

## **THE SIGN OF THE CROSS**

The Orthodox Christian often crosses himself, inscribes the sign of the Cross on his body. This devotional act is as ancient as the Church and may be considered: a.) a confession of faith in the Holy Trinity; b.) a silent declaration of faith in Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of mankind; c.) as a prayer.

It is a confession of faith in the Holy Trinity because as we cross ourselves we say: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It is a prayer, because by inscribing it on our bodies we bring to mind the fact of the Crucifixion of Christ from which springs up the power of salvation.

The Orthodox Christian makes the sign of the Cross to begin and end his private devotions, when he enters the church, venerates the icons, the Holy Gospel, or the Holy Cross. He makes the sign of the Cross when the name of the Holy Trinity, the Mother of God, and the Saints is pronounced during the Divine Liturgy or any Divine Service. Finally, he makes the sign of the Cross at prayers before and after meals, and at any appropriate time as an act of piety.

St. Kosmas Aitolos, concerning the sign of the Cross, writes the following: Listen, my brethren, how the sign of the Cross is made and what it means. First, just as the Holy Trinity is glorified in heaven by the angels, so should you join your three fingers of your right hand. And being unable to ascend into heaven to worship, raise your hand to your head (because the head means heaven) and say: "Just as the angels glorify the Holy Trinity in heaven, so do I, as a servant glorify and worship the Holy Trinity. And as the fingers are three separate, and are together, so is the Holy Trinity three persons but one God." Lowering your hand to your stomach, say: "I worship you and adore you, my Lord, because you condescended and took on flesh in the womb of the Theotokos for my sins." Place your hand on your right shoulder and say: "I beg you, my God, to forgive me and to put me on your right with the just." Placing your hand again on your left shoulder say: "I beg you, my Lord, do not put me on the left with the sinners." This is what the Cross means.