

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

## The Mass, Part 5 – Stand, Sit, Kneel – Catholic Calisthenics Anyone?

Last week, we explored how we participate in the Mass. We explored the roles of the clergy and the laity, and also how all of us are called to “fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations.” [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14] Today, we will explore how our bodies can help us in our prayer, especially in our liturgical prayer.

If you’ve ever brought a friend to Mass, they may question you about why we stand, sit or kneel at specific times. In fact, you may even wonder the same thing. Some might even quip, “They’re just trying to make sure we stay awake.” However, all of the different positions we use for the Mass can help us in our prayer. Let’s explore how our bodies help us pray.

When we first begin the Mass, we are standing. “Standing is a sign of respect and honor, so we stand as the celebrant who represents Christ enters and leaves the assembly.” [USCCB, “Praying with Body, Mind, and Voice,” 2010] We also stand for the Gospel for the same reason. We stand out of respect for Jesus’ words and, more importantly, His presence in His Word. Finally, we stand in prayer (e.g. “Let us pray...”), especially in our common prayer, such as the “Our Father.”

We sit when we are adopting a posture and attitude of listening. We are seated during the readings that precede the Gospel and for the homily. We are also seated for moments of meditation, such as the preparation of the altar. We meditate on the gifts that we present to God, represented by bread and wine (and our

financial support), and the work that God can do with our gifts for Him.

Sometimes our meditation and prayer bring us to a place of adoration and homage. During these times, it is most appropriate for us to kneel. We kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer. Many people will also kneel in prayer after receiving the Eucharist. Kneeling helps us to attain an interior attitude of reverence, respect and adoration; therefore, many people feel most prayerful when they are kneeling.

There are two other signs of respect and reverence that we accomplish through our bodies. These are genuflecting and bowing. We often genuflect as a sign of respect, and this gesture is most often made toward the Eucharist. Many people will genuflect when they enter or leave the Church, and this gesture is made toward the Tabernacle, where the Eucharist is reserved. Why genuflect? Because the Tabernacle holds the Body of Our Lord. Sometimes a bow is the most appropriate sign of respect. We bow during the Creed as we recite the words of the Incarnation and before receiving the Eucharist. We may also bow when crossing in front of the altar and when the name of Jesus is spoken.

For more information about using our bodies to help us pray, please see “Praying with Body, Mind, and Voice,” published by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Next week, we will explore how music and silence can help us more effectively pray during the Mass.

