

Making The Sign of the Cross

What It Means To Each Of Us within The Ante-Nicene Tradition



Do we really understand what it is that we are doing when we make the sign of the Cross upon ourselves, or as clergy -- when we make the sign of the Cross when we give or bestow a blessing? Symbolism is a wonderful tool of our Faith, *But* it is a dead meaningless gesture if we do *not* know what it is that we are doing and why we are doing it!

When we make the sign of the Cross upon ourselves, we are allowing the body to share in the homage and glorification which the whole man/woman is rendering to God, who is our creator. The sign of the Cross is an expression of Faith *and more importantly* it is an act of "Consecration" to God. Like our Faith, our symbols of our Ante-Nicene Christian orthodox, catholic and apostolic Faith must *live*, they must have meaning, usage and importance to each of us in our daily lives, our daily prayers and worship. They must never be allowed to become rote or meaningless gestures done without full knowledge of what they mean and how they benefit us in our relationship to God.

First we need to understand that there has in the past been much distortion about the sign of the cross. Symbols are very important and must therefore be used in their entirety, not in partial form only. Thus has it been with the sign of the cross for many years within major portions of the Christian Apostolic Church. Much of the Church has fallen into using only half of this very important symbol of our Faith by signing themselves with only *half* of the sign of the cross (i.e. Forehead, chest, right shoulder, then the left shoulder).

Making the "Sign of the Cross" is an Act of Faith

To understand the Sign of the Cross, we need to look or begin with our right hand:

The thumb, the index and the middle finger of the right hand are joined together, while the fourth and little fingers are joined and bent in the palm of the hand. The three fingers joined together express our Faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The two fingers joined together in the palm of the hand signify that there are two natures in Christ. He is truly divine and truly human united in the Incarnation of *one* person: *Jesus Christ*. When we make the "The Sign of the Cross", we proclaim our *Faith* in the Redemption (i.e. that we are saved by the redeeming action of our Lord Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our salvation, that we might dwell with Him in His Kingdom forever).

Making the "Sign of the Cross" is also an "Act of Consecration"

After we join our fingers of the right hand, we lift our hand to our "forehead" which touches the highest part of the cross, calling on GOD to be in our mind (i.e. to Consecrate our minds to Him), then we move our fingers over and past our "hearts." At the place of our heart we are calling upon God to be in our *love*, affections and sentiments (i.e. Once again to consecrate them to Him). And continue all the way down to our stomach which touches the lowest point of the cross. We then move our joined fingers to the "right shoulder", thereby calling upon God to be in our good actions/prayerfully in ALL of our actions and to consecrate all of our actions to God. Then we complete the "Sign of the Cross" by moving our joined fingers to the "left shoulder", for in this forth step we create the cross beam by the extended arms of the cross in which our Lord Jesus Christ was

crucified, our Lord's hands extended to gather all the nations scattered to the ends of the earth *into one* in Him and thereby asking God to *forgive* us our sins.

So there are *four* distinct movements in making the sign of the cross. Forehead, stomach, right shoulder then left shoulder.

We can also make a wonderful little devotional prayer, simply out of making the "Sign of the Cross," in the following way. While making the sign of the Cross as instructed above, we simply pray:

*Lord, I give You my mind.
Lord, I give You my Heart and my love.
Lord, I give You all of my good thoughts, actions and behavior.
Lord, forgive me all of my sins.*

The Blessings of Bishops and Priests

The Blessings of Bishops and Priests are *also very important*. Once again, the "Blessings" is not an empty gesture. When the blessing is given, it calls upon God to be present in all of the different human activities of His People (i.e. in their thoughts, affections, actions and behaviors). It carries the meaning and the *loving* promise of God consecrating His children to Himself and to *be present in them*.

When a Bishop or Priest makes the "Sign of the Cross" over God's Faithful flock, the Bishop or Priest arranges the fingers of the right hand to form the name of Jesus Christ Himself and imparts the blessing as His representative.

To do this, the Bishop or Priest extends the finger or index finger out straight, the second finger or middle finger slightly bent to represent the Greek letters: I and C (the first and last letters of the word Jesus, as spelled in the ancient Greek). The third finger or annular finger is bent inward toward the palm and the thumb is laid across it and the little finger is slightly inclined so that the last two fingers form the letters: X and C (the first and last letters of the word "Christ" as spelled in the ancient Greek).



As Ante-Nicene Christians the faithful and the clergy should make the Sign of the Cross every time that the "Divine Invocation" ("In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit") is mentioned. They need to also make the Sign of the Cross when the Bishop or Priest imparts the blessing, as it symbolizes their acceptance of the "Consecration" of themselves to God.

Let us strive, my beloved in Christ, to renew our knowledge and awareness of making and receiving the "Sign of the Cross", in our worship, our private prayer devotions, and Worship within the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy. We ask all of you to be aware of *why* we use symbolisms with our Worship, what they mean and why we use them. Our worship must always be *alive*, aware and deeply personal in nature and never simply by rote memory for reasons that we do not understand.

*May the Lord God, by the power of His Most Holy Spirit,
render herein His mercy to us and may He,
through the power of His honored and life-creating Cross,
guard us from all evil,
and even unto ages of ages.
AMEN.*