MEDITATIONS
ON THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

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MEDITATION 1

When did the Sign of the Cross begin and what does it mean?

This Christian practice of making the Sign of the Cross dates back as early as the third and fourth century A. D. According to one interpretation, this practice was an effort to obey the biblical command to pray continually. At its most basic meaning, it seems reasonable for us to say that signing the Cross of Christ on a person sets him/her apart as belonging to Christ, and as such is under the care and protection of Christ.

One case of divine marking in the Old Testament is described in Ezekiel 9:3-6. This might or might not have been used by the early Christians as a scriptural basis for the practice of making the Sign of the Cross. But we may glean from this example some meaning that could enrich our own practice today.

EZEKIEL 9:3-6:

[3] Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer's inkhorn at his side; [4] and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."
[5] To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. [6] Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little

children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary."

LET'S OBSERVE:

(1) God commanded this marking of certain people.

(2) Those who were marked had one quality: *They sighed and cried over all the abominations that are done within the city.* In other words, they were grieved over the sins and wicked practices around them. Obviously, they took no part in these evil practices, and they prayed for these abominations to end.

(3) Those who received the mark were protected from divine judgment. Everyone else without the mark were killed by God's angel of judgment.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY:

(1) Some Bible commentators suggest there may be some significance to the fact that the "mark" was literally the letter TAV (equivalent of the letter T), which in the prophet Ezekiel's time was written in the shape of a CROSS. What might have been just a dim foreshadowing in Ezekiel's time is plain and clear for us today. When we make the Sign of the Cross we are testifying to our faith in Christ and His work of redemption on the Cross of Calvary.

(2) Today, when we make the Sign of the Cross on ourselves we must make sure that we have the same attitude toward sin that those people marked in Ezekiel's time had: *We must hate sin in all its form; and we must be continually praying for God to cleanse away sin from our personal lives and from our society.* The first sentence in the Lord's Prayer expresses this attitude positively: *"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* We must show genuine sorrow whenever we see God's name not being honored and when we see His will being set aside both by sins of omission and sins of commission.

(3) Let us, tactfully but firmly, remind loved ones and friends who don't have Christ's mark on them – that is, those who don't have a personal, meaningful relationship with Christ – to establish such a relationship with Him in order to be saved from the coming judgment.

MEDITATION 2

STEP ONE: THE TRINITY

To make the Sign of the Cross, first, we put the thumb, pointing finger and middle finger together. This first action declares our faith in the Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This reminds us of our Christian baptism, when these words were pronounced over us: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Gospel of St. Matthew 28:19).

Many people find the doctrine of the Trinity a stumbling block. They ask: How can you believe in ONE GOD while at the same time declare that THREE PERSONS are equally called God? Aren't you contradicting mathematics that says one plus one plus one equals three?

The Christian answers:

(1) The Bible teaches there is only ONE GOD.

Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

1 Corinthians 8:6: Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

(2) The same Bible teaches that THREE PERSONS equally possess the same nature of God.

(a) Nobody questions that God the Father is God.

(b) The Bible states very clearly that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, possesses the nature of God. In John 1:1 we read about Christ under His title as the WORD: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Hundreds of years before it happened, God foretold through the prophet Isaiah the human birth of Christ the Messiah: *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6).

(c) Nobody questions that the Holy Spirit has the nature of God because He is the Spirit of God. The question we need to answer about Him is whether He is a Person (with His own mind, emotion, and volition) like the Father and the Son. And the answer is yes, because the Three Persons can relate to one another. Note Christ speaking in John 14:16-17 of Himself, the Father and the Spirit: *"And I will pray the Father, and He will send you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- the Spirit of truth...."*

(3) Finally, the same Bible describes the THREE PERSONS united as ONE GOD under ONE NAME in the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

The TRIANGLE provides a helpful illustration. There is only ONE TRIANGLE (there is only ONE GOD) but it is made up of THREE ANGLES (there are THREE PERSONS who share in the NATURE of God), just as the three angles share in the "nature" (the center) of the triangle, which represents the NATURE of God, in which the Three Persons share equally in a UNITY that is permanent and which cannot be separated from one another. Note the connections pointing toward the Persons.

The DISTINCTION of Persons is expressed as follows:

- The Father is NOT the Son, is NOT the Spirit;
- The Son is NOT the Father, is NOT the Spirit;
- The Spirit is NOT the Father, is NOT the Son.

The UNITY of Deity (the fact that the 3 Persons share in the NATURE of God) is expressed as follows with the connections pointing to the center:

- The Father is GOD;
- The Son is GOD;
- The Spirit is GOD.

There is ONLY ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS, not three Gods, just as there is ONLY ONE TRIANGLE though consisting of THREE ANGLES.

Some people do not like the word mystery, but this word describes the truth of the Trinity. So, whenever a Christian makes the Sign of the Cross, he/she declares his/her faith in the Trinity: ONE GOD in THREE PERSONS. How can you reconcile these two seemingly contradictory truths? Humanly speaking, we cannot. It is a MYSTERY, but we believe it because God Himself revealed it to us in the Bible.

MEDITATION 3

THE TRINITY (continued)

Through the Sign of the Cross we confess our faith in the Trinity. As we said in our previous meditation, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery and we will never be able to explain or to understand it fully. But in the Bible God provides us with enough information to know that this doctrine is not a human invention but a divine revelation.

In addition to the question of "mathematics", opponents also ask this question that usually stumps some Christians; it shouldn't but it does. The question runs this way: "Show me chapter and verse in the Bible where you find the word TRINITY?"

Christians answer:

No, the word TRINITY is not found in the Bible.

But, yes, the TRUTH of the Trinity is everywhere found in the Bible.

THE TRINITY IS HINTED AT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(a) In the very first chapter of Genesis the truth of the Trinity is already hinted at. Please study Genesis 1:26-27.

GENESIS 1:26: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

In verse 26 God says, "Let US make man in OUR image, in OUR likeness...." To whom was God talking? Opponents say that God was talking to angels. It could not be, because in verse 27 it does NOT say, "So God created man in THEIR image, in the image of God AND ANGELS He created him...." Rather, verse 27 says, "So God created man in HIS image, in the image OF GOD He created him...."

(b) Please also study Genesis 3:22-23. Notice the use of the plural in verse 22 (when God speaks as a FIRST PERSON) and the singular in verse 23 (when God is described in the THIRD PERSON). By the way, this is a good illustration of the Law of Language in interpretation – we must understand the GRAMMAR of these verses. If God speaks in the PLURAL in the first person and if God is described as SINGULAR in the third person, either we have a grammatical violation, or we have a hint of the Trinity – that there is ONE GOD, but this one God speaks of Himself as more than one. Compare also the similar use of plural and singular in Genesis 11:5-8.

(c) Genesis 1:1, 2 implies at least TWO PERSONS of the Trinity: God the Father (verse 1) and the Holy Spirit (verse 2).

Genesis 1:1,2: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

(d) Proverbs 30:4 recognizes the existence of the FATHER and the SON.

Proverbs 30:4: Who has ascended into heaven or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in the garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?

The Son is also identified in *Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"*

THE TRINITY IS ASSUMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(1) In the New Testament there are passages which assume the unity of the Three Persons of the Trinity. The following verses show the unity of the Three Persons:

Matthew 28:19: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

1 Peter 1:2: Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

(2) During the Baptism of Jesus we see the Three Persons in operation together: the FATHER speaking from heaven and the HOLY SPIRIT like a Dove descending upon the SON.

Matthew 3:16-17: When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

THE TRINITY IS DEMONSTRATED IN THE UNITED WORK OF THE THREE PERSONS

The Bible shows that the Three Persons equally share in the three works of deity as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer.

1. CREATOR

God the Father and the Holy Spirit - *Genesis 1:1,2: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

The Son - *Hebrews 1:8, 10: But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom…. And: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are work of Your hands."*

2. SUSTAINER

The Father - *Psalm 36:6:Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast.*

The Son - *Hebrews 1:3: Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

The Holy Spirit - *Psalm 104:30: You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.*

3. REDEEMER

The Father - *John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

The Son - *1 Peter 3:18: For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit – *Hebrews 9:14: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

MEDITATION 4

STEP 2: CHRIST: DEITY & HUMANITY

To make the Sign of the Cross, the ring and the little fingers are held together and pressed on the palm to symbolize the two natures of Christ: deity and humanity.

Filipino Christians have attacked relentlessly regarding their belief in the deity of Christ the Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ, not to be confused with the U. S. based Church of Christ). A primary doctrine of the INC is that Christ is only a human being.

When shown a verse like John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" the INC reply in Tagalog with an explanation along this line:

"Si Cristo ay Salita ng Dios, at siyempre, kasama na ng Dios ang kanyang Salita noong una pa. Bilang Salita ng Dios, siyempre may maka-dios na katangian ang Salita ng Dios. Ang salita ng tao ay may katangiang maka-tao." Translation: Christ is the Word (speech) of God and, of course, God's Word was already with him in the beginning. As God's word, the Word as a matter of course possesses a divine quality, just like man's word has a human quality."

In the view of the INC, Christ as the Word was merely an impersonal force. In fact, their ministers ask: "What is word? It is a spoken sound; and on the printed page a word is a written symbol of the spoken sound." This explanation seems reasonable.

But here's the question: Was Christ merely God's spoken sound?

Let's take the apostle Paul's explanation in Philippians 2:5-11 (New King James Version): *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those one earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This passage tells about Christ in three stages: (a) before He came to earth, (b) while He was on earth, and (c) about after He went back to heaven.

(1) BEFORE Christ came to earth, what FORM did Christ have?

He was in the "form of God". FORM follows NATURE (essence). Only someone with the nature of God has the form of God, in the same way that only someone with the nature of man has the form of a man. Since Christ possessed the FORM OF GOD, what kind of NATURE did He have? And while in the form of God, Christ had the personality and identity and ability to think and to decide. Therefore He was not merely the sound of God's voice. He did not consider equality with God as something to be selfishly retained or held on to, but instead He made Himself of no reputation by coming down to earth and hiding His divine glory in His human form.

(2) WHILE Christ was on earth, what FORM did He have?

He was found in the "form of a bondservant… in the likeness of men." This was because, through the miracle of the Virgin Birth, Christ took on human nature. Since

Christ as God cannot die, He took on human nature in order to die on the cross for our sins. And because He had human NATURE, He also possessed the human FORM.

(3) AFTER Christ returned to heaven, what position did He occupy?

The Bible declares that Christ was given the name and position above every name, deserving of worship. According to the Bible, only God deserves the worship of all His creatures, and that He does not give His glory to another (Isaiah 45:14, 18, 21, 23; 48:11; Matthew 4:10). Philippians 2:9-11 says that God made a decree that all creatures must worship and bow the knee to Christ and confess that He is Lord. In the Old Testament the name "Lord" means JEHOVAH (YHWH). Therefore is Christ God or not?

When we make the Sign of the Cross, by pressing together our ring finger and little finger upon our palm we are declaring our faith that Christ has two natures – deity and humanity – combined in one Person, our Savior and Lord.

MEDITATION 5

STEP 3: CHRIST'S DESCENT & ASCENT

Now we come to the downward and upward motion of the Sign of the Cross.

- The DOWNWARD motion signifies the descent of Christ from heaven to earth;
- The UPWARD motion signifies His ascent back to heaven.

In those two actions – descent and ascent – are encompassed the whole story of our redemption.

The downward and upward motions of the Sign of the Cross signify, as we have said, the descent (humiliation) and ascent (exaltation) of the Son of God. In these two cosmic actions amazing results happened.

Christ came down as God taking on human nature. Christ went back to heaven taking human nature permanently bound up with divine His person, so that in Him deity and humanity are forever united, never to be separated again.

Christ also went up to heaven to assume His work as our heavenly High Priest. As High Priest He stands between God and people. We might picture Christ as holding God with His right hand and holding humanity with His left hand and uniting them together in eternal relationship.

IN HIS DESCENT: CHRIST AS THE OFFERING

On the cross, Christ offered Himself as the Lamb of God – offering His body and blood as sacrifice for the sins of the world. This offering was a once-and-for-all, never-to-be-repeated work.

Hebrews 9:24-28: *For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, ONCE at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for me to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered ONCE to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.* (Emphasis added)

IN HIS ASCENT: CHRIST AS THE MEDIATOR

Christ's work as heavenly High Priest is a work that He has performed continually from the moment of His ascension until now and will continue to do until the time of His Second Coming at the end of the world.

Hebrews 7:25: *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.*

And so, whenever we make the Sign of the Cross, as we make the downward and upward movement, let us not do it as if we're making some magic sign. Rather, let us actually call upon our heavenly High Priest who is up there at the right hand of the Father in heaven, praying for us. Let's pray in words like these: "O Lord Jesus Christ, my heavenly High Priest, save me, help me!"

Hebrews 4:14-16: *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with out weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

MEDITATION 6

RIGHT TO LEFT OR LEFT TO RIGHT?

One seemingly technical question is often asked:

Do you make the sign of the Cross from the RIGHT shoulder to the LEFT?
Or from the LEFT shoulder to the RIGHT?

In fact, this is the difference between the western Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Eastern Church.

- **<u>Roman Catholics</u> (Western):** LEFT to RIGHT.
  From Forehead to Chest to Left Shoulder to Right Shoulder
  Meaning: Left to Right symbolizes moving from misery to glory.

  <u>Orthodox/Eastern Catholic</u>: RIGHT to LEFT.
  From Forehead to Chest to Right Shoulder to Left Shoulder
  This is considered the older form.
  Meaning: Right to Left symbolizes the Incarnation, God coming down to earth; also, it means the Gospel came from the Jews to the Gentiles.

BOTH FORMS MEANINGFUL

RIGHT TO LEFT: Historically, this is the earlier form, retained by the Orthodox Eastern Church. Right to left best expresses the main message of the Gospel, which announces the Good News that God is the Author and Source of the Gospel. God Himself planned from all eternity to send His Son to come down to earth to bring salvation to humanity and to all creation. Salvation is all by God's grace. Human wisdom, desire or devise had absolutely no part in it. God by Himself alone initiated and accomplished His redemption plan.

John 3:16, 17:
16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Later on the western Roman Church adopted LEFT to RIGHT. This form expresses the result of God's plan of salvation, to deliver people from the realm of sin's curse and misery over to the realm of blessing and eternal bliss.

Colossians 1:12-14:
12 Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption [d]through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Both forms are meaningful.

RIGHT to LEFT reminds us of God as the Source of our salvation.

LEFT to RIGHT reminds us of the result of salvation, we are saved from Satan's kingdom of sin and death and hell and we have been transferred to the kingdom of God and received forgiveness and the hope of eternal life and heaven through our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

A SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

It's very significant that the first doctrines signified by the Sign of the Cross (the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the descent and ascent of Christ, God's plan of salvation and its results) are clearly set forth in the two earliest creeds of the Christian church. Let's review these two creeds (modern English text below taken from http://myweb.lmu.edu/fjust/Mass.htm).

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

In a very real sense, when we make the Sign of the Cross we are confessing in physical action the substance of our Christian faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

NOTE: The term "catholic" in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed referred to the "one universal Christian Church" BEFORE the Big Split happened between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Church. The true universal catholic Church consists of true believers whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 20:15), not those listed in the membership rolls of churches on the earth.

OUTSIDE OR INSIDE?

Christ is knocking at the door of your heart.

Listen to Christ's voice: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20).*

In the Bible, dining or eating together symbolizes having a permanent, permanent relationship.

As we conclude these simple meditations on the Sign of the Cross, we must honestly answer one question:

Is my faith in Christ only on the OUTSIDE, expressed by mere outward motion of making the Sign of Cross? Am I still sitting as the king/queen on the throne of my life while Christ continues to wait outside, patiently knocking at the door of my heart?

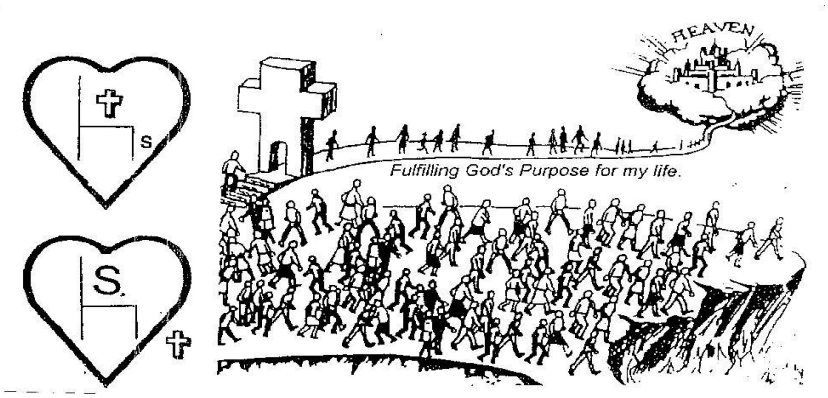
Or have I true believed in Christ and received Him INSIDE my life? Have I surrendered the throne of my life to Him and fully accepted Him as my Savior, Lord and God?

In the figure below, which heart represents your life?

- Am I the heart with me, the proud "S" (SELF) on the throne with CHRIST (+) outside?

- Or am I the heart with CHRIST (✝) on the throne, and my SELF ("S") fully surrendered to Him?

Your kind of heart will determine your eternal destiny.



If you want Christ on the throne of your life, pray this sincerely:

"Lord Jesus, I want to be a real Christian in my heart. Lord, I believe with all my heart everything that's taught in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, that You rose again from the dead, that You are alive for evermore. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for knocking at the door of my heart. I open the door of my heart, and I invite You into my heart and receive You as my Lord and Savior. Lord, I surrender the throne of my life to You today. Forgive me of my self-controlled life in the past, forgive me for habitually ignoring and disobeying You. Lord Jesus, from now on help me to know You, love You, follow You, and serve You for the rest of my life. Amen."

What next?

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