

When to Bow

Although customs vary tremendously there are several points during the Eucharist at which it is traditional to bow profoundly.

1. At the words "By the power of the Holy Spirit - - - and was made man" in the Creed, in honour of the Incarnation of Our Lord.
2. For the Dominical Words, or Words of Institution, in the Eucharistic Prayer, at which moments the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

More generally, it has been customary to bow the head slightly at the mention of the name of Jesus, whenever it is heard in Church. This practice not only honours the sacred name, but encourages us to be attentive at all times during Divine Service.

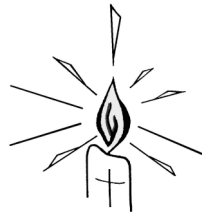
Equally traditional is the practice of turning to the High Altar and bowing the head as you pass in front of it, honouring the throne of God in Church, the Holy of Holies.

Practice does vary so much that there can be no hard and fast rules about when to bow, or even how to bow. For many people, unused to bowing, the slightest nod of the head can feel like a tremendous movement. You may also feel very conspicuous! Don't let that put you off though because, however it feels, it is very unlikely that anyone else will notice, and you will soon become accustomed. Above all, if you put your soul, your mind, and your body into worship you can't go far wrong.



Soul of Christ sanctify me,
body of Christ save me,
blood of Christ inebriate me,
water from the side of Christ wash me,
passion of Christ strengthen me,
O good Jesu hear me.
Within thy wounds hide me,
suffer me not to be separated from thee,
from the malicious enemy defend me,
at the hour of my death call me
and bid me come to thee,
that with thy saints
I may praise thee
for ever and ever.
Amen

*This leaflet was largely the work of
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Holy Trinity Church



What we do in Church and Why!



Genuflecting and Bowing

What is Genuflection?

To GENUFLECT is to 'bow the knee': to go down on one knee. Either knee will do! It is the most profound and solemn form of bowing.

The next most solemn form of BOW is a profound bow from the waist. Finally there is the simplest form in which the head alone is inclined slightly forward and down.

Why Bother?

Prayer

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14). These words are at the heart of the Christian Gospel. It is only because of that one almost unbelievable fact that we can pray at all. These words also remind us of a fact that some earlier generations were inclined to forget: that the whole human person, spirit, mind and body has been 'saved'. A fact emphasised when the Risen Christ ascended, or returned, to the Father taking His human body with Him.

When we pray we offer our whole self to God, we come before the throne of the Heavenly Grace with humility. The whole self seeks to be united with God. Although prayer comes from the heart it is often expressed, rightly and naturally, through our bodies.

We pray with words. We put into words, in the best way that we can, what we want to say to God. There is much that we want to say to Him, though, that we simply cannot find words to express. Indeed, the most meaningful prayer is often completely silent, for when we stop talking to God we may listen to what He might want to say.

Midway between words and silence is 'non-verbal' communication, the language of facial expression and bodily movement. It is such a

powerful language because it is almost instinctive. One gesture is often worth a thousand words, as we all know! It can express attitude and state of mind, and when it accompanies words can point up their deeper meanings to us.

Worship

We are all familiar with signs of reverence and honour in non-Church life. Anyone who has been in a Courtroom will have seen how the officials have to 'nod', or bow the head to the Judge or Magistrate when they pass in front of him. The same is true of people who are introduced to Her Majesty the Queen; they have to curtsy or bow.

In this way we are saying that what the person stands for, or represents, is worthy of our respect. How much more is God worthy, not only of our respect, but of the worship of our souls!

In St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (ch.2 v.9) we read: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth".

For the person who wishes to worship the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind and, with all his strength, worship with the body is both right and natural.

When to Genuflect

When we genuflect depends partly on the tradition of the Church in which we worship. Whatever the current tradition of your Church, though, the general rule should be to reserve the most solemn reverence, i.e. genuflection, for the most solemn times. Genuflection is particularly appropriate in the presence of God Himself!

If you are fortunate enough to worship in a Church in which the Body of Christ (the Blessed Sacrament) is reserved, it is right to acknowledge the Lord's Real Presence with a brief act of worship on entering or leaving the building. Normally a genuflection in the direction of the place of reservation, coupled with a turning of the mind towards Him is enough.

If you are unsure whether the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in your Church, then look for the tell-tale sign of a permanently lit lamp, red or white, near to a wall-safe or 'box' fitted to, near, or suspended above an altar. The wall-safe is called an AUMBRY, the 'box' is called a TABERNACLE or SACRAMENT HOUSE, or when suspended over an altar it is called a HANGING PYX. Alternatively you could ask if there is one of these things in your Church.

Whether the Body of Christ is reserved in your Church or not, during the Eucharist the Body and Blood of the Lord certainly comes into your Church. The Real Presence of the Lord God Himself comes among us under the appearance of bread and wine, as St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians reminds us. When you move from your seat to go up for Communion, remember who is waiting for you at the altar, and genuflect to adore your Lord and God. After you have received the Body and Blood of the Lord, and before you retake your seat, it is a good practice to genuflect in adoration of the Lord who is still present at the altar.