

Church of St. John the Evangelist

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April 28, 2013

Dear faithful parishioners,

After a long period of waiting, we will soon be blessed with a new tabernacle installed in the sanctuary of our church. This wonderful and sacred addition also brings with it the requirement that we change our ways of acting in church. I write this letter so that we can all begin to observe proper decorum in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd ed.) states “Even before the celebration [of the Mass] itself, it is commendable that silence be observed in the church ... and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner” (44). This instruction reflects the long-standing tradition of remaining silent in church where the Blessed Sacrament is present. Thus I ask that effective immediately there be prayerful silence both before and after Mass – indeed at all times inside the church nave and sanctuary. I know there are times we must communicate with others in the church, but we should limit these occasions to matters of immediate importance and should do so in a quiet whisper. This also means that there should be a respectful “hush” in the narthex – not a strict silence, but certainly no loud talking, laughing, etc., the noise of which easily disrupts the prayerful attitude within the church.

The *General Instruction* further states: “A genuflection, which is made by bending the right knee to the ground, signifies adoration, and for this reason is reserved to the Most Blessed Sacrament.... If there is a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon and other ministers genuflect to it when they approach or leave the altar, but not during the celebration of Mass itself” (274).

Thus, all those in the procession at the beginning and at the end of Mass will genuflect at the bottom of the steps leading to the sanctuary. There is one exception: “Ministers who are carrying the processional cross or the candles bow their heads in place of a genuflection.” Although not required in the instructions, we will continue the practice of Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion pausing at the bottom step and bowing their heads before entering the sanctuary.

The *General Instruction* does not specifically prescribe the actions of the faithful upon entering and leaving the church, but by reference to the above instruction, **we should all genuflect in adoration when we arrive at our pew at the beginning of Mass and when we exit the pew at the end of Mass.**

The instruction further states: “Otherwise [i.e., outside of Mass], all who pass before the Most Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are moving in procession.” This means that as we are moving around the nave and the sanctuary before or after Mass, we are to genuflect in adoration

to the tabernacle. The “passing before” is generally thought of in our church building as on a line from the tabernacle to the altar and up the center aisle to the doors. We must each guard ourselves from the temptation to reduce this action to a quick, slight bending of the knee -- an action that appears to be more of a curtsy than an act of adoration.

Please note that genuflection is simply the bending of the right knee to the ground. Some Catholics have the tradition of bowing, making the Sign of the Cross, saying a short prayer, etc. while genuflecting. These additions are actions of personal piety and are not required.

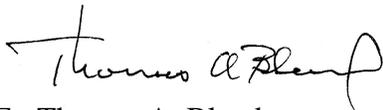
I must also emphasize that those people who because of age or infirmity cannot genuflect should not attempt to do so, but should make some other sign of adoration as they are able, such as a bow of the head (similar to the cross bearer).

The *General Instruction* defines a bow as “a sign of the reverence and honor given to persons or what represents those persons” (275). There are two types of bows: an inclination of the head (when the three Divine Persons are named, at the name of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is celebrated) and a bow of the body, or profound bow (toward the altar if there is no tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament and during the Profession of Faith at the words “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit ... made man”). There are also certain times during the Mass that are prescribed for the priest and deacon to make a profound bow.

I would also like to clarify the matter of the “double genuflection.” If the monstrance is exposed during Adoration, the custom had been to offer a double genuflection, that is, to kneel with both knees and bow one's head. However, liturgical norms state that “a single genuflection is made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration.”* The rationale for that change simply was that it is the one Lord who is present in the Holy Eucharist – and equally so – whether in the reserved Sacrament in the tabernacle or in the exposed Sacrament during adoration. Thus, any distinction between acts of reverence to our Lord present in the tabernacle or in the monstrance is avoided. However, this does not prohibit any of the faithful from doing a double genuflection out of their own personal piety.

I ask you to keep this letter as a reference for the next few weeks as we transition to this important advancement in our parish. I also take this opportunity to thank all of you whose contributions have made the installation of the tabernacle a reality for our parish.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas A. Bland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

Fr. Thomas A. Bland

**Holy Communion and Worship of the Holy Eucharist Outside of Mass* (84), USCCB 1976.