

Mass Parts 9/52: *Mass postures and Opening Prayer*



Finally, the Opening Rites of the Mass come to a close with the Opening Prayer. When the presider invites all to join with the word: “Let us pray,” this is not about watching the server come over with the book. It is also not about waiting for father to find his place in the book or waiting for him to start the prayer. We are invited to pray, so we should pray. The technical term for the Opening Prayer is the *Collect*. This is because we now have the time to place all of our prayers and petitions for this particular Mass before the Lord. The Collect prayer then brings all of these intentions together into one public prayer. I always try to give time for silence after I say “let us pray.” This is the time for the congregation to think about all that they are praying for during the Mass.

So far, we have been standing throughout this whole part of the Mass. At the conclusion of the Opening Prayer, we finally get to sit. Why sit? Why stand? Why kneel? These are not just Catholic Aerobics. Our postures actually have a deep meaning that recognizes the connection between the body and the soul. An important theme of liturgical theology is the maxim: *Lex orandi, Lex credendi*: “The law of prayer is the law of belief.” How we pray, what we pray, what words we use, and how we move our bodies while praying all have an effect on our beliefs.

Standing shows our active participation, as during both the Opening and Closing Rites; or we stand as a show of respect, as during the proclamation of the Gospel.

Sitting is for when we are passively receiving something, as during the readings and the homily.

Kneeling in adoration we reserve for the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Throughout the consecration in the Eucharist Prayer of the Mass, we kneel down.

Genuflecting is closely related to kneeling. We go down on one knee in reverence to the Eucharist. We do this when we enter a Church, pass a tabernacle, or during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, recognizing the Real Presence. There is a private tradition of the double-knee genuflection during Adoration. While there is nothing wrong with this, this is a private devotion. The rubrics, even during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, only call for a single-knee genuflection.

Bowing: There are three types of bowing used during the Mass. The first is a simple nod of the head, used whenever the sacred names of Jesus, Mary, the Trinity, or the saint of the day is mentioned. The second is when the rubrics say “The priest, bowing slightly...” The congregation doesn’t do this type. You will see this mainly when the priest is holding the bread and then the chalice for consecration. Finally, we have the “profound bow,” which comes from the waist. When reciting the Creed, both the Apostle’s and the Nicene (as directed in the front of our blue Hymnals), we bend over at the waist when we mention the Incarnation. For added reverence, on the Annunciation and Christmas, we don’t simply bow at these words, we genuflect, in recognition that the event of the Incarnation is particularly celebrated on these feasts.

Now that we have the basics down, a practical question for application: Should we be sitting before communion? We are all kneeling when we say: “Lord, I am not worthy...” When the priest comes down to begin distributing communion, the congregation sits, waits their turn, and then after communion returns to kneeling. I would like to begin the habit of remaining kneeling throughout the Communion Rite, unless medical necessity dictates that you sit. Another option is that all remain standing, not kneeling at all after the “Lamb of God.” This shows our unity during the Communion Procession. It puts the focus on “we” are receiving Communion, more than “I” am now receiving. We’ll keep praying about this for now.

-Fr. Kopp

Next week: Liturgy of the Word