

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. ~ Song of Songs 8:6

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS IS A CHRISTIAN SIGN; in fact, it is even more correct to say that it is a distinctly Catholic sign (which we share with our separated brethren in the Orthodox churches). Like our love for one another, it could also be said of the Sign of the Cross that *“by this all men will know that you are my disciples”* (Jn 13:35). By the Sign of the Cross, the world knows that we are Catholic. The Sign of the Cross gives witness to both those who make it and those who see it that faith in Jesus Christ is a force in the world.

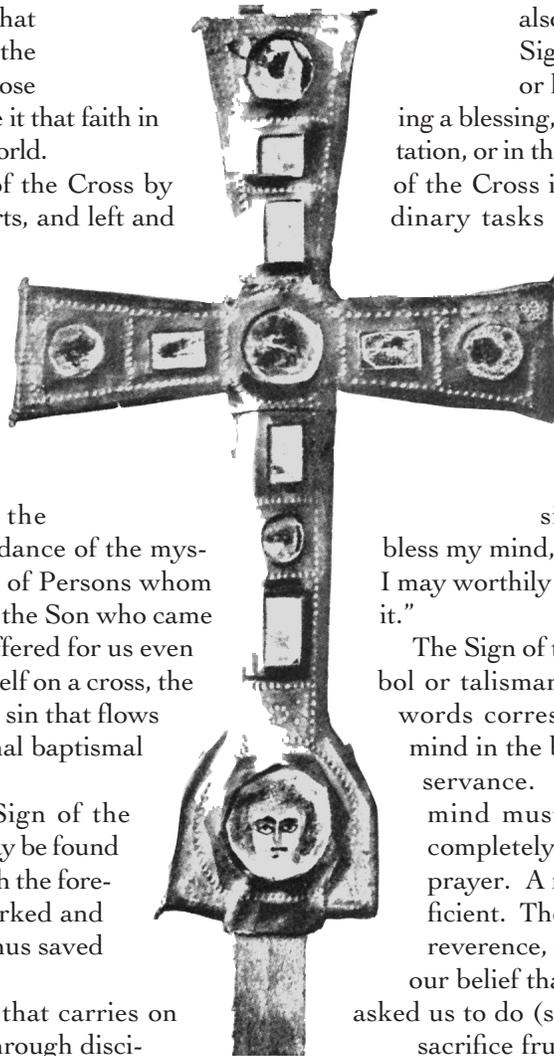
Catholics make the Sign of the Cross by touching their foreheads, hearts, and left and right shoulders with the tips of the fingers while saying, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” When possible, the fingers are dipped in holy water before making the Sign of the Cross.

In making the Sign of the Cross, we proclaim the abundance of the mysteries it signifies: the Trinity of Persons whom we name as the one God, that the Son who came to earth in the Incarnation suffered for us even to the point of sacrificing himself on a cross, the sure hope of redemption from sin that flows from the cross, and our original baptismal promises.

A prefigurement to the Sign of the Cross in the Old Testament may be found in the book of Ezekiel, in which the foreheads of worshipers were marked and each person was sealed and thus saved from death (see Ez 9:4-6).

Christ founded a Church that carries on and promotes his teachings through disciples who reverence his memory and give public evidence of their belief in and love for their crucified Savior. From the earliest

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Wooden cross set with colored glass, 5th century, Egypt

times of the Catholic Church, the Sign of the Cross has been used in many important ways: at the beginning and end of its prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Mass which commemorates what Christ achieved on his holy cross, in administering the sacraments, and in all its blessings. The Sign of the Cross is the customary way to begin any time of prayer. It is also common practice to make the Sign of the Cross when entering or leaving a church, when receiving a blessing, during times of spiritual temptation, or in the presence of danger. The Sign of the Cross is also used to bless many ordinary tasks and make them holy, such as meals, sleep, trips, and meetings. A variation is used just before the Gospel is proclaimed during Mass. Everyone traces small crosses with the right thumb on the brow, the lips, and the heart while

silently praying: “Oh Lord, bless my mind, my speech, and my heart that I may worthily hear your Word and proclaim it.”

The Sign of the Cross is not a magical symbol or talisman. Unless the action and the words correspond to a devout heart and mind in the believer, they are a useless observance. That does not mean that the mind must necessarily and always be completely attentive to the details of this prayer. A right intention in its use is sufficient. The Sign of the Cross, made with reverence, signifies our belief in God and our belief that, in taking up our cross as he asked us to do (see Lk 9:23), we will make his sacrifice fruitful in our own salvation and enjoyment of eternal happiness with him in Heaven.

(CCC 2157)