

Why do Catholics
bounce on
one knee?

Why does the
priest sniff
the altar?

Why do
Catholics
scratch their
foreheads
before the
Gospel
Reading?

A Very Simple Guide to the Catholic Mass

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Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

Introduction

Are you about to attend a Catholic Mass for the first time? Maybe you haven't been to Mass for a long time and can't remember what to do. Maybe you go to Mass regularly, but you're not sure of what's going on. Whatever the reason, it's wonderful that you're attending Mass, and to help you enjoy the Mass, without looking like you don't know what you're doing, I've written this guide for you.

I've kept this track short, but to keep you fully aware of what's going on, most of the words the priest or a helper says are given, and all the word you'll have to say are given.

Words like this are what the priest or a helper says.

Words like this are what you and everyone else say.

Sometimes the priest mumbles to himself, to clear this up, I'm going to give you most of the words he's mumbling.

Entering a Catholic Church

The first thing you'll see people doing is dipping their finger in some water and crossing themselves. This water has been blessed by a priest, and is called "holy water." Crossing yourself is done quite often by Catholics, so you should make sure you know how to do this. First, you touch your forehead with a finger of your right hand, saying "In the name of the Father," then touch your lower chest, saying, "the Son," next touch your left shoulder, saying, "and the Holy," and finally touch your right shoulder, saying "Spirit." Whenever you hear the priest say, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," everyone crosses themselves. The priest doesn't always cross himself, but sometimes makes the sign of the cross in the air, around a foot in front of him. When he does this, he's blessing everyone, and you simply cross yourself.

When everyone takes their seat, you'll usually see them bow, dip their knees a bit, and some even bounce a knee off the floor. This is one thing that many Catholics have no idea what they're doing, or why they're doing it. The basic idea is that you bow to the altar, and genuflect (touch your right knee to the floor) to the tabernacle. The tabernacle is a locked box where the Body of Christ is kept for adoration, and in reserve to give to the sick that can't attend Mass. Most newer or renovated churches have the tabernacle off to the side or in another room, and you can usually find it by looking for a red light that looks important. In older churches, the tabernacle is

right in front of everything. If the tabernacle is in front of you, genuflect to it, otherwise, just bow to the altar.

Remember, whenever you're walking around the church and you pass in front of the tabernacle, genuflect to it. As well, whenever you pass in front of the altar, bow to it.

Before Mass starts, you'll see some people kneeling. They're simply getting ready for Mass by praying. If you want, you can do the same, but you don't have to. It's just as easy to pray while you're sitting.

THE ORDER OF MASS WITH A CONGREGATION

INTRODUCTORY RITES

ENTRANCE SONG

To start the Mass off, the priest and the helpers walk slowly to the altar, while everyone else stands. Usually a song is sung at this time. The priest and the helpers bow to the altar, and then take their spots. Most priests will also go behind the altar and kiss it (he's not smelling it to see if it needs washing).

GREETING

Remember how to cross yourself? Well, this is the time to do it, as the priest says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and the Holy Spirit.

Don't forget that the way the next line looks means you're suppose to say it.

Amen.

Now the priest continues a bit, with something like:

The Lord be with you.

And you say (this is the last time I'm going to remind you, so watch out for words that look like this):

And also with you.

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

RITE OF BLESSING AND SPRINKLING HOLY WATER

Sometime this is celebrated, but I won't go into the details about it. Just remember that if the priest sprinkles holy water in your direction, make the sign of the cross again (I told you Catholics do this a lot).

PENITENTIAL RITE

If the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water is not celebrated (which is most of the time), the Penitential Rite is. The priest tell us to remember our sins, saying something like:

As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ's love,
let us acknowledge our failures
and ask the Lord for pardon and strength.

After we remember our sins for awhile, one of the follow three prayers are done:

#1:

**I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault
(you should hit your chest now, but not too hard)
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done,
and in what I have failed to do;
and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
all the angels and saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.**

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen.

#2:

Lord, we have sinned against you:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your mercy and love.

And grant us your salvation.

#3: The priest, or someone else, leads everyone in the following way:

the leader says something, followed by:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

the leader says something, followed by:
Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

the leader says something, followed by:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

KYRIE

If the "Lord, have mercy" was not prayed in the Penitential Rite, it's prayed now:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA

Usually this is said or sung next, but not all the time.

**Glory to God in the highest
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God, and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

OPENING PRAYER

The priest then says:

Let us Pray.

He then says a short prayer, ending with something like this:

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Or maybe ending with something like this:

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

We don't want to stand through the whole Mass, so everyone sits down now. Someone goes up front to read from the Bible (notice how he bows to the altar, or at least he should). When he's done reading, he'll say:

The Word of Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

A Psalm from the Bible gets read, or sung, now. To make it more fun, everyone gets to join in. Try to quickly remember the first line the leader says or sings. This is the line that you and everyone else gets to do.

SECOND READING

On week-ends (you can also go to Mass during the week you know), someone else now goes up to read from the Bible. Again, when he's done, he'll say:

The Word of Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ALLELUIA OR GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Now it's time for the priest to read the Gospel (one of the first four books of the New Testament). Since this is a story about Jesus, everyone stands.

Usually everyone will first sing:

Alleluia.

When we're getting ready for Easter (the season of Lent), we're not suppose to say "Alleluia," so one of the following are usually sung:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory

Praise and honor to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Glory to you, Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ!

GOSPEL

The priest walks over to the Bible (notice that he also bows to the altar as he passes it), and as he's walking, he mumbles:

Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim your gospel.

Once he's done mumbling, he says:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

A reading from the holy gospel according to **(whoever)**.

Everyone then traces a small Cross with their right thumb on their forehead (it looks like their scratching their forehead), on their lips, and on their heart. As they do this they're quietly praying, "May the Gospel be on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart." At the same time, they're saying:

Glory to you, Lord.

The priest then reads the Gospel, and when he's done, he says:

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The priest then kisses the Bible, and mumbles:

May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins.

And now everyone can sit again.

HOMILY

Now the priest spends some time explaining the Bible readings that were just read. Usually this is quite interesting.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

On week-ends (remember you can come to Mass during the week), one of the creeds (a short summary of what Catholics believe) is said.

Oh yeah, everyone stands now.

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down for heaven:

(you're suppose to bow for the next two lines)
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died, and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in fulfillment of the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living
and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of
life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped
and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the
dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

Now it's time to pray for stuff. Someone will lead in the
prayers, and everyone responds the following way, although
sometime a different response is used.
(if you're not standing yet, you should be)

a prayer, followed by:
We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

(repeat sequence)

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

PREPARATION OF THE ALTAR AND THE GIFTS

Everyone sits again, as someone gets the altar ready for the
Eucharist. The Eucharist is the bread and wine that's been
changed into the Body and Blood of Christ (only the bread gets
stored in the tabernacle). Usually the gifts (the bread and
wine) are brought from the back to the priest, while a song is
sung. You'll have to watch because some churches stay sitting,
and others stand while the gifts are brought to the priest.

Once the altar's ready, and the gifts are in their places, the
priest starts praying. If a song is being sung, he'll mumble
these prayers quietly, but if the song is done (of if there was
no song), he'll say the prayers out loud, and there's also
something for you to say.

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

The priest picks up the bread, and prays:

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,
which earth has given and human hands have made.
It will become for us the bread of life.

Blessed be God for ever.

The priest pours the wine and a little bit of water into a cup, and prays:

By the mystery of this water and wine may we come
to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself
to share in our humanity.

He then hold the cup up, and prays:

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this wine to offer,
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.
It will become our spiritual drink.

Blessed be God for ever.

The priest then mumbles:

Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the
sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts.

The priest now symbolically washes his hands with water, and mumbles:

Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.

By the way, if you're a Eucharistic minister, you're not supposed to wash your hands with this water. You should wash your hands with soap and warm water before Mass.

Then the priest says:

Pray, brethren, that our sacrifice
may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.

**May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands
for the praise and glory of his name,
for our good, and the good of all his Church.**

It should be noted that the sacrifice is Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS

If everyone's not standing yet, they should stand now. Some churches stay sitting during the next prayer, so you'll have to watch what everyone else is doing.

The priest prays a short prayer, ending something like:

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Amen.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

If you're still not standing, you should definitely stand now. Sometimes this next section gets sung! If not, you just say it.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

PREFACE

The next prayer starts with the following words, but then changes from day to day. When this prayer is done, there's something for you to say or sing.

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere
to give you thanks...

ACCLAMATION

Is it done? Now it's your turn.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

This next part is very special. This is where the bread and wine get changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Some churches stay standing during this prayer, but they're really supposed to kneel. Whatever you do, don't sit. Of course if you're physically unable to kneel or stand, you may sit, but everyone else, DON'T SIT. Christ is King, and when a king enters a room, nobody sits. It's been known to happen that a king will cut off someone's head if he sits while the king enters a room. Luckily, King Jesus doesn't do this.

If you feel weird about kneeling, do it anyway. You'll look really out of place if you sit now, as sitting is a sign of disrespect. If you don't want to kneel, you can stand, but if everyone else is kneeling, you'll look out of place again, but that's OK if you can't kneel.

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

There are a number of different prayers that can be said now, and it's up to the priest to choose which ones to use that day. It would take too long to show you all the different prayers, but they all share some parts, and I'll show these to you.

After the priest's been praying for awhile, he'll remind us of the Last Supper. Then he'll hold the bread up and say the words Jesus said:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT IT:
THIS IS MY BODY WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

As these words are said, the bread changes into the Body of Christ. This is such a special moment that bells are rung sometimes. As the priest show the Body of Christ to you, you can quietly pray, "My Lord, and my God." After this, you should bow your head, as the priest genuflects.

The priest prays a bit more, holds up the cup, and says the words Jesus said:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT:
THIS IS THE CUP OF MY BLOOD,
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT.
IT WILL BE SHED FOR YOU AND FOR ALL
SO THAT SINS MAY BE FORGIVEN.
DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

As these words are said, the wine changes into the Blood of Christ. Again, this is a special moment, and bells might be rung. As the priest show the cup with the Blood of Christ to you, you can quietly pray, "My Lord, and my God." After this, you should bow your head, as the priest genuflects.

Everyone usually stands up now, although some churches stay kneeling, as one of the following is said:

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Or:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus,
firstborn from the dead!

**Dying you destroyed our death,
rising you restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come in glory.**

Or:

We are faithful, to your command:

**When we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus,
until you come in glory.**

Or:

Christ is Lord of all ages!

**Lord, by your cross and resurrection
you have set us free.
You are the Savior of the world.**

Again, it's up to the priest to decide what to pray now, but when he's done, he'll hold up the Body of Christ (it's on the plate) and the cup with the Blood of Christ, and says:

Through him,
with him,
in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.

Amen.

COMMUNION RITE

LORD'S PRAYER

It's time to pray the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father). If you're still kneeling, you should stand up now. If you want, you can hold your hand towards heaven (just bend your arms at the elbows, and face your palms up). Some people also like to hold hands now (I mean other peoples hands, not your own).

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

Deliver us, Lord, from every evil,
and grant us peace in our day.
In your mercy keep us free from sin
and protect us from all anxiety
as we wait in joyful hope
for the coming of our Savior,
Jesus Christ.

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

DOXOLOGY

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

SIGN OF PEACE

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles:
I leave you peace, my peace I give you.
Look not on our sins, but on the faith
of your Church,
and grant us the peace and unity
of your kingdom
where you live for ever and ever.

Amen.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

It's now time to give the sign of peace. It's not time to say, "Hi, how ya doing?" but time to shake hands with the people around you, and say to them, "Peace be with you." Some people like to hug, and if you're married, you can kiss your spouse.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Stop shaking hands now, and say:

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
grant us peace.**

As this is being said, the priest breaks a piece of Christ's Body in two, and drops a small piece of it into the cup of Christ's Blood. As he does this, he mumbles:

May this mingling of the body and blood
of our Lord Jesus Christ
bring eternal life to us who receive it.

Remember that the priest dropped a small piece of Christ's Body into the cup, so if you drink from this cup, you're not grossed-out because you think it came out of someone's mouth.

PRIVATE PREPARATION OF THE PRIEST

The priest now mumbles a special prayer for himself that goes something like this:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world. By your holy body and blood free me from

all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from you.

COMMUNION

The priest genuflects, holds up the broken pieces of Christ's Body, and says:

This is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world.
Happy are those who are called to his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.**

The priest mumbles:

May the body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.

Then he eats the Body of Christ, and picks up the cup of Christ's Blood. He mumbles:

May the blood of Christ bring me to everlasting life.

Then he drinks the Blood of Christ.

COMMUNION SONG

Now it's time for everyone to eat and drink Christ's Body and Blood, and a song might be sung at this time. Now the Body and Blood of Christ is very sacred, and only Catholics (not Protestants) that have had their First Communion can receive it. As well, if you have any grave sins that have not been brought to confession, you cannot receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Oh yeah, you're also not supposed to eat for at least an hour before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ (only water is OK for this hour). If you cannot receive the Body and Blood of Christ, you can still go up for a blessing. To show that you only want a blessing, cross both of your hand over you heart when you go up.

Some people will sit while they're waiting to go up, but King Jesus is still in the room, so **STAY STANDING!**

When you get up there, look into the eyes of the person giving out the Body of Christ as he says:

The body of Christ.

Keep looking into his eyes, and say:

Amen.

Some places give the Body of Christ on the tongue, and some give it in the hand. To take it on the tongue, simply open your mouth and stick out your tongue a little, while the Body of Christ is placed on your tongue. To take it in your hand, cup your right hand under your left, and remember that you're

Why Do Catholics Bounce On One Knee?

holding the most precious thing there is. Put it in your mouth, and check for any crumbs so you can eat them as well (these crumbs are also the Body of Christ). DO NOT walk around with it in your hands, and DO NOT give it to anybody else.

If you're only coming up for a blessing, get the blessing from a person handing out the Body of Christ. Don't go to a person with a cup of Christ's Blood for a blessing.

When you go to get the Blood of Christ, look into the person's eyes as he says:

The blood of Christ.

Keep looking into his eyes, and say:

Amen.

Take the cup, and have a small drink. If you see a small piece of bread in the cup, remember that the priest put it there. As well, the cup is wiped and turned every time someone drinks from it. The Blood of Christ also contains alcohol, which kills germs, but if you have a cold or flu, skip the Blood that day. DO NOT dip Christ's Body into His Blood (there are far more germs on your hand than in your mouth).

By the way, if you go to an Eastern Rite church (like Ukrainian Catholic), you don't say, "Amen," but just open your mouth and tilt your head back. The priest will drop some of Christ's Body, which has been soaked in His Blood, into your mouth.

Now you go back to your seat. Some people will sit, and others will kneel, both are wrong things to do. You should stay standing until the very last person has received the Body and Blood of Christ. Standing until everyone is done is a sign of community. But if you're the only one standing, you don't want to look out of place, so kneel.

PERIOD OF SILENCE OR SONG OF PRAISE

Now is the time to kneel and pray. A good prayer to pray is the one the people washing the dishes are praying:

Lord, may I receive these gifts in purity of heart.
May they bring me healing and strength,
now and for ever.
Amen.

When you're done praying, be careful when you sit back. The person behind you might still be kneeling, and you don't want to put the back of your head into his face.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

When the priest stands up again, so do you, and he prays a short prayer that ends something like:

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Amen.

CONCLUDING RITE

GREETING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

BLESSING

Everyone makes the sign of the Cross again, as the priest says:

May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Notice the priest didn't cross himself, but crossed everyone else. This is what I was talking about earlier.

There are a few other blessings the priest can use. Some have a few verses which everyone answers with "Amen."

DISMISSAL

The priest then lets you know that everything is over by saying something like:

Go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

The last song is sung now (unless there's no singing that day, which is the case some week-day Masses). The priest kisses the altar again (not all priests do this), then he and the helpers go in front of the altar, bow, then leave.

Most people pray a little bit more now. Some kneel and others sit. It's a good time to visit with everyone, unless it's Good Friday (everyone leaves the church in silence on Good Friday). Some churches even have coffee and cookies after (usually juice for the kids).

If you want, you can go pray in front of the tabernacle (you can find it by the important looking red light). Remember to bow to the altar, and genuflect to the tabernacle. If you're in an old church with the tabernacle on the altar against the front wall, just genuflect.

When you're leave the church (or going for coffee), don't forget to cross yourself with holy water, and I hope you come back again soon!