

THE MASS – Lesson 3c

Genuflecting vs Bowing/Kneeling or Sitting

GENUFLECTING vs BOWING. It is necessary in all prayer to be mindful of the Presence of God. In prayer we talk to someone, not something. Walking into a Catholic church, we are about to pray the greatest prayer any Christian can pray – the Mass.

What we do before we enter a pew or choose a seat depends on the layout of the church. If the tabernacle, which contains the Blessed Sacrament – the Real Presence of Jesus Christ – is at the front of the church, we genuflect toward our king, honoring Him, before entering the row where we will sit. This is an act of adoration. It should help us to be mindful that we are in the Presence of God.

What should we do if the tabernacle is not in the main body of the church, or if the sanctuary candle is not lit, signifying that the tabernacle is empty (as is the case on Good Friday and at the beginning of the Easter Vigil Mass)? In this instance, one should make a profound, reverent bow toward the altar, which is another sacred object within the Church that symbolizes Christ. The bow is an act of reverence toward an object that has deep symbolic meaning, while a genuflection is an act of adoration not toward a symbolic object, but toward the actual Presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

KNEELING OR SITTING. What you do next depends on the architecture of the church you are in. If there are kneelers you make the sign of the cross and kneel. If there are no kneelers you sit in a prayerful posture with your hands resting on your lap. The posture in either case is one of prayer.

While kneeling or sitting, empty your heart to God. It is helpful to pray one or more short, memorized prayers that should always be followed by a real conversation with God. Tell Him all that is on your mind. Think about where God is in your life, as you kneel or sit there in the church. Do you think of God at all times? Or is this one of those rare occasions?

DID YOU KNOW.

ALTAR. The altar is the sacred table where the Eucharist is celebrated. Sometime it resembles a table, calling to mind the “banquet”; other times it resembles a tomb, reflecting the early Church’s practice of celebrating the Mass on the tombs of the martyrs and calling to mind the entombment of the Lord.

TABERNACLE. A box sometimes shaped in the form of a temple, where the Blessed Sacrament is kept.

SANCTUARY LAMP. A candle that burns either near the tabernacle or hangs from the ceiling of the church. The lit candle signifies that the tabernacle contains the Blessed Sacrament.

REVIEW QUESTIONS.

1. When is it correct to genuflect?
2. When is it correct to bow?

THE NEXT TIME YOU ATTEND MASS. See if you can locate the ALTAR, TABERNACLE AND SANCTUARY LAMP.