

The Cross as 'Prayer'

Very often when we make the sign of the Cross, we do it to accompany another prayer. For example, we make the sign of the Cross when we say the words "In the name of the Father... etc". In this case, the three points of the Cross may remind us of the Trinity. Making the sign of the Cross is also a prayer itself: a prayer without words.

It is fitting that when we come together in worship, we should worship with all our being. We are to worship with our minds, our souls, and also our bodies, for our bodies are the "Temple of the Holy Spirit". Making the sign of the Cross is nothing less than worshipping with our bodies, for what is more fitting for the body than movement and gesture?

When we use words to pray, we are using only one form of language. The body has its own language also, in which making the sign of the Cross is an eloquent expression. One small gesture can speak volumes of words.

(* The way of making the sign of the Cross at the beginning of the Gospel differs slightly from the usual way. It is made with the thumb of the right hand, and consists of three Crosses in one. A small Cross is traced on the forehead, and then on the lips, before the hand is moved to the breast. This reminds us that we are redeemed in all our parts: mind, spirit and body. When we hear the Gospel we pray that we should understand it with our minds, speak it with our lips and believe it in our hearts.)

As I wake from sleep
I sign myself with Christ's Cross,
And remember the ONE GOD,
The Three in One and One in
Three,
Who is—

FATHER of glory,
My Friend who makes me:
CHRIST our Saviour,
My Friend who saves me:
HOLY SPIRIT,
My Friend who guides me.

Before I go to sleep
I sign myself with Christ's Cross,
And remember the ONE GOD,
The Three in One and One in
Three.

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Holy Trinity Church



What we do in Church and Why!



Making the Sign of the Cross

The Cross and Christianity

St. Paul writes: "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ" [Gal 6:14]. For St. Paul the Cross is one of the two hinges of our faith, the other is the Resurrection. In fact, the Resurrection is only possible after we have been crucified "to the world" and the world to us.

This idea is at the heart of Christian belief: that Resurrection is the reward or goal, but the Cross is the means. The road to God and eternal life leads through the Cross.

How to make the Sign of the Cross

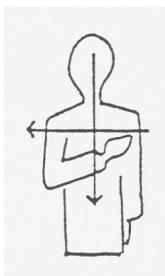
Making the sign of the Cross is a feature of worship throughout Christianity, although its form varies from East to West. It can be made over other people and objects, or self-administered.

In the Western Church, including the Church of England, it is usually made with the right hand.

You begin by:

1. touching the forehead,
2. bringing the hand down to the 'heart',
3. touching the left shoulder and then bringing the hand across the chest to the right shoulder.

In one fluid action you will trace the sign of the Cross upon yourself.



When to make the sign of the Cross

The sign of the Cross can be made at almost any time. It is more usually made either in response to it being traced over us, in blessing by a priest, or at particularly significant points in worship and prayer.

During the Eucharist

There are nine points within the Eucharist at which the sign of the Cross is commonly made upon oneself. They are:

1. At the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen."
2. At the words of the absolution.
3. At the beginning of the Gospel reading*.
4. At the end of the prayer for the dead in the intercessions.
5. When the Consecrated Host is raised, and
6. When the Chalice is raised.
7. At Communion - before receiving the Host,
8. - before receiving the Chalice.
9. When the priest pronounces the final blessing.

Other Times

It will be noticed that numbers 1, 2, 4 and 9 also occur frequently during Morning and Evening Prayer, in the Occasional Offices, and private prayer. It is equally appropriate to make the sign of the Cross at those times and at the beginning of the Gospel Canticles: Benedictus, Magnificat, and Nunc Dimittis.

Some Churches have a small dish or bowl of 'Holy Water' (called a 'Stoup') near to the entrance. It is a good practice when entering or leaving such a Church to dip a finger in and make the sign of the Cross with the water. This will remind you of your Baptism and Confirmation in which you were signed with the sign of the Cross.

The Cross as 'Sign'

The symbol of the Cross is common to Christians of all traditions, and has been since the beginning of Christian history. It is to be seen in art, in and on our Churches, and as ornaments on our bodies. All of this is appropriate for Christians, because the sign of the Cross constantly reminds us of what Christ did for us all.

When we make the sign of the Cross, we are reminding ourselves of this. We are also reminding ourselves that what Christ did on the Cross 'He did for me' personally! In making the sign of the Cross, we "glory in the Cross of Christ", and we 'take up our Cross'. When we 'take up our Cross' we must be prepared to say to God 'not what I will, but your will be done'. 'Not I, but thou!'

