

# Posture Enhances Prayer

**W**hen non-Catholics attend Mass, they often comment on how frequently posture changes.

At each Mass the average worshipper changes postures more than a dozen times. These postures of standing, kneeling, and sitting help the faithful to pray with their whole bodies, and as they are done together, they express unity. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explains,

A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them. (42)

Every posture mediates meaning, even outside the liturgy. Think of the times when standing is a given: when a prominent person enters the room, for the national anthem, to pledge allegiance to the flag, and to express enthusiasm, such as when a team scores a touchdown.

Every posture in the liturgy also mediates meaning. The assembly stands during the Entrance Song as a sign of joy—that they are one body ready to pray. Standing has long been considered a sign of resurrection, so the congregation stands again as the Alleluia, or Acclamation before the Gospel, is sung to signify readiness to receive the hope the Gospel proclaims. The faithful stand during the Creed to proclaim their beliefs. They also stand during the reception of Holy Communion as a sign of unity as they approach the table of the Lord. At the Dismissal, the assembly stands to be sent forth with God's blessing.

Kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer is a sign of reverence; however, this posture at this time in the Mass is relatively new and is not universal. Many churches in Europe and in other parts of the world maintain the long-established tradition of standing



Each posture the assembly takes during Mass enhances prayer.

during the Eucharistic Prayer. Traditionally, kneeling has been considered a sign of penance, which is the reason for this posture during penitential services and rituals such as the scrutiny rites that express the cry for God's healing power.

In the Mass, the faithful sit to learn—to allow God's Word to penetrate them. In other settings, such as meditation or contemplation, people sit—often with palms open—to pray.

Whether through sitting, kneeling, or standing, posture enhances prayer. Let us pray for the grace to realize the reverence, the joy, the hope, and the unity these postures convey.

