

# Postures and Gestures at Mass

The celebration of the Mass is a corporate act of the Body of Christ. There are certain actions that we do together as an assembly or congregation to express our unity and to join ourselves to Jesus in acknowledging the great things God has done and in the offering of sacrifice. These actions are the postures and gestures we experience at Mass. Our prayer is expressed by our bodies as well as in our minds, hearts and voices. **Various postures and gestures are not merely ceremonial actions but they are the way we engage our bodies in prayer.**

## Postures

**Standing** is the posture which from the earliest days of the Church, has been understood as the stance of those who are *risen with Christ and seek the things that are above (Colossians 3:1)*. By Baptism we have been given a share in the life of God, and the posture of standing is an acknowledgement of this wonderful gift. Standing is a sign of respect and honor so we stand as the celebrant who represents Christ enters and leaves the assembly. When we stand for prayer we assume our full stature before God in humble gratitude for what God has done in creating and redeeming each one of us. The Gospel is the pinnacle of revelation and it contains the words and deeds of Jesus so we stand out of reverence. We stand for the reception of Communion, which unites us most closely with Jesus, who now gloriously risen from the dead, is the cause of our salvation.

The significance of **kneeling** has changed through the centuries. In the early Church it signified penance. It then changed in the Middle Ages to signify homage as that of a vassal to his lord. More recently it has come to signify adoration. This is why we kneel for the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

**Sitting** is the posture of listening and meditation. This is why we sit for the pre-Gospel readings and the homily. We may sit for the period of meditation following Communion. Sitting in silence provides the opportunity to rest in the awareness of God's presence.

## Gestures

By his death on the cross, Jesus redeemed humankind. Thus the **Sign of the Cross** is a very important gesture related to our Baptism. We begin Mass with this sign and Mass concludes with it in the form of a blessing. We trace the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads, lips, and hearts at the beginning of the Gospel.

During the **Confiteor** the action of **striking our breasts** at the words *through my own fault* can strengthen my awareness that *my sin is my fault*.

In the **Creed** we are invited to **bow** at the words which commemorate the Incarnation: *by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man*. This gesture signifies our profound respect and gratitude to Christ, who though God, did not hesitate to come

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among us as a human being, sharing our human condition in order to save us from sin and restore us to friendship with God.

The Our Father is followed by the **Exchange of Peace**. The bow, handshake or embrace that accompanies such words as *“Peace be with you”* to the people around us express the fact that we are at peace, not enmity, with others. The persons near me with whom I share the peace signify for me, as I do for them, the broader community of the Church and all humankind.

Before **receiving Communion standing**, we are asked to give a sign of reverence. The bishops of the United States have determined that this sign is to be a **bow** through which we express our reverence and give honor to Christ who comes to us as our spiritual food.

**The Church sees in these common postures, gestures, and prayer in one voice both a symbol of the unity of those who have come together to worship and a means of fostering that unity.**

*When we stand, kneel, sit, bow, sign ourselves, and pray aloud in common action, we give unambiguous witness that we are indeed the Body of Christ, united in heart, mind, and spirit.*