

The Rev. Ryan Fischer
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Trinity Sunday
June 12, 2022

Lectionary Year C: John 16:12-15

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Like many of you, I make the sign of the cross whenever the Holy Trinity is invoked. But, growing up as a Lutheran where Lutheranism tended to be very anti-Catholic, many folks thought of making the sign of the cross as one of those "Catholic things" rightfully purged from that branch of Christianity during the storied purification of the Church known as the Reformation. It wasn't. In his own writings, it is clear that Martin Luther himself was a staunch advocate of the practice, but, years of anti-Catholic sentiment, particularly in the New World, effectively squeezed it out of popular piety.

As for making the sign of the cross among Anglicans, it appears that "all may, some should, none must" applies in this case, too, although some Low Church, evangelical Episcopalians might still find it reprehensible.

But in this little ritual, the Trinity appears in the form of a cross. Granted, there is no real significance to our forehead, sternum, or shoulders as they relate to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...but the Trinity, in both its essence and glory, comes to us through the cross. A Father who gave his only Son to die for our sins has, together with his Son, given us the Holy Spirit. But in order for us to be redeemed, and in order for the Holy Spirit to be poured out, Christ had to die. And on what device of execution did Christ die?

On a cross.

Without the cross, the Trinity simply wouldn't "work." Sure, we can argue that the Spirit has been active since creation, back when the Spirit moved over the waters in the book of Genesis. And we can also argue that God was up to at least some kind of redemption once in a while with the Israelites prior to Christ. But it took a cross to bring the Trinity into full blossom. The cross makes Christianity a faith and the Trinity a reality to us; indeed, the Trinity is the living, dynamic presence of our Three-in-One and One-in-Three God who brings life into existence, gives eternal life to those who believe in him, and sustains life in the meantime. I realize that Trinity Sunday is a favorite occasion for well-meaning preachers to reach into their grab bags of bad illustrations (so please forgive me for doing exactly this now), but a three-legged stool comes to mind. The Christian faith depends ultimately and intimately on each of the Trinity's three "legs" -- so much so that, if you knocked one of them out, the Christian faith would not stand. Creation without redemption would mean damnation. Redemption without the Spirit's breath and guidance would mean chaos. Redemption without creation would be impossible.

And the list could go on and on.

When Jesus spoke to the disciples as recorded in today's Gospel text, he is (obviously) talking about a future occurrence about which the disciples have barely a clue. But from our perspective, we can see how Jesus is illustrating the way in which the three-legged stool of the Christian faith will come into being. Again, this course of events must include the apparently untimely

death of Jesus, And it must also include the coming of the Holy Spirit. To that effect, Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13).

Last Sunday, we celebrated the Day of Pentecost, which, of course, recalls the day on which the Holy Spirit arrived, bringing together people from all over the known world and forming the Christian community, the Church. This Sunday, however, "puts it all together." Jesus, Son of the Father, foreshadows not only the redemption through his death on the cross, but also the guidance that his followers will enjoy thanks to the Holy Spirit. Yes, there is, indeed, a trinitarian shape to this day -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come to us, as always -- but, not entirely coincidentally, the cross remains at the center. The cross is, in so many ways, everything that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can (and will) do for us. The cross forgives a creation that has fallen from its Creator and paves the way for Christ's abiding presence among us by virtue of the Holy Spirit.

We remember, too, that each time we baptize, we do so in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We belong to and dwell in the Triune God for as long as we have our being. And once again, the cross appears in the service of Holy Baptism, where the newly baptized person's forehead receives an anointing in the shape of a cross. It is then that the celebrant says the person's name and the words "you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever." We belong to the Trinity but we are marked with the cross. Accordingly, the sign of the cross is made in re-

membrance of our Baptisms. An invocation of the Holy Trinity is, thus, so intimately connected with the cross that we, contrary to the belief of my Lutheran forebears, can never be hurt by ritual actions that call to mind our relationship with God and what it took to establish that relationship.

Baptism and the Trinity...with the cross bringing it all together.

Jesus, too, guaranteed to the disciples that whomever follows him will work just as validly and just as efficaciously as Jesus worked in-person. The Spirit will, indeed, continue to do his work after he has returned to his heavenly Father, and, regardless of how you "spin" it, Father, Son, and Spirit are one in the same. The final words of today's Gospel text say pretty much that: "All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15). The Trinity "works" because each Person of the Trinity participates simultaneously with and in full knowledge of the other's activity.

Yet we cannot unpack completely all of the Trinity's mysteries, which is, perhaps, the hardest thing of all to explain on this day. Rather than continuing further with lame illustrations, lengthy creeds, or complex theological discourses, I shall ask you only to remember the one thing that can bring this fallen creation back into the good graces of its Creator and pave the way to abundant and faithful life with God guided by the Holy Spirit. The one thing to remember is the cross. Without the cross, the Trinity would be only doctrine. But when we invoke the Trinity and make the sign of the cross as we so invoke, we perform a little ritual that puts the Trinity in proper perspective...namely, that we put the work of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sus-

tainer before ourselves and see the cross that makes sense of the Trinity's work.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.