

A Menu of Devotional Acts within the Holy Eucharist

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There are no Episcopal canons or Prayer Book rubrics which direct us on most of these matters but instead a long tradition of various practices which flow through the millennia of the Church's liturgical life. They do not guarantee any spiritual experience. They are opportunities for experiential participation in the liturgy, including the body in prayer such that perhaps the mind, heart, and spirit may also follow. Sometimes, frankly, in worship all that may be very present is the body--so let the body carry you. These practices can also assist you in paying attention. If your body becomes accustomed to devotional practices in the liturgy then your mind is less likely to be distracted. When you miss a place where you normally bow or cross yourself, for example, then you will become aware of your distraction and can re-focus. This list here is quite literally a menu. Some will choose some or even all of these practices. When it is not a directive of the Prayer Book or the priest then it is subject to the personal decision of the communicant and the local customs of the parish. While much is left up to personal choice it is important that some basic devotional acts are observed by most Episcopalians in respect for the Episcopal sensibility about the presence of Christ in sacred space and in us. I have underlined some devotional acts which may be considered "fundamentals".

Bows and Genuflection

To bow or genuflect is an ancient practice showing respect and reverence. We practice reverence for God in church with the intention of living reverently for God outside of the church, including reverence for others and your own body.

Simple Bows (briefly bending the head with a slight bending of the waist):

- The Name of Jesus spoken in prayers or creeds when standing (Philippians 2:10: "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth")
- Acknowledgment between clergy and chalice servers in serving the altar (sometimes accompanied by a prayer posture of the hands under the chin)
- Acknowledgment between clergy and congregation in the Peace (sometimes accompanied by a prayer posture of the hands under the chin)

Moderate Bows (moderate bending at the waist):

- Receiving the Aspersion, i.e. the sprinkling of Holy Water
- Acknowledging the Processional Cross (footnote 1)
- The Gloria ("we worship you" and "receive our prayer")
- The Procession of the Gospel Book (in addition to the Processional Cross or when there is no Processional Cross)
- The Nicene Creed ("he is worshiped and glorified")
- Confession of Sin (a sustained bow if done while standing)

Profound (or Solemn) Bows (deep bending at the waist) **or Genuflection:**

- Entering and exiting the pew
- Approaching and exiting from the altar in choral procession, to read, etc., usually done at either the gate of the altar or the steps to the chancel
- The Nicene Creed ("he came down from heaven")

- The Sanctus (“Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might”)

Genuflection:

- The Nicene Creed (“he came down from heaven”) on Christmas Eve/Day and the Annunciation of Our Lord (March 25)

Note: Profound bows generally can substitute for genuflections except in the case of the Creed noted above. The basic rationale of the profound bow/genuflections is the reverencing of the Body of Christ either in the Altar itself, in an unveiled or opened Tabernacle/Aumbry, or when the Blessed Sacrament is on the Altar.

Self-Crossing

To cross yourself is to claim your Holy Baptism and into the royal priesthood of Christ (1 Peter 2:9) from which all Holy Orders and all Christian vocation flows. It is also a tangible reminder to ourselves that we are called to take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23).

Small Single Self-Crossing (with wet thumb upon forehead)

- Taking Holy Water from a Stoup

Small Triple Self-Crossing (with thumb making small cross each upon the forehead, mouth, and heart--in that order):

- Announcement of the Gospel reading

Large Self-Crossing (thumb, index finger, and middle finger held together touching in a soft gliding motion the forehead, mid-chest, left shoulder, and right shoulder—in that order):

- Receiving the Aspersion, i.e. the sprinkling of Holy Water
- Beginning and/or concluding private prayer in the pew upon entry to the church
- The Holy Trinity
 - Opening Acclamation
 - The concluding Blessing
- The Nicene Creed (“one baptism” or “resurrection of the dead”)
- The Absolution of Sin
- The “Blessed is he who comes...” (footnote 2)
- Sanctification by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic Prayer (the location varies depending upon the prayer—watch the priest)
- The Presentation of the Sacrament (“The Gifts of God for the People of God” (either here or >))
- Before and/or after receiving the Sacrament at the altar

Postures

The arrangement of our body can affect our mental attitude and our ability to receive and perceive divine realities. If you include your body in your prayers then your body can help your mind and spirit.

Standing

There are numerous places where standing is required by the Prayer Book and this can be so noted there in the rubrics. It is appropriate to stand for any prayers, including the Confession of Sin and the Reception of the Sacrament, as may be directed either by the priest or the physical capacity of the communicant to kneel. It is not an innovation or in anyway disrespectful to stand

for prayer but is in fact the most ancient posture of prayer which existed for almost 1500 years until the invention of pews. This posture participates in the belief in the resurrection and our ultimate hope in God (Luke 21:28) and is a posture of active strength in Christ as exemplified in the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. It is also a posture which allows for the opening of the heart to God. It is appropriate to stand if you cannot or choose not to kneel in the pew following the Reception of the Sacrament until the ablutions of the remaining Sacrament by the priest, out of respect for the presence of the Sacrament upon the altar. Standing for the Gospel is required by the Prayer Book rubrics. One turns and faces the station of the Gospel procession wherever it stops. One looks at the reader and listens and does not hold nor read any bulletin lesson leaflets during the reading of the Gospel. The gospel procession is high drama—you don't look at play programs during high drama in a theatre either.

Kneeling

This prayer posture is most familiar to Episcopalians since we have kneelers. It has become so familiar and somewhat distinctive to Episcopalians that we have mistaken it to be the only reverent way to pray. Actually, it was an exceptional practice mostly limited to penitential occasions when one knelt on the floor--until the invention of kneelers. It is especially a penitential posture. It is most commonly associated with the Confession of Sin but with the exception of the first invitation to Confession in Rite I it is not actually required. It is just as acceptable to stand for the Confession with a sustained moderate bow, especially if your knees or the location will not permit it. Kneeling is not actually required for any portion of the Holy Communion in either Rite I or II, including the postcommunion prayers. It is instead a matter of local custom and personal choice. It is appropriate but not required to kneel or stand in the pew following the Reception of the Sacrament until the ablutions of the remaining Sacrament by the priest, out of respect for the presence of the Sacrament upon the altar. Again, the directives of the priest and local custom are factors in the practice of kneeling.

Sitting

Sitting is the posture for listening. It is not the posture for liturgical prayer except in the case of meditation and contemplation which may occur at various open moments before or during the liturgy. Sitting is then the normative posture for reading the psalm and listening to the lessons and the sermon. A form of sitting is sometimes practiced as an alternative to kneeling or standing for prayers when a communicant is infirm or has difficulty kneeling—in this case, the communicant will usually slide up toward the edge of their pew to indicate an awareness of a different posture from sitting.

Footnote 1: Bowing for the processional cross is one of two examples of a misunderstanding becoming enshrined in tradition. The fundamental act of bowing has been for the altar as the sacramental of Christ. Since an altar cross has long been present at the altar the reverence for the altar became associated with the altar cross and then subsequently the processional cross. As a transference of reverence from the altar to the processional cross, it is fine though not the original intent of the devotional.

Footnote 2: The self-crossing which came to be practiced at the "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord..." derived from the old latin rite which was read by the priest "Benedictus qui venit..." When latin was no longer understood by the congregation it was easy to confuse the *benedictus for the people* which was a blessing of the priest for the people, with the *benedictus upon Christ* himself which did not actually invite a self-crossing. But all the benedictus sounded the same to the congregation so the practice of this particular self-crossing arose although it is actually a blessing of Christ and not the congregation and so does not actually invite self-crossing. It is still frequently observed although it may be omitted in accordance with the original intent.