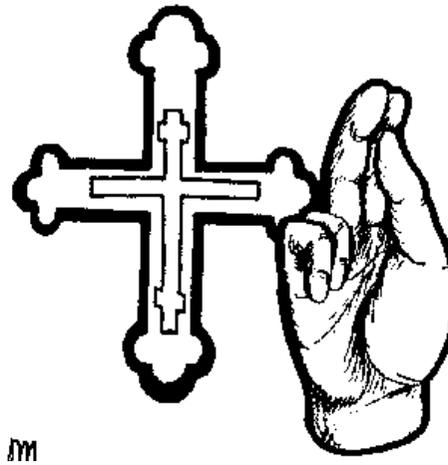


The sign of the Cross is one of our most important spiritual weapons in our war against temptations, because through the Holy Cross of Christ the Devil was defeated. St Cyril of Jerusalem says: "Let us make the sign of the Cross boldly and courageously. When the demons see it, they are reminded of the Crucified; they take flight; they hide themselves and leave us." We don't just make the sign of the Cross in Church during the services. It should be our constant companion. St Cyril continues, "Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified; let us boldly make the sign of the Cross on the forehead and on everything; on the bread which we eat; on the cups from which we drink; let us make it at our going out and at our coming in; when we lie down to sleep, and when we rise, when we journey and when we rest. It is a great safeguard, given to the poor without a price, to the weak without labour. For this is the Grace of God; a token for the faithful and a terror for evil spirits."

We make the sign of the Cross with our right hand by joining the thumb, index and middle fingers and bending the other two fingers down to the palm. We touch the three joined fingers to the forehead, showing that we love God with our mind and dedicate all our thoughts to Him. We then touch the breast, showing that we offer to God all our desires and feelings. Finally we touch our shoulders: first the right and then the left, showing that all our physical activity belongs to Him. The sign of the Cross is a confession of the Orthodox faith. The three joined fingers symbolize our faith in the Holy Trinity, the One God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The two lowered fingers are a confession of perfect divine and perfect human natures of our Lord Jesus Christ.



It is important that we make the sign of the Cross reverently. It is easy for something we do repeatedly to become mechanical and precisely for this reason we should pay special attention when making the sign of the Honourable Cross of our Lord. To those who make the sign of the Cross carelessly, simply waving their hand about as if playing the guitar St John Chrysostom warns, "The demons rejoice at this frantic waving." When however we make the sign of the Cross correctly and with devotion and faith it dispels the demons, drives away sinful passions, attracts Divine Grace and gives us strength to do good and struggle against evil.

Rules for bows (metanoias/poklons) and the Sign of the Cross:

I. The Sign of the Cross without Bows

1. At the middle of the Six Psalms of Matins, at Alleluia, thrice.
2. At the beginning of the Creed.
3. At the dismissal: "May Christ our true God..."

4. At the beginning of a reading from Holy Scripture: Gospel, Epistle or Parable (at Vespers, Royal Hours.)

II. The Sign of the Cross with metanoias/poklons

1. When entering or leaving the Church, thrice.
2. "Blessed is the Kingdom..." thrice.
3. At each petition of the Litanies
4. At each exclamation of the priest offering up glory to the Holy Trinity.
5. At the exclamations: "Take, eat"; "Drink of it, all of you"; "Thine Own of Thine Own" and "The Holy things are for the holy."
6. At the words: "More honourable that the Cherubim..."
7. At each of the words: "Let us worship," "Worship," "We fall down."
8. During the words: "Alleluia," "Holy God," "Come let us worship" and after the exclamation "Glory to thee, O Christ God," before the dismissal, thrice

III. The Sign of the Cross with prostrations

To make a prostration we kneel, place our hands on the floor, touch our foreheads between our hands and get up again. These are made:

1. During fasts, on entering and leaving the church, thrice
2. During fasts, after each refrain of the Hymn to the Theotokos (Magnificat), "we magnify you."
3. At the beginning of the hymn: "It is meet and right to worship the Father..."
4. After, "We praise Thee..."
5. After "It is truly meet" or its substitute megalynarion.
6. At the exclamation: "And vouchsafe us, O Master..." before the Lord's prayer.

7. At the bringing forth of the Holy Gifts, at the words: "With the fear of God," and the second time, at the words: "Always, now and ever."
8. During Great Lent, at Great Compline at the chanting of "O most holy Lady", at each verse; at the chanting of "Rejoice O Virgin Theotokos. At the end of Great Lenten Vespers, three prostrations.
9. During fasts at the prayer, "O Lord and Master of my life."
10. During fasts, at the concluding chanting: "Remember us, O Lord when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom."

IV. Bows from the waist without the sign of the Cross

1. At the words "Peace be unto all."
2. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you..."
3. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father..."
4. "And may the mercies of our great God..."
5. At the words of the deacon: "And unto the ages of ages" (after "For holy art Thou, O our God.")

V. The sign of the Cross is not made:

1. During psalms.
2. Generally while chanting
3. During the Litanies by the choir that chants the responses. The making of the sign of the Cross and bows should be done after chanting is finished and not during the closing words.

In Church, whenever we are blessed with the Cross, the Gospel book, an icon or the chalice we make the sign of the Cross and bow the head. But when we are blessed with candles, the priest or bishop's hand(s) or when we are censured we do not make the sign of the Cross but just bow our heads. However during

Bright Week when the priest censes with the Cross in his hand, then all make the sign of the Cross and answer: "Indeed He is risen!" Thus we distinguish between reverence toward holy things and toward persons, even though they be of priestly rank.

Prayer to the Life-giving Cross of the Lord:

*Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered!
Let those who hate Him flee from before His face!
As smoke vanishes, so let them vanish.
As wax melts before the fire so let sinners perish before the face of those who love God
and sign themselves with the sign of the Cross and say joyfully: rejoice most precious and life-creating Cross of the Lord, which chases demons away through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ Who was nailed to you, descended into hell and, having trampled down the power of the devil, gave to us His precious Cross for the routing of all enemies.
Help me forever, most precious and life-creating Cross of the Lord, with the Holy Lady Virgin Theotokos and all the saints. Amen.*

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The Sign of the Cross

