

Making The Sign Of The Cross: Have We Forgotten The Meaning

When was the last time you realized or took notice as to the meaning of making the Sign of the Cross? People do it so frequently that sometimes we forget the true meaning. Have you ever noticed that people make the Sign of the Cross for a variety of reasons (outside of church)? Many baseball players will sign themselves before they swing away. People have told me that they will make the Sign of the Cross when they pass a graveyard. My parents taught me to sign myself whenever I pass an accident on the road. But whatever our personal reasons maybe, we must remember what the meaning of this action is: we make the Sign of the Cross as a prayer and as an outward sign of our faith. The Sign of the Cross is our profession of faith in God (a shortened version of the Apostles' Creed). When we sign ourselves we are opening ourselves to Him. Jesus promised us, that suffering would be a normal part of our lives. So, when we mark our bodies with the sign, we are accepting whatever pain comes our way. In other words, we are "taking up the cross and following" Him (Lk 9:23). One of the most important reasons for making the sign is a defensive move. We understand that we are sinful people by nature and the devil is constantly trying to influence every aspect of our lives. According to Saint John Chrysostom, "wherever [demons] see the sign of the cross, they fly away, dreading it as a staff that they are beaten with." The cross is at the very center of what we believe. We recall that profound sacrifice of Jesus 2,000 years ago, as well as, call upon His aid in our time of need. Eastern Christians, both those who are members of the Orthodox Churches and Byzantine or Eastern Catholics in union with Rome, all make the sign of the Cross. However, they begin with the right shoulder rather than the left, as is the practice of Latin Rite or Western Catholics. Catholic writer Bert Ghezzi says the sign of the cross has six meanings: "The sign of the cross is: a confession of faith; a renewal of baptism; a mark of discipleship; an acceptance of suffering; a defense against the devil; and a victory over self-indulgence." Wherever, whenever and for whatever the reason may be for making the Sign of the Cross, we must always remember one thing: We MUST always sign ourselves with reverence and a true love in our heart. It is an outward sign of our faith so let it shine for all to see! - *Sherrie Clutts DRE*