

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”

During our diocese’s “Year of the Eucharist,” as declared by Bishop Matano, having begun on the solemn feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ on June 18th, various articles will appear about the Eucharist for educational and reflective purposes. Our first topic: Postures at Mass.

+++Standing—It indicates resurrection joy and readiness to share the Good News of Christ risen from the dead. It communicates praise, respect, and attentiveness in greeting and following the Lord, as well as lifting up our spoken or sung prayers. It’s also a sign of respect for legitimate authority. We stand at the beginning and the end of Mass to not only raise our voices in praise and worship to Christ through hymns and prayers, but to also acknowledge Christ’s presence in the priest celebrant processing in and out. He acts in the person of Jesus Christ whenever the Sacraments of the Church are offered. Thus, showing respect to the one who is called by Christ to serve as priest for His Church is a way to show due respect to Jesus.

+++Sitting—It’s a sign of attentive reflection and openness to receiving what is being offered or taught (especially when God’s word is proclaimed from Scripture and during the homily) and to consider what is being asked of us as God’s children.

+++Kneeling—During the Eucharistic Prayer and after the “Lamb of God” is sung or spoken, just before receiving Communion, Catholics kneel as a sign of great reverence to the Lord, as well as offering adoration to Christ. It shows humility before the Lord’s Presence, as the bread and wine offered on the altar truly become the Body and Blood of Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer, which is the high point of the Mass.

Kneeling conveys a deep desire to follow God’s Will in our lives, no matter the personal cost to us. It shows our total dependence on the God who brought us to life and reigns over all of God’s Creation. A beautiful example of this is found at the end of Acts 7, when the deacon Stephen knelt down, as he was about to be stoned to death, to become the first martyr for Christ in His new Church. His kneeling showed a desire to accept God’s call to lay down his life for Jesus, making himself more vulnerable to the persecuting mob around him, as he prayed that God may forgive them their sin. It is an act of humble love.

+++Genuflecting (bending down on one knee briefly, then rising again)—Just as we may recall seeing the knights going down on bended knee before a king or queen in medieval movies, we also offer this posture as a sign of adoration and honor before Christ, the King of Kings, as we face the altar before entering our pew. It’s also done by believers as they approach the altar and tabernacle, acknowledging the true Ruler of the Universe.

+++Bowing—As a number of cultures do this as a regular practice, especially in Asian countries, such as Japan, China, India, Korea, and Vietnam, this posture shows honor and respect to the one who receives it. Bowing can be used in place of genuflecting, especially if one’s physical condition does not allow one to get down on bended knee. One prominent place in the Mass during which people bow together is while the Nicene Creed is being said by the worshippers, specifically when we say: “and by the Holy Spirit, was incarnate (becoming human flesh) of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” We bow throughout this line.

