



St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church

Ongoing Renewal of Our Liturgy

For almost 40 years now we Roman Catholics have been in an on-going renewal of the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the bishops of the world gathered at the Second Vatican Council, this renewal has called us all to a more mature sense of who we are as Christ's Body. The so-called "changes" effected by the Council continue to summon us to shared responsibility for the life of the Church, especially its manner of worship. I heartily commend all those who have worked so diligently to make the Church and its liturgical celebrations a more visible sign of God's loving and saving presence. More specifically, I commend our parishes for enriching a sense of prayerfulness in the liturgy and for fostering the full and conscious participation of the People of God in the Mass. I am profoundly grateful to one and all for such a manifest willingness – even eagerness – to take part fully in the worship of the Church.

The renewal of the liturgy of the Church is an on-going reality. In 2002, Pope John Paul II approved and promulgated a revised version of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. This General Instruction establishes the basic structure and format for the celebration of Mass, especially the Sunday Eucharist.

One of the most significant liturgical principles identified in the General Instruction, is proper integration into the Mass of all the various liturgical ministries. The previous version of this instruction which was promulgated immediately after Vatican II - when the modern reform of the liturgy was only beginning - did not give much attention to the many lay ministries which have enhanced the liturgy over the long history of the Church. The involvement of the laity in the liturgy has now been fully incorporated into the celebration of the Mass. As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#14) approved at the Council reminds us, the full and active participation in the liturgy by all the faithful is an over-riding principle. This principle is especially important in determining the actions and postures during Mass. These common actions and postures give expression to the fact, although we may come to Mass as individuals, we worship together in common fashion as the living Body of Christ.

Throughout our Archdiocese, most parishes have already implemented the revisions called for in the new General Instruction. Because of their importance for our common action as a worshipping community, I wish to call special attention to the instructions the General Instruction gives concerning certain gestures and postures to be observed by the entire assembly at Mass. These instructions resolve inconsistencies in the previous version of the General Instruction or actually amend some confusing practices which may have developed over time in some parish communities.

A Commitment to Common Postures at Mass

1. The people make a profound bow from the waist during the Creed, at the words, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man." (On the feasts of Christmas and the Annunciation of the Lord, all genuflect)
2. The people stand at the priest's invitation, "Pray friends" which follows the preparation of the bread and wine.
3. The people kneel after the Holy, Holy, Holy and remain kneeling until after the recitation or singing of the AMEN at the end of the Eucharistic prayer.
4. The people stand from the Our Father and remain standing until after the reception of Holy Communion. After returning to their places, the faithful may kneel or be seated.
5. The people make a reverent bow of the head when coming forward to receive the Body of Christ and/or the Blood of Christ.

1. The assembly is now to stand when the priest presider says: "Pray my brethren that this our sacrifice . . ." Presently, the seated assembly stands after their response: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice . . ." Since the assembly stands when it prays at every other time during the Mass, the assembly is to stand on this occasion as well, reflecting consistency in its posture during prayer in common.

2. The assembly is to kneel after the Holy Holy and to remain kneeling through the recitation or singing of the "Great Amen" (the people's response at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer). Avoiding the confusion manifest in a variety of current practices, this directive for a unified posture at this moment in the liturgy also is for the sake of common posture.

3. The assembly is to remain standing after the Lamb of God - and remain standing until after the reception of Holy Communion. After returning to their places, the faithful may kneel or be seated. The common gesture of standing during the Communion procession reflects our Catholic understanding of Holy Communion as much more than a private moment of Eucharistic devotion. The Breaking of the Bread and Sharing in the cup of Salvation (Precious Blood) takes the form of a common procession on the part of the faithful. Standing is the posture of one who is participating in and giving active attention to the procession. Standing also is an expression of unity by those who have received Holy Communion with those who are about to communicate. In some parishes, the faithful even remain standing until the last person has received. After the distribution of Holy Communion, the General Instruction asks for a brief time for personal prayer and meditation. This common posture can be embraced more easily in smaller parishes than in larger ones where standing throughout the

Communion Rite may become burdensome for some people. In parishes which experience an unusually long Communion Rite people may choose to either kneel or be seated when they return to the pew. **The General Instruction asks the faithful to kneel after the Lamb of God, but also gives the local bishop the discretion to determine the posture at this point. Archbishop Dolan is exercising this right and allowing each pastor to choose the posture most appropriate for their assembly.** Because there still may be differences in this posture around the country, I offer you a general rule for participating in the liturgy: The faithful should follow the postures and gestures of the parish community during the celebration of the Eucharist. The Mass should never become a public forum for demonstrating liturgical righteousness to the sacrifice of a common posture of faith.

4. At Holy Communion, the faithful are to make a reverent bow of the head just before receiving the Body of Christ as well as just before receiving the Precious Blood. The General Instruction encourages a greater degree of prayerfulness and devotion at Mass, particularly in relationship to the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist. After a few years of "experimentation" with a whole variety of expressions of devotion at this moment in the Mass (genuflection, kneeling, full body bow, etc.) the General Instruction now specifies a single and common expression of devotion. The bishops of the United States have specified that expression to be a simple reverent bow of the head - in all the dioceses in our nation. Again, this common gesture expresses unity in worship on the part of the faithful and avoids the sign of disunity manifest in a plurality of private gestures. (Of course, the faithful always have the option of receiving the Body of Christ either in the hand or on the tongue. However, they themselves are not to dip (intinct) the Host in the Precious Blood.)

The renewal of the liturgical life of the Church is an ongoing project that helps us offer praise and glory to God. In anticipation of everyone's cooperation in the implementation of these changes, I am grateful for the special, sensitive effort it will require of us. Initially, the changes will have an uncomfortable feel to them. Nevertheless, the revision called for in the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal will enrich our spiritual lives as active participants in the liturgical celebrations of Christ's community of faith.

(This insert used by permission, modified, and taken from "Ongoing Renewal of Our Liturgy" from Bishop Skylstad. Bishop Skylstad is the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)