

How do we use our bodies to pray in Mass?

As human beings, we are a unity of mind, body and soul. When we integrate all these parts, St Irenaeus says it is then we are “fully alive”. Last week the instruction was preparing our mind and soul to enter into our intimate experience of Mass. Now, we must learn to pray with our body also. Our body “speaks” through the way we carry ourselves, our gestures and actions. It speaks to our own heart as well as to those who see us.

There are 2 gestures in particular that should lead us into our preparation for Mass. As we enter the church, we look for the Holy Water in which to dip our fingers then make the Sign of the Cross. This dipping and blessing reminds us of our baptismal promises and declares to those around us that we are baptized Christians able to participate in this Sacred Liturgy. We remember the waters of Baptism that have the power to cleanse us of sin and unite us to God.

In making the sign of the cross, we invoke God’s presence and at the same time we profess our faith — our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a mark of discipleship, a declaration that I belong to Christ. If we take being a Catholic seriously, make this declaration bold, clear and decisive, not hurriedly or as if we’re brushing flies away — remember, our body is speaking.

The next action we perform is to genuflect as we enter our pew. This ancient posture, touching our right knee to the floor, was assumed in the presence of a king. When we do this, we are honoring Jesus, Our King present in the Tabernacle. The key to knowing in which direction to make our genuflection is to locate the Tabernacle, usually a fixed ornate box distinguished by the red sanctuary lamp which shows Jesus, the King, is present. In his final years, it cost Pope John Paul II something to genuflect. He griped the altar bravely, and forced his aching bones to bend all the way down to the floor. And then the Master of Ceremonies helped him back up.

Let us demonstrate our love and devotion to Jesus Our King, by a reverent and intentional genuflection — remember, your body is speaking. If a complete genuflection is truly not possible, then we are to greet The King with a profound bow, bending our body at the waist — remember, our body is speaking.