We Catholics are a people who pray not only with our lips and our voices but also with our bodies. Prayer involves the whole person.

Our body language expresses what we believe and speak and helps us to pray. Our bodily movement assists us in our prayer, as embodied spirits, and liturgical practice therefore integrates movement and gestures of the body.

Standing, a posture that identifies us most uniquely as human persons is also a posture of respect, honor and reverence. Since the early Church standing has been understood as the natural posture of the baptized, those raised up through sharing the life of the risen Christ. So we stand in reverence for the proclamation of the Gospel; we stand to proclaim our faith in the Creed and to pray the General Intercessions and stand to pray the Lord’s Prayer and to receive Holy Communion. We stand when the presider says the words, “Let us pray,” as he gathers all our silent prayers together in the words he utters on our behalf.

Sitting is a posture of attentive listening and meditation. We sit for the scripture readings before the Gospel. We remain seated, as the gifts of bread and wine are being offered, prepared and set apart for Eucharist. After receiving Holy Communion and when all have received, we sit in the period of Sacred Silence for reflective thanksgiving.

Kneeling, from the earliest days of the Church, has signified penance; indeed, so much so that believers were forbidden to kneel on Sundays and during the Easter Season when the spirit of the liturgy is joyful and festive. In more recent times, kneeling has also become a posture of adoration and awe. It is for this reason that the bishops of the United States have adopted the posture of kneeling for entire Eucharistic Prayers.

Gestures, such as making signs of the cross, bowing, lifting up our hands, are all meant to help us pray as the Body of Christ. We make the sign of the cross when we enter the church, at the beginning of Mass, and at the final blessing. We sign our forehead, lips, and heart with the cross at the proclamation of the Gospel. We bow at the words of incarnation in the Creed in awe that God become one of us; we lift our hands when we pray the Lord’s Prayer in supplication to God; we now bow before receiving Holy Communion as a sign of our deep respect and gratitude for what we are about to receive.

While our movement and position express the intent of the prayer, involving our voices and bodies point to a living response to our God, who now listens and speaks among us. Our common postures and gestures witness to and foster our unity in Christ.

**Why All This Moving Around?**

**Journey Demands Moving**

The ordered movement of a group of people from one place to another is called a procession. The operative word is ordered. Processions occur regularly during Catholic liturgical celebrations, and symbolize our journey of discipleship.

You might think that the liturgy begins with the Opening Hymn, but in another way it actually begins as we arrive at church, since that is the gathering together of the liturgical assembly. You might think of it as a grand neighborhood procession as Catholics come together from all directions. “Here comes everybody!” best describes Catholics coming to church.

Processions are ritual expressions that we are a pilgrim people on a journey to Gods Kingdom.

The Mass contains four liturgical processions: the entrance procession, the Gospel procession, the procession with the gifts of bread and wine, and the Communion procession.

- The gathering or entrance procession is the community making its way to the house of the Lord. We join our voices and bodies. Members of the liturgy move to the altar with the Book of Gospels carried as a sign that Christ journeys with us.
- In the Gospel procession the deacon or priest process the Book of Gospels to the ambo to proclaim the Good News.
- The gifts of the people are processed and presented at the altar to be prepared and set apart for Eucharist.
- The assembly approaches the table to receive the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation in the communion procession.

At the end of all our liturgical celebrations we go forth as pilgrim people missioned and sent out into the world to share what we have received and have become: bread blessed and broken for the world.

Major feasts during the liturgical year are marked by special processions: — Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, Corpus Christi — as are other occasions, like weddings and funerals. Such processions are the ritual expressions of a pilgrim people on life’s journey to God.

**What Do We Do Next?**

**Faith Does Justice**

We are not just moving within the liturgical rite, we are sent out to heal the wounded, alienated, marginalized: to grow deeper into a faith that does justice. We are sent out to share with others the peace of Christ—in the fullest meaning of Old Testament term, shalom, the fullness of life.

Prayer is what God does in us. The call to prayer is always from God. The God who calls us is a God of love and mercy. God sent his son Jesus to gather us in hospitality. Thus we are called as believers to heal the wounded, alienated, and marginalized.

The Gospel impels faith communities to look inward and outward and to reach beyond our limited perceptions of those who are to be welcomed, to reach out to all those who are marginalized—persons with disabilities, the stranger among us, the poor, the homeless, the divorced or separated, and gays and lesbians.

“After the blessing, the deacon or the priest dismisses the people with the words: Ite, missa est [Go forth, the Mass is ended]. These words help us to grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. In antiquity, missa simply meant “dismissal.” However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word “dismissal” has come to imply a “mission.” These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting point. (Pope Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis [reflecting on the deliberations at the 2005 Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist] 45.)

Our movement outward in mission to the world is one of the hallmarks of the Christian community’s home between the present and the promised future. As St. Augustine preached to his community: “In the Eucharist, we become what we eat: the Body of Christ.” Becoming, welcoming, inclusion, and mission are characteristics of the now and not yet of the reign of God. Becoming, welcoming, inclusion, and mission are the signs of an authentic hospitality. Jesus’ ministry was at first about a hospitality that honored the marginalized. It is only from this place of welcome and mission that faith can do justice. An inclusive community more clearly calls to the obligations of a priestly people to work for social justice and the common good. It recapitulates the practice of journey through life with another sojourner in mission sharing the peace of Christ.

**How Catholics Worship**

The Catholic faith has always embraced creation—water, air, light, darkness, the beauty of the earth; work of human hands in the bread and wine; oil and incense and the light of candles; and used them in its worship. We lift up our hands and heart to the One who has created the very things about which we speak words of thanks and praise. As a baptized people we stand in awe as we pray, realizing, with Saint Paul, that we have access to God through the gifts of creation declared by God to be “very good.” The church over the centuries has used all the gifts of creation to help us lift up our hearts in prayer together and called it liturgy: the work of the people. Our American bishops have stated, “Liturgy is the source of the Church’s prayer and action, and the summit by which our lives and all our ministries ascend to the Father.”

Liturgy in the Roman Catholic tradition proceeds in three ways: signs and symbols perceptible to human senses which point to the divine, call and response which resonate in our being, and bodily posture and movement. It is in these moments that we consciously connect to God and respond to God’s call through ritual word and deed.

There is a danger that we do the right thing for the wrong reason. It is not liturgy if we become trapped in doing actions as religious behavior to feel good, while overlooking the mystery to which it points. Liturgy is inauthentic when it becomes unworlthy and does not impel us to action. We must neither be satisfied with externals, but rather allow them to lead us in our search for God found always and everywhere, who is the source of all our prayer and our longing.

The relationship between liturgy and the life all around us is the profound and incarnate expression of our faith. Liturgy is not where we go to avoid the world, retreat from the mundane, or recoil from life. Liturgy is where we bring our shattered dreams of crushed lives, our lamentations of loss, our sorrows, and the pain of a broken world. We also bring our joys and hopes knowing that through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery all is transformed.

---

**SAMPLE ONLY. Printed pamphlet 16 x 9, four-fold. Sold in pack of 100. $18.**

**Author:** Dr. Peter J. Zografos

**Artwork:** Jane Pitz

**© 2008 FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS Rights reserved.**

**PUBLICATIONS OFFICE 1515 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Suite 10 Washington, D.C. 20036 202-337-6520 Fax: 202-337-6513**

**www.fdlc.org publication@fdlc.org phone 202-337-6520 fax 202-337-6513**

**How Catholics Worship What We Do and Why We Do It**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Constitution on the Sacred Council

The council fathers of the Second Vatican Council made their first concern our celebration of liturgical prayer, desiring to recover the ancient understanding that liturgy is the “work of the people.”

“Therefore, the full, conscious, and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered above all, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit (Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #7).

Such participation involves five fundamental actions:

Gathering: We gather because we are called by God to come together for the purpose of giving worship to God and creating communion with one another. Is not our gift to one another cooperation in praying together which is ultimately our cooperation with God’s plan? What do we do together? expresses the reality that we are sisters and brothers.

Listening: We listen to the Word of God through the proclamation of the readings, the homily, and the prayers of the faithfulto order sacred meaning.

Thanking: We give thanks and praise through the Eucharistic Prayer and give our assent by our great Amen! In the blessing, breaking, and sharing Christ assured his disciples that he would be with them whenever they did this together in his name, so that we can gratefully receive what is given to us in the liturgical books.

Praying and Singing: Jesus promised that where “two or three are gathered in my name, there am I.” So to really know Christ we can only know him in relationship to others. Therefore when we attend liturgy we are the community of the faithful, but also as the body of Christ: a community. In the Return to the Liturgy: what happens during the liturgy? We all experience an excess of physical and emotional noise in our lives, many Catholics are asking for more opportunities for silent prayer during the liturgy.

Why Do We Do It Together?

Private or Public Prayer

Why Is It Always The Same?

Do We Plan, We Prepare

Do we invent our worship services; do we improve our liturgies. With the exception things like the homily, the prayers of the faithful, and other brief introductions, and the hymns, most of the words spoken or sung during liturgical worship are given to us in the liturgical books.

Some talk about ‘planning the liturgy’ as if creating something new from scratch. But that’s not what we do; we prepare rather than plan. We prepare to use properly the set texts that are given to us. We prepare to hear the Word through the words of the Scriptural readings given for the day, in the Lectionary, the book of assigned readings. We prepare to have our prayers summed up in the words of the prayers the presider offers in the name of the whole liturgical assembly, prayers that are given for that particular day in the Sacramentary. And through this careful preparation of what has been given to us, God takes us by surprise when we least expect it.

All ritual involves familiar words and actions, things everyone knows. We don’t feel the need to extemporize new words to Happy Birthday every time we sing it to someone. When we greet our neighbor we don’t feel obliged to rack our brains so as to come up with something new to say instead of “Hi, how are you?” The familiar is just fine. In the same way our ritual worship has many fixed patterns of prayer, of words and gestures—things everyone knows by heart without having to think about what we should say. When we hear “through Christ, our Lord” we automatically reply “Amen.”

The familiar set of words evokes a familiar response. This expresses well the dialogue format, the “call and response” nature of our liturgy. This dialogue between the liturgical assembly and its ministers reflects the dialogue between God and his people.

The danger in repeating formulas is that our response can become unthinking, something said by rote, without meaning. But is it our responsibility to make these words, which we say by heart to become words that truly come from the heart. Even after some thousand years the Church has been singing. Perhaps we don’t like the way we sound, or, for so many centuries we have sung only in one way for us: choirs or soloists. But this was not always true. For almost two thousand years the Church has been singing.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal stresses the importance of song when it insists that when we sing we recognize ourselves all the better as a praying community.

The U.S. Bishops have stated in their 2000 document on liturgical music, Sing to the Lord, that the "whole assembly is actively involved in the music of the Liturgy." We support one another with our many diverse voices, which now become one voice of praise. We sing what we pray, or as Saint Augustine put it so eloquently, “when we sing we pray twice.”

It is clear that Catholics do not so much sing songs at Mass as they sing the Mass. What is of ultimate importance is that our liturgy gives voice to our desire to pray and worship our God as a community with one voice.

The liturgy sings the dialogues and is formed by the historical relationship with our God, which is one of "call and response." God calls us to worship and we respond. We are always asked for our assent to the prayers which are said aloud by the presider by our "amen!

And we sing, "Glory to God" and often sing the Litany of Praise (Kyrie), and then the Gospel Acclamation. During the General Intercessions we may sing; “Lord, hear our prayer!” The Eucharistic Prayer demands that the assembly’s voice in the Preface Acclamation (Holy Holy), the Memorial Acclamation (Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again), and the Great Amen. Before communion we sing the Litany for the Breaking of the Bread (Lamb of God) and then again at communion we sing as we process to the table. Finally we sing a song of thanksgiving before we are missioned and sent forth into the world.

We also sing hymns, which express our experiences of the God who is always and everywhere. Hymns are sung prayer and as such should be sung in their entirety. We would never think of ending the Lord’s Prayer half way through the prayer.

Hymns as prayer also assist the community form experience of joy and praise, faith and hope, justice and mercy, love of God and neighbor. For some of us, singing in church may be the only time we publicly express our experiences of God, “Singing is the people doing the liturgy.”

Do We Have To Sing?

Singing the Mass, Not Singing at Mass

Roman Catholics seem to be reluctant to sing in church. Many of us are not very comfortable with all this singing. Perhaps we don’t like the way we sound, or, for so many centuries we have sung only in one way for us: choirs or soloists. But this was not always true. For almost two thousand years the Church has been singing.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal stresses the importance of song when it insists that when we sing we recognize ourselves all the better as a praying community.

The U.S. Bishops have stated in their 2000 document on liturgical music, Sing to the Lord, that the “whole assembly is actively involved in the music of the Liturgy.” We support one another with our many diverse voices, which now become one voice of praise. We sing what we pray, or as Saint Augustine put it so eloquently, “when we sing we pray twice.”

It is clear that Catholics do not so much sing songs at Mass as they sing the Mass. What is of ultimate importance is that our liturgy gives voice to our desire to pray and worship our God as a community with one voice.

The liturgy sings the dialogues and is formed by the historical relationship with our God, which is one of “call and response.” God calls us to worship and we respond. We are always asked for our assent to the prayers which are said aloud by the presider by our “amen!”

And we sing, “Glory to God” and often sing the Litany of Praise (Kyrie), and then the Gospel Acclamation. During the General Intercessions we may sing; “Lord, hear our prayer!” The Eucharistic Prayer demands that the assembly’s voice in the Preface Acclamation (Holy Holy), the Memorial Acclamation (Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again), and the Great Amen. Before communion we sing the Litany for the Breaking of the Bread (Lamb of God) and then again at communion we sing as we process to the table. Finally we sing a song of thanksgiving before we are missioned and sent forth into the world.

We also sing hymns, which express our experiences of the God who is always and everywhere. Hymns are sung prayer and as such should be sung in their entirety. We would never think of ending the Lord’s Prayer half way through the prayer.

Hymns as prayer also assist the community form experience of joy and praise, faith and hope, justice and mercy, love of God and neighbor. For some of us, singing in church may be the only time we publicly express our experiences of God, “Singing is the people doing the liturgy.”

Why Is It So Quiet?

Silence a Sacred Time

At a time when we all experience an excess of physical and emotional noise in our lives, many Catholics are asking for more opportunities for silent prayer during the liturgy.

However the liturgy provides times not only for private silence, but also the opportunity to pray together as a Christian assembly in “sacred silence.” The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says that after the distribution of Holy Communion “A sacred silence may now be observed for some period of time.” (#164)

Silence is an integral part of every liturgy. It is called “sacred” for it is in this sort of silence that we are able to meet our God. Silence allows the word of God to enter into our hearts. Silence allows the word of God to transform our hearts.

We are human beings, not human doings. We are called to be: to be still and to know that God is our God, our own God. Silence frees us from our control and allows the word of the Holy Spirit to work deep within us not only as individual disciples, but also as the body of Christ: a community of believers. Silence helps us pray.

What are these moments of silence we are invited to keep in the liturgy?

The Penitential Rite provides us the necessary moment to put aside the distractions of the world from which we have just come, and reflect on our lives in the presence of God in our midst.

In the Opening Prayer the presider introduces a prayer with the invitation, “Let us pray.” He then pauses so that each of us, individually and as a gathered community can have the opportunity to “collect” ourselves, body and spirit, to add our own intention to that of the presider. He then “collects” all our individual prayers into the one prayer said aloud, to which we all asent with our “Amen.”

Within the Liturgy of the Word, after each reading, psalm, gospel, and homily proclaimed, we are given a few moments to settle the words sink in; to take in more deeply what we have just heard. This silence calls for a listening with the heart.

After the Communion Procession, which concludes when the last person has received Holy Communion, we celebrate the last of the designated times for sacred silence in the liturgy.

Through these moments of collective silences we have the time to let God enter into our hearts and the heart of the community.