

ACTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

During liturgical celebrations, we pray not only with our minds, but with our bodies. The various actions we perform together during liturgy provide meaning to our prayer. These actions also unite us as a Eucharistic community. When we participate in these various actions and movements, we are better able to engage in full, active, and conscious participation.

“The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all.”

“A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.”

(GIRM #42)

There are 3 main types of liturgical actions and movements:

- [1] postures
- [2] gestures
- [3] processions

Postures

Various postures represent our attitude toward our prayer.

[a] **Standing**

Standing is a posture of respect, honour, and reverence. From the earliest days of the church, it has represented a posture of people who are risen with Christ. Standing is the posture of public prayer. When do we stand?

– We stand at the beginning of Mass – to greet Christ present in his priest and in his people.

– We stand during the Gospel – to greet Christ present in his Word.

– We stand at Communion – to greet Christ present in his Eucharistic Body and Blood.

We also stand when invited to pray, for example, when the priest says: “*Let us pray*”. By standing, we acknowledge the importance of that invitation.

CHANGES:

- At present, when the priest invites us to pray at the Preparation of the Gifts, we remain seated until after we say the words, “*May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and the good of all His holy Church.*” Then we stand.

In the revised Missal we will stand after the washing of the hands, just before the priest invites us to pray: “*Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters) that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.*”

- At present, we kneel after the “Lamb of God”. The Bishops of Canada have decided that during the Communion Rite, we will use the universal posture of standing. Therefore, we will remain standing throughout the entire Communion Rite, until everyone has received Communion. This posture unites us in public communal prayer.

[b] **Sitting**

During liturgy, sitting is not a posture of relaxing; rather, it has purpose. It is a posture of readiness and attentive listening. It expresses our desire to listen and reflect on the Word of God.

We sit:

– during the Liturgy of the Word, as we listen to the First and Second Readings and the Psalm Prayer.

– during the Homily

– following Communion, for a period of silent meditation

[c] Kneeling

Kneeling expresses sorrow for sin and adoration – it is the posture of a penitent and one who is profoundly in love. In Canada, we kneel at the Consecration.

“In the dioceses of Canada, the faithful should kneel at the consecration, except when prevented on occasion by ill health, or for reasons of lack of space, of the large number of people present, or for another reasonable cause.” (GIRM #43)

“For the sake of uniformity in gesture and bodily postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the instructions which the Deacon, a lay minister or the Priest gives, according to what is laid down in the Missal.” (GIRM #43)

Gestures

Gestures are also actions which engage our bodies in prayer.

1. Sign of the Cross

This is perhaps the most familiar gesture of our faith. It reminds us of our Baptism as well as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We sign ourselves two ways:

[a] large cross – forehead, chest, shoulder to shoulder

We use this sign at the beginning and end of Mass.

[b] small cross – forehead, lips and heart

This is the gesture that represents our prayer that the Lord may be in our mind, on our lips and in our heart. We use this gesture just before the Gospel.

2. Striking the Breast

This gesture expresses contrition and sorrow for sin and acknowledges our need for forgiveness. We strike our breast during the Confiteor when we say: “*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault*”. This gesture is found in the Gospel of Luke (18:9-14) in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

3. Bowing

Bowing is a gesture of humility; it signifies reverence and honour. There are two types of bows: a head bow and a profound bow, made from the waist.

[a] head bow

– We bow our heads when the three divine persons are named together and at the name of Jesus, Mary, and the saint in whose honour Mass is celebrated [275a].

– We bow our heads in reverence as we receive the Body of Christ.

– We bow our heads when we receive the final blessing.

[b] profound bow

– We make this bow during the Creed as we hear the words that speak of the birth of the Lord. In the Nicene Creed, these words are: “*and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*” In the Apostles Creed, we bow as we say: “*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*” [137 and 275b].

– During the Eucharistic Prayer, IF the assembly is not kneeling, we make a profound bow when the priest genuflects as a sign of our humility and reverence before the Lord.

– When the Opening Procession reaches the altar, all ministers (except those carrying something) make a profound bow, as the altar represents Christ, the Living Stone [49, 298].

4. **Genuflecting.**

This is gesture of reverence. If the tabernacle is in the sanctuary, we genuflect when we enter and leave the church. During Mass, the priest celebrant makes three genuflections. On The Nativity of the Lord (December 25) and the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25) we genuflect instead of bowing during the Creed. These two solemnities celebrate the Incarnation [137].

5. **Sign of Peace**

This is a symbolic gesture. Following the Lord's Prayer, we are invited to offer a Sign of Peace – a handshake or bow – only to those near us and in a dignified manner [GIRM #82]. We should not leave our pews to visit nor should we wave. As we exchange this Sign of Peace, the people we share it with represent the entire community of the Church and all humankind. The Priest, too, may give the Sign of Peace to those nearby but should not leave the sanctuary [154]. The Sign of Peace should be accompanied by the words "*The Peace of Christ*".

Processions:

The purpose of processions is not to simply get people from one place to another. They represent a ritualistic action expressing who we are. We are people on a journey and processions symbolically represent this journey.

There are 5 processions that take place during Mass.

1. **The Entrance Procession**

When the people are gathered, the presider and other ministers go in procession to the altar in this order:

- [a] the thurifer, carrying a smoking thurible, if incense is being used;
- [b] ministers carrying lighted candles, and between them a minister with a cross adorned with a figure of Christ crucified;
- [c] other ministers;

[d] a reader, who may carry a Book of Gospels (though not the Lectionary), slightly elevated [120d]; the lectionary is placed on the ambo beforehand [118d];

[e] the Priest who is to celebrate the Mass.

If a deacon is present and is carrying the Book of Gospels, he precedes the priest; otherwise, he walks at the priest's side [172].

2. **The Gospel Procession**

If a Book of Gospels is on the altar, the Priest takes it and approaches the ambo, carrying the Book of Gospels slightly elevated. He is preceded by the lay ministers, who may carry the thurible and lighted candles. Candle bearers stand on either side of the ambo, facing each other. The priest incenses the book, if incense is being used.

3. **The Offertory Procession**

It is desirable that the participation of the faithful be expressed by an offering; this can include bread and wine as well as other gifts for the needs of the Church and of the poor [140]. Water is not carried in the Offertory Procession. These offerings are received by the presider who may be assisted by other ministers or a Deacon. Gifts other than the bread and wine are to be placed "away from the Eucharistic table" [GIRM #73]. This is new; the previous text simply said "not on the altar".

4. **The Communion Procession**

While the priest is receiving communion, the communion chant begins [GIRM #159]. The communicants come up in procession. We rise and approach in reverent procession as a sign of our oneness in faith.

5. **The Dismissal**

When Mass is over, the priest and other ministers depart in the same manner by which they entered.

