



Introduction: The Pax, More Than Just a Liturgical Object

In an increasingly individualistic society, where human contact is reduced to digital messages and relationships become impersonal, the Catholic Church has always had tangible gestures that express *fraternal communion*. One of these gestures, now largely forgotten but rich in theological meaning, is the **Pax** (also known as the *Pax Board*, *Osculatory*, or *Kiss of Peace*).

This small liturgical object, often crafted from precious metal, ivory, or carved wood, was not merely a ceremonial tool but a *tangible symbol of Christian charity*—a reminder that the Mass is not a private act but the gathering of God’s children around the Altar of Sacrifice.

In this article, we will explore:

1. **The historical origins of the Pax**
 2. **Its theological significance and connection to Sacred Scripture**
 3. **How it was used in the traditional liturgy**
 4. **Its relevance today and how we can recover its spirit**
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I. The History of the Pax: From the Early Church to the Traditional Rite

A. Origins in the Early Church

The gesture of peace has its roots in the New Testament itself. St. Paul exhorts: “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*” (Romans 16:16). This “holy kiss” (*osculum pacis*) was a sign of unity among the faithful before receiving the Eucharist, as a preparation for the Sacred Banquet.

Over time, to avoid disorder and maintain reverence, the Church regulated this gesture. Instead of a direct kiss, a sacred object symbolizing peace was introduced: the **Pax**.

B. Liturgical Development in the Middle Ages

During Solemn High Mass in the Tridentine Rite, the Pax was used after the *Agnus Dei*. The priest would kiss the altar (a symbol of Christ) and then the Pax, saying: “*Pax tecum*” (“Peace be with you”). A server or altar boy would then carry it to the faithful, starting with the first person in the pew, who would kiss it and pass it to the next, repeating the greeting.

This gesture was not mere formality but a **profound expression of reconciliation and fraternal love**, recalling Christ’s words: “*If you are offering your gift at the altar and there*



remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother” (Matthew 5:23-24).

II. Theological Meaning: Peace as a Gift from Christ

The Pax was not just a greeting but a **sacramental** that expressed spiritual realities:

1. **The Peace of Christ:** Not worldly peace but the peace that flows from the Cross (John 14:27).
 2. **The Unity of the Church:** By passing it, the faithful showed they were “*one Body in Christ*” (Romans 12:5).
 3. **Reconciliation:** Before receiving Communion, they were to be in a state of grace and charity with their neighbor.
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III. Practical Guide: How Was the Pax Used?

A. The Ritual in the Traditional Mass

1. **Timing:** After the *Agnus Dei*, before Communion.
2. **Gestures:**
 - The priest kisses the altar and then the Pax.
 - A server brings it to the faithful, saying: “*Pax tecum*”.
 - The first person in the pew kisses it, responds “*Et cum spiritu tuo*”, and passes it to the next.
3. **Interior disposition:** Those who received it were to do so reverently, remembering it was a sacred sign.

B. Why Is It No Longer Used?

After the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms, many rites were simplified, and the sign of peace was replaced with a handshake among the faithful. However, the Pax is still preserved in some traditional Latin Mass communities.



IV. Modern Relevance: Recovering the Spirit of the Pax

Today, when many Catholics attend Mass without knowing their fellow parishioners, the Pax challenges us:

1. **To live charity:** The peace is not just a mechanical gesture but a call to true unity.
2. **To recover the sacred:** The Pax reminds us that peace is a divine gift, not just a greeting.
3. **To prepare for Communion:** Like the early Christians, we must examine our conscience before approaching the Sacrament.

How to Apply It Today?

- If you attend a traditional Latin Mass, participate devoutly in this rite.
- In the Novus Ordo, live the sign of peace with true reconciliation in mind.
- At home, keep a replica of the Pax as a reminder of Christ's peace.

Conclusion: A Call to Fraternal Unity

The Pax is not a relic of the past but an **invitation to live authentic Christian peace**. In a divided world, Catholics are called to be *instruments of that peace*, beginning with sacramental and communal life.

As St. Francis of Assisi prayed: *"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."* May the spirit of the Pax be reborn in our hearts and parishes.

Pax Christi sit semper vobiscum. (May the peace of Christ be always with you.)

Did you know about the Pax? Share in the comments how you live the sign of peace in your parish!