



From the office of the Bishop of Plymouth

**PASTORAL LETTER
THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY
SUNDAY 31ST MAY 2026**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

The sign of the cross: we make the sign of the cross several times a day. But, of course, it is the sign not just of the cross but of our faith in the Most Holy Trinity. We make it “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” because each one of us is baptised into the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And, as Pope Leo declared just a few days ago in his first encyclical, “At the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person lies the great biblical affirmation that men and women are created in the likeness of the Triune God.”ⁱ

So the sign of the cross we can understand as a sign of our identity as sons and daughters of the Triune God. Saint Bernadette, who saw the Mother of God, used to say we must make the sign of the cross with deep sincerity – meaning, in so doing, that we know ourselves to be sons and daughters of the Triune God and united to the Son in his sacrifice on Calvary. I rather admire people who have the courage, when they say grace in a restaurant, to make the sign of the cross; or footballers who make the sign of the cross as they run out onto the pitch. But making the sign of the cross is not the only way to declare our identity.

Not long ago, when you turned on the TV to watch European Football, you would often see someone standing behind the goal with a placard. On it would be written simply, “John 3, 16”. “John 3, 16” – the very words of Jesus which we hear in today’s Gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” That placard-bearer was declaring their identity and also extending an invitation. It was an invitation to anyone watching to look up that reference and ask what it might mean for them - just as making the sign of the cross, or wearing a cross, is both a sign and an invitation to people to ask, “Are you a Christian?”

Christians can often be fearful about how they might explain their faith if asked. The words captured by that banner are useful to hold in one’s head: “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” And the way to express our baptism into not just the Father and the Son but into the Spirit also we derive similarly from Jesus himself. Because Jesus explains that he will also send us a helper. That helper he calls “the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father (and that) he will bear witness about me.”ⁱⁱ So we can say the Spirit will bear witness; and will help us also to bear witness by reminding us of everything Jesus said.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus reveals the Triune God to be on a mission to draw us into eternal life with them. He tells us that the Father draws us to the Son; and that he has asked the Father to give us the Spirit who will dwell with us and be in us.^{iv} That the Spirit is given to us to be witnesses – of this we should be in no doubt. “You also will bear witness,” Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John^v. This statement is amplified in the Great Mandate with which Saint Matthew concludes his Gospel, where Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.”^{vi} “Behold, I am with you always,” Jesus adds, “to the end of the age.”^{vii} He is telling us that his followers will be his witnesses till the end of time.

I am frequently struck by the advice given by Saint Peter always to be prepared to give an account of “the hope that is in you.”^{viii} I hear in those words the advice to be both willing and prepared. We prepare ourselves by being better formed – better informed too – in our understanding of what it means to be baptised into the Most Holy Trinity. The call for the Church to be Synodal, initiated by Pope Francis and endorsed by Pope Leo, placed such formation at the very top of its agenda. Formation in Synodality and formation in the Faith were judged to be equally vital. Coming together with others to be formed is literally vital, life-giving. But we should take responsibility to be formed on our own too.

A brief look at what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has to say about the Trinity yields treasures to delight and inspire. Hear what the Council of the Florence chose in the 15th century to say of the Most Holy Trinity - that “the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Spirit; the Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.”^{ix} “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds,” wrote the Fathers of the 4th Lateran Council two centuries earlier.^x

Inspiring too are the words of saints like Saint Therese of Lisieux when she describes the way the Father draws us to the Son in order that we might be led with the help of the Holy Spirit into the fire of love which is at the heart of the Trinity. “O Divine Word,” she cries, “you are the Eagle I love, the Eagle who draws me to himself. Plunging down to the land of exile you chose to suffer that you might attract souls to the eternal furnace of the Blessed Trinity.” Hearing these words of Therese about fire just as we conclude our celebration of Easter serves to magnify the words we heard uttered by Cleopas and the other disciple on Easter evening as they met the Risen Lord; and they said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”^{xi}; or Jesus himself choosing to say, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!”^{xii}

In the seminary where our own diocesan martyr, Blessed John Cornelius, trained, there is a wonderful illustration of these last words of Jesus’s. Martyred in Dorchester in 1594, Fr Cornelius worshipped daily beneath a painting which adorns, to this day, the chapel of the English College in Rome. The painting depicts the Most Holy Trinity: God the Father raising up the crucified Son; the Holy Spirit hovering in the form of a dove between them. Across the painting are emblazoned the words of Jesus, “I came to cast fire on the earth.” Cornelius and the 43 other priests who had trained there and were martyred for the Faith knew themselves to be sharers in that mission. The whole painting is a statement that “communion is for mission”; that the mission of the Father, the Son and the Spirit are continued in the Church; that communion with the Most Holy Trinity is for sharing with others in order that they too might have a share in that life.

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It is not surprising the instinct we have to trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of a newborn child. As a child myself, I remember my father tracing the sign of the cross on my forehead every night before I went to sleep. I remember too that it was the last thing he did for my mother after she had died. If you do not do it already for your own child before sleep, you may consider starting to do it now – as a sign of our faith; and our hope, indeed, that we might all be called to share one day in the life of the Most Holy Trinity to which the Son and the Spirit draw us daily – draw us at the Father’s behest.

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Nicholas". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name "Nicholas" is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Rt Rev. Nicholas Hudson
Bishop of Plymouth

ⁱ Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* 50; c.f. Gen 1, 26-27

ⁱⁱ Jn 15, 6

ⁱⁱⁱ c.f. Jn 14, 26

^{iv} c.f. Jn 6, 44; 14, 16

^v Jn 15, 26

^{vi} Mt 28, 19-20a

^{vii} Mt 28, 20b

^{viii} c.f. 1 Peter 3, 15

^{ix} *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #255

^x *ibid.* 254

^{xi} Lk 24, 32

^{xii} Lk 12, 49