

Posture at Mass Kneeling

This article is the second in a series on the liturgy. The previous one focused on the vital role posture has on the full, conscious, and active participation of all the people beginning with the standing posture. This week the focus will be on the kneeling posture at Mass.

A few years ago, Bishop Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix, expressed eloquently the significance of kneeling in the Mass, “Kneeling is a fundamental act of faith, a strong expression about Who stands at the center of one’s life and Who stands at the center of all creation.” In biblical times, he said, “being on one’s knees before God stated boldly yet simply that God is the source of all power and that the one on bended knee is ready to place his life and all his energy at the service of the Lord.” This intention is central to the times that we kneel in the Mass.

In our everyday lives there are few times when we are required to kneel, yet there is something very basic in human nature that impels us to fall on our knees at times of intense prayer. A visit to a hospital chapel confirms this human tendency. Even on a much more mundane level, in the post game elation after a football game, players from both sides, totally unbidden, frequently kneel in prayer.

Some have welcomed the renewed attention to kneeling as we implement the General Instruction of the Roman Missal



and others may have thought kneeling at Mass was appropriate for biblical times but not today.

Today, carrying forth the tradition of our ancestors, Catholics are directed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (no. 43) to kneel for the Eucharistic Prayer from the time after the singing of the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy) until after the Great Amen that concludes this prayer.

The elements within this Eucharistic Prayer shed light on the reasons for the kneeling posture. In the great Eucharistic Prayer the priest voices the text in the name of the entire community, calling on God to send the Holy Spirit to transform the offering of the bread and wine and the offering of our lives into the Body and Blood of Christ.

We kneel as we present our lives to be joined with the sacrifice of Christ in offering to the Father. We kneel as the account of the Last Supper is read with the great words of institution. We kneel as we hear the command to do this in memory of me, committing our lives to the mission of love and service. We kneel as we express our belief and openness to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. We kneel as we make our plea to God to grant the petitions that conclude this great prayer.

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Bishop Olmsted, Diocese of Phoenix

So much of the content of this prayer is centered on the transformative power of the Spirit; the kneeling posture enhances our intention of surrender to God’s awe-inspiring work.

In the Communion Rite after the Lord’s Prayer, Sign of Peace, and the Lamb of God litany that accompanies the Breaking of the Bread, we again take the kneeling posture. Even though this time for kneeling is quite brief, this posture helps to convey the text of the act of faith and our surrender to God’s transformative action as we are given an invitation to Holy Communion and make our response in faith, “O Lord, I am not worthy....” After this act of faith, we rise as the priest receives Holy Communion and the distribution of Holy Communion begins the communal portion of the rite.

After the distribution of Holy Communion is completed, the General Instruction directs the priest and the people to spend some time in silent, individual prayer. For this period of private prayer, communicants have the option to kneel or to sit as their personal devotion suggests.

This change of posture after the period of distribution clearly marks the move from the communal portion where we stand and sing the Communion Song to the individual, private portion where we pray in silence, either kneeling or sitting. The recommendation from Archbishop Kurtz is for this period of silence to be from one to two minutes.

Our postures at Mass are not empty rituals but each one, standing, kneeling or sitting contributes to our full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy.

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This article is part 2 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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