

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
September 14, 2025
“The Sign of the Cross”

The feast of the Holy Cross takes the place of the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time. This feast commemorates the finding of Our Lord’s cross by Saint Helena (the mother of the Emperor Constantine) in Jerusalem on September 14, 320 A.D. The feast also commemorates, 15 years later, in 335 A.D., the consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which Constantine built over Our Lord’s tomb and Mount Calvary.

The Cross is quite familiar. It is on the top of our churches and chapels; it is located in sanctuaries; people wear crosses and crucifixes around their necks; you can purchase all sorts of crosses on-line. It is so familiar to us that we might take it for granted, but we should not because there are still countries around the world that ban possessing a cross. It can get you killed in Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia. The same was true in the early Church.

But early Christians worked around those laws by doing something we do today. They made the Sign of the cross. At first, it was just a small cross, like we make at the Gospel, on their foreheads, lips, and chest. In time, when openly practicing the faith became safer, it became the large Sign of the Cross we make today across the upper part of our bodies: from forehead, to chest, to left and right shoulders.

The Sign of the Cross is one of the earliest gestures Christian parents teach their children to make. And for many of us, it is the last gesture we make on earth. Frequently priests are called to the side of a dying person, who has been unresponsive for some time. And when we give them absolution from sin and the Apostolic Blessing we end with the Sign of the Cross. Sometimes, “unresponsive” people even respond by making the sign, which is wonderful and consoling for struggling family members.

Why do we or should we make the Sign of the Cross frequently?

First, we do it to honor Almighty God, the Blessed Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Second, it reminds us that the Son of God became one of us—out of love for us—and died on the cross to save us. Before Calvary, the cross was a sign of death and disgrace; after Calvary, it became a sign of glory and triumph.

Third, the Sign of the Cross stirs up our faith. There is one God in three Divine Persons. The second Person died for our sins, rose from the dead, and will come again in glory.

Fourth, blessing ourselves strengthens our hope. Through the cross all blessings come to us in this life, and through it we have the promise of eternal life with Christ.

Fifth, making this sign increases our love – for Christ who loved us so much that he died for us and for neighbor as ourselves, as he commanded us.

We may not think of all these things when we make the Sign of the Cross, but we should try to think about one or two of them when we do.

If someone ever says to you, “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Savior?” respond, “Yes, at Baptism! And I renew that acceptance every time I make the Sign of the Cross.” Then bless yourself. That should confound them.

V. We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee

R. Because by Thy Holy Cross, Thou has redeemed the world!

(+) In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.