

If done with reverence and thought, the sign of the cross is a protection from the powers of Satan and a reminder of the power of our Faith. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, proclaims for all to see, our belief in the Trinity and the Unity of God in three persons. The touching of the forehead is to show that the Son proceeds from the Father, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and is signified by touching the heart and the two shoulders; while the form of the cross reminds us of our redemption by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Make the sign of the cross devoutly. It is one of the greatest sacramentals of the Church.

The cross is signed upon the forehead lips and heart when the Gospel is read to show that we must avoid sin in thought, word, and deed and professes our faith in these three ways.

Another Source on the Sign of the Cross

Making the sign of the cross was a widely practiced Christian tradition as early as the second century. This action of tracing the sign of the cross has roots deep within the Bible itself. Passages such as Ezekiel 9:4, Exodus 13:9, 16, and Revelation 7:3, 9:4, 14:1 remind us that the tracing of a "sign" or "seal" on the forehead was one way of showing that the person was set apart by God for special protection or blessings.

When Catholics make the sign of the cross, they are invoking the grace and protection

of the Lamb of God, the one who alone can protect and deliver us from eternal death. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton CO., 1908), vol. 8, pp. 785-786) explains:

"Of all the above methods of venerating this life-giving symbol [i.e., of the cross] and adopting it as an emblem, the marking of a little cross seems to be the most ancient. We have positive evidence in the early Fathers that such a practice was familiar to Christians in the second century. 'In all our travel and movements,' says **Tertullian** (*De Corona* iii), 'in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupieth us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross.'

"On the other hand, this must soon have passed into a gesture of benediction [i.e., blessing], as many quotations from the Fathers in the fourth century would show. Thus, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** in his *Catechetical Lectures* (13:36) remarks, 'Let us then not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the cross our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything; over the bread we eat and the cups we drink, in our comings and in goings; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we awake; when we are traveling, and when we are at rest.'

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Sign of the Cross

The most important sacramental of our Church, and the one most frequently used, is the sign of the cross. The sacramentals are intended, as the Catechism tells us, "to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion," and these results are accomplished most effectively by this holy sign for whenever we use it, we are reminded of the sufferings and death of our Blessed Savior and thereby, we are filled with more fervent love, more profound gratitude and more earnest contrition. The sign of the cross is the symbol of our deliverance and the emblem of the mercy of God giving redemption to sinful man.

A Summary of Our Faith

The form of words which we use in making this sign, together with the action performed, manifests our belief in the principal truths of our religion. We say: "In the name" - not "names" - and thereby

express our faith in the unity of God. We mention the three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and thus show our belief in the Adorable Trinity. The cross itself, made with the hand, manifests our faith in the incarnation, death and resurrection of our Blessed Savior and shows that we regard Him not only as God but as man - for that He might be able to die on the cross it was necessary that He should possess a human nature. Thus, we have in this brief formula a summary of the most important articles of our faith. The sign of the cross is more than this. It is a prayer to God, made in the name of our Mediator Jesus Christ, Who has declared: "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it unto you."

How the Sign is Made

The making of the sign of the cross is a very ancient practice. It probably goes back to apostolic times and was in common use in the second century.

Among the early Christians it was usually made very small, by a slight movement of the finger or thumb, on the forehead or breast. In the days of persecution, the faith of the Christian had to be concealed, and any more conspicuous sign would have put them in danger of death.

The devotion to the sign of the cross in those distant days is attested by many writers. They tell us that it was used by the more devout on every occasion. No work was begun without invoking God's blessing by this holy sign. The triple sign of the cross was employed very commonly in the

early centuries of the Church and in the Middle Ages. It is not used at present except at the beginning of the Gospels at Mass. It is made by marking the forehead, the lips and the breast with a small cross, using the thumb, and is intended to remind us that our intellect must be attentive to the Word of God, our lips ready to announce His truths, and our hearts filled with love to Him.

The ordinary method of making the sign of the cross is that which every Catholic learns in early childhood - the putting of the right hand to the forehead, to the breast and to the left and the right shoulder, with the words: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." In past centuries, the formula varied greatly. "The sign of Christ." - "The seal of the living God." - "In the name of Jesus." - "In the name of the Holy Trinity" - "Our help is in the name of the Lord," etc., were used. One of these old forms, "Oh God, come to my assistance," is still in use at the beginning of [each "hour" or daily section] of the Divine Office.

In the Church's Liturgy

This is not only the greatest but the most frequently used of all the sacramentals. No ceremony is performed without it. When a priest is ordained, his hands are anointed with holy oil to give them the power to confer blessings by the sign of the cross. In the administration of all the sacraments this holy sign is used at least once, and in some of them it is employed more than once. For example, in the Sacrament of the Sick the priest anoints the sick person with oil

using a small sign of the cross on the forehead and on the palms of the hands.

This holy symbol of our salvation, then, should be frequently used by us. It teaches us our true dignity. It reminds us that we are the brethren of Jesus Christ. In making the sign of the cross we become partakers in the wonderful history of our faith and companions of the glorious saints of our Church. We are soldiers and this is our weapon. The cross of our Redeemer has vanquished death and has overthrown the dominion of Satan. Let us, then, re-echo the words of St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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The Sign of the Cross

"The sign of the cross," says St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of St. John, "is the trophy raised against the power of the prince of this world; when he sees it, he is afraid; when he even hears of it, he is filled with terror."

Our Lord's death sanctified (made holy) the symbol of the cross. The cross went from being regarded as an instrument of shame, to the symbol of Jesus' triumph and victory over sin and death and a sign of our faith in Him. That is why we make the sign of the cross.