

## Actions

### The Importance of Reverence

#### genuflection / bowing / standing / sitting

Thomas Aquinas tells us:

We show God reverence, not for his benefit, since creatures can add nothing to the fullness of glory He already has in himself; we do it for our benefit, so as to subject our spirit to him and perfect it.

Every creature gains perfection by subjecting itself to higher ones.

**Aquinas tells us then, that true reverence ultimately benefits us by perfecting our spirit.**

#### **Where has the reverence gone in Church today!**

On a typical Sunday nowadays we see people in Tee-shirts with monster pictures on them; coming in late – even after the Gospel reading; chewing gum during Mass; coming to receive communion talking and laughing; leaving during or immediately after communion, and often dressed immodestly by Christian standards.

Even in general conversation, the name of the Lord is used irreverently.

**Reverence** hasn't been thrown out by the Church!

So, what do we mean by the word **reverence**?

Reverence is a feeling of deep respect, love, awe, and esteem shown for someone or something sacred. True reverence flows out of a relationship of loving union with God.

The more humble you are, the more reverent you will be, because in your humility you realise that God is everything – and that we are nothing. So, true reverence is not so much something that we do, a demeanour that we portray, **but rather an attitude that flows out of an humble heart in its experience of loving union with the Lord of the universe.**

How do we show reverence in church then?

#### **Reverence for the Tabernacle**

What does the real presence of God mean to us?

At every eucharist the bread and wine become **the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ our Lord, wholly and substantially present.**

If we really believe that Jesus is there, present before us and to us in the eucharist – our Lord and God, then we need to act as if that were the case.

Many of us can relate to seeing people just walk into church and sit down in a pew.

Sometimes people give a quick *curtsey* or a quick genuflection.

The Church teaches that this act be preformed in a recollected way.

In order that the heart may bow before God in profound reverence, the genuflection must be neither hurried nor careless.'

The Church reminds us of the profound reverence needed before the Blessed Sacrament. And not only does the Church call for a genuflection, but one that is neither hurried nor careless.

The Fatima apparitions began with a visit from an angel, who invited the three children to *imitate him* as he prayed. The angel prostrated himself in adoration before a Host and Chalice suspended in mid-air as he prayed.

Similarly, the Missal says that, as communicants approach to receive communion, if they receive standing, they should make the proper reverence (before receiving, a genuflection or bow) and then stand in front of the priest.

Although this is seldom done, the instructions do call for the **reverence** to the Lord. We are also asked to make a genuflection whenever we pass in front of the Blessed Sacrament (unless we are taking part in a procession).

## Receiving the Eucharist

The Church teaches us that Christ's faithful are to hold the Blessed Eucharist in the highest honour. We should take an active part in the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass; receive the sacrament with great devotion and frequently, and should reverence it with the greatest adoration.

From this instruction, we are not called just to *be polite* to the Lord, but to hold the Blessed Sacrament in **the highest honour**.

Receiving the Eucharist is not only a matter of belief, but also of reverence.

Belief and reverence go hand-in-hand in the eyes of the Church.

Jesus is not only present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity under the appearances of bread and wine during the mass, but this remains true even after the mass when He is reserved in the Tabernacle – and in us as we become tabernacles of his presence.

## Genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament

After entering the church and making the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water, we walk to a pew.

As we enter the pew, we remember that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle, and we genuflect.

### What is the difference between bowing and genuflecting?

There is a traditional distinction that is very useful using the three Greek words:

#### **Latria, Dulia and Hyperdulia.**

Latria means adoration, its reserved for God alone!

Dulia means reverence, its given to the saints and sacred objects.

Hyperdulia is extra special reverence and is given to Mary the Mother of God, since she is above all saints by the glorious design of Divine Providence.

When we reverence the altar – and the altar always represents Christ – we are showing honour to a sacred object; that is **DULIA** so we bow. When we reverence the Blessed Sacrament, we are adoring God Himself, since the Lord is truly present in the Sacrament. That is **LATRIA** so we genuflect.

## 3 types of bowing!

1. There's the simple bow of the head used at the name of Jesus. During mass, the head bow can also be used at the name of Mary.
2. There's a medium bow of the head and shoulders. This bow is used as a greeting to each other honouring the presence of Jesus in one another.
3. Then there's a profound bow, bending the entire body at the waist, touching the knees with the palms. This bow is used when the deacon asks the priest of a blessing before reading the Gospel, and in the liturgy of the hours at the 'Glory Be' in honour of the Trinity. This bow can also be used to salute the altar which represents Christ, if the Blessed Sacrament is not on the Altar.

(If there is a physical disability which prevents genuflection, a profound bow may be substituted before the blessed sacrament...however this should be used only if the person truly cannot genuflect, not simply because it is easier!)

### Genuflecting before entering a pew:

This gesture is related to kneeling, but we think of it as a quick kneel, or half-kneel, since we only bend one knee, not both, and immediately get up again.

'Quick kneel' however, does not mean we should be in a hurry! A little 'bob' is not a genuflection.

The right knee is to go all the way down to the floor and rest there for a moment. Keep your back straight and you may rest your hand on your left knee for balance.

(when genuflection is especially difficult for physical reasons, you may hold the edge of the pew).

It may seem silly to give such specific directions on bowing and genuflection, but these bodily gestures have become foreign to us and we need to re-learn them with new deliberateness. We need to be conscious of what we are doing.

When entering the church, we genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle, not to an empty altar – that simply requires a bow.

*This requires that we are aware of where Jesus is when we visit unfamiliar churches so that we may give the proper reverence to our Lord.*

## Standing

After making preparation for Mass, whether kneeling or sitting in the pew, we **STAND** for Mass to begin.

By standing we show that we are ready – paying attention.

- ✕ We stand **as Mass begins**, showing respect and reverence before God. In addition we are ready to listen and act.
- ✕ We stand for the reading of the **Gospel**
- ✕ Sometimes **we stand for prayer** as this was the normal posture for Jewish prayer and for some Christian prayer

We stand up straight *without fidgeting* (be still and know that I am God) is an excellent way to show honour to our God!

## Sitting

After the penitential rite, we sit down. Sitting is significant, because when we sit to listen to the readings, it signifies attentive listening, and a *readiness* to be instructed.

We are not sitting in our living rooms but in the house of God, attentive and alert, listening with our body as well as our minds.

Sitting is significant for the Celebrant, and especially for Bishops. The posture of sitting is proper to the bishop who teaches and to the head of the community who presides. That is why the Bishop (and the president at Mass) have a chair.

The Bishop's chair is called a *cathedra*.

The word Cathedral, means the place where the bishop's chair is. The chair symbolizes his authority.

So sitting, on the part of a superior, is a posture of authority for the sake of teaching.

We sometimes hear the words **Ex Cathedra** –meaning speaking from the chair, from authority. If you skim through the gospels you will find that Jesus sat when he taught – for the Sermon on the Mount, on hillsides, in boats, etc.

**Sitting in liturgy is not just relaxing...it has a purpose.**

**Something for you to do at home:**

### **'Six of the best' – Quiz**

1. When you enter or leave Church, do you genuflect (a) to the person you are standing next to (b) to the pew you are entering or leaving (c) to the Holy Water stoup (d) to our Lord in the Tabernacle?
2. When you genuflect, what are you looking at (a) the nearest exit (b) the person you are talking to (c) your car keys (d) The Tabernacle?
3. When you genuflect does you knee (a) remain straight (b) touch the floor for at least 1 second? (c) point away from the tabernacle (d) flex about 1"
4. If you do not genuflect towards the Blessed Sacrament, what is the reason (a) you don't want to hold up the line (b) you are physically unable to (but you bow your head reverently - if possible) (c) you want to reach the pew or exit before everyone else (d) you don't want to dirty your trousers or skirt?
5. What does sitting show that we are doing in church (a) getting ready for a good chat with the person next to us (b) sorting out our mass sheets (c) means that we are ready to listen and be taught (d) tells everyone that we are tired?
6. Why do we stand up during the mass (a) to stretch our legs (b) to show respect for the Gospel or to pray (c) to get ready to make for the door as soon as possible (d) to see over the person sitting in front?