

Thank you for the kind introduction. Good afternoon everyone.

Yes, I am Sis. Penny Mansalay and I did my Cursillo weekend in April 1984, # 459 at St. Benedict Center with Sis. Norma Gamboa as my Rectora and Sis. Sophie Rualo as her moderator. I belong to the Decuria of St. Bernadette Soubaro, of Our Lady of Lourdes. I have served in various weekend in different capabilities, even as a Rectora; as well as serving as part of the Service Team.

I am married to Brother-husband, Bro. Jun . We have two children who are also cursillistas, and we have three grandsons and one granddaughter. We belong to St. Joachim Parish in Hayward. I have attended St. Mary's College for my Pastoral Ministry schooling and the Catholic Apologetics Academy.

Do you have any favorites? Now, I too have a lot of favorites: For today, I choose St. Augustine to lead us into the talk in his prayer: " Lord, teach me to know you and to know myself ".

I understand that we will have a Q & A after the talk. So, I am going to get a headstart – Who knows the answer to the question. HOW DO WE START AND END OUR PRAYER ? - very good.

What is the Sign of the Cross and who, where, how did it come about?

The Sign of the Cross is a Christian ceremony that represents the Passion of our Lord by tracing the shape of the Cross with a simple motion.

There is no direct evidence that exists as to its origin but based from circumstances, the holy gesture has its roots as a prayer in apostolic times. Fourth century Father of the Church, St. Basil (329-379) said that the Apostles "taught us to mark with sign of the Cross those who put their hope in the Lord" – those who presented themselves for baptism. I imagine it would be St. John the Baptist time.

Early Christians used the thumb or index finger to trace a little cross on their foreheads. That mark was a cross – like the Greek letter **tau** – that was written as a T and stood for the name of God. This tau symbol was said to be the original form of the Crucifix. The logo looks like a capital T. From the Egyptian tau, also known as Crux Ansata a symbol that represents immortality and resurrection. It was also known as St. Anthony's cross. Why? I don't know.

Origen (c.185-c.253) a third century theologian and spiritual writer, commented on the Ezekiel's Passage by this:

"the shape of the letter tau presented a resemblance to the figure of the cross and that this represented a prophecy of the sign that Christians make on their foreheads. For all the faithful make this sign when they undertake any activity, especially prayer or reading Holy Scripture."

So early Christians probably learned to make the sign of the cross at their Baptism when the celebrant marked them with it to claim them for Christ. St. Paul may have speaking of his being signed with the cross at Baptism when he told the Galatians that: "I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus. (Galatian 6:17).

While the pagans mocked the Cross of Jesus Christ and said that it was a source of shame and folly to believe and to hope in one who had been crucified and had died, the Christians to the contrary, understood that all our glory lies only in the Cross of Christ. It is this great power and wisdom of God to the salvation of all believers. With the sign of the cross we openly show that we are not ashamed and we are the knights who had taken the Cross and are disciples of Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom said in his homily on the epistle to the Romans: If someone asks you, "Do you worship one who was crucified?" have no shame and do not lower your eyes to the ground, instead glory and rejoice in making this confession with chin raised and your eyes looking straight ahead.

St. Augustine also said, we should answer this way: "we lack your good sense, for we have no shame in Jesus Christ or in His Cross, and we make it on our forehead, the very seat of modesty. We make it there, in the place where shame appears, in order that it may be clear that we have no shame."

We recognize therefore that this custom of signing oneself on the forehead was introduced in antiquity – by whom and how it does not matter. St. John said, if we call ourselves Christians, we are attached to Jesus Christ and we carry on our foreheads the mark of the one whom we do not blush to carry in our hearts, whose mark is His very Humility. The ancients understood by this sign that is an external testimony of the Christian faith. The Sign of the Cross was commonly made in the time of St. Gregory the Great as well as St. Augustine's time. The doctrine of making the Sign of the Cross, therefore is pure and apostolic. It is not known either by whom or how..... therefore what is held by the universal Church and what was not instituted by councils but has always been observed, is most properly believed not to have been given by any authority other than the apostolic one. St. Leo and St. Frances de Sales concurs that it must not be doubted that everything that is received in the Church as a custom of devotion comes from apostolic and is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. This is the rule by which the Fathers judged ecclesiastical customs, according to which the Sign of the Cross, which has always been practiced by the Church, and comes from no one knows where, should be referred to apostolic institution.

A bit of ancient story mentioned by St. Jerome – “ the priest of the Old Law carried a plate of the finest gold attached to his tiara, hanging on his forehead, on which was engraved: Holy unto the Lord, and he had always to keep this on his forehead so that God would be kindly to him (Exodus 28:36-38) What was formerly shown in the plate of gold is shown by us with the Sign of the Cross; the blood of the Gospel is more precious than the gold of the Law. In order to show that Christians, being a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) are holy to the Lord by the blood of the Savior, in place of the plate of gold, we carry the Sign of the Cross. So awesome, don't you think ? Therefore.....

II. What is the meaning of when we make the sign of the Cross?

By signing ourselves is a way of considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

When making the Sign of the Cross, we confess three great mysteries:

- The Holy Trinity
- The Passion
- The remission of sins-by which we are moved from the left, the hand of the curse, to the right, the hand of blessing.

The biblical understanding of God's name opens us more fully to the spiritual power of the sign of the cross. In the name of the Holy Trinity, we are praying in accord with God's divine nature and substance. We are drawn to God's presence – in (Exodus 20:24) “ Wherever I choose to have my name remembered, I shall come to you and bless you.”

The Passion: Last Sunday, we celebrated Easter Sunday – and the Triduum led us to it. We were shown what true love is by Jesus himself. Remember the seven last words? We all have experienced these sentiments. He has conquered all of them. Can you imagine how horrific it was for Jesus to all of humanity. From the cross, he looked down on us: past, present and future generations and drew all to Himself. During the Easter Vigil, the candidates for Baptism

are signed with the cross on their forehead, mouth, shoulder, hands and their full body – they are now a new creation. Jesus makes everyone new from the Cross.

III. What is the Scriptural reference on the sign of the Cross?

Frankly, I don't know how to further explore through scripture on the Sign of the Cross since we basically established it to be purely apostolic. There is evidence in the scripture for example when St. Paul reminded the Ephesians that they received the sign at baptism when he said : " You have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the promise (1 Corinthians 1:13). One more would be a reading in (Ezekiel 9:3-6). However, I will mention one specific and it is Jesus' command: (Matthew 28: 19) " Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". This verse is the biblical foundation of the Trinitarian formula and also of making the sign of the cross. When we cross ourselves, we are making a visible reminder of the mark of Christ imprinted upon us through our baptism. It is through our baptism that we died with Christ (the cross) so that we could rise with him to new life, cleansed of all our guilt. Herein, the sign of the cross is referred to as a sacramental since it invites us to enter into a new life in Christ. (Are we still together good?)

IV. Is there a specific way of making the sign of the cross reverently?

The reverence part, I believe lies on each person – their orientation, faith and personal disposition. I will not get into it because only God can judge the reverence part. I am guilty of making the sign of the cross carelessly at times, and being thoughtless. I can mention how we do it though :

The Christian first lifts his right hand while saying, " In the name of the Father," in order to show that the Father is the first person in the Blessed Trinity and the principle and origin of the others. Then, he moves his hand downward toward the stomach while saying" " and of the Son," in order to show that the Son proceeds from the Father, who sent Him here below into the Virgin's womb. Finally, he pulls his hand across from the left shoulder to the right while saying, " and of the Holy Spirit," in order to show that the Holy Spirit being the third person in the Blessed Trinity, proceeds from the Father and from the Son and is their bond of love and charity and that is is by His grace enjoy the effects of the Passion.

The Sign of the Cross consists in a motion, which is what differentiates it from permanent signs, engraved or marked out in enduring materials.

V. Are Catholics the ones doing the sign of the cross?

The Sign of the Cross is a brief and lively exterior prayer by which God is invoked and as a result it is proper for all of our doings and plans. Now, I will just be brief on this part, all Christians calls on God in their own unique way in expressing their relationships with Him. Other denominations uses the sign of the cross in blessings, consecrations and sacraments, to chase off demons, to protect oneself against their assaults, and to accomplish other miracles. One

the soul, but the voice, our actions, and other external signs by which we express our interior state are the noble accompaniments and most useful qualities of prayer, for they are its effects and its works. The soul will not be content to pray if the whole person does not. The soul indeed makes the eyes, the hands and the knees pray along with it. So as you can see the Sign of the Cross is not uniquely Catholic. Other Western Christians, like the Lutherans, Anglicans, Episcopalians and some Presbyterians follow the same pattern because they inherited it from the Western church. We have our own brothers and sisters within the Catholic church under other rites who make the sign of the cross probably slightly different but the same purpose. With the Sign, we all invoke God's name. Thus the invocation transports our prayer to a higher level by bringing us into the Lord's presence and engaging His Power.

Let us take a look at how some of our brothers and sisters do the sign and why !

- The Orthodox Church – does it with the right hand. They follow the same formula, but right after the word “ Spirit” a significant bow is made then seal it with AMEN. Hand is raised to remember the Father who is the source of the Trinitarian, then the Son by putting our hand to the belly, recalling his incarnation in the womb of the most Holy Theotokos, we touch our right and left should, we invoke the Holy Spirit. When we touch our forehead, we ask God to cleanse our mind, when we touch our belly we ask him to purify our inner feelings. Shoulders are an image of our physical strength and everything we do. We touch the right shoulder first because the right side has always been more honorable than the left side judging from the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ sits to the right side of the Father. The good thief was crucified to the right side of Jesus, the Lord will put the sheep to his right side and the goats to his left.
- The Ethiopian Church – they use their index and middle fingers to make the sign. This position is called the Cross of Salvation. They press the thumb against the tip of the ring finger, while the little finger clings tightly to the ring finger. Fingers crossed in this way symbolizes the Most Holy Trinity and resembles the way Old Believers cross their fingers. They touch their forehead and say “ In the name of the Father, then the chest and say and the Son, then left shoulder and say and the Holy Spirit. They add, ONE GOD while touching the right shoulder , then bow and say AMEN. They say that the left side symbolizes the Prophets, the Old Testament, the West, the robber on the left side of Christ, the sin, as well as the Exile of the Holy Family to Egypt; while the right side symbolizes the good thief, righteousness, and the return of Jesus from Egypt. Therefore the left to right movement symbolizes rejection of sin and old self and striving for the light of righteousness.
- Roman Catholic Church, the Latin rite - we make the sign of the cross with an open hand and from left to right. Catholics gave strict rules concerning the sign of the cross: the open palm symbolizes the five wounds on the Savior's body. Aside from the ‘ big ‘ sign of the cross, the Catholics have also preserved the ancient ‘ small ‘ sign of the cross. The cross is made with the thumb first on the forehead, then on the mouth and finally on the heart. We use this sign before the reading of the Gospel during the mass, as our way of showing that we are to receive the Good News in our mind, to preach it with our mouths,

entering the church and then crossing ourselves to remind us of our baptism and as a remnant of the long gone practice of washing of hands before the Eucharist.

Ancient authors ascribed the notion of holiness to the right side. That is why when Greeks said the words Holy Spirit the designated the word Holy to the right shoulder and the word Spirit to the left shoulder. That was why they crossed themselves from right to left. However, Latin has reverse word order, ie. Spiritus Sanctus. Possibly that was why the Latin West, wanting to assign santus to the right shoulder, chose left-to-right direction.

VI. When is it appropriate to make the sign of the cross?

So we continue to explore when is it appropriate to make the sign of the cross ? My old spiritual director, Fr. Monk Damien shared a paraphrased Ukranian Divine Liturgy exam: " It is better not to cross yourself than to do it without proper reverence." This statement got me thinking. I/we make the sign of cross A LOT – before and after other prayers. So I asked myself: am I always conscious of the significance of this sacramental? If I'm being honest with myself ...not always. Sometimes I just fly through the action. My plan and I'm being generous I will share it with you – to find extra occasions in daily life to pause and turn to God through this sacramental action and focus on God in my/your heart. The sign of the cross is a beautiful sacramental, reminding us of our Baptism into Christ. Let us remember His mark upon our lives through making this sign throughout our day.

TIMES TO MAKE THE SIGN: (feel free to add on)

1. When walking by our bedroom altar, family altar, Sto. Nino
2. Before reading scripture
3. When I need to pause because I have forgotten what I was about to do
4. When going past a church
5. When filling my water bottle, looking for a snack
6. When passing by a cemetery
7. When passing by an accident or hear a siren (Trust – help is on the way)
8. When getting up in the morning; before leaving the house
9. Before I start " Badong,my truck"
10. When I am really trying to do my best
11. Etc.. etc..
12. A bonus challenge: Sis. Sabina has attached Bert Ghezzi's , Sign of the Cross, please read it at your leisure. Start with page 5.

Brothers and Sisters, regardless of how we cross ourselves and what meaning we attribute to it, how many fingers – let us remember that it is not the way we cross that saves us. It is Christ who died on the Cross for us. Let us be thankful to the Lord throughout our lives, bearing in mind the price that He had to pay for our salvation. St. John Chrysostom's advice: " When you make the sign of the cross, may your forehead express living hope and your soul shall become free. "

My own personal bit: The sign of the cross is a brief and powerful way to call our Redeemer that can be done on every and any occasion suitable for prayer. Isn't our life from conception to resurrection one long form of prayer?

MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS FREELY, WE JUST MAY BECOME SAINTS !

De Colores

Resources:

The Holy Bible

The Sign of the Cross by Bert Ghezzi

The Sign of the Cross by St. Frances de Sales

A blog: How Byzantine Are you

A blog: Why Protestants do not make the sign of the cross?