



Making Crosses

This activity is based on Ellen Morris Prewitt's book *Making Crosses: A Creative Connection to God*. Permission granted by author to use excerpts for retreat purposes, June 2020. To learn more about cross making as a spiritual practice, you may wish to purchase the book at https://paracletepress.com/products/making-crosses?_pos=1&_sid=39f6dac37&_ss=r

The following activity invites you into a time of prayerful reflection to find objects that speak to you and to form these objects into a cross.

More than oral or written word, more than our analytical thinking, making crosses is a way of understanding that comes from doing. And doing with our hands. Making crosses locates you in a place of prayer and keeps you there. As you work on your cross, God is right there beside you, making suggestions, leading you into new understandings, showing you things that you didn't know you knew. Because you are working on the most complex symbol of Christianity—the cross—you are attached deeply to God.

There are three simple building blocks for making a cross:

1. Take what the world doesn't value and make it into a work of God.
2. Reject the materialism of this world, in your own small way, by reusing discarded materials and giving them new, godly life.
3. Engage in an activity that takes you directly into communion with God.

Enter into God's presence.

Take a moment to enter into God's presence. Think about a moment or moments when you have experienced God's most profound love...Relive the sense of peace and security and happiness this experience brought to you. Write down the words that best describe how you felt. Set yourself in that place, so that for the time you are making your cross you are speaking to that God, the One who loves you so.

Step 1: Find objects for your cross.

Allow your inspiration to come from God's word: take what the world doesn't value and use it to commune with God, or "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Mt. 20:16). Again: reject the rampant materialism of this world, or "Sell all that you have, give to the poor, then come and follow me" (Lk. 18.22).

For Ellen, the author of *Making Crosses*, crosses cannot be separated from what they symbolize: a rejection of the world's way of valuing. That is why she tries to use only broken, discarded, seemingly worthless objects. It's the very commonness of the cross materials—a plumber's elbow, found string, a broken key chain—that helps the meaning of

the cross itself to come through. The simplicity removes religious pretense and spiritual smugness and points instead to the everyday fact of the Cross.

Try using objects that are unvalued by the world, unnoticed even, to make images of God: “Things which were cast down are being raised up” (BCP 280).

- Find two sticks, which will become the beams for your cross.
- Consider what you will use to hold the beams together.
- Go for a walk: around your home, outside, or both. Collect objects to add to the beams.

Reflect.

Meditate on what it means to you to be a co-creator with God. That is what you will be doing in cross making: creating something new together with God. In what other aspects of life have you felt you were a co-creator with God? Using your prayer thoughts make a list of creation goals that do not include the word perfection. Read your list out loud.

Step 2: Assemble your items.

Assemble all of your collected items. Spread them in front of you. Gently place each object in your hand. Meditate on what this item means to you, what that item might mean. Let God come close to you in prayer. Your cross might be quite representational, or the pieces can be put together in a decorative way that shouts, “Hallelujah!” Give it a little bit of time. Let the Holy Spirit work with you and the objects.

Step 3: Adorn your cross.

Begin to put together your cross, starting with the crossbeams. There is no set way to make a cross, so use the items you have gathered, affixing them with glue, string, or whatever you might have on hand.

Think about other “physical” ways have you worshiped God—in dance, drawing, making clay objects? How was that experience different for you than traditional cerebral worship? How does working on your cross feel different to you? What would you like to get out of such a physical prayer experience?

Step 4: Tell the story of your cross.

Do this silently or aloud, or write your story on paper. First identify what has gone into your cross: where the sticks came from, what adornments you used, the origin of your materials. Tell what each object means to you, what it symbolizes. If there is any double meaning in your symbols, explain it. Give your cross a title.

Ask yourself: What will you do with your cross? With whom will you share its story?