

## **The Marking of the Candles**

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### **Author Note**

This topic is for the second session of RCIA. The participants should have:

1. Get a deeper understanding of who Christ is and His desire for a personal relationship with us;
2. Understand why the Catholic Church uses symbolism;
3. Understand the Paschal Mystery;
4. Understand how Christ protects us through his wounds;
5. Understand why as Catholics, we have the courage to embrace suffering.

### **The Marking of the Candles**

If you have ever walked into a Catholic church, then it is pretty obvious we use a ton of symbolism to evangelize the faithful. There is evidence of symbols being used since the earliest Christians with the fish symbols found in the catacombs of ancient Rome and beautiful murals found on the walls of early places of Christian worship and churches. One of my favorite symbols is the Paschal Candle. The Paschal Candle represents Jesus Christ and is given a place of prominence during the Easter season, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other important feast days and important liturgical events. This short talk [transcript] will explain the symbolism of the paschal candle and how the paschal candle symbolizes Jesus Christ. Hopefully, after listening [reading this transcript] to this talk, you will have a deeper understanding of the paschal candle and why the Catholic Church uses symbols to evangelize.

### **The Church and Symbols**

Two thousand years ago, when the apostles and first disciples of Jesus Christ were spreading the Gospel or good news about Jesus Christ's resurrection, the early disciples used tools to help spread that good news that Jesus Christ had defeated death and eternal life was at hand. The population was largely illiterate, so books were for the upper classes and those privileged enough to afford private education. However, people did understand art and symbolism and the Catholic Church used symbolism throughout the world, in every church, to share the message of the Gospel with the world—something the Church still does today.

Here at Corpus Christi, you can find stories of the last supper and the story of the Latin Mass through the reforms of Vatican II in our stained glass window. You can also see the story of St. Monica begging for her son and husband's salvation as you walk in through the main doors

of the church. If you get an opportunity, please walk through the church and see how many symbols you notice and see if you can understand their significance.

One of my favorite symbols is the paschal candle. The paschal candle is used to represent the attributes of our Lord Jesus Christ. A new candle is blessed every year at the Easter Vigil then used throughout the year. The old candle is recycled by being melted down, burned all the way down in private, or buried in the ground. The Pascal Candle cannot be reused for a second year.

### **The Paschal Candle**

The Pascal Candle is the tallest candle in the sanctuary. It is made from beeswax from top to bottom and must come from virgin bees. This is in direct relationship to the fact Jesus came from the Virgin Mary.

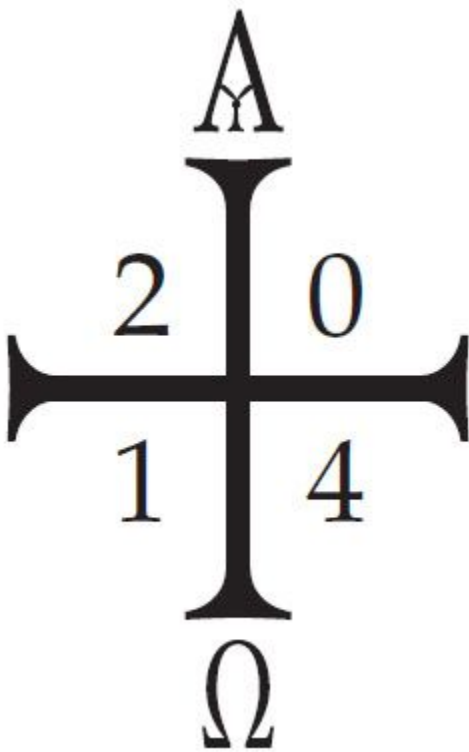
The wick runs through the entire candle from top to bottom and represents the soul of Christ that burns bright for His people. The light that burns is a reminder to Catholic Christians that Jesus Christ is our light, and he cuts through the darkness of sin and has conquered death to redeem humanity to the Father. The longer the candle burns, the brighter the candle gets as a reminder that the more Jesus is consumed, the brighter His light becomes for the world.

During the Easter Vigil, the priest marks the candle during the candle's blessing. The first marks begin making the sign of the cross. A vertical line first followed by the horizontal line makes the sign of the cross. The cross is the Christian symbol that reminds us death has been defeated, and for many believers, there is no greater symbol in Christianity than the cross. The second mark is recognizing Jesus is the same yesterday and today at the Beginning and the End. This is done with the Greek letters Alpha and Omega. Revelations chapter 22 verse 13, Jesus

reveals to John, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

The Alpha symbol is placed on top of the cross made earlier around the candle's center, and the Omega symbol is placed below the cross. Once the Alpha and Omega are finished, the priest then says, “all-time belongs to him, and all the ages, to him, be glory and power, through every age and forever. Amen.” while carving the year into the candle surrounding the cross.

**Figure 1**



### **The Wounds of Christ**

After the recognition that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the symbolic wounds of Christ are marked in the cross that was just carved at the appropriate places. The priest says, “By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us. Amen.” As the priest says, “By his holy,” he puts the first nail in the candle’s marked

cross, symbolizing the crown of thorns. As the priest says, “and glorious wounds,” he puts the second nail in the middle of the cross, representing the spear that pierced Jesus’s side. As the priest says, “may Christ the Lord,” he puts the third nail at the bottom of the cross, symbolizing the wounds in Jesus’s feet. As the priest says, “guard us,” he places the fourth nail in the right hand of Christ. Finally, as the priest says, “and protect us. Amen.” he places the fifth and final nail in the left hand of Christ. These nails represent the five wounds of Christ.

**Figure 2**

12. When the cutting of the cross and of the other signs has been completed, the Priest may insert five grains of incense into the candle in the form of a cross, meanwhile saying:
- |                          |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. By his holy           | 1     |
| 2. and glorious wounds,  | 4 2 5 |
| 3. may Christ the Lord   |       |
| 4. guard us              | 3     |
| 5. and protect us. Amen. |       |
- 

It is important to park a minute on the powerful prayer I just read, “By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lod guard us and protect us. Amen.” The idea that Jesus Christ protects His people through wounds is a compelling and moving image. It is the recognition by the Church of the intensity in which Jesus loves us. This powerful love should not be overlooked, underplayed, or understated.

In Isaiah, Chapter 53, verse 5, it is written, “But he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole; by his wounds, we were healed.” The sentiment is echoed in the New Testament as well, where it is written in 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 24, “He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.”

Jesus saves us and protects us from death by his passion (suffering and death). He united us with His Father, our Creator, through his crucifixion (death on the cross). He defeated death by His resurrection (He rose from the dead). Finally, He has offered us eternal life as seen through His ascension. This is the Paschal Mystery of the Catholic faith (The passion, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ).

If I expand 1 Peter: 2, verse 24, we learn that Jesus did all this for us even though:

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:22-24).

Catholics are called to live a Christocentric life. This means Christ should be at the center of everything we do—not just when we fulfill our Sunday obligations. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to live as Christ taught us to live to exemplify Christ's love to others. If we live our lives correctly, people should see the love of Christ in us even though we, too, will suffer.

Expanding 1 Peter 2 a little further and we read:

For whenever anyone bears the pain of unjust suffering because of consciousness of God, that is a grace. But what credit is there if you are patient when beaten for doing wrong? But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this, you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. The Catholic Christian needs to remember, our path is a path to the cross (22-24).

We will suffer because of sin. Our hope lies in the resurrection. As Catholics, we don't run away from suffering, we know it is a part of life on Earth. When we suffer, we look for the resurrection. We know that life mirrors the paschal mystery. There will be pain and suffering. We have to die to this pain and suffering so that we can rise from it and ascend past it. This will most likely happen many times during the life of a person.

It is through the wounds of Christ we have the courage to embrace virtue. St. Maximilian Kolbe traded places with Franciszek Gajowniczek who was randomly picked to die in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Gajowniczek said he had a family and that he did not want to die, St. Maximilian Kolbe traded places with Gajowniczek even though he was a stranger.

I am sure. St. Maximilian Kolbe didn't want to die, but he did not fear death. He knew there would be suffering involved. He knew he was going to die; however, he also believed in the resurrection and ascension. St. Maximilian Kolbe knew he was protected by the wounds of Christ and had the courage to live out his paschal mystery.

I bet you didn't know until now a candle could tell such a fantastic story. Until next time. God bless.