

Why are crucifixes important to a Catholic?

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So why is the crucifix, a cross which holds an image of the crucified Jesus, so important in our Catholic tradition? Many non-Catholics say Jesus is risen and having an image of the suffering Jesus on the cross takes away from the power of the Resurrection. And others argue we are keeping Jesus on the cross. Catholics are no more keeping Jesus on the cross than all Christians keep Jesus an infant when they display statues or figurines of a baby Jesus in a manger at Christmastime.

The reasons for crucifixes over crosses are many and are deep and are beautiful much like the whole of the Catholic faith. With crucifixes, we see **sacrifice**, **commitment** (both seen last month), **redemption** and most of all **love**. These last two and a bit about Liturgical Tradition will be in this edition.

Redemption

Jesus came to be the Lamb of God who took away our sins and redeem the world. While we, as Catholics, believe that our Lord is risen, you can't have the resurrection without the crucifixion. We need to be remind-ed of what Christ had to endure before the Resurrection could take place, namely his Passion and Death on the cross. The crucifix helps us better understand and appreciate our theology of redemption. The open arms of our Savior on the cross gladly welcome and receive us into His Presence. After all, we are saved by Jesus, and not by a cross.

Love

The use of the crucifix is not trivial, nor is it a morbid preoccupation with Christ's Death. With it we are reminded of how much Jesus loved each of us individually and as a human race as he hung upon that cruel Cross that was transformed from a sign of torture, to the sign of salvation of all Mankind. One cannot look at a crucifix without seeing Great Love. For, as Christ said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." -John 15:13. Crucifixes depict this 2000-year-old, and yet timeless Sacrifice of Love to save all men. He loved us so much he endured all of that for our sake! And that is what we are proclaiming when we display and venerate the crucifix. LOVE!

Liturgical Tradition

Because of all the reasons above, the crucifix plays a special role in the liturgical tradition of the Catholic Church. In most of our parish churches, the crucifix is given a place of honor and prominence, usually located centrally above the altar or tabernacle. When you walk through the doors of the church, the crucifix is one of the first things that grabs your attention: The open arms of our Savior gladly welcoming and receiving us into His Presence.

The Church requires that a crucifix be visible during the celebration of Mass to remind us of the sacrifice of Jesus on the altar of the cross, which is made present for us each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. A simple cross doesn't have the same visual or spiritual impact.

At Mass, we are really present at Calvary on Good Friday, and thus, it is the crucifix that intimately reminds us of such an amazing and startling fact. If you do not have a crucifix, perhaps it is time you owned one.