

A PRIMER ON LITURGICAL ETIQUETTE

Attire:

Those who serve at God's altar work in community to celebrate the mysteries of God's presence among humankind revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, leading God's people in worship demands a degree of anonymity in deportment in order to focus the entire congregation on the object of our liturgical action.

This anonymity begins with dress. A white dress shirt, black hose and black shoes are required of all servers. Trouser legs that extend past cassock hems should be rolled up until they are no longer visible. Dangling earrings should be removed, as should visible jewelry other than wedding rings or wristwatches. St. Vincent medals or other religious insignia may be worn over the cassock, but inside the cotta. Black cassock, with black rope cincture fastened at the left side, should be ankle-length. Red cassocks are not worn at any time. Cottas should reach to the hip. Knee-length surplices are worn only by choir ministers and clergy. Only the MC wears a Florentine style (lace-trimmed) surplice, so that the celebrant may easily identify him/her.

A note about summer: Brick buildings, like brick ovens, absorb heat rapidly and retain it for days. This is a boon to pizza parlors but misery to summertime acolytes in a church devoid of air-conditioning. Common sense should therefore take precedence in matters of dress. While black hose* and black shoes are mandatory at all times, shorts and white t-shirts are perfectly acceptable under the cassock. Subdeacons may omit the cassock and wear amice and alb over street clothes as long as said clothes will not show through. *Female subdeacons may wear white hose and black shoes – black hose would show through the alb. A long slip is also recommended!

Decorum:

Silence should be maintained in the hallway and sacristies during preparation for Mass. Any necessary conversation should be limited to the purpose of preparing for Mass. Discussion of other matters should be saved for Coffee Hour. Short of calling others' attention to immediate threats of well-being – "Don't look now, but a free-range thurible is hurtling toward your head!" – cultivate the discipline of silence when not making the appropriate liturgical responses. Display a posture of poised attentiveness, of being "in the moment" while considering your next immediate movement. When seated, do not slouch, cross your legs,¹ or perform any acts of personal hygiene you wouldn't want captured on film for your mother to see. Sit with the back relatively straight, placing the hands flat upon the knees. You may fold your hands on your lap in a way that avoids the "Freudian clutch," but hands flat upon the knees are preferred.

The clergy need time to prepare for worship, too. Unless a server's presence is requested by the MC, servers should respect the privacy of the priests' sacristy and remain in the smoke sacristy until summoned.

While the clergy would be the first to remind us that they are human too, proper respect is due to their office. The Rector in particular is our father in God and as such his word is law. Insubordination or rudeness toward the clergy will not be tolerated. If a cleric makes a liturgical decision with which you do not agree, bite your tongue and follow instructions. Disagreements or differences of opinion are to be settled privately, not during Mass or in the presence of others.

¹ Some of our vertically-challenged servers may wish to cross their ankles.

Clerics are addressed as “Father” or “Deacon,” according to their orders, or “sir”. (Under the present administration the French equivalents of these titles are also appropriate.) Although some clerics may allow or even prefer use of their Christian names, do not assume that such informality automatically applies to new members of the staff or to guests: until a new or visiting cleric directs otherwise, he is to be addressed by the appropriate title. Within the context of the liturgy the formal titles are used at all times unless a rubric specifically directs otherwise (as in the ceremonial for the Institution of a Rector). Even if the cleric is your lifelong best friend and you are still threatening to tell his mother about that childhood indiscretion involving his kid sister, the lizard, and the neighbor’s vegetable garden, the dignity of his office should be honored when he is executing the functions of that office.

A bishop, when present, is to be addressed as “Bishop” or “sir” or “Father.” Anglicans though we are, this is America; the title “my Lord Bishop” is appropriate *only* to prelates of the Church of England and of those Commonwealth nations, such as Australia, which preserve the temporal dignity (however symbolic) of the episcopate. Honorifics such as “Your Grace” are reserved for the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The same directives apply to bishops of other communions.

Anonymity:

As noted above, leaders of worship must not draw attention to themselves, but to God who is the focus of the liturgy. Despite the considerable temptation to think otherwise, even the most elaborate Solemn High Mass is not a Broadway show; there are no “stars” in worship other than Almighty God. Servers must cultivate an attitude of self-effacement during the service. Individual acts or postures of devotion are not appropriate when serving, nor are exaggerated gestures or speech beyond the normative range. In short, anything that draws attention to the individual, rather than to the corporate act of worship, is a distraction and should be avoided. Believe it or not, it is possible to manage anything up to and including a medical emergency or an outbreak of fire without attracting the congregation’s notice.

Posture:

When walking, hold yourself straight with your shoulders back and your head erect. Face directly the point to which you are headed. In general, except when you are seated, carrying a hymnal or torch, or performing a ceremonial action such as crossing yourself, you should join your hands palm to palm, not merely fingers to fingers. Insofar as you are physically able, fully extend your fingers and hold them together, crossing the thumbs over each other in the form of a cross. Fingers should point slightly upward, not toward the ground or straight out. Hold elbows close to the body and keep hands more or less at the height of the breast. Whether standing, sitting, genuflecting, or kneeling, keep eyes straight ahead or focused on the liturgical action. When seated on the Gospel side of the nave (to your left as you face the altar), avoid leaning forward or physically straining to hear the sermon. Do not lean on the bishop’s throne or use it as an arm rest. Also, do not place glasses, hymnals, or programs on the bishop’s throne; despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the Advent respects its canonically consecrated bishops and the symbols of their authority.

Servers with nothing else to carry may elect to carry in hymnals or to walk empty-handed. Either way, pairs must be *uniform*; servers in pairs always mirror each other.

Servers face across chancel *at all times* except when facing the Gospel Book during the reading of the Gospel. Especially when seated in the crucifer’s stall, avoid turning to look at the preacher or checking to make sure that Aunt Tillie and Uncle Al found their seats. That is, before Mass, make arrangements for childcare or supervision of older adults and then offer it up.

In the presence of the Sacrament: When the Consecrated Elements are exposed on the Altar (e.g., during Communion or at Benediction), servers should *never* turn their backs toward the Elements. In practical terms, this means that if a server approaches the mensa for any reason (e.g., to bring up chalices), when leaving the server “crab walks” sideways down the stairs. Under *no* circumstances should a server *ever* walk backward down the stairs!

When counting during Communion, servers should not look *at* the people. Instead, follow the clergy’s hands as they distribute the Sacrament.

How to carry a candle: The *outside* arm is always *down* and *out*.

How to walk and carry a candle at the same time: Step off on *left* foot first. Pairs should hold their candles at a level. If there is a height disparity between partners, the taller partner should accommodate the shorter by carrying his/her candle lower. Hold the candle far enough out front, without discomfort, so that knees do not knock into it while walking.

Turns:

Solo right angle turns should be crisp, finding a disciplined medium between a rounded corner and a military pivot. When in pairs, the inner partner takes no steps, but stops and pivots, allowing the outer partner to maintain his or her rhythm - without rushing or taking giant steps - to execute the turn. Picture an opening door: the inner partner acts as the stationary but pivoting pin in the hinge, while the outer partner functions as the moving door. The same principle applies to acolytes and the crucifer in procession, except that the crucifer must coordinate his/her action with the outer acolyte to maintain linear alignment. It is extremely important that at all times, all servers - singly, in pairs, or in groups of three - maintain a consistent rhythm, even when ascending or descending steps.

Genuflecting:

Except as specified during Holy Week, Corpus Christi, and Benediction, the simple genuflection is considered normative when entering or leaving the ambit of the altar when the Sacrament is present. When making a simple genuflection, touch the *right*² knee to the ground, close to the heel of the left foot (unless the genuflection is made on a step). Do not bow the head or prop a hand on the floor; we are not in the huddle before third-and-one on the ten-yard line at the Harvard-Yale Game. Hold your body steady and perfectly erect. Leaning forward while genuflecting (the aforementioned football huddle position) is an invitation to loss of balance and an unplanned, to say nothing of undignified, prostration at some painful cost to your nose. It can also be dangerous, especially if you are holding a charged thurible or any other implement that poses some risk of injury if it comes between you and a hard stone floor.

Hold the head straight - even at the name of *Jesus* - since the act of reverence is fully expressed by the bending of the knee and not by a superfluous bow of the head or body. Parenthetically, this principle applies as well to kneeling. Insofar as you are physically able, maintain the joined-hands position at the breast throughout the genuflection.

Genuflections are made as follows:

- Whenever arriving at or leaving the chancel.
- On MC’s cue, at entrance.
- At *Et Incarnatus* in the Creed.
- On MC’s cue, at final exit at the end of the Mass (*except* A CR A).

Do **not** genuflect:

² The only time a genuflection is made on the *left* knee is in the presence of a bishop.

- When the Sacrament is **not** present on the Altar or in the Aumbry (some Evensongs; the conclusion of the Maundy Thursday liturgy; Good Friday and the first part of the Easter Vigil).
- When carrying one of the consecrated Elements.

Bowing

In liturgical actions, in general, there are three bows: simple, moderate, and profound. The simple bow is *a bending of the head only*. This bow is made (1) to the cross and altar when the Blessed Sacrament is not present, (2) at the mention of the name *Jesus*, (3) at the mention of the Blessed Trinity (such as the *Gloria Patri*), and (4) at certain points in the liturgy, most notably, *we worship thee* and *receive our prayer* in the *Gloria*. The moderate bow, as the designation implies, is never excessive, consisting of a bowing of the head and slight rounding of the shoulders so that, while standing, you should just see your feet. At Masses at the Advent, the moderate bow is reserved for *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts* in the *Sanctus*. The habit of using the moderate bow at the *Gloria Patri* has crept into our usage in recent years, but it is incorrect and shows an unedifying taste for excessive, one might even say competitive, piety. At the Advent, servers *never* use the profound bow - made from the waist so that you could touch your knees with your hands - except during daily Masses when possibly following the lead of clergy who are physically unable to genuflect when entering and leaving the altar. The main point is that any gestures that exceed the norms of general usage among servers on the altar break the ideal of the anonymous server. That is, they threaten to hijack worshippers' attention away from the object of the liturgical action, who is none other than the God of Jesus Christ.

Nod the head:

- When the Celebrant passes in procession. Some pious folk bow the head every time any cleric passes. This is incorrect. The bow to the Celebrant acknowledges his role as the offerer of the Eucharistic sacrifice for that particular Mass. The bow is appropriate to *no other* clerics in procession except the Rector or a bishop, for either of whom the bow is a sign of respect to a father in God.
- Whenever the Name of Jesus is spoken or sung **except** when *kneeling* (as during the Prayer of Consecration); kneeling subsumes a bow.
- In the *Gloria in Excelsis*:
 - At "*adoramus Te/We worship Thee*".
 - At "*suscipe deprecati/receive our prayer*".
 - At the *Gloria Patri* at the end of the Psalm.
- When the Gospel Book passes in procession.
- At the exclamations of praise before and after the Gospel.
- At "is worshipped and glorified" in the Creed.
- Whenever receiving vessels or other impedimenta from the MC or other servers.
- AA only: after the lavabo (mirroring the Celebrant).
- At Trinitarian doxologies in hymns and/or Canticles.

Servers holding candles do *not* bow.

Bow the upper body (shoulders) to acknowledge a ceremonial act, such as the censuring by orders.

Bow profoundly (from the waist) for the first two phrases of the *Sanctus*. **NOTE:** the Sacred Ministers cue this bow and do not always rise at the same phrase. Servers should mirror them.

The Sign of the Cross

When making the sign of the cross, begin with the joined-hands position. Then place the left hand, extended, with the fingers and thumb held close together, on your chest, just below the breast. Make the sign of the cross with the right hand. Without bowing your head, touch your forehead with the tips of your three longest fingers fully extended and held close together, then, in sequence, touch the center of your chest (above your left hand), your left shoulder, and then your right shoulder. Immediately resume the joined-hands position without touching the center of the chest again or kissing the thumb or an imaginary rosary. Save that for Mother Angelica.

In general, it is our custom to cross ourselves in the following places in the liturgy:

THE PREPARATION	<i>In the name of the Father ... Our help is in the name of the Lord ... May Almighty God have mercy upon us ... But deliver us from evil ... (in the Lord's Prayer)</i>
OPENING ACCLAMATION	<i>Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</i>
GLORIA IN EXCELSIS	<i>... in the glory of God the Father/in Gloria Dei Patris.</i>
HOMILY INTRODUCTION/ CONCLUSION	<i>... in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.</i>
CREED	<i>... and the life of the world to come.</i>
THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE	<i>(Introduction:) Rest eternal grant unto them for all thy servants departed this life ...</i>
ABSOLUTION	<i>... have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you ...</i>
EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER	<i>(at the elevations of the elements) ... be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction ...</i>
THE LORD'S PRAYER	<i>...But deliver us from evil ...</i>
THE COMMUNION	<i>Behold the Lamb of God ... (at reception of Communion)</i>
THE BLESSING	<i>... the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ...</i>
THE ANGELUS	<i>The angel of the Lord so by thy Cross and Passion ...</i>

Servers with anything in their hands during any of these times *do not* cross themselves.

A Final Word

While the foregoing may seem excessively fussy, particularly in an age when manners are out of fashion and seminaries are apparently intent on turning the Mass into a rock-n-roll show, remember that Divine Worship is not a casual activity. The Lord's Supper is a heavenly banquet, not a drive-thru lunch from a fast food shop. Lack of attention to deportment at Mass is as inappropriate as wearing torn jeans to a formal dinner. Sloppiness of appearance, movement or behavior will not show forth "the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty," which is what we seek to present.