

PROCESSION GESTURES AND POSTURE
November 13, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The changes that the translation of the Roman Missal will introduce on Sunday November 27, 2011 are about more than externals. The changes are introduced to help us deepen our prayer life and energize our commitment as Catholics in the community.

Processions, gestures and posture is another example in the New Missal that aims at deepening our prayer life and commitment to love and serve God and neighbour.

During the **Entrance Procession** the Reader will carry the **Book of the Gospels**, (not the Lectionary as has been custom). The Book of the Gospels will be placed directly on the altar (not the ambo as has been custom). This gesture is to emphasize the special sacredness of the 4 Gospels within the Bible. (GIRM #120 and #122). This practice will begin in our Diocese as soon as the Book of the Gospels is published. The GIRM describes the reading of the Gospel as *“the high point of the Liturgy of the Word.”*(#60).

The Offertory Procession: The gift bearers represent the Assembly. The gifts of bread and wine also represent the People of God who are assembled in the Church. During the Eucharistic Prayer the priest offers a prayer called the *Oblation* in which the body and blood of Christ is offered to God the Father. The Oblation offers Christ in the Eucharist AND the People of God who are His body. *"The oblation, by which, in this very memorial, the Church, in particular that gathered here and now offers the unblemished sacrificial Victim in the Holy Spirit to the Father. The Church's intention, indeed, is **that the faithful not only offer this unblemished sacrificial Victim but also learn to offer their very selves.**" # 79 f).* In other words when we see the gift bearers carry the bread and wine up the aisle to the Celebrant, we are to see in those gifts a sign of ourselves who will be offered to God the Father in the Holy Spirit (GIRM #78, 93,95).

Posture and Participation: The New Roman Missal reminds all of us of the meaning and importance of our posture and our

participation. Often we take the meaning of our posture and participation for granted. The New Missal reminds us, *“The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest and the Deacon and the ministers and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty, and noble simplicity, and to fostering the participation of all. 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.”* (#42) Because of the spiritual value of unity individual gestures and postures are discouraged in the Roman Missal. *“They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers and sisters one to the other.”* GIRM #95.

Hand washing at Holy Communion: Extraordinary Ministers of Communion in some parishes sanitize their hands before distributing communion. This practice began mostly in reaction

to the outbreak of SARS and the bird flu some years ago. Although these diseases are no longer an imminent threat, the practice continues. For those who wish to continue this practice I ask that it take place in the pew where the Communion Ministers are seated; that is, **before they enter the Sanctuary.** The gestures performed in the Sanctuary are symbolic. For example, as he washes his fingers, the priest prays, **“Wash me O Lord from my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.”** Hand washing in the Sanctuary has a symbolic not a hygienic meaning. It would be preferable to affix the sanitation devices to the pew of the Extraordinary Ministers of Communion to assure constant availability to the Ministers. And so, where it has been common practice, hand washing will continue although most people in the Church will not be able to see the hand washing.

Gesture of Reverence at Communion: One new gesture, a slight bow of the head before receiving Holy Communion needs little explanation. A simple bow of head expresses reverence for

the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. GIRM

#160

Again, I wish to point out that the externals of Mass are important only because their purpose strikes a conscious chord in our souls reminding us of spiritual realities such as unity, beauty, simplicity and nobility.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop Richard Grecco, Diocese of Charlottetown