

Why We Genuflect

Have you ever wondered why we genuflect at various times during a mass or inside the church in general? If you have - you're not alone. Many Catholics, it seems, are not familiar with the various appropriate gestures that are to be observed when in a Catholic Church.

Whereas, a reverent or profound bow may be appropriate in certain situations, *genuflecting* is usually reserved for the Holy Eucharist. According to the **General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)**, “A genuflection, made by **bending the right knee to the ground**, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as for the Holy Cross from the solemn adoration during the liturgical celebration on Good Friday until the beginning of the Easter Vigil” (274).

Genuflecting is not only reserved for the laity - priests are also bound by certain rubrics during Mass. The GIRM (n. 233) notes, “*Three genuflections are made during Mass: after the showing of the Eucharistic bread, after the showing of the chalice, and before Communion. If there is a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary, a genuflection is made before and after Mass and whenever anyone passes in front of the Blessed Sacrament.*”

Unfortunately, some people make only a half-hearted attempt to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, resembling a quick curtsy while others will stop briefly to bow or make a speedy sign of the cross. There are those who will genuflect or kneel before a statue of the Blessed Mother or other saint when entering or exiting the church – yet they will ignore the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, there are some who will completely forego *any* gesture and simply walk on by as if Jesus wasn't even there. Some people might not be able to genuflect at all due to physical limitations, which is permissible in those cases.

As Catholics, we *cannot* ignore the fact that our Lord is **physically** present (*body, blood, soul and divinity*) on the altar, in the tabernacle or the monstrance. His presence is as real as if he were to walk into our homes and sit down at the table. Would we simply whisk by him and ignore him if this were the case? Or, would we fall prostrate before him with awe and respect, paying him the proper homage and adoration reserved for God alone?

In the Gospels, Jesus said, “***This is my Body***” and “***This is my Blood***” (Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). St. Augustine may have said it best for all of us when he stated, “*What you see is the bread and the chalice, that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ.* (Sermons 227 [A.D. 411])

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<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06423a.htm>