

FAITHFULNESS TO THE ROMAN MISSAL

Some comments about the posture of standing during the Eucharistic Prayer in the Diocese of Palmerston North show an understandable lack of historical awareness, and only a partial understanding of the relevant rubric in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (43).

Since 2002, The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) has allowed kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer, recognising that this custom had developed in some countries. Until then, the GIRM acknowledged only standing. The practice of standing echoed (and in many countries still echoes) the Church's earliest tradition. For example:

It is good for us to remember both that we have fallen in sin and that we have risen by the grace of Christ. We therefore kneel on six days for prayer, as a sign of our fallen state. But on the Lord's day we do not kneel, as a sign of the resurrection through which by the grace of Christ we have been freed from sin and from death. This custom had its origin in apostolic times as the blessed Irenaeus bishop and martyr of Lyons says in his book *De Paschate*, in which he reminds us that we are not to kneel during Pentecost since it is of the same importance as the Lord's day". (Pseudo-Justin, *Quaestiones ad Orthodoxos*, q.115)

Since there are some persons who kneel on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost; in order that all things may be observed in like manner in every church, the holy synod has decreed that all should at those times offer up their prayers to God standing. (Council of Nicea, AD 325)

The 50 days that are celebrated after the resurrection of the Lord are already the image not of labour but of peace and joy; because during this time the fast is relaxed and we pray standing, which is the image of the resurrection (St Augustine, Letter 55 to Januarius, 15:28).

In other words, there are underlying doctrinal reasons for each of the various postures. The posture of standing symbolises our having been raised up - redeemed.

The New Zealand bishops, at their meeting in May 2001, had agreed to promote "intensive liturgical catechesis" in their dioceses. Such catechesis was carried out in the Diocese of Palmerston North, based on sources that were also agreed upon by the NZCBC. This led to the widespread acceptance of the practice of standing for the Eucharistic Prayer. Priests were asked not to require standing of those who preferred to kneel; we used the methods of adult education, enabling people's informed decisions, not decree.

The position of the DPN was being allowed for in the way the rubric agreed to by the bishops and confirmed by the Holy See stipulated that those who are standing, for whatever good reason, should kneel or make a profound bow at the consecration.

There is, of course, a paramount and on-going need to encourage reverence in all our liturgies. But it would be unfortunate if this were to be based on a misunderstanding regarding the role of kneeling. Kneeling is indeed the most appropriate posture for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, as we do in devotions such as Benediction and in private prayer. However, liturgy is more than a form of devotion, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is *not the main purpose of Mass*.

The *meaning* of each part of the celebration is what determines the appropriate posture, not our own personal preferences. The GIRM explicitly requires that "*gestures and postures be conducive to ... making clear the full meaning of each of the celebration's different parts*" (see n.42). So, the question becomes: what posture best respects the "full meaning" of the Eucharistic Prayer?

Let the Eucharistic Prayers speak for themselves. Two of the Eucharistic Prayers we use bring the Church's early tradition into the present day:

In Eucharistic Prayer II, addressing the Father, we profess that we have been "made worthy to stand in Your presence and serve You." Being able to stand in God's presence is the extraordinary privilege that has been merited for us by Christ. In the Eucharistic Prayer we are making that profession of faith. And that is the profession of faith that has become smothered by the mistranslation of the Latin, where it replaces "stand in Your presence" with "be in Your presence."ⁱ

Eucharistic Prayer I also describes the congregation as "standing around" (the altar). A further mistranslation reduces this to "gathered here." I am taking seriously the GIRM's requirement that "the meaning of the Latin text is to be fully and faithfully rendered" (GIRM 392). And I am taking seriously the need for what we do at Mass to correspond to what we say we are doing – according to a full and faithful translation of the Latin text.

All the Eucharistic Prayers express in their structure the meaning of this part of the Mass, leading up to its climax in the doxology with its "great Amen." We have been raised up through our union with the risen Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to give the Father "all honour and glory." We are not still waiting to be redeemed.

It is not ideal that our congregations adopt two different postures. This comes back to the lack of on-going catechesis and the arrival of people who presumably have not had much formal liturgy education. A unified posture symbolises the unity of the body of Christ. Unity would be restored either by adopting the posture proper to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, or by adopting the posture that expresses the full meaning of this part of the liturgy.

Just as Pope John Paul II had issued an Apostolic Letter in 1988 calling for liturgy formation based on the GIRM and on the underlying principles on which the Second Vatican Council based is liturgical renewal, so too, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter (*Desiderio desideravi*) in 2022, calling for a renewed liturgy formation for all – priests and people. Such formation was to be "for" the liturgy (by making the work of academics and the Council more accessible to everyone), and formation "by" the liturgy, (which involves doing in the liturgy what the liturgy, faithfully translated, says we are doing.)

ⁱ The first English edition of the Missal after the Council still had the correct translation. It was changed by the USA Bishop's Conference to reflect the current custom of kneeling (the rubric being a "descriptive" rubric, not a "prescriptive" one.) Australia and New Zealand followed suit. But it was never intended to replace on-going liturgy formation, and the NZ edition allowed for this.