

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The sign of the cross is an important liturgical gesture whereby we acknowledge the triune nature of God, that is, Three Persons in One God, who is the source of all mysteries of our Faith. We profess our faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With right hand cupped, we make the Sign of the Cross by touching first the forehead, then the breast, and finally both shoulders.



To make the sign of the cross is to recall the salvation that God has made available through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is therefore a reminder of the divine love, which is not only found in a past event, but which continues to abide with us.

Theological Reflection

Bishop Barron reflects on the importance of the cross. Early Christians, according to him, saw all forms of human dysfunction (stupidity, hatred, cruelty, violence, institutional injustice, etc) placed on Jesus hanging on the cross. And Jesus swallowed it all with the phrase, “Father, forgive them they know now what they do.” What the first Christians saw in that sign was everything the world can throw at us now conquered, now swallowed up in the ever-greater divine mercy.

“And you see now why when the first Christians held up that cross, they were doing it as a kind of taunt. The first Christians knew that in light of the resurrection, God's love had definitively broken that power of evil in the world. And so, they taunted the world with the cross.

What does the world today want us to do with the cross of Jesus? They want us to make it a little private symbol. A sign of our little hobby Christianity. But that is repugnant to the Bible. Because that sign is meant to be held up to all the world announcing that there is in fact, a new Lord, a new King. Jesus said that when the Son of Man is lifted up, he will draw all people to Himself. Now,

that is the work of the church. That is called evangelization.

And so every day of the year, let us hold up the cross of the crucified Jesus as a challenge to the cruelty and violence, injustice and hatred of the world as a sign that we know that the true Lord is Jesus.”

Historical Development

According to the research by Dr. Bert Ghezzi in Zenit.org (Lake Mary, Florida: Nov 22nd 2004), the sign of the cross does not have explicit indication in Scripture. But St. Basil in the fourth century said that the sign was learned from the time of the apostles and that it was administered in baptisms.

When adult Christians were baptized, they made the sign of the cross that claimed them for Christ on their forehead proudly. Tertullian said that Christians at all times should mark their foreheads with the sign of the



cross. Christians would make a little sign of the cross with their thumb and forefinger on their foreheads, to remind themselves that they were living a life for Christ.

Meaning of the Sign

According to Ghezzi, the sign means a lot of things. In his book, he describes six meanings, with and without words. The sign of the cross is: a confession of faith; a renewal of baptism; a mark of discipleship; an acceptance of suffering; a defense against the devil; and a victory over self-indulgence.

Do non-Catholics use the sign of the cross?

Yes, the sign of the cross is used by Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists and Presbyterians, particularly in baptisms. In his small catechism, Martin Luther recommends making the sign of the cross at bedtime and first thing in the morning. It's a shame that many non-Catholics see it as something they shouldn't be doing; it comes from an ancient Church that we all share.