

Understanding the Mass

The Crucifix

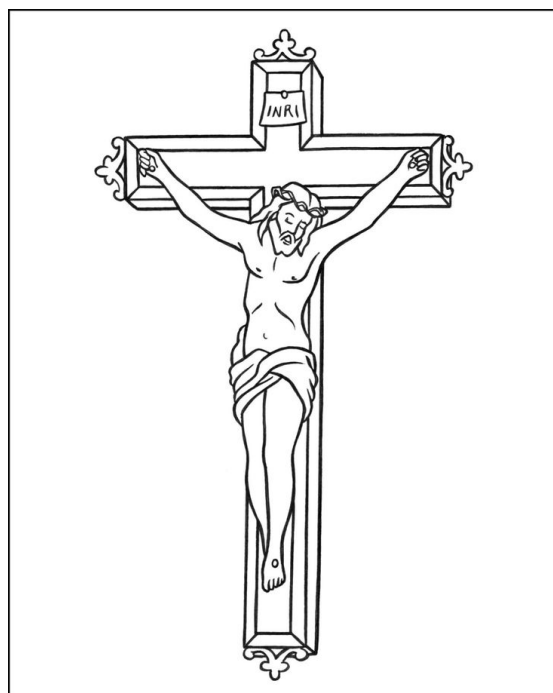
Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is the **Crucifix**.*

Crucifix comes from two Latin words *cruci* and *fixus*, which together mean “fixed to a cross”. A Crucifix is a representation of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Churches usually have a large Crucifix hanging near the altar - it will be hung on the rear or side wall, or hanging above the altar. The Crucifix is large so that everyone in the church can see it.

If you look closely, you will see that there is often an inscription on the Crucifix: INRI. This represents four Latin words: *Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*, which means “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews”. These are the words that Pontius Pilate ordered to be written and hung on the Cross when Jesus was crucified.

The sacrifice of the Mass is the same sacrifice that Jesus offered for us on the Cross. The Crucifix reminds us of God’s love for us - that Jesus chose to die on the cross for us to save us from our sins. Pope Benedict XVI wrote that “the new weapon that Jesus places in our hands is the Cross - a sign of reconciliation, of forgiveness, a sign of love that is stronger than death.”



There are two other crucifixes you may see during Mass.

The first is a Crucifix carried by an altar server called a **crucifer**, from the Latin words *crux* (“cross”) and *ferre* (“to carry”), meaning “cross-bearer”. It is attached to a long pole that is carried before the priest at the start of Mass and at the end of Mass. During Mass, this Crucifix - called a **processional cross** - rests near the Presidential Chair of the priest.

The second is a Crucifix on the altar itself. In some churches, it is standing upright, while in others, it rests flat on the altar. This Crucifix reminds the priest as he is celebrating Mass that the Victim offered on the altar is the same as was offered on the Cross: Jesus.

1. Where is the Crucifix in your church? _____
2. Can you see the inscription INRI on the Crucifix in your church? _____
3. Can you see the altar Crucifix from where you are sitting? _____