



Dear Clergy, Religious and Laity,

One of the pillars of the National Eucharistic Revival includes giving increased attention to the way we participate in the Mass. As human beings created both spiritual and physical, we engage our entire selves in worship of God. This is why we have set postures and gestures in the Mass, for the priest, the deacon, and the gathered faithful. These postures can and do change over time to help people to participate and express their faith.

One area where there is often confusion, with regard to posture, is during the Communion Rite. In the United States, the **norm** is for the faithful to *kneel* following the *Lamb of God*, unless the diocesan bishop determines otherwise. This has remained the norm in the other dioceses of the Central Valley, that they kneel. Since the early 2000s, meanwhile, our diocese, along with several others in the country, changed to having the faithful stand at this point of the Mass. However, over the past several years many dioceses which chose to stand at this point in the Mass have returned to the posture of kneeling.

While standing at this moment is in line with the general practice of the Roman Rite worldwide, it has often become an opportunity for confusion with dioceses in the same region having differing practices. Both postures have their value: standing together helps us to recognize our unity as the Body of Christ, while kneeling is seen to better express an attitude of adoration before our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Even though both are legitimate, there does not seem to be sufficient reason to have a different practice from the great majority of the other dioceses of our country.

Therefore, in the Diocese of Stockton, beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2024, the practice during Mass will be that the faithful kneel following the *Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)*, in accord with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 43.

The Diocese of Oakland will be changing back to kneeling on the same day, meaning that with the change we will have the same practice as most of our surrounding dioceses.

This change also has implications for posture following Communion. The norm given in the *General Instruction* is for the faithful to stand until the last person has received Communion. Even though the norm is to stand, the common practice in the U.S. has been to kneel after receiving Communion. When the U.S. Bishops asked the Vatican about whether this custom could be retained, the Vatican replied that the instruction to stand after Communion was meant as a *general* indication, and not intended to be *strictly* applied. The faithful should therefore know that they may follow the customary U.S. practice of kneeling following the reception of Holy Communion.

To ensure that the faithful are properly instructed regarding this upcoming change, I am asking that a catechesis be offered about this change of posture at Mass. The Liturgy & Worship office will be providing short articles and helpful teaching points for this purpose in the coming weeks leading up to this modification.

In the Peace of Christ,

The Most Reverend Myron J. Cotta
Roman Catholic Bishop of Stockton