

THE CROSS AS OUR BRAND

Holy Cross Day - 14.09.2025

Numbers 21:4-9 | Psalm 22:23-28 | Philippians 2:6-11 | John 3:13-17

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.¹

SERMON

I. CORPORATE BRANDING

Dear friends in Christ,

As a public relations agent for Caritas, I often consider the true meaning of a brand. It is more than just a logo; it is an identity, a promise, and a set of principles. The Caritas logo reflects Caritas's mission, but we are aware that a brand is only as powerful as the deeds that support it. People's opinions of our work are influenced by their own experiences, both positive and negative. Because of this, we have very specific rules about how to use our logo. The idea is to serve as an assurance that if the Caritas emblem is on the outside, then Caritas is within.

This entire process is called corporate branding, a communication method focused on an organization's image and ideals. During the process of corporate branding it is very important to use symbols and signs very carefully.²

¹ Cf. Psalm 19:14, NRSVUE

² Cf. <https://www.upwork.com/resources/what-is-corporate-branding>

II. THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

All over the world Caritas uses a very similar logo. It shows a cross with flames³ In Austria Caritas decided some time ago to remove the cross from its logo. Today the organisation uses only the word "caritas" as its symbol. This word is simply a Latin translation of the Greek word "agape", which comes from the New Testament, and it signifies a sacrificial love that is foremost looking for the well-being of others.⁴ The cross, however, remains a universal symbol of Christianity.⁵ We see it everywhere (on churches, worn as jewellery, on flags, and even atop the imperial crown).

We're so used to seeing crosses that we might not always think about their deeper meaning. But when someone is upset by a cross in a classroom or a courtroom, it becomes clear that this symbol has a deeper significance.⁶ So, what does this sign represent?

III. SEEING, BELIEVING, AND LOVING EACH OTHER

To understand the faith the cross represents, it is good, helpful, and eye opening to look at the feast we celebrate today and today's readings. Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.⁷, commemorating St. Helena's (the mother of the emperor Constantine) discovery of the true cross of Christ during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the 4th century.⁸ And it is also the day of the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.⁹ This Day of the Holy Cross is a reminder for us that the cross is indeed the central symbol of our faith. The readings today take us to the very core of our beliefs. The Gospel of John includes the most popular verse¹⁰ in the New Testament: "For

3 Cf. <https://www.religionen-entdecken.de/fragen/10593/wofuer-steht-das-caritas-kreuz>

4 Cf. <https://www.die-bibel.de/ressourcen/wibilex/neues-testament/agape>

5 Cf. arma, R. (2022, September 25). *What the Cross really is?* Catholically.

[https://www.catholically.com/blogs/news/what-the-cross-really-is?](https://www.catholically.com/blogs/news/what-the-cross-really-is?srsltid=AfmBOoqv0QQq_oi7hFHZIWQHFa3QL2TjfA3mD500mZb3X-4F93efCp_v)

6 Cf. <https://www.domradio.de/artikel/der-streit-ums-kreuz-oeffentlichen-gebaeuden>; cf. Est, D. (2022, August 21). The Holy Cross of Jesus. *Dominus Est PH*. <https://www.dominusest.ph/post/the-holy-cross-of-jesus>

7 Cf. Est, D. (2022, August 21). The Holy Cross of Jesus. *Dominus Est PH*. <https://www.dominusest.ph/post/the-holy-cross-of-jesus>

8 Cf. <https://mycatholic.life/saints/saints-of-the-liturgical-year/september-14the-exaltation-of-the-holy-cross-of-our-lord-jesus-christ/>

9 Cf. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Exaltation-of-the-Holy-Cross>; cf. Wikipedia contributors. (2025, September 16). Feast of the Cross. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_the_Cross

10 Cf. <https://www.christiantoday.com/news/john-316-is-the-worlds-most-popular-bible-verse-according-to-digital-survey>

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"¹¹

Jesus, the Eternal Word, came into the world to atone for our sins through his suffering, death, and resurrection. According to John's gospel it is our task to believe in Jesus to gain access to the divine life in the here and now. The cross is the symbol of our salvation.¹²

This connects directly to our first reading from the Book of Numbers, which tells of the Israelites' struggle in the wilderness. When a plague of poisonous serpents struck, God gave Moses the instruction to produce a bronze serpent and ordered him to put it on a pole. Anyone who looked at it was healed. John's Gospel draws a direct parallel: just as the Israelites were saved by looking at the serpent, we are saved by looking to Christ on the cross. The cross, a symbol of suffering and death, becomes a symbol of healing and eternal life. It is the ultimate sign of God's grace.

The core themes in John's Gospel are seeing, believing, and taking part in the divine life through the Son of God, which includes the command to love one another. To evoke faith in Jesus and to enable us to take part in the divine life, here and now, John's Gospel presents seven "signs" or miracles:

1. Turning Water Into Wine (John 2:1-12)
2. Healing the Nobleman's Son (John 4:46-54)
3. Healing the Man at the Pool (John 5:1-11)
4. Feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-15)
5. Walking on Water (John 6:16-21)
6. Healing a Man Born Blind (John 9:1-12) and
7. Resurrecting Lazarus (John 11)

All these public acts lead to Christ's passion and resurrection.¹³ Therefore, you could say the cross is the ultimate sign of our redemption (our brand as Christians). When we wear a cross, we are affirming that.

11 @Bibliatodo. (n.d.). *John 3:16 NRSVUE* - "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not... <https://www.bibliatodo.com/da/amp/biblen/new-revised-standard-version-updated-edition-2021/john-3-16>

12 Cf. <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-john/>

13 Cf. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/seven-signs/>

IV. WE ARE PART OF GOD'S RECONCILING MISSION

By wearing a cross, we affirm that we are part of God's mission (a mission for everyone to trust in God, to be freed from sin, and live in community with him). We are called to follow Christ and love one another, as the Letter to the Philippians says: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5, NRSVUE).

Through our loving service, God's mission should be made visible. It is a mission of reconciliation and community between God and his creation. The core of Jesus's teaching in John's Gospel is not just an element of love; it is love itself. Jesus came into this world because of God's unconditional love.¹⁴ Love is the centre of the messages of Jesus. And for us as Christians the love of God and our loving service is the characteristic of our discipleship.¹⁵ This is what people should recognize when they see our crosses, our brand.

Unfortunately, the history of Christianity is full of examples where the cross has not been a symbol of love in the eyes of the people. In the past Christians have supported things that we today would recognize as evil. Think about slavery or wars fought in the name of God. Christians have failed to communicate their faith properly in the past, and Christians, including us, will continue to fail.

In Austria today, Christianity is often seen as a cultural heritage, but institutional trust is low, especially among young people. Many associate the Church with abuse scandals and an outdated world-view.¹⁶ But maybe that is also true for other countries in the west.

We also see political movements, parties, and governments using Christian symbols to promote their ideologies of racial prejudice, bigotry, identity, and exclusion (tendencies that are fundamentally incompatible with God's mission of unconditional love).¹⁷ But all these negative associations and misuses of the cross are unfortunately also part of the communication connected to the cross.

14 Cf. Lutzer, E. W. (n.d.). Does God love everyone unconditionally? | God is Love #2.
<https://www.moodymedia.org/blog/2019/04/attributes-god-week-14-love/>

15 Cf. <https://voice.dts.edu/review/love-in-the-gospel-of-john-francis-j-moloney/>

16 Cf. <https://www.herder.de/communio/theologie/oesterreich-entchristlicht-aber-nicht-unreligioes-doch-die-krise-ist-selbstverschuldet/>

17 Cf. <https://theferret.scot/far-right-are-weaponising-christianity-warn-experts/>

V. AN ORNAMENT TO REMIND YOU

Unlike a corporate logo, anyone can wear a cross. Obviously, there are indeed limitations to the analogy of the cross as a brand. And there are other weaknesses of this analogy. A human brand, for instance, is made and managed, but the cross is a divine symbol that we can only accept and that defies our full "branding." It is a symbol that we can't control. God is the one who controls the symbol of the cross. And God is able to bring something good out of our bad behaviours and deeds. As a proverb says: God wrightens straight on crooked ways.¹⁸ However, the cross may be considered as our Christian brand. And the cross should never be an instrument of manipulation. Because the cross is a symbol through which God communicates with us and we with each other, we should be really mindful to use this sign of our redemption and salvation very carefully. We must use it wisely because we are indeed part of God's mission. We have to take care not to obscure the message of Jesus, which is the message of the love of God.

When I became a Franciscan tertiary, I was given a cross with these words: "Wear this cross in token that you are crucified with Christ, yet live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for the life of the world."¹⁹ We may not all be part of a religious community, but we can wear our crosses as a thoughtful remembrance, admonition, and source of strength.

The cross reminds us of Jesus's sacrifice and divine love. The cross is an admonition. It reminds us of human mortality as well as our need for repentance and calling us to follow Jesus's example. It is also a source of strength, hope, and comfort, symbolizing the triumph of life over death through the resurrection.²⁰

Therefore we should not just wear the cross only as piece of jewellery. The central symbol of our faith is very powerful and a tool that helps us to carry out God's mission. Let me suggest that when we wear crosses to be mindful of the true meaning of the cross of Christ. Let us be inspired by the cross to live out daily God's love. This includes serving others. It means seeking to reconcile in moments of conflict (a very important aspect in

18 Cf. <https://www.kirche-im-hr.de/sendungen/2021/hr4-uebrigens/06/27-gott-schreibt-auf-krummen-linien-gerade/>

19 Third Order, Society of Saint Francis: The Profession of a Tertiary, www.tssf.org

20 Cf. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cross-religious-symbol>

today's world). And the cross reminds us to strive and advocate for the dignity of truly all people.

Let us pray: Almighty God, who called your Church to witness that in Christ you were reconciling the world to yourself: help us so to proclaim the good news of your love, that all who hear it may be reconciled to you through him who died for us and rose again and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.²¹

21 Cf. <http://justus.anglican.org/~ss/commonworship/word/thanksmission.html>

SUMMARY

The cross could be understood as the Christian brand. It is not just a logo, but it represents our faith and our identity as Christians. It is the sign of our salvation and redemption. Through the cross we are called to take part in God's mission and to be healed. It is a mission of reconciliation. The cross has a difficult history because of its misuse and the failings of Christians. And the misuses continue until today. Having this in mind, wearing the cross thoughtfully serves as a remembrance of divine love, an admonition to live virtuously, and a source of strength. Ultimately, the cross is meant to communicate the core message of Jesus: Love.

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