

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let us begin . . .

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

Why did we do that?

It's so very routine.
We could have skipped it,
If you know what I mean.

We began this Mass as we begin so many things as Catholics.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Most other Christians don't do it,
But we do, most of the time without even thinking.

We even engage our bodies, +

With hand moving from head to gut,
From shoulder to shoulder.
Sometimes for the world to see,
And at others discretely, lest it does.

It is among the first things we teach our little ones

In matters of faith,
And among the last things we will ever do,
When that faith reaches its most critical moment.

Why do we do this?

It seems so routine.
We could easily skip it,
If you know what I mean.

Biblically, to pray in the name of someone,

Is to draw on the power of that person.
I like that, and believe it,
And besides, it reminds us we never have to pray alone.

But when we make the sign of the cross
We pray to the power of Three,
A power that existed for all eternity,
In the Spirit of Love between the Lover and the Beloved.

Then, with a bang, that Dance of love we call God
Broke open upon the nothingness outside.
And in that act, grace poured out, and with that grace creation,
And everything was invited into the Dance.

When we accept this miracle of divine love,
We become dancers and enter the Dance ourselves.
And, more amazingly, the Dance enters us,
And, thus, are caught up in that Communion we call God.

It is a movement we enter, a rhythm even.
It doesn't exist only in the head, but also in the gut.
It flows through our whole being,
And unites us to all who are created in the Divine Image.

When we made the sign of the cross a moment ago,
We drew on the dynamic of that Divine Love.
We called upon the love that exists, somehow, outside of God,
So our work, our worship, will be wrapped in that love.

It is something we do each day, but why?
Our works are so often routine.
We could easily skip it,
If you know what I mean.

With all the other things going on in our world,
Our work, our prayer, seems so pitifully insignificant.
For, as we speak, the sign of the cross is being made
Over a sinner in sorrow and a soldier in the field.

A priest gestures in the form of a cross
Over bread and wine,
So that divine love will transform those simple elements
Into the Beloved of the Father.

What kind of power is it that we draw upon
When we make the sign of the cross?
Do we have any idea?
Well, the cross is the clue.

We draw on the power of a God
Who humbled himself, who ate with the outcasts,
Who cured the sick, forgave the sinner,
And washed feet, all as a prelude to the cross.

We draw on the power of the crucified, a true victim,
Who never played the role of a victim,
Who never created a victim,
But said instead, "*Father forgive them.*"

What kind of power is that?
It violates everything we know from our human experience!
Jesus couldn't be showing us a new way to live could he?
Is that what "*Love one another as I have loved you*" means?

Is this what the nuptial blessing calls married couples to?
Priests when anointed with oil at ordination?
Or students at a Mass of the Holy Spirit?
Or families when they say grace before dinner?

When we pray with the sign of the cross,
We accept the invitation to enter the Divine Dance
And hope the Divine Dance will enter us, so that
What we do will be in harmony with the music of the Dance.

We pray for that, even at the most common of times.
We ask to draw upon that kind of selfless power
To do the work we are about, no matter how small,
Lest what we do, be out of sync with God's design.

In the grand scheme of things, what we do most of the time isn't much,
But if making the sign of the cross helps us realize
That what we are about is still a moment of grace,
There is nothing insignificant about it at all.

But, if what we do helps others experience selfless love,
Then we know that they are very close to the Divine.
And since it is Divine Love that transforms hearts
We know our time spent is more than worthwhile.

Oh Lord, when we choose to begin our prayer
With the sign of the cross so routine,
Help us to pause just long enough,
To remember what it means.

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

Thomas L. Vandenberg
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