

The Sign of the Cross: The Most Basic Catholic Prayer

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Amen."

Since Catholics make the Sign of the Cross before and after our prayers, many people don't realize that the Sign of the Cross is a prayer itself. It should always be said with reverence; we shouldn't rush through it on the way to the next prayer. Making this holy sign calls on our God -- the Father, His Son, and the Holy Ghost -- and is a sign of our belief; it is both a "mini-creed" that asserts our belief in the Triune God, and a prayer that invokes Him.

Using your right hand, you should touch your forehead at the mention of the Father; your breastbone at the mention of the Son; your left shoulder on the word "Holy" and your right shoulder on the word "Spirit."

The open right hand is most commonly used in Western Christianity with the five open fingers representing the Five Wounds of Christ. In the Eastern Rite Churches, the thumb, index, and middle finger are brought to a point, symbolizing the Trinity; the remaining two fingers are kept pressed together and touching the palm, representing the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ.

During Mass, the Sign of the Cross is required at certain points: the assembly signs themselves with holy water upon entering the church (recalling our Baptism), during the introductory greeting, before the Gospel reading (small Signs on forehead, lips, and heart), at the final blessing, and upon exiting the church. At other times during Mass, the assembly may optionally cross themselves during a sprinkling with holy water, immediately after receiving Communion, and when concluding private prayer after Communion. When the small Sign of the Cross is traced with the thumb over the forehead, lips, and breast, Catholics traditionally pray silently, "May Christ's words be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart".

Outside of the Mass, the Sign of the Cross is traditionally made upon passing a church to honor Jesus present in the Tabernacle; when passing a cemetery or otherwise recalling the dead; in times of trouble, fear, or temptation; when hearing an ambulance or fire truck to pray for those in danger; when seeing a Crucifix -- and any time one wishes to honor and invoke God.

"The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in Himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truths of faith." (CCC 234)

Sources: Wikipedia, Fisheaters.com, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reverent Genuflections

As faithful Catholics who believe in the Real Presence, we acknowledge Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament by a reverent genuflection. A genuflection is a bodily gesture of respect that **reflects** (shows) our **genuine** (real) belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Reverent genuflections are made facing the tabernacle and then bending our right knee to the point of it touching the floor after which we raise our body to an upright standing posture. It is a silent "hello" to Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. Faithful Catholics genuflect before entering and leaving their pew, when coming directly before or passing by the tabernacle. When we genuflect we reflect on whose presence we acknowledge in the tabernacle. It is the Lord! We owe Him our greatest respect and those who truly know and respect Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament gladly give Him the homage (respect) of their reverent genuflection. It is a powerful witness of one's faith in the Real Presence and of helping others to recognize Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament by our good example.