



JANUARY 15, 2023 | SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

HOLY FAMILY PARISH

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ST. THERESA'S

312 Tazewell Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651

ST. ELIZABETH'S

160 Merrick Lane
Pocahontas, VA 24635

ST. MARY'S

1122 Farmer Street
Richlands, VA 24641

ST. JOSEPH'S

1007 Independence Rd.
Grundy, VA 24614

The Power of Divine Identity

ONE OF THE most amazing but unfamed wonders of the world is our fingerprints. There are no two identical fingerprints in the world, even among identical twins who share the same DNA. Every one of us in the world has unique fingerprints and they do not change even with all the processes of growth, development, and maturity.

For many years, scientists have been battling with the mystery of fingerprints, and some have ended up with ideas about their formation from the tenth week after conception, information about their use for gripping things, and the three forms of fingerprints, namely the loop, whorl, and arch. However, there are no universally accepted and concrete findings on why no two individuals can share the same fingerprints.

The United Nations estimates, as of July 2022, that there are about 8 billion people in the world. If this demographic information

stands, it means that there are about 8 billion distinct sets of fingerprints. This information makes it plausible that each person in the world is uniquely endowed with an unchanging identity. The Bible supports this uniqueness from the words of David in the Book of Psalms (139:13-14):

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

The Testimony John the Baptist and the Identity of Jesus Christ

The Gospel Reading today (John 1:29-34), narrates John's testimony about our Lord Jesus Christ as he makes his identity public. The Gospel Reading tells us that as John the Baptist was coming towards Jesus, he said among other things, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Furthermore, he reveals that Jesus Christ is the one who is coming after him and ranks above him. He further testifies that he knows that Jesus is the Christ through God's revelation that on whomever he sees the Spirit descend and remain would be the one, and we observed this happening during the baptism of the Lord.

It is one thing to have an identity and yet another to activate that identity; that is, to put it into action. After John's testimony and

identification, we watch as the elements of the identity of our Lord Jesus Christ play out in his mission on earth which culminate in his death on the cross where he paid the debt of our sins (John 19:30).

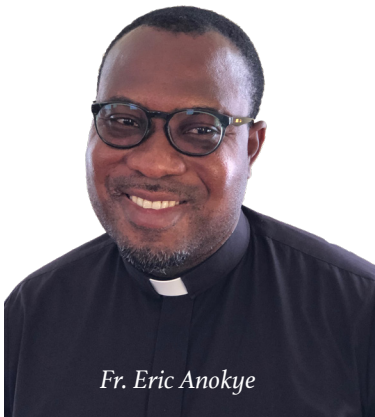
Searching for our Christian Identity in a World of Multiple Identities

There is no doubt that the world runs on multiple identities, and most of them are false identities. With the rapid rising and spreading of modern means of communication, most people now find it easy to highlight and ascribe to themselves identities that are far from whom they are in reality; a tour through Instagram and Facebook and other social networking sites show the rising chaos in the search for identity.

Identity theft is not something new; falsehood rides on the wings of distorted identity. To tell a lie, one needs to add or remove something from an existing identity.

The Light Identity

The First Reading today (Isaiah 49:3, 5-6) tells us about one of the identities we have received from God and that is about our being "a light to the nations." The power of light is not something we can negotiate. We depend on light from dawn to dusk for almost everything we do including seeing. To be a light for others means helping them to see, giving them warmth and hope.



Fr. Eric Anokye

We could recall this light identity from the Sermon on the Mount when our Lord Jesus Christ said, “You are the light of the world, a city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). Here our Lord Jesus Christ is asking us to live by our identity. The primary duty of light is to shine, not for itself but others. In the First Reading God says I will make you a light for the nation. Furthermore, the Sermon on the Mount also says:

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. (Matthew 5:15).

The Holiness Identity

In the Second Reading (1 Cor. 1:1-3), St. Paul instructs the Corinthians who have received sanctification to live by that identity, namely, holiness. Holiness does not entail locking oneself out from the world and praying from morning to morning. It instead means making the right choices in our relationship with God and others.

Some time ago, while reflecting on the Holy family of Jesus Mary and Joseph, we said that the word HOLY is an acronym which means humility, obedience, loving, and yielding; we shall hold unto that in this reflection. There is no contention with the fact that without humility, obedience, love, and yielding to God, we cannot achieve the life of holiness.

When we acquire the holiness identity we, at the same time, gain

the grace of God that would produce the spiritual fruit of peace in us as St. Paul further said in the narrative.

Moving Forwards and Living by our Identity

When adults start behaving like children, there is every reason to suspect that something is fundamentally wrong somewhere, at least attitudinally. In the same way, when we as Christians fail to live by our Christian identity, there is every reason to conclude that something is spiritually wrong.

In the Gospel of John (4:23-24), our Lord Jesus Christ instructs that God is Spirit, and those who come to worship Him must do so in Spirit and truth. From the preceding passage, we understand that we fail to live by our Christian identity when we depend on the flesh and falsehood. Writing to the Galatians St. Paul says, “Live in the spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Regarding the truth, our Lord Jesus Christ encourages us to know the truth because only the truth will set us free (John 8:32), just as the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

As we march into a new week, may we resolve to live by our Christian identity by becoming the light in a dark world striving to be holy through humility, obedience to God, loving without limits and yielding positively to God and others in all things.

God bless you and have a wonderful week ahead.

PASTOR

Fr. Eric Anokye
eanokye@richmond diocese.org
(276) 385-7312

OFFICE MANAGER/ BOOKKEEPER

Lydia St. Peter

OFFICE HOURS

Mon–Fri 9:30AM – 2:30PM

Please call the parish office to make arrangements for the **Sacraments of Baptism, Anointing of the Sick or Holy Matrimony** as well as funerals. **Reconciliation** is available from 30 minutes before a scheduled Mass.

MASS TIMES

SATURDAY

4PM – St. Joseph's
6PM – St. Mary's

SUNDAY

9AM – St. Elizabeth's
11:30AM – St. Theresa's

TUESDAY & FRIDAY

10AM – St. Theresa's

Cover image:

Andrea del Verrocchio,
Leonardo da Vinci, *Baptism of Christ*, 1470–80

A Short History of the Sign of the Cross

wordonfire.org

The following excerpt is taken from Bert Ghezzi's book *Sign of the Cross: Recovering the Power of the Ancient Prayer* (Word on Fire Publishing).

During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, some Christians repudiated the sign of the cross because they judged it to be superstitious. But Martin Luther himself did not abandon it and recommended the practice in his *Small Catechism* in an appendix on family prayer. Today, athletes who sign themselves for good luck at sporting events reinforce the opinion that it is a superstition. But basketball players at the foul line were not the first to abuse the gesture by ascribing to it magical powers that could be turned to dubious personal advantage. As early as the sixth century, St. Caesarius (470–542), the bishop of Arles and one of Christianity's first best-selling authors, rebuked Christians who signed themselves while on their way to steal or commit adultery.

But no trace of superstition or magic marred the sign of the cross in its origins. While no direct evidence exists, it seems clear from circumstances that the holy gesture had its roots as a prayer in apostolic times. Fourth-century Father of the Church St. Basil (329–379) said that the Apostles “taught us to mark with the sign of the cross those who put their hope in the Lord”—that is, those who presented themselves for Baptism.

So early Christians probably learned to make the sign of the cross at their Baptism when the celebrant marked them with it to claim them for Christ. There is some evidence for this in Scripture. For example, St. Paul reminded the Ephesians that they received the sign at Baptism when he said: “You have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise” (1 Cor. 1:13). And Paul may have been speaking of his being signed with the cross at Baptism when he told the Galatians that “I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17). I will say more about this later, but for now I merely want to show you that the sign of the cross originated among people who were not far removed from Christ himself.

Early Christians used the thumb or index finger to trace a little cross on their foreheads. They associated the practice with references in Ezekiel 9:7 and Revelation 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1, all of which describe believers bearing God's seal on their foreheads. That mark was a cross—the Greek letter *tau*—that was written as a T and stood for the name of God. Origen (c. 185–c. 253), a third-century theologian and spiritual writer, commented on the Ezekiel passage by quoting a writer who said:

The shape of the letter tau presented a resemblance to the figure of the cross and this represented a prophecy of the sign that Christians make on their foreheads. For all the faithful make this sign when they undertake any activity, especially prayer or reading Holy Scripture.

So by the third century, Christians frequently marked their foreheads with the cross. They also traced the little sign on their lips and breasts, as we still do today when the Gospel is announced at Mass. And they made the sign in the air as a blessing over persons and things. Tertullian, for example, told of a woman who signed her bed, and St. Cyril of Jerusalem described Christians tracing the cross “over the bread we eat and the cups we drink.” Using the sign of the cross as a blessing may have prompted some Christians to make the larger sign that we know today, but that practice did not come into common use until later on.

Opposition to the Monophysite heresy in the seventh and eight centuries may have contributed to popularizing the larger sign. To summarily refute these heretics, who held that Christ had only one divine nature instead of two natures, one human and one divine, Christians in the East began to sign themselves with two fingers or with the thumb and forefinger. They had to trace a larger sign over their breasts so that their use of two fingers to defend the truth would be visible to all. Imagine the duel that occurred when a Christian encountered a Monophysite. The Christian would conspicuously make a large sign with two fingers and hurry to the other side of the street. The Monophysite

would respond with a large sign made with his index finger and walk off in a huff. The idea of that scene may make us smile, but in those days ordinary folks' tempers flared over theological issues.

By the ninth century, Christians in the East were making the larger gesture with thumb and two fingers displayed, symbolizing the Trinity, and with the ring and little finger folded back, symbolizing Christ's two natures. In the middle of the eighth century, at a time when emperors had a lot to say about ecclesiastical matters, Byzantine emperor Leo IV decreed that all blessings should be made with a large right cross—that is, with the horizontal gesture moving from right to left. Although this proclamation applied to blessings, it was popularly adapted to the gesture of signing oneself. The emperor's directive established the large sign as the common practice in the East. Christians of the Eastern Churches signed themselves with two fingers and thumb extended, touching their forehead and moving to their breast, then crossing their shoulders from right to left.

How Western Christians came to adopt the larger sign of the cross is less clear. Apparently after the ninth century some Western Christians imitated the practice of the Eastern Church and signed themselves with a large right cross. But at the same time others in the West had begun to trace the large cross over their breasts moving their hand from the left shoulder to the right shoulder.

Innocent III (1160–1216), who was pope at the beginning of the thirteenth century, directed that Christians sign themselves with two fingers and thumb extended. He allowed that some make a right cross and others a left cross, indicating no preference for either approach. But before the end of the Middle Ages, Western Christians showed a preference for signing themselves with a large left cross. For example, the *Myroure of Our Ladye*, a late-fifteenth-century document, taught the Brigittine Sisters of Syon Abbey in Middlesex, England, to cross themselves from left to right. It explained that the movement from forehead to breast meant that

Christ came down from heaven to earth in his Incarnation, and the movement from the left to right shoulder indicated that Christ at his death descended into hell and then ascended to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand.

By the end of the Middle Ages, probably under the extensive influence of Benedictine monasteries, where the practice was to make a large left cross with an open hand, most Western Christians were making the sign of the cross as we do today.

In every age Christians commonly, but not indispensably, accompanied the act of making the sign with words of prayer. But the prayers varied greatly. In the earlier period, they used invocations like "The sign of Christ," "The seal of the living God," and "In the name of Jesus." In later ages, they prayed, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth," "In the name of the Holy Trinity," and "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the latter being the most common prayer that we use today. Christians have also used formulas suggested by the liturgy, like "O God come to my assistance" and "Our help is in the name of the Lord." This diversity of words accompanying the sign should encourage you to pray spontaneously when you cross yourself, a practice that I recommend in later chapters.

Twenty-first-century Christians have inherited a diversity of ways to make the sign. Today you will see people marking themselves with large left crosses or large right crosses, with open hand or with two fingers and thumb extended; tracing little crosses on their foreheads, lips, and breasts with one finger, two fingers, or with thumb and forefinger. You may see a Latino youth make a large left cross and then kiss a little cross made with thumb and forefinger, a practice rooted in the ancient past. You will see clergy in liturgical settings and laypeople in ordinary situations blessing persons and objects with two fingers and a thumb or an open hand. But no matter how they do it, large or small, with one finger, two, three, or an open hand, all who sign themselves with faith are opening themselves to the Lord.

mass intentions

Date	Intention
1/14 SATURDAY	
4PM	St. Francis parishioners
6PM	Backpack volunteers
1/15 SUNDAY	
9AM	Bishop Knestout
11:30AM	St. Michael parishioners

stewardship of treasure

Donations Received as of January 8 (Week 28)		
CHURCH	ATTENDANCE	OFFERINGS
St. Joseph's	10	\$175
St. Elizabeth's	22	\$720
St. Mary's	22	\$873
St. Theresa's	50	\$720
Total	104	\$2,488
Outside Donations		\$2,459
Year to Date Received		\$80,415
Goal		\$75,385
Ahead/Behind Goal		+ \$5,030

OUTSIDE DONATIONS—THANK YOU!

St. Michael, Glen Allen, VA: \$1,265
St. Francis, Staunton, VA: \$1,044
Hampton donor: \$150

ST. MARY'S BACKPACK PROGRAM:

Consolidated Steel, Pounding Mill: \$4,000

BUILDING FUND:

St. Joseph: \$80
St. Theresa: \$200

please pray for

Louise Serreno*	Tina Rocchetti
Gerry Hankins	Alice Godin
Clarence Moore	Randy Snyder
Lexi Cox	Andrew Bird
Sarah Wall	Bryan Gunter
Tammy Bennett	Michael Beavers
Margaret Wasilewski	Linda Smith
Nic Ulate	Natalie Dodge
Elizabeth Gregory	Roger Empson
Frannie & Rayburn Minton	Dreama Ritter
Sue Bailey	Joe Petro
Christian Lambert	Joseph Magee
Shane Neal	Marco Warner
Tiffany Hladek	Chris Lambert
Archbishop John Kwofie	Alyssa Stout
Carolyn Wade	Virginia Dy
Stacy Hall	Mary Muncy
Pete Belcher	Cindy Lambert
Rick Hall	Jean St. Clair
Lucas Boyd	Helen Petro
Ralph Heldreth	Clinard Coleman
Elizabeth Managan	Joan Harrison
Chris Jessie	Joe & Yvonne Blevins
Leo Brown	Kyle Brown
Carolina Ferrare	Tom Farrell
Junior Aiken	Bobby Cole
Jeanne Hash	Jeffrey Parkhurst
Lara Marshall	Fr. Dan Brady
Virginia Shumate	Elfie Forrest
Carol & Jim Shumate	Sarah Walters
Doug Vance	Everly Duns
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parish news & events

There will no daily Mass until February 14 when Fr. Eric returns from vacation.

Note: There's a scam out there in which emails are sent, supposedly from priests who are out of the country, in distress and in need of money. Please know that neither Fr. Eric nor any priest would ever send an email to any parishioner requesting money or assistance. If you receive one, it's a scam!

The *Word* of God became flesh and dwelt among us.
To those who accepted him, he gave power to become children of *God*.
– John 1:14a, 12a

january birthdays & anniversaries:

BIRTHDAYS

19: Pete Belcher

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