

# Mass Parts 4/52: ***Sign of the Cross***

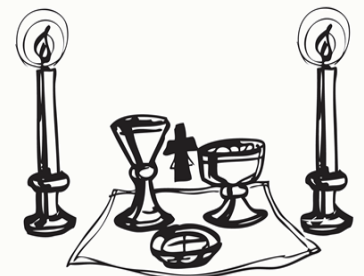
At each entrance to our church, there are little dishes with holy water in them. We dip a few fingers of our right hand into them and mark ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. This is by way of reminding ourselves that we have been baptized, that we belong here in this church. Our entrance into the faith was through the waters of baptism and so it is fitting that water is present at the physical entrances of our church to renew this sacrament. I have seen some churches that don't have individual dishes. They have a large baptismal font near the door and ask everyone to enter by that door, thereby making the baptismal connection even more obvious.

At the beginning of Mass, too, we sign on our own body with the symbol of our salvation: the Sign of the Cross. Back to the time of the conversion of the emperor Constantine, he had a vision before a battle of either the *chi-rho* symbol or the Cross in the sky, and heard the words: "In this sign, conquer." His conversion to Christianity was confirmed with the victory in battle. In all of our struggles in life, we continue to face them with our faith in the Cross.

Every time we make the Sign of the Cross, we are reminding ourselves of our baptism and of the faith to which we belong. "What I am about to do, I am doing in the name of the Cross." The Mass is book-ended with the Sign of the Cross: here at the very beginning and with the final blessing. There is no other greeting at the beginning of Mass. The first words declare what we are about and why we are here. The priest doesn't just say "hello" first. At the beginning of Mass, no other words should come out of his mouth than: "In the name of the Father..."

The Trinitarian formula of the Sign of the Cross comes from the ending of the Gospel of the Matthew, with Christ's final words to the disciples: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (28:19-20). We are baptized into the reality of the Cross, into the very death and Resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:3-4). We were baptized into the Trinity of God, into a community of persons, into a communion. Our community, our parish, in which we are now together marking ourselves with this sign of the Cross, participates in the Trinity through our bonds of love.

With this meaning and strength in mind, don't make a tiny cross, like you don't want anyone else to know or see what you are doing. No weird, rushed circles brushing in front of you that could be a cross, but looks like you are just in a hurry. "Father" = forehead. "Son" = chest or belly. "Holy" = Left Shoulder. "Spirit" = Right Shoulder. Make a big-ole cross over yourselves for all to see.



Next Week: "And with your spirit"

- Father Scott Kopp