

Posture at Mass Standing

In the upcoming months, parishes in the Archdiocese of Louisville will be making preparations for the full implementation of the directives for the celebration of the Mass found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM). Archbishop Kurtz has asked that a period of liturgical catechesis precede implementation so that we not only know what we are to do but also why we do it.

In the years since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there has been a concerted effort to encourage the “full, conscious, and active participation of all the people” in the celebration of the liturgy. This type of participation includes more than our verbal involvement as we sing the parts of the Mass, respond to the dialogue and recite the prayers. Full engagement in the liturgy requires attentiveness, keeping our minds focused on what is happening, as well, as our physical postures and gestures.

When people are first exposed to Roman Catholic liturgy they frequently comment on how much we get up and down during the celebration of the Mass. The postures that we take during the liturgy are not empty rituals, but they each have a meaning and a certain power of their own, greatly influencing our experience. A common posture is a sign of the unity of the Christian community gathered for the sacred liturgy, a recurrent theme throughout the GIRM. Our common posture both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of

the participants (GIRM, 42). There are three different postures that we take during the celebration of the Mass: standing, kneeling and sitting.

Standing is the primary posture that we take at Mass since it best embodies the active stance of the participants. The liturgical directives list the exceptions to the standing posture. Outside the liturgy, we stand when a dignitary or elder enters the room; for the national anthem and to pledge allegiance to the flag. We stand to make a commitment. Our common phrase “stand up for what you believe” carries implications for our posture at Mass. Let’s take a look at some of the times in the liturgy when we stand and why we take this posture.



We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel. We stand for this reading and not for the other readings from Scripture because we hold the Gospels in the highest esteem since they contain an account of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Our faith teaches us that these words are not the words of the deacon or

the priest but they are the words of Christ. Not only do we rise to our feet out of respect for the presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel but this particular reading has other ritual actions surrounding it that speak of its importance, such as the singing of the Gospel acclamation, a procession to the ambo with the Book of the Gospels, the use of incense.

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We stand for the Creed as we profess the tenets of our faith and our commitment to them. We stand for the Prayer of the Faithful when we express our petitions to God and indicate by our active posture that we are willing to work toward the realization of these intentions.

It is noteworthy that after sitting for the presentation of gifts and the preparation of the altar we stand for the invitation to pray over the gifts, "Pray my brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable..." as a sign of our active participation in this offering.

Standing is also the posture for the distribution of Holy Communion. After our response of faith to the invitation to Communion, "O Lord, I am not worthy...." we rise to our feet. As we stand, the priest receives Holy Communion and the Communion Song begins, continuing until the last person in the assembly receives.

Just as we stand in honor of Christ's presence in the Gospel, we stand for the distribution of Holy Communion out of respect for the Body of Christ in the Sacred Host and in the Precious Blood. The standing posture demonstrates the communal nature of this action and shows respect for the rest of the body of Christ, the communicants, coming forward to receive Holy Communion. The GIRM clarifies this intent when it directs the Communion song to express "the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the 'communitarian' nature of the procession to receive Communion."

The kneeling posture will be the focus of the next article.

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This article is part 1 of 4 in a series on the implementation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in the Archdiocese of Louisville.

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