

Faith in Five – Adults
Catholic Gestures and Postures
August 19, 2022

The Church makes it clear that our unity of gestures and postures is an expression of our participation in the one Body formed by the baptized with Christ, our head. The [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) states active participation [in the liturgy] includes ‘actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes’. (Images from this post: <https://masscomminfo.tumblr.com/>)

1. **The Sign of the Cross** – this gesture is made, “In the Name of the Father (touching forehead), and of the Son (touching the center of the chest) and of the Holy Spirit” (touching one’s left shoulder, then the right). It is the most distinguishable feature of a



Catholic; it is an invocation, a “mysterious mark on the forehead used as a sign of divine protection and a mark of distinguishing the righteous from the wicked” (Ezekiel 9:4-6). Making the Sign of the Cross consecrates us and brings into focus our heart, mind and soul for God. In Ezekiel’s time, the word “mark” literally translates to the hebrew Tahv, which when written, forms a letter much like a slanted “t”. Today, a giant Tahv spans from our forehead to our chest, from shoulder to shoulder. The sign of the cross signifies our salvation through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, a reminder of our baptism, and of our commitment to Christ. The sign of the cross is used with holy water upon entering and leaving the church. We make the sign of the cross when we are sprinkled with holy water by the priest, and at the start of Mass.



We make small signs of the cross before the Gospel proclamation as a prayer, that the Word of God stay in our minds (forehead), on our lips and in our hearts (on our chest).

The priest motions the sign of the cross over the gifts at the altar, in his general blessings over the faithful and over the penitent in the final words of absolution during confession. He also administers the sign of the cross upon the recipient with holy oils during the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, holy orders and anointing of the sick).

Outside of Mass, we make the sign of the cross before and after prayers; when passing by a church to honor the Blessed Sacrament inside, when passing by a cemetery for all Holy Souls or when someone dies; anytime a siren is heard or when there is an accident, that God may be close to that person(s) in their need.

2. **Genuflecting** – this gesture is made with the right knee to the floor and is reserved for the Blessed Sacrament. It is done as one enters and leaves the church at the pew. We honor and adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
3. **Bowing** – this is made as a sign of reverence, respect and gratitude. There are two types of bows: of the head and of the body. We bow our heads at the name of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is celebrated. A profound bow of the body is made to the altar, during the creed at the words commemorating the Incarnation and when receiving the Holy Eucharist.



4. **Processions** – more than a ritual, it is an invitation to come to the Lord in our 'journey towards to heaven' as the priest *in persona Christi* and ministers approach the sanctuary at the start of Mass. The Book of the Gospels is processed towards the ambo. We process as we come to meet Jesus in the Holy Eucharist for communion. The altar rail or foot of sanctuary signifies the place where "heaven and earth meet".
5. **Prostrating** – Ordained deacons, priests and bishops prostrate themselves in humble and full submission to Christ. The person lies full length on the floor, with the face to the ground. It is used at the beginning of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, and during the Rite of Ordination.
6. **Standing, Sitting, Kneeling** - Standing is a sign of unity with the celebrant as he enters and leaves the assembly. It is a sign of honor and respect. It was considered the appropriate posture for prayer since before the time of Christ. We stand in prayer before God giving thanks and praise for His goodness. We stand during the proclamation of the Gospel. Sitting is considered the base position of worship. It allows us to listen, learn and meditate. Kneeling is the most humble act of reverence. This was a sign of homage in the Middle Ages. This posture also signifies adoration, especially before the Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist.

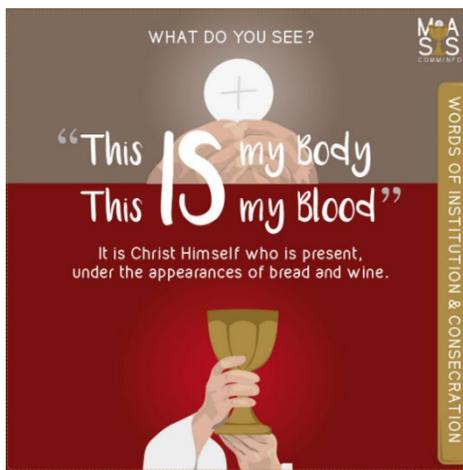


These gestures actively encourage our inner participation of attention and focus in lifting our hearts to God.

7. **Striking of the breast** – done during the Confiteor at the words, “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”. This action draws upon ancient custom where striking the breast was an action of deep sorrow and repentance. We call to mind our own sins and sinful state, asking God for mercy. The striking of the breast was also liturgically customary to do at the “Lamb of God” and at the “Lord, I am not worthy”, but was no longer prescribed after Second Vatican II. Striking of the breast when the bells are rung during consecration, may customary for some – a form of humble realization of the Presence of our Lord.

8. **Outstretched arms, raising of our hands** – Orans (Latin for ‘praying’) is the posture of prayer for the priest. While standing, with elbows towards the body and hands stretched to the sides, the palms are up. The outstretched arms during the greetings, and preface, (the priest towards the assembly; the assembly gestures in return with lifting of the hands towards the priest) is sign of acknowledgement and acceptance of the other. Outstretched hand(s), with the palm down is an act of blessing a person, group or object.

The raising up of our hands is a sign of our surrender to God, of praise and an offering of our whole being to Him. “So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psalm 63:4).



9. **Elevation of the Host and Chalice** - The priest recites the words of Institution and Consecration, recalling the words Jesus said to His disciples. The priest elevates the Host, the Body of Christ. He does the same as he elevates the Chalice, the Blood of Christ. The elevation draws our attention to the True Presence of Jesus Christ for all of us to see and adore. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. The priest invites us all to participate in the Supper of the Lord. We are in reverent awe to be in His Presence, and humble ourselves in gratitude and love.

10. **Sign of Peace** – we are given a gesture of peace from the priest and invited to share the peace of Christ with others in return. This invokes unity and charity among the faithful. Matthew 5:23-24 states when offering a gift at the altar and if you are not at peace with your brother, to leave the gift, “... go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift”. To be at peace allows us to receive the Lord worthily.

- 11. Reception of Holy Eucharist in the hand or on the tongue**– The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the United States is standing, though it is not denied for those who choose to kneel. When receiving the Host in the hand, both hands are raised up high toward the priest/Eucharistic Minister, with one hand placed directly on top of the other hand. If right handed, the right hand is on the bottom; if left handed, the left hand is on the bottom. There should be no sudden movements until the Host is placed on the hand; then the bottom hand picks up the Host to place on one’s own tongue. When receiving the Host on the tongue from the priest, the tongue is touching the lower lip and the mouth open wide while lowering the jaw and remaining still. All of these movements should be made with reverence.
- 12. Silence** – this time is spent in reflection and meditation. We place ourselves in God’s merciful presence, separating ourselves from the the concerns of the world. It is our time to listen to what God has to say to us, and enter into deep praise and worship.
- 13. Singing** - we meet the call to full, active, and conscious participation in the Liturgy through its sung elements. As a community, we raise our voices to God in praise and thanksgiving.

**“You know when I sit down and when I rise up,
you discern my thoughts from far away”. Psalm 139:2**

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