

Western Rite Liturgical Customs

Genuflections

If the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle on or behind the Altar where the liturgy is being celebrated, it is customary for persons in the congregation to genuflect at their pew when entering the church and when leaving the church at the end of the liturgy.

If the Blessed Sacrament is *not* reserved at the Altar where the liturgy is being celebrated, persons in the nave make no reverence at all when entering or leaving the church. It is never appropriate to bow to the Altar from the nave. When “in choir” or in the sanctuary (the delineated area immediately around the Altar), however, it is proper to make a full “bow of the body” (from the waist) when entering, leaving, or passing across directly in front of the Altar.

A genuflection is also made when passing directly across in front of an Altar at which or behind which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved or exposed (e.g. during Solemn Exposition) except when in procession.

A genuflection is made to a relic of the True Cross when it is exposed (e.g. on Good Friday or the feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross) and may be made to the Crucifix at the Good Friday Veneration of the Cross.

When a Bishop is leaving the church after a liturgy, persons in the congregation may, if they wish, receive an individual blessing from the Bishop as he processes out through the nave by genuflecting as he passes.

Also when greeting a Bishop individually – particularly in a liturgical or very formal context – it has been customary to genuflect as one takes the Bishop’s right hand and kisses his ring.

Bows

It is customary to make a simple bow of the head (only) at the Name of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of any Saint being commemorated that day whenever it occurs during a liturgy.

At the Eucharist in the Nicene Creed it is customary to make a full bow (from the waist) at the words “...by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” On the feast of the Annunciation and the Mass of Christmas morning, however, the bow is replaced with a genuflection.

In the contemporary Western Rite it is now customary to make a simple bow of the head before receiving Holy Communion, as the Priest says “The Body

of Christ" and as the Eucharistic Minister says "The Blood of Christ."

Before and after being censed, a full bow (from the waist) is made to the thurifer as he bows to the person(s) he is censuring.

At the Divine Office whenever the *Gloria Patri* is said (at the end of Canticles, each Psalm, etc.) it is customary to make a simple bow of the head at the words "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit..." as well as at doxologies at the end of Office hymns.

Sign of the Cross

When entering the church, many people keep the ancient tradition of making the sign of the cross on themselves with Holy Water from the Baptismal font as a reminder of their Baptism.

Upon entering the church before each liturgy it is appropriate for each person in the congregation to kneel at his/her place for a period of prayer as a part of individual spiritual preparation. It is traditional to begin prayer with "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is customary to make the sign of the cross at the *In nomine* whenever it is said.

When there are Asperges at the beginning of a Mass or after the administration of Holy Baptism at the Easter Vigil, it is traditional for persons to make the sign of the cross as they are sprinkled with the blessed Baptismal Water.

In the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy, at the opening Acclamation it is customary to make the sign of the cross: "... Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit."

At the announcement of the Gospel, as the Priest

or Deacon does so, it is traditional for everyone else as well to make three small crosses with the side of their right thumb on the forehead, the lips, and the heart: "The Holy Gospel + of Our Lord + Jesus Christ + according to _____."

Whenever the Priest Celebrant makes the sign of the cross over the congregation, it is customary for persons to respond by making the sign of the cross on themselves:

- at the Absolution: "Almighty God have mercy on you, + forgive you all your sins...."
- at the Blessing: "... and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, + the Son, and the Holy Spirit...."

At Holy Communion it is traditional to make the sign of the cross after receiving the Sacred Host and after receiving the Precious Blood.

Many people make the sign of the cross after returning to their pew, at the beginning of their individual thanksgiving after Communion.

At Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament it is customary to make the sign of the cross at the Blessing with the monstrance.

At the Divine Office it is customary to make the sign of the cross:

- at the Preces (a small cross with the side of the right thumb on the lips at Morning Prayer and a full cross at the other Offices)
- at the opening words of the Gospel Canticles (the *Benedictus Dominus Deus* at Morning Prayer or Lauds, the *Magnificat* at Evening Prayer or Vespers, and the *Nunc dimittis* at Compline)
- at the Grace
- at the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed