

CHANCELLOR'S REFLECTIONS - KofC Council 7115 Meeting - JUNE 2023

For those of you that thought, last month's reflection on the five precepts of the Catholic Church---being a little too much and thinking that there may be something less complicated. Tonight, let's look at something simpler such as PRAYER and very apt in following last Sunday as Most Holy Trinity Sunday.

Not with the first prayers: likely the first in being the Memorial Acclamation (Holy, Holy, Holy—from the prophet Isaiah), or the second being the Hail Mary (the Angel Gabriel's words to Mary), or the third being the Our Father (directly from the mouth of Jesus); but the shortest being "The Sign of the Cross." Yes, a true prayer!!! The words "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, (amen)", being some of the last words of the Risen Christ (from Acts) as He instructs the Apostles and Disciples of the words by which they are to Evangelize and Baptize all on Earth.

We do not often think of it that way, but the Sign of the Cross is a prayer. It is not only used in Baptism, but it opens and closes the Mass as it does our prayer times, our blessings, and those times of our joys and distress. When we make the Sign of the Cross, we open ourselves to the Lord's doing something within us. We are preparing ourselves for His blessing and expressing our desire to receive and use it.

It is said that the Sign of the Cross is the most ancient Christian prayer & containing six truths:

1. ****an act of faith that brings us into God's presence,**
2. ****a way to renew our Baptism,**
3. ****an affirmation of our decision to follow Christ,**
4. ****a decision to accept our share in Christ's suffering,**
5. ****a means to overcome our faults and to grow in likeness to Christ, and**
6. ****a defense against the devil.**

As a history, based of their own Baptism and their instructions to Baptize given from Christ, the Apostles and Disciples would have been the first contrived to use the Prayer. Christians then learned to make the Sign of the Cross with their thumb or index finger by tracing a small cross on their foreheads. By the third century Christians also traced the cross on their lips and over their heart as we see after the Gospel is announced at Mass. Christians have always had their share of opposition and the unintended use that we see with athletes today began the spread. Likewise, although the initial two fingers and thumb emulated vision of how Christ is pictured and painted, even the number of fingers or with the right or left hand began to be viewed as a heresy. However, Pope Innocent III in the beginning of the thirteenth century clarified that the intent was to use the two fingers and thumb of either hand.

Through the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Reformation, Christians were encouraged to follow the process of the Benedictine Monks whom, on being unafraid of being marked as Christians and Catholics in public, used the whole hand in an unmistakable gesture from the head to the lower chest and left to right from shoulder to shoulder much as we do today to invoke the six truths which marks ourselves as Catholics. Clergy traditionally continue using the Sign of the Cross as a blessing and still emulating Christ, using two fingers and the thumb.

It does not seem possible that so much could be said of a simple Prayer titled with only five words and containing only fifteen or sixteen words; however, in a book “played forward” to me by Charlotte Nelis, the writer uses some 90 pages to explore the wonders of this ancient prayer. Thus, not surprising, as we see when we spend our time exploring and seeing the depth and wonder of all the other elements of our Faith as they begin to unfold to us.

The writer notes that of the six truths, all are positive actions towards our Faith except for the sixth (*a defense against the devil*) which follows the Middle Age Legend of Saint Christopher. That story has Christopher searching for the strongest person on earth – whom he intended to follow. When he is told that it is the devil and he locates the devil as an evil warrior, he also finds that the devil also has an adversary. The devil tells Christopher that he is filled with the terror of even the name of Jesus Christ. Christopher then finds Christ, (working as a ferryman; thus, the protection during travel) is evangelized, and begins the custom of making the Sign of the Cross *as soon as the influence of the devil is felt*. The statue on the dashboard or boat deck is no longer used as our reminder as it became to mean something automatic instead of a personal act by us.

Overall, the Sign of the Cross opens us up to Christ, reaffirms our Baptism, reminds us of the suffering and resurrection of Christ, ties us to our Faith, & protects us from the work of the devil.

Therefore, whether in a private or public setting, we should not be afraid to use the proudest and widest (not sloppy or hurried) of an acclamation of our Faith through the Sign of the Cross.