

BACK TO BASICS: The Expressions of Our Faith

By Karen Pourbabaee

“Every part of the body is an expressive instrument of the soul.” -- Father Romano Guardini

In the sanctuary, standing, kneeling, bowing, gesturing with our hands, even sitting, become sacred actions. Posturing and gesturing have become second nature for life-long Catholics, but they are not merely ceremonial. When our bodies participate in prayer and worship, they give voice to our souls and that prayer and worship become more alive within us.

The Bible speaks of several postures of prayer: kneeling, standing, bowing, and prostration. In Scott Hahn’s book, Signs of Life, he shares the meanings behind these actions.

Prostration: reserved for solemn moments as ordination where it indicates the candidate’s inadequacy for the task which he has been called; at the opening of Good Friday services or in private prayer it shows profound reverence for God or even helplessness and surrender.

Kneeling: prayer posture that signals reverence and worship, expresses recognition of our humility before the Lord

Sitting: it’s not a neutral posture but a receptive position, we are listening and taking in the Word of God, like the open-hearted receptiveness of Mary

Standing: posture of attentiveness and readiness to serve, shows the respect of the servant in attendance and the soldier on duty

When the priest and the faithful **genuflect** before the Eucharist, it is an expression of faith in the Real Presence of Jesus.

In addition, the **gesture of hands folded** is a sign of deference, trust, and vulnerability. Historically, knights rendered themselves vulnerable and unable to reach for a weapon as they approached a king or judge by this gesture. When we fold our hands in prayer we defer to the Lord as greater than any earthly king because He alone is all powerful and all knowing.

Dear Lord,

“You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.” (Psalm 139:1-2) Let me always love and worship You with my whole heart and mind and body. I will kneel before You with humbleness and in reverence. I will sit and listen to Your words with an open heart. When I stand I will become a willing servant and ready soldier for Christ. I will genuflect because I know You are really there. When I fold my hands in prayer, I will trust in You and remember that You are greater than any earthly king. Amen.