



## Ask, Father James:

### *Why the Sign of the Cross at the Beginning and End of Mass?*

This holy sign is necessary in order to fully experience the Mass. We begin with this sign because it expresses from the start that the Mass is an encounter of love with Christ," who offers his body on the cross, becoming victim and priest. It reminds us of the two central realities of our faith: the Trinity and what God has done for us through the Cross. Pope Francis describes it in this way; With the sign of the cross, the priest and assembly recognize the liturgy is carried out "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." It is a sign of the mystery of the Trinity, of Christ's loving sacrifice and resurrection, and of each person's baptism. Pope Francis again urged parents and grandparents to teach children from a very young age how to make the sign of the cross properly and what it means. He said so often it looks like kids are just gesturing "a picture of something" that is definitely not a cross. "Explain to them that they will have Jesus' cross as protection."

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians understood that the cross of Christ has great power. The cross is powerful because it is a reminder of the instrument Jesus used to defeat Satan. The sign of the cross is a form of Catholic blessing whereby a person traces a symbolic cross on their body by touching one's forehead with a finger or a few, then the chest, then the front of the left shoulder, and finally the front of the right shoulder, or if an ordained clergy, in the air in commemoration of the crucifixion of Christ to bless the people. The sign of the cross represents the victory of Jesus Christ over death and it is an act of and a sign of Faith in the Triune God and it puts demons to flight. St. Cyril states that at the sign of the cross "demons tremble and angels recognize it. Thus the former are put to flight, while the latter gather about it as something pertaining to themselves." (From his Catechetical Lectures).

At the end of Mass, we dismiss with the sign of the cross to bless ourselves and praise God and prays for his gifts as we leave Mass. In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father "with every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3). At the closing of Mass, the priest imparts blessings by invoking the Trinity, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ. Don't leave the Mass until you have received this final blessing and dismissal. It is an empowerment to go out and live in the blessing. Every Christian is encouraged to make the sign of the cross several times daily having been empowered at Mass. By making the sign of the cross before every Church's prayer or Mass, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. Making the sign of the cross derive from the baptismal priesthood: that every baptized person is called to be a "blessing," and to bless (For further reading see; Catechism #1669; Genesis 12:2; Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:9).

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