained it to us at my first retreat, I was skeptical. It sounded like a children's activity from Vacation Bible School. I already knew the story of the Fall and had learned the theological principles and consequences of Original Sin in the world. What more could this play-acting exercise add?

But there is something about watching it play out with real people – and even more, being a part of the sculpture yourself – that has a strong impact on one’s understanding of the importance of being in Communion with the Most Holy Trinity. And even though I’ve observed and even been a part of the sculpting exercise a few times, each time I participate it still has an impact on me.

At each stage of the sculpture, the participants are asked to share their thoughts and feelings. After the first sculpture, the Three Divine Persons usually share that they feel things like love, support, and warmth. When the human person is added to the Embrace, the participants feel these same things – plus a new feeling of even greater completeness. When the human person is torn away from the Embrace by Satan, it’s not just the human person who feels cold, alone, and separated. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit also report feeling sadness and emptiness because of the separation.

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At this point of the exercise, people start to get emotional. Not only those in the sculpture, but even some of the observers cry or yell out. The theological concepts of the Fall and our separation from Communion with the Trinity are no longer abstract ideas. We feel in our body and our emotions what this separation does to us. We understand not only why we need and desire to be back in Communion with the Trinity – we also understand why the Trinity desires to bring us back into Communion.

Why the Father sent the Son into our world:⁵ so that there would no longer be separation between us and God. Why the Son offered Himself on the Cross:⁶ to destroy sin and death that separate us from God. Why the Son asked the Father to send us the Holy Spirit:⁷ to be our

Helper in our battle against Satan and evil so that we can be brought into and kept safely in communion with God – in this world and in Heaven for all eternity.

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We celebrate today's feast of the Most Holy Trinity because there is a need and a desire in all our hearts to become more aware of the Trinity's Presence in our life. Not only in the Mass – but in every moment of our lives. Satan is always trying to pull us away from Communion with the Trinity. When we choose sin, or are harmed by some kind of evil, we experience a separation that makes us isolated and cold. But we must also know that when this happens, the Trinity also feels that separation and is working to bring us back into their Holy Embrace.

In the final stage of the sculpture exercise, we get to see and experience the Trinity breaking Satan's bond on us and restoring us into Communion with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The lesson we learn is that anytime we feel separation from God, the Most Holy Trinity desires to restore Communion with each one of us – and is constantly at work to make this happen. With this awareness, we trust that God is always with us,⁸ and that we can always turn back to and call on the Power of the Most Holy Trinity to bring us back into Communion: by making a good Confession; by receiving the Eucharist; and many times each day by making that simple sacred gesture and praying that powerful prayer:

*In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

¹ Herbert Thurston, "Sign of the Cross" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1912); Richard McBrien, "sign of the cross" in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1191

² Adrien Nocent, "48. Solemnity of the Most Blessed Trinity" in *The Liturgical Year: Lent, the Sacred Paschal Triduum, Easter Time*, 444; also see Francis Mershman, "Trinity Sunday" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1912)

³ Nocent, 444

⁴ jpiihealingcenter.org

⁵ John 1:10, 14; 3:16-17

⁶ John 10:10; 2 Timothy 1:10

⁷ John 14:16; 15:26; Luke 24:49

⁸ Matthew 28:20