

How Prayer Looks



Part 3

Our Postures

When the guest of honor appears, everyone stands. To start dinner everyone sits. At the national anthem all stand. To stand or sit as a group expresses a union of hearts and purpose.

Regarding posture at mass, "The uniformity in standing, kneeling, or sitting to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the community and the unity of the assembly; it both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part" (GIRM 20).

Standing. The main posture for mass is standing. "The people should stand from the beginning of the entrance song or when the priest enters until the end of the opening prayer or collect; for the singing of the Alleluia before the gospel; while the gospel is proclaimed; during the profession of faith and the general intercessions; from the prayer over the gifts to the end of the mass," except when other postures apply (GIRM 21). When standing for the gospel all should face the reader (CB 74). We also stand when the deacon incenses people (CB 149). We stand for the eucharistic prayer when we are prevented from kneeling "by the lack of space, the number of people present, or some other good reason" (GIRM 21).

The scriptures testify that people stood for prayer. Phinehas stood to pray about a plague (Psalm 106:30). Israel stood to confess sin (Nehemiah 9:2) and to bless God (9:5). Ezra

stood to read the scripture and the people stood to hear (Nehemiah 8:5). Jeremiah stood to petition God (Jeremiah 18:20). Jesus knew about standing for prayer (Matthew 6:5; Mark 11:25). He stood to read scripture (Luke 4:16) and to instruct (Luke 6:17). In his parable both the pharisee and the tax collector stood for prayer in the temple (Luke 18:11-13). John envisioned a multitude standing to praise the Lamb of God (Revelation 7:9). As individuals, in groups, as ministers and as assembly, people in the scriptures stood for prayer.

The first Christians stood for prayer to express respect, attention, and readiness; however, they reinterpreted standing as a sign of the resurrection. Tertullian (+220) restricted kneeling: "We regard fasting or kneeling to adore unlawful on the Lord's Day. We enjoy the same privilege from Easter up to Pentecost" (*The Crown* 3). The Council of Nicaea (325) legislated the same: "Although there are certain people kneeling on Sundays and on the days of the Easter season, it pleases the holy council to perform prayers to the Lord standing, so that all things may be observed harmoniously in all places" (Canon 20). Artwork adorning the catacombs depicts people standing at prayer with arms raised. Basil (+379) explained, "When we pray standing we remind ourselves of the grace given to us on the day of