



The Laity's Mass Obligations—Part II **by Joe Sixpack**

Now that we've dealt with Mass attendance, arriving late & leaving early, getting the kids in gear so tardiness isn't a problem, silence when exiting the church and proper attire, let's move on to the rubrics in your missal or missalette (those little red letter words). First, however, I think it's important to review why we *must* obey the rubrics.

Under the old covenant, God demanded things done by both priests and the people be done *exactly* as He said or face dire consequences. Since Jesus didn't abrogate the law but merely fulfilled it, strict obedience still applies to us today. In speaking to the apostles He said, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:16) And again, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me." (Matthew 10:40) Then there is the most popular one: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that the Son of man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death¹ shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' (Matthew 16:13-19)". And to the apostles in a lesser way, "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18) So we know from these example passages that the pope and bishops have been given Christ's authority to tell us how to worship God in the Mass.

Oh, one thing I forgot in last week's installment is what we're to do when we enter the church before Mass. It is proper that we face the tabernacle and genuflect. Not one of those half-way-down genuflections either, but a full one. It's a matter of paying respect and homage for our King! Of course, that's assuming you're physically able to genuflect. If not, a bow will do.

This next thing from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) is very important, because it sets the tone for the decorum of the laity during Mass. It says, "Attention must there-

¹ This is from the RSV, but most versions say "the gates of hell".

fore be paid to what is determined by this *General Instruction* and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, **rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice**. A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.”²

So what is that common posture? Unless otherwise directed by the rubrics, the proper posture at Mass when standing is to fold your hands at your breast in an attitude of prayer. You can also clasp your hands at the chest or top of the abdomen. That means putting your hands in your pockets or holding on to the back of the pew in front of you isn’t at all proper.

Next is the proper conduct during the Liturgy of the Word. During the first reading, the responsorial Psalm, the second reading, and the Gospel acclamation you can read along all you want, but it’s not to be that way when the priest or deacon reads the Gospel. The priest or deacon is filling Christ’s role of proclaiming the good news when reading the Gospel, so we are to pay the same attention to them as we would Jesus as if he were proclaiming the Gospel himself. That means looking at him at the pulpit rather than looking at your missalette.

Now for the Nicene Creed. One major *faux pas* I see all the time that is not only a violation of the rubrics, but is also very disrespectful. I realize some people may not know better, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen a missalette that doesn’t have it spelled out plain as day. When we recite, “by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the virgin Mary, and became man,” we are supposed to bow. This is the Church’s way of honoring the Incarnation, one of our greatest mysteries of faith.

Now let’s talk about the Consecration during Mass. After the priest consecrates each species, he elevates Them. Now, I understand the desire to lower one’s head out of humility and feelings of unworthiness, but our posture is to focus on and adore Christ in the hands of the priest. The Church allows us to adore Jesus three times during the Mass, and that is what we are to do. If you want to momentarily bow your head *after* the elevation, fine; but not during the elevation.

Another thing that is common among Catholic congregations is standing when we should be kneeling. We kneel out of humility and respect for what is taking place on the altar. If you can’t kneel (and I for one can’t anymore), then sitting is the proper thing to do.

Now let’s move on to the Our Father. *Holding hands and extending your hands out with palms up-turned are verboten*. Palms up-turned is a posture reserved solely to the priest, as it signifies our prayers going through him to God during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Our only posture is to maintain the standard prayerful posture mentioned earlier herein.

We’ll finish this in the next installment of *What We Believe... Why We Believe It*.

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² *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Chapter 2 ¶42. Emphasis mine.