

Making the Sign of the Cross

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Not all prayers are made with words. Prayers may also be made by gestures. Christians, like followers of all other religions, generally pray by the position of the body—say, kneeling or standing—and of the arms and hands—for example, praying with hands outstretched or folded in front.

Today, all religions have gestures that express a devout attitude before the divine or heavenly being(s) they invoke, but the gesture that is most expressly Christian, and used only by Christians, is the Sign of the Cross. By it, we profess the central truths of our faith in a Trinitarian God.

The making of the Sign of the Cross (Latin: *signum crucis*) is a ritual blessing made by members of some branches of Christianity. This blessing is made by the tracing of an upright cross or † across the front of the body with the right hand. The Sign of the Cross is made by touching the hand sequentially to the forehead, lower chest or stomach, and both shoulders, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula: at the forehead *In the name of the Father* (or *In nomine Patris* in Latin); at the stomach or heart *and of the Son* (*et Filii*); across the shoulders *and of the Holy Spirit* (*et Spiritus Sancti*); and finally concluding with the word: *Amen*. (*Amen* is derived from the Hebrew word *āmēn*, which means “certainty,” “truth” and “verily.”)

From the earliest times, Christians have made the Sign of the Cross. St. Basil the Great tells us that the apostles themselves taught the Sign of the Cross. This is shown by the fact that the earliest mentions of the Sign of the Cross, speak of it as an already established custom and simply encourage the faithful to make it correctly.

There are slight variations in how it is made between the various rites of the Church, but they are all legitimate. Those who are ordained in Holy Orders bless by making the Sign of the Cross in the air toward the persons or things to be blessed. However, members of the laity, bless others (such as little children) only by using their finger (usually the thumb) to make the Sign of the Cross on the person to be blessed.

The open right hand is used in Western Christianity. The five open fingers are often said to represent the Five Wounds of Christ. Though this is the most common method of crossing by Western Christians, other forms are sometimes used also. The West employs the "Small Sign of the Cross" (†), using only the thumb: The priest or deacon, before announcing the Gospel text in the Mass, makes the Sign of the Cross on the book and on his forehead, lips, and breast. The people generally acclaim: “Glory to you, O Lord”.

In the Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic churches, the tips of the first three fingers (the thumb, index, and middle ones) are brought together, and the last two (the "ring" and little fingers) are pressed against the palm. The first three fingers express one's faith in the Trinity, while the remaining two fingers represent the two natures of Jesus, the Christ: Divine and Human.

(SR: <https://www.catholic.com/tract/sign-of-the-cross> and <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/significance-of-the-sign-of-the-cross-4999>)