



### **Signing ourselves with the Cross**

In the Mass the first act of the entire assembly, priest and people gathered, is the Sign of the Cross. At its heart this is the physical act of marking our bodies with the marks of Jesus' death. Each of us makes the gesture, and all of us make it together.

But in marking ourselves with this sign, are we really aware of what we are doing? Are we not suggesting that we will stand where Jesus stood – that where his cross is, there we will be? This may be a more challenging task than we imagine at first. It is worthwhile, then, revisiting Jesus' last days to discover what it means to be at his cross.

Jesus' passion (sufferings unto death) involved a violent, relentless stripping of his identity as a human being. Scourged, mocked and naked, he walked in solidarity with those in society who were outcasts and the recipients of others' derision. In all this he was left friendless. He walked with the abandoned. Carrying his own cross, he became a public spectacle for his own people. His rejection was complete. His death was a public sport. His religious leaders betrayed him. His crucifixion was at the hands of the enemy, and it was associated with the crucifixions of criminals. His burial was rushed, with less than proper arrangements, without custom or dignity. Even in death Jesus was a nuisance, disrupting the temple worship. It fell to a non-believer to provide for him.

When we mark our bodies with the Sign of the Cross we symbolize the suffering of Christ. We also symbolize our commitment to those in the same position as him. In his passion, Jesus was stripped of human dignity. In the Sign of the

Cross we make a commitment to stand in solidarity with those whose human dignity is under threat.

In the passion Jesus endured the wrath of the mob, the violence of society and the desertion of his companions. In the Sign of the Cross we ask about the underside of our own society, the scapegoating, the violence, the cowardice. We declare that it should cease. In his death, Jesus is amongst criminals, helpless bystanders and women rendered powerless by their society. In the Sign of the Cross we say that such people shall never be without help – our help.

Since the thirteenth century we have clothed the Sign with the words of baptism. Those words recall our own entry into the community of Christ's kingdom. They signify our joy in the resurrection, our belonging to the Church and our commitment to embody the kingdom of God on earth. Through the Sign of the Cross the gathered Eucharistic assembly marks itself as dedicated by baptism to stand by the cross of Jesus.

From *Why the Mass Matters* (Strathfield: St Pauls 2004)  
<http://www.stpauls.com.au/product/2578>

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