

Today, followers of Francis, lay as well as religious, wear the TAU cross as an exterior sign, a "seal" of their commitment, a remembrance of the Victory of Christ over evil through daily self-sacrificing love. The sign of contradiction has become a sign of hope, a witness of fidelity till the end of our lives.

This symbolic image was immediately taken to heart by St. Francis, who was in attendance at the Fourth Lateran Council. The TAU could easily be identified with the cross of Christ and from that day forward, instead of signing his name, Francis would use the sign of the TAU as his signature.



Up to the year 1508 Third Order members wore a habit. After 1508 the use of a habit was changed to the wearing of a large scapular (two large pieces of cloth worn front and back) that were held together by a piece of rope worn around the waist. The scapular part became smaller until it became two small pieces of cloth held together with string and worn around the neck. The rope around the waist no longer served a practical purpose and was replaced with a string that was worn around the waist and under the outer clothes of a Lay Third Order member. At that point in time the original intent of the scapular, with cord to hold it together, became obsolete. After 1978 (the time of the updated Pauline Rule) the habit for Secular Franciscans was changed from the smaller scapular and cord to the TAU CROSS.

(Made by Lesley V. for St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity
Boynton Beach, Florida)

In Old Testament times the image of the TAU, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, meant that we were admonished to be faithful to GOD throughout our lives until the last.

In the year 1215, Pope Innocent III called for a great reform of the Roman Catholic Church...the Fourth Lateran Council. The Pope opened the Council by recalling the Old Testament image of the TAU (Hebrew letter "T") as taken from the Prophet Ezekial...Yahweh said this to him, "go all through the city, and through Jerusalem, and mark a cross on the foreheads of all who grieve and lament over all the loathsome practices in it."

The Franciscan Tau Cross (An Explanation)

