

Call to Celebrate

Chapter 2 - We Gather

Theme: The Mass is the way that we come together as a faith community to pray, praise God, listen to God's Word and receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

Doctrinal Content

We gather together as Jesus instructed us to do. The people of faith have been gathering as a community since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. To attend Mass and worship together is an act of love for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, and for those in our lives to remain in relationship with the Holy Trinity through prayer, praise, and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Mass has remained consistently the same since the first Christians. The Mass begins with the Introductory Rites.

Parent Background: It is important to understand that the Mass is not something that has "been made up along the way". It has been given to us by the earliest Christians and practiced in a form that has remained structurally consistent for 2000 years.

Justin Martyr (100-165): Christian philosopher and apologist

And this food is called among us the Eucharist of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;" and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood;" and gave it to them alone.



First Apology, chapter 65

There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

Throughout the next few months, the focus of the activities will be on the Mass and the different parts that make up the whole Prayer of the Mass. This week, we will focus on the Opening Rites: The Sign of the Cross and the Greeting.

Please read the following before you do the activity with your child:

OSV Newsweekly

Why Catholics make the sign of the cross Six overlooked ways in which making the ancient sign opens Catholics to life-transforming graces Bert Ghezzi OSV Newsweekly 3/14/2012

I used to make the sign of the cross casually as a nice gesture for beginning and ending my prayers. But about a decade ago, probably nudged by the Holy Spirit, I took it more seriously.

I began to sign myself more frequently with faith and reverence. I did not think much about it, but after a year I noticed that I seemed to be doing measurably better in my Christian life. I was praying with more passion, resisting my bad inclinations somewhat more effectively, and relating to others more kindly.

When I asked myself what had produced these positive results, I decided the only thing I was doing differently was praying the Sign of the Cross more fervently. Pretty good, I thought, for just signing myself reverently, and I realized that the Sign of the Cross is not merely a pious gesture. It is a powerful prayer. So I studied about it in Scripture, the Church Fathers and saints, and Catholic teaching.

In my study, I discovered six perspectives on the Sign of the Cross that revealed why making it opens us to life-transforming graces. I share them here, confident that once you grasp them, you will make the gesture with more faith and experience its great blessings.



Mini-creed

The Sign of the Cross is a profession of faith in God as he revealed himself. It serves as an abbreviated form of the Apostles' Creed. Touching our forehead, breast and shoulders, we declare our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are announcing our faith in what God has done — the creation of all things, the redemption of humanity from sin and death, and the establishment of the Church, which offers new life to all. When we sign ourselves we are making ourselves aware of God's presence and opening ourselves to his action in our lives. That would be enough, wouldn't it? But there is much, much more.

Six Signings

I invite you right now to imprint in your heart these six truths about the Sign of the Cross by making it with me six times, each time applying one of the perspectives.

- **First**, let's sign ourselves professing our faith in God.
- **Second**, let's mark ourselves remembering that we died with Christ in baptism.
- **Third**, let's make the sign to declare that we belong to Christ and that we will obey him.
- **Fourth**, let's sign ourselves to embrace whatever suffering comes and to celebrate our suffering with Christ for the Church.
- **Fifth**, let's make the sign of the cross as a defense against the devil and as an offensive advance of God's kingdom against him.
- **Sixth**, let's make it to crucify our flesh and to put on Christ and his behaviors.

I often go through these signings in my morning prayer and recommend that you try it, too.

Renewal of baptism

First-century Christians began making the sign of the cross as a reminder and renewal of what happened to them when they were baptized. It still works the same way for us. When we sign ourselves we are declaring that in baptism we died sacramentally with Christ on the cross and rose to a new life with him (see Rom 6:3-4 and Gal 2:20). We are asking the Lord to renew in us those baptismal graces. We are also acknowledging that baptism joined us to the body of Christ and equipped us for our role of collaborating with the Lord in his work of rescuing all people from sin and death.



Mark of discipleship

At baptism the Lord claimed us as his own by marking us with the Sign of the Cross. Now, when we sign ourselves, we are affirming our loyalty to him. By tracing the cross on our bodies, we are denying that we belong to ourselves and declaring that we belong to him alone (see Lk 9:23). The Church Fathers used the same word for the Sign of the Cross that the ancient world employed to indicate ownership. The same word named a shepherd's brand on his sheep, a general's tattoo on his soldiers, a householder's mark on his servants, and the Lord's mark on his disciples. So signing ourselves recognizes that we are Christ's sheep and can count on his care; his soldiers, commissioned to work with him in advancing his kingdom on earth; and his servants, dedicated to doing whatever he tells us.

Acceptance of suffering

Jesus promised us, that suffering would be a normal part of a disciple's life (see Lk 9:23). So, when we mark our bodies with the sign, we are embracing whatever pain comes as a consequence of our faith in Christ. Making the sign is our "taking up the cross and following" him (Lk 9:23). But at the same time it comforts us with the realization that Jesus, who endured the crucifixion for us, now joins us in our suffering and supports us. Signing ourselves also announces another significant truth: With St. Paul, we are celebrating that our afflictions as members of the body of Christ contribute to the Lord's saving work of perfecting the Church in holiness (see Col 1:24).

Move against the devil

When the devil sent Jesus to the cross, he mistakenly believed he had won a great victory. Instead, the Lord surprised him with an ignominious defeat (see 1 Cor 2:8). From the first Easter morning through the present, the sign of the cross makes the devil cower and flee. So on one level, making the sign is a defensive move, declaring our inviolability to the devil's influence. But more importantly, the sign is also an offensive weapon, helping us

reclaim with Christ all that Satan lost at the cross. It announces our cooperation with him in the indomitable advance of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness.

Victory over the flesh

In the New Testament, the word flesh sums up all the evil inclinations of our old nature that persist in us even after we die with Christ in baptism (see Gal 5:16-22). Making the sign of the cross expresses our decision to crucify these desires of the flesh and to live by the Spirit. Like tossing off a dirty shirt or blouse, making the sign indicates our stripping ourselves of our evil inclinations and clothing ourselves with the behaviors of Christ (see Col 3: 5-15).

The Church Fathers taught that the Sign of the Cross diffused the force of powerful temptations such as anger and lust.

So no matter how strongly we are tempted, we can use the Sign of the Cross to activate our freedom in Christ and conquer even our besetting sins.

Parent/Child Activity

1. Begin with a deliberate sign of the cross.
2. Using the Mass for Children Booklet, read pages 2-3 together. Ask your child if they have a favorite hymn or song that is sung at Mass. Tell them that we sing for three reasons: Songs are simply prayers that we put to music. So it is like an opening prayer. It is also a way to praise God for bringing us together. Finally, it is a reminder that we are about to start something beautiful and amazing and it is special, that's why we sing when the priest and servers come in. The procession is a reminder that something special is about to happen.
3. Read page 4 together.
4. Watch the video from this link:
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/151785449919383903/>
5. Have your child do the activity that was sent home from his/her class.