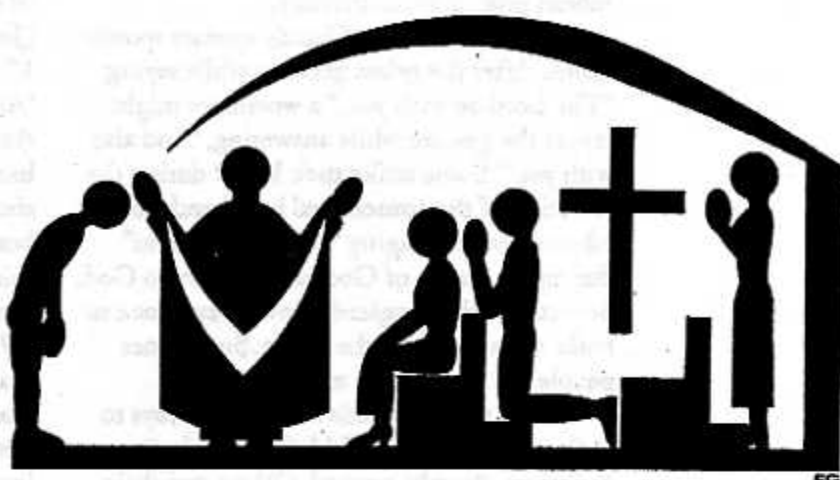


# How Prayer Looks



## Part 4

# Adapted Postures and Gestures

Custom has introduced additional postures and gestures which do not appear in the rubrics for mass. Catholic worship so integrates the body that people spontaneously or traditionally add to the repertoire of postures and gestures. The widespread use of adaptations indicates the flowering of a spirituality which fosters prayer not just by speech but also by action. The look of prayer in the Roman tradition continues to evolve as we improvise ways to express our belief.

Some of these adapted postures and gestures are so traditional that many people assume they exist in the rubrics. However both the rubrics and the tradition contribute to the way prayer looks at mass.

The rubrics themselves acknowledge the development of local customs. "It is up to the conference of bishops to adapt the actions and postures described in the Order of the Roman Mass to the customs of the people" (GIRM 21). "If...a conference of bishops adapts the congregation's actions at mass to the mentality of a people, it should take the special condition of children into account" (*Directory for Masses with Children* [DMC] 33). Thus, some traditions which develop within a region may later enter the rubrics.

**Posture.** Alternate postures appear for various reasons. Sometimes we choose them to express

an interior attitude. For example, before mass begins, a worshiper who has located a seat commonly kneels for a time in prayer and then sits in anticipation for the service to begin. The rubrics give no direction for postures before the eucharist begins.

Sometimes people choose a posture erroneously. For example, Catholics who know well which postures to assume during mass may become disoriented at a funeral or a wedding and neglect what they customarily do. Or again, many still kneel after the Lamb of God and after receiving communion even though the rubrics now call for standing.

Sometimes a physical disability prevents someone from joining the posture of others. A person who uses a wheelchair or whose knees ache may not be able to stand or kneel even though they compose their hearts in union with everyone else.

**Hands.** People often use their hands to create additional gestures during the eucharist. For example, in some cultures people conclude the sign of the cross by kissing their thumb. Sometimes people sign themselves where the ritual does not specifically call for it, for example when the minister sprinkles them with holy water or imparts the blessing at the end of mass. Many sign themselves with holy water on leaving the church even though the