



# OUR NORTHLAND DIOCESE

Official Publication of the Diocese of Crookston since 1946

A Voice from the Valley – May 18, 2022

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## **Unity and Reverence: A new way to approach kneeling during Mass**

On April 30 in Roseau, we completed our 13th Synod Prayer and Listening Event. I was able to attend 12 of them, and they were privileged events where I met more than 400 of our faithful.

I found myself inspired as people demonstrated the depth of their faith and commitment to our Church through their prayer and sharing. We are still processing all the responses and hope to share the results with parishes as well.

There were many gifts acknowledged in the diocese that people were grateful for including the good work of our priests, wonderful lay works like Cursillo and our religious education programs, and the important work of our Catholic Schools.

There were also many concerns shared about the faith life in the diocese. Three of them topped the list: 1. The problem of young people leaving the Church; 2. The need to restore trust in the leadership of the diocese and bring healing; 3. A concern for more reverence, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is this last concern that I want to address here.

At every prayer and listening event some of the faithful mentioned the need for more reverence during our Eucharistic celebrations, especially in light of the diocesan practice of standing from the Lamb of God until the Blessed Sacrament is back in the tabernacle and then having everyone be seated. Many people commented on this, and they experienced it as a lack of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, especially because our practice is different from most other dioceses.

This liturgical practice has been part of the diocese for almost 20 years and at one time was in place in several dioceses around the country. The practice emphasized a couple of important truths. First, that standing is an ancient position of respect and reverence, and especially symbolic of the resurrection when we will rise from our graves to greet the Risen Lord. In fact, one of the early ecumenical councils (where all the bishops of the world gathered) in Nicaea in 318 did not allow Christians to kneel while praying during the liturgy in the season of Easter. Kneeling was considered a penitential act more than a reverential act.

We always stand for the Gospel as a sign of reverence for the words of the Lord, and it is still true (with a nod to the council of Nicaea) that when praying the Litany of Saints during the liturgy in the Easter Season we stand, while, if we pray the same Litany during the rest of the year we kneel.

The second truth the diocesan practice emphasized was unity. Since the communion procession is an act we are all doing together, maintaining the same posture together throughout emphasizes our unity. We are one body in Christ, and this is emphasized when we sit, stand, and kneel together.

Even though these are valid reasons for the diocesan practice, as everyone is aware most other dioceses follow the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) in the matter of posture during the liturgy, which prescribes a different practice. The General Instruction says, “the faithful kneel after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) unless the Diocesan Bishop determines otherwise” (#43) and it also says, “if appropriate, they may sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion” (#43).

Since all the other dioceses around us (and almost all in the United States) follow this practice, many mentioned that this becomes somewhat of a sign of disunity or confusion, as often people from other dioceses come to Mass in our churches and they are confused why everyone else doesn't kneel. The same confusion happens when our people go to Church in other dioceses.

Our distinct practice can become a sign of disunity, since we are not following the common practice, even though the church allows this legitimate variation.

Having heard these many voices in our Synod events, and consulted our priests, I have decided to change our diocesan practice to be in accord with the majority of dioceses around the country starting on the weekend of the celebration of Corpus Christi, June 18 and 19. This is the day the Church in the United States begins a three-year National Eucharistic Revival.

Beginning with the Vigil Mass of Corpus Christi, we will kneel after the Lamb of God is said or sung. People should remain kneeling until it is time to go to Communion.

After receiving communion when they return to their pew, they are encouraged to kneel and pray. Of course, those who find it difficult to kneel may always be seated, as they do during the Eucharistic Prayer.

This practice also has noteworthy benefits. Since kneeling in our culture is almost never done except at Catholic Mass, it is a posture that marks the special reverence we give to the Lord and puts us in a beautiful position of humility before him.

It also helps us focus our hearts on the Lord's Sacred Presence, his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, which enters into us during Communion and allows for intimate moments for us to speak to him. The saints often spoke about those moments right after receiving Communion as being a sacred time to speak to the Lord heart to heart.

The act of going to Communion is unique because it is both communal and personal. We do this together as a body, yet Christ comes individually to each of us. As we respond to him individually with love and devotion, we grow in communion with him and with each other in the one body of Christ.

We will of course continue to stand to pray the Collects, for the Gospel, and for the Preface before the Eucharistic Prayer when we sing the Holy, Holy, as these times of standing together remind us of the day of resurrection when we shall stand up from our graves at the voice of the Lord, but we will kneel at these other sacred moments remembering that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).