

Cross which Christians use today. A Georgian source probably of the 4th/5<sup>th</sup> century tells us of an early manifestation. St Nino cured a queen: "...she took her (wooden) cross and with it touched the Queen's head, her feet and her shoulders, making the sign of the cross and straightway she was cured" (*Studia Biblica*, V, 320)

The large version of the Sign of the Cross may have become more popular as a counter to the Monophysite heresy which flourished from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. This heresy focused on the divine nature of Jesus and undermined His human nature. Using two digits (i.e. thumb and index finger, or the first two fingers) symbolised and emphasised the dual nature of Jesus, contrary to the heresy. For practical purposes, i.e. insufficient room on the forehead, and so that the symbolism could be clearly demonstrated, the Sign of the Cross could not be limited to a mark on the forehead. Somewhat later the Eastern Church began using 3 digits (thumb and first two fingers) to symbolise the Trinity, the remaining two fingers folded back on the palm to represent Jesus' dual divine and human nature. Making the Sign of the Cross on the head and upper body probably became prevalent and accepted throughout Christendom from the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

-Stephen S

**Entrance antiphon: Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you, that your prophets be found true. Hear the prayers of your servant, and of your people Israel.**

**First Reading: Isaiah 50:5-9**

**Responsorial Psalm: 114: I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living. /R**

**Second Reading: James 2: 14-18**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, says the Lord; no one can come to the Father except through me. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Mark: 8:27-35**

**Memorial Acclamation: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.**

**Communion Antiphon: How precious is your mercy, O God! The children of men seek shelter in the shadow of your wings.**



## **Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B, 2024**

**Weekly Reflection: The Sign of the Cross (1): Early History:** The Sign of the Cross comes so naturally to Catholics, cradle Catholics having

been taught it and made it so often since infancy, that perhaps we do not often think about its history, its significance and its use in other Christian denominations. It is not precisely known how far back into the early history of the Church we can trace the making of the Sign of the Cross. Tertullian (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century) wrote: "*in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.*" There is also evidence that it was used in apostolic times. Its first use was a cross made with the thumb on the forehead at baptism, thereby dedicating the recipient to Christ. This may well be to what St. Paul was referring when he wrote (1 Eph 1:13): "*you...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*". There are repeated references in Revelation to the protection given to those with the seal on their forehead, e.g 7:3 where an angel says: "*Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.*". This appears to reflect the passage in Ezekiel ch 9 where the Lord requires a mark to be put on the just of Jerusalem; when the people are to be punished, the Lord commands: "*..touch no one upon whom there is the mark*". In early Christianity the Sign of the Cross was sometimes made not only with the thumb on the forehead but also on the lips and breast. Every time we greet the Gospel in this way, we are renewing this ancient Christian practice. On Ash Wednesday, too, our forehead is marked in ashes with the Sign of the Cross.

As early as the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century it seems that the Sign of the Cross had become used to bless objects as well as people. Tertullian mentions a woman 'signing' her bed. Blessing an object at some distance required the Cross to be made in the air, without touching the person/thing to be blessed. The 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Epiphanius recounts a holy man, Josephus, praying over a vessel of water while, "*making over the vessel with his finger the seal of the cross*". Thus there gradually evolved the larger version of the Sign of the