What Is a Symbol?

Part 1

Silently read the following statements about symbols and be prepared to ask a question if you need clarification.

- The word symbol is based on a Greek word meaning "to throw together or compare."
- A symbol is an object, action, or ritual that has meaning beyond itself: the object or action is concrete, and the meaning is abstract.
- Humans, by nature, are symbol makers. Relating abstract realities, such as love, to concrete realities, such as a wedding band or an exchange of wedding vows, gives meaning to our lives.

Part 2

The following objects or actions can be understood as symbols. Explain how each can represent an abstract idea. Use the first example as a model:

| Symbol | Abstract Meaning |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fire | action, passion, transformation |
| Evergreen tree | |
| The Sign of the Cross | |
| The color red | |
| A journey | |

Part 3

Respond completely to each item.

Think of an object that has special meaning for you personally, and describe it below. Explain how
this object could be considered to be a private symbol.

• Give your own example of a public symbol. Why is the action or object you chose a public symbol, and what abstract meaning does it have?

 Symbols are an integral part of Church liturgies. Describe two objects or ritual actions that you are aware of from sacramental celebrations (such as Baptism, Marriage, or Anointing of the Sick) and explain, to the best of your knowledge, the abstract reality they represent.