

LITURGY BYTES

The Sign of the Cross



The simple gesture of the sign of the cross which precedes our prayer experiences – what is it all about? Many people will sign themselves for a variety of reasons, even people who are not Christian use this gesture. We see it in all walks of life – at sporting events by athletes, before taking an exam or undergoing a medical procedure, to name a few.

Even back in the 3rd century, it was written that Christians were making the sign of the cross over their bodies. In the 4th century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem said that we should not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. It is believed that the early tradition of marking one's body with the cross was inspired by a passage in the book of Ezekiel where it says, “And the Lord said to him, ‘Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.’” (Ezekiel 9:4) These early Christians believed that the sign of the cross set them apart and “marked” them as a chosen people who belong to the one true God.

The sign of the cross that Catholics make before prayer or any other activity is not meant to be a superstitious act, but an outward profession of faith. In the CCC (Catechism of the Catholic Church) we read that “Christians begin their day, their prayers and their activities with the sign of the cross. The baptized person dedicates the day to the glory of God and calls on the Savior's grace which lets him act in the Spirit as a child of the Father. The sign of the cross strengthens us in temptations and difficulties.”

The cross is at the very center of what we believe, and crossing ourselves is supposed to be a constant reminder of the price Jesus paid for our sins. It is both a profession of faith and a simple prayer that has such great power. In the end it is a simple gesture that has ancient and biblical roots, and as we enter Church, we bless ourselves with the holy water making the sign of the cross, reminding us of our Baptisms where it all began for us as Catholics.

Have a safe, peaceful, and blessed week! ~~~*Michele Hahn*