

Why a Crucifix and Not a Cross?

As Catholics, the crucifix (a cross which holds an image of the crucified or suffering Jesus) plays a special role in the liturgical tradition of the 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 to grab your attention: The open arms of our Savior gladly welcomes and receives us into His Presence.

In many non-Catholic churches, a simple cross is often used to adorn the "altar" area. There is a growing trend in many churches not to have any type of religious Christian symbol visible on the interior or exterior of the church, especially the cross.

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. Many non-Catholics will state that "my Savior is risen" and that "having an image of the suffering Jesus on the cross takes away from the power of the Resurrection." Catholics also believe that our Lord is risen, but we also need to be reminded 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."

For some non-Catholics, the image of the crucifix is somewhat "offensive" and perhaps a source of "discomfort." Spiritually speaking, the crucifix can help us better accept and live the words of Christ to "deny yourselves, take up your cross daily, and follow Me" (Mt 16:24). When some type of suffering comes our way, the image of the crucifix can give us spiritual strength and inspiration. We know that the Crucifixion of Jesus is a one-time event that can never occur again in history. But it is an event which should never be forgotten. The image of the crucifix, whether it be placed in our homes, our churches, our schools, or our hospitals, makes sure that this sacrifice of our Lord for us is not forgotten.



Sometimes key moments and events in history which can never be repeated are memorialized forever through a piece of artwork. As Christians, when we gaze lovingly upon the image of our suffering Lord on the cross, we are reminded of the depth of Christ's redeeming love for us. A plain cross just doesn't have the same impact. The crucifix is a visual reminder of Christ's battle over sin, a battle in which He is the Victor!

While Christ's Death is memorialized forever in the image of the crucifix, we believe that our Risen Lord is with us, especially in His Sacramental Presence in the Holy Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle. As we gaze upon the crucifix, we see what Mary saw when she stood at the foot of the cross. What thoughts go through your mind when you look at the image of the crucifix? We know what Christ was thinking about when He hung upon the cross. He was thinking about us!



Source: https://dioscg.org/why-catholics-have-crucifix-rather-than-cross/