



CGSUSA Lent The San Damiano Crucifix

Over 800 years ago, inside the old San Damiano church near Assisi, Italy, St. Francis encountered our Lord as he prayed before a large crucifix. St. Francis of Assisi was praying before this cross when he is said to have received the commission from God to rebuild the Church. That original cross now hangs in the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi, Italy. A replica of the original cross can be found at the church of San Damiano.

The San Damiano Crucifix in the Atrium

For the three- to six-year-old child, early in the atrium year in presenting the model Altar, we place a small crucifix on the altar table, pointing out that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, and that Mass or Holy Eucharist is Jesus' meal. Death and resurrection is one reality for the young child, so that in the atrium they rarely (if ever) fixate on the crucifixion. This fact is also why the preferred crucifix in the atrium is the San Damiano image; in which Christ is very much alive, still embracing the reality of the cross. The San Damiano cross is also often used with the Baptism work, and for the processional cross at the prayer table.



The depiction of Jesus is that of our living God: Christ stands upright, not nailed to the cross. The eyes of Jesus are open. His wounds are visible, the source of those wounds, the nails and thorny crown are gone. Because his Risen life is stronger than death, in the place of the crown of thorns is a halo. The image of Christ is a figure of light that gives light to the other figures depicted on the crucifix, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). With the children, we are so careful to hold the death and resurrection of Jesus together. We never speak about one without the other. They are one mystery. The San Damiano cross is the visual sign of this one mystery – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is striking that, in almost all the young children's atrium drawings of the crucifix, Jesus on the cross is smiling! The colors and the image of the San Damiano crucifix appeal to the child. In the CGSUSA Annual Journal, Sr. M. Claire, MC writes in her article, [A Great "Thirst"](#), about the children's response to receiving a small San Damiano cross after the sacrament of Reconciliation:

Each child receives a small San Damiano cross on a white cord. After the child has kissed it, as Father puts it around each child's neck he says, "You have been forgiven by the Good Shepherd who laid down his life on the Cross for you. Receive now the sign of his love."

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Nicholas, age 7, St Francis Xavier, St. Louis, MO He created a booklet in response to learning about the History of the Kingdom of God.

We see in the image to the left that he has drawn the moment of Redemption, with Jesus on the cross.

Note that Jesus is smiling.

The San Damiano Crucifix in the Home

Many families display sacred art in their home. What art images do your children see at home? The art should be hung at the child's eye level, especially in the child's own room. Before you hang anything, sit on the floor to see what it looks like from their height. Or perhaps it is a cross or statue that the child may hold or carry.

- Families may wish to display a San Damiano Cross in the home. Hang it on the wall behind the family prayer table, or in a child's bedroom, or a free-standing crucifix that can be placed on the family prayer table. A simple San Damiano crucifix may be purchased from CGSUSA [here](#).
- For the very youngest child, simply point to the cross and say the name, "Jesus".
- For the older children, pray before the crucifix. Below are two prayers attributed to St. Francis. Or create an original prayer.

The Prayer of Saint Francis Before the Cross of San Damiano

Most High and Glorious God, bring light to the darkness of my heart. Give me right faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, insight, and wisdom, so I can always observe your holy and true command. Amen.

Prayer Before a Crucifix

We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.