



How Does God Want to Be Worshipped? Part 2 by Joe Sixpack

This is our first piece on the proper way to worship God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. No, I'm not promoting Joe Sixpack's idea of what's proper, but rather what Holy Mother Church says is the proper way to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

And that's the first thing we'll cover: participation versus celebration. This is a small point that sort of sticks in my craw, so I'm just ranting a little. I hear Catholics say all the time that they went to church and *celebrated* the Mass, and if you're one of them, this is for you. No, you didn't. Only the priest can celebrate the Mass; the laity cannot. You can participate in Its celebration, and you can appreciate Its celebration, but you cannot actually celebrate the Mass.

Another little thing that sticks in my craw that I have to dislodge before moving on to the rubrics is, I hear people all the time say they are lectors at Mass when I know that's an impossibility in many cases. Usually, this error isn't their fault; they just don't know any better. But unless you've been officially installed as a lector by the local bishop, you're not a lector. You might read the readings at Mass, but that doesn't make you a lector.

Lector is an official ministry of the Catholic Church. It is one of the incremental steps to the diaconate and the priesthood. Some men who are not in formation for the priesthood or diaconate become lectors, but not all that many. And just because a man becomes a lector in one diocese doesn't mean he still is one in another. I was formally installed as a lector in one diocese a long time ago, but the minute I moved into my current diocese that privilege stopped. And sorry, ladies, but only a man can be installed as a lector.

To set the tone of how the rubrics guide us to proper worship, let me quote norm #42 of the GIRM.¹ It says...

*The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with the beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all. Attention must therefore 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. (Emphasis mine.)

So we can see the mind of the Church for the way God is worshipped is uniformity, just as He demanded to be worshipped by His people under the old covenant in the Old Testament. Its called a rite for a reason, and that rite is established by God Himself through His Church.

¹ General Instruction of the Roman Missal

My intention here is to talk about everything, in order, from the time you arrive at your parish church. Speaking of arrival, let's talk about arriving late and leaving early.

The very first precept of the Church, obligatory under pain of sin, is the most important of the precepts. It says, "You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation."

Here's the skinny on that precept. First, you must attend Mass on every Sunday and holy day throughout the year. Failure to do so without a sufficient reason is a mortal sin, which means the absence of sanctifying grace. As Pope Pius XII said, "Above all, the state of grace is absolutely necessary at the moment of death; without it, salvation and supernatural happiness of the beatific vision of God—are impossible."

Now, here's the kicker. If you arrive late or leave early, you may not have fulfilled your Sunday/holy day of obligation. If you show up late—that is, after the sign of the cross—and you don't have a sufficient reason, don't bother going to Communion and commit the additional mortal sin of sacrilege. What is a sufficient reason? Well, it isn't met by failing to get the kids out of the house and into the car. Is somebody ill? That will work. Did the car break down? That works. Just over slept? Not so good. You get the idea.

Leaving early is a bit different. If you're sick, have to go to the restroom, or something like that, no problem. But if you are one of those people who just walks out of the church after you receive Communion, you are committing a mortal sin. As St. Paul would say, you are "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (I Corinthians 11:27). The Mass, and therefore your obligation, isn't over until the final blessing. You can leave after the final blessing, even though it's very disrespectful to the priest to leave before him. Personally, I can't imagine what difference another five or ten minutes can make.

Let's talk about genuflecting. Genuflecting when you enter the church prior to Mass is not part of the rubrics, as no liturgy is taking place, and you're not strictly bound to genuflect. However, the reason we have that custom is, you're paying homage to your Creator, King and Savior in the tabernacle. Some people can't fully genuflect or genuflect at all due to physical limitations. But for those of you who don't have physical limitations, don't just make a partial, half-hearted genuflection. Make a full genuflection.

What if Jesus halted His sacrifice for us while in the Garden of Olives saying, "Okay, I'm done. I really don't want to go through this whole dying thing. I've suffered enough; they're redeemed." What sort of value would we place on our redemption, and what motivation would we have to avoid sin? Jesus went through all His Passion, shedding every drop of His blood, so we could be redeemed and see how evil sin is. It stands to reason, then, that if we really love and believe in Him, and if we appreciate what He did for us, since He and His Church are gracious enough to make Him present in all our churches, the least we can do is show Him the proper respect and appreciation by fully genuflecting. He wasn't lazy and half-hearted for us. What reason could we possibly have for being lazy and half-hearted?

Next week we will start on our posture and role in the parts of the Mass. Don't worry; we won't cover every part of the Mass. We'll just cover those parts where I see people regularly do things they're not supposed to do, or where they fail to do as they ought.

People regularly ask me why I make such a big deal about the things we ought or ought not do. It's simple, really. Jesus gave us His all—He made the ultimate sacrifice for us. St. Therese of Lisieux—aka, The Little Flower—said she was willing to die for one rubric of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Since this is What We Believe...Why We Believe It, I wonder how we feel we can do less.

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