

The Sign Of The Cross

It, **the Sign of the Cross**, is mentioned everywhere because it was practiced everywhere. At the end of the second century, Tertullian proclaimed: “In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever task occupies us, **we mark our forehead with the Sign of the Cross.**” Tertullian praised his wife for her virtues, her beauty, and her wardrobe, but preeminently, because she made the Sign of the Cross over her whole body and over her head before retiring for the night. Even Julian, the notoriously ex-Christian emperor, fell back to tracing the Sign whenever he felt oppressed by demons.

When was the ‘**first sighting**’ of the Sign the Cross? The prophet Ezekiel, well before the time of Christ, who saw that the righteous in Jerusalem would one day be saved because of a ‘mark upon the foreheads’ (Ezekiel 12:7). What was this mark? According to the ancient rabbis, it was a ‘Tau’. The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, **which in ancient times was drawn as a Cross!**

What water is to the elements, the Sign of the Cross is to gestures. The most basic Christian gesture in prayer is and always will be the Sign of the Cross! The earliest accounts suggest that Christians traced the cross with their thumb upon their forehead. They also traced it on objects, such as food, and over the sacramental elements: bread, wine, oil, and water.

In Western Church's, we bless ourselves with our open right hand, touching our fingertips to the forehead, then the breastbone, then the left shoulder, and finally the right shoulder. Christians of the Eastern Church's have their own way of making the Sign. Their placement of fingers turns the hand into a virtual catechism. They join the thumb, the index, and middle finger at the fingertips. The three fingers together represent Trinity and Unity. The remaining two fingers- pinky and ring - are pressed together against the palm, and they together symbolized the Hypostatic Union: the unity of Jesus' human and divine natures.

St. Paul is equally clear about his understanding; “But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

According to Pope Benedict XVI, “**making the Sign of the Cross...means saying a Visible and Public 'YES' to the One who died and rose for us...**”

*Signs of Life by Scott Hahn