

Standing

The respect we owe to the infinite God requires of us a bearing suited to such a presence. The sense that we have of the greatness of His being, and, in His eyes, of the slightness of our own, is shown outwardly by our kneeling down to make ourselves small. But reverence has another way of expressing itself. When you are sitting down to rest or chat, and someone to whom you owe respect comes in and turns to speak to you, at once you stand up and remain standing so long as he is speaking and you are answering him. Why do we do this?

In the first place to stand up means that we are in possession of ourselves. Instead of sitting relaxed and at ease we take hold of ourselves; we stand, as it were, at attention, geared and ready for action. A man on his feet can come or go at once. He can take an order on the instant, or carry out an assignment the moment he is shown what is wanted.

Standing is the other side of reverence toward God. Kneeling is the side of worship in rest and quietness; standing is the side of vigilance and action. It is the respect of the servant in attendance, of the soldier on duty.

When the good news of the gospel is proclaimed, we stand up. Godparents stand when in the child's place they make the solemn profession of faith; children when they renew these promises at their first communion. Bridegroom and bride stand when they bind themselves at the altar to be faithful to their marriage vow. On these and the like occasions we stand up.

Even when we are praying alone, to pray standing may more forcibly express our inward state. The early Christians stood by preference. The early figures painted on the catacomb walls of praying Christians show them standing in flowing robes, praying with outstretched hands in perfect freedom, obedience, and readiness to pray with joy.

We may feel at times a sort of constraint in kneeling. One feels freer standing up, and in that case standing is the right position. But stand up straight: not leaning, both feet on the ground, the knees firm, not slackly bent, upright, in control. Prayer made thus is both free and obedient, both reverent and serviceable.