

# EMBRACING THE CHANGES

## *Deepen Faith - Nurture Hope - Celebrate Life*

Beginning Sunday, November 27, 2011, the First Sunday of Advent, there will be changes in the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mass. Preparing for these changes will provide us with an opportunity to examine and renew our celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy that stands at the heart of Catholic Christian Life, and to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Liturgy, nurture liturgical practices that will lead to fuller liturgical participation, and celebrate the Liturgy with renewed purpose.

### PRAYING WITH BODY, MIND AND VOICE

In the celebration of Mass we raise our hearts and minds to God. During Mass we assume different postures— standing, kneeling, sitting—and we are also invited to make a variety of gestures.

**Standing** is a sign of respect and honor. From the earliest days of the Church, this posture has been understood as the stance of those who have risen with Christ and seek the things that are above. We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel, which recounts the words and deeds of the Lord. The bishops of the United States have chosen standing as the posture to be observed for the reception of Communion.

**Kneeling**, in the early Church, signified penance. So thoroughly was kneeling identified with penance that the early Christians were forbidden to kneel on Sundays and during the Easter season, when the prevailing spirit of the Liturgy was one of joy and thanksgiving. In the Middle Ages kneeling came to signify homage, and more recently this posture has come to signify adoration, especially before the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is for this reason that the bishops of the United States have chosen the posture of kneeling for the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

**Sitting** is the posture of listening and meditation, so the congregation sits for the pre-Gospel readings and the homily and may also sit for the period of meditation following Communion. All should strive to assume a seated posture during the Mass that is attentive rather than merely at rest.

**Bowing** signifies reverence, respect and gratitude. In the Creed we bow at the words that commemorate the Incarnation. We bow as a sign of reverence before we receive Communion. The priest and other ministers bow to the altar, a symbol of Christ, when entering or leaving the sanctuary. As a sign of respect and reverence even in our speech, we bow our heads at the name of Jesus, at the mention of the Three Persons of the Trinity, at the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and at the name of the saint whose particular feast or memorial is being observed (see GIRM, no. 275).

**Singing** “By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. As we raise our voices as one in the prayers, dialogues and chants of the Mass, most especially in the Eucharistic Prayer, as well as the other hymns and songs, we each lend our individual voices to the great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Triune God.

**Being Silent** “Silence in the Liturgy allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its heart to the mystery celebrated” (Sing to the Lord, no. 118). We gather in silence, taking time to separate ourselves from the concerns of the world and enter into the sacred action. We reflect on the readings in silence. We may take time for silent reflection and prayer after Holy Communion. These times of silence are opportunities for us to enter more deeply in what God is doing in the Mass, and, like Mary, to keep “all these things, reflecting on them” in our hearts (Lk 2:19).

The Church sees in these common postures and gestures both a symbol of the unity of those who have come together to worship and also a means of fostering that unity. When we stand, kneel, sit and bow we give witness that we are indeed the Body of Christ, united in body, mind and voice.

*Based upon Roman Missal Formational Materials provided by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*