

Saint Michael

“Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another”

Proverbs 27:17.



Newsletter



Vol. 1, Issue 11, © February 2019

Editor: Victor R. Claveau, MJ

Tel: (727) 378-4361 - E-mail: claveau@earthlink.net

Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:12-17).

The History of Valentine's Day

How in the world, you may wonder, did the name of such a pious Christian and Catholic martyr as St. Valentine ever become associated with the lover's letters known as Valentines? Why is it that on St. Valentine's Day lovers send messages all done up in fancy cards? What connection do these greetings have with the great St. Valentine, priest and martyr?

Some say there is no connection, except the fact that this man of God who lived in the third century just happened to be martyred on February 14. However, there seems to be more to it than that. We might suggest that love is very much like martyrdom; in love man gives his all, just as in martyrdom, he gives his all. Further, love has its pains, which are not unlike those of martyrdom. Seriously, there is a connection.

On February 14 in ancient Rome, it was the custom of boys to draw lots from a huge container the names of girls with whom they were to be partners in the various forms of celebration. Should John draw the name of Mary, then John and Mary were partners in all the festivities in honor of the goddess of that day. This was a haphazard, hit and miss method of finding a companion. It was blind dating on a huge scale. It wasn't very satisfactory to the boys and girls; it was too often an additional occasion for ugly immorality in already deeply immoral Rome.

The Catholic priests of the time condemned the custom as too promiscuous, too likely to lead to sin. They tried to Christianize the custom. They tried to give the boys and girls a clean, healthy, Christian view of dating and marriage. Foremost in this effort was St. Valentine.

At that time also, Rome was embroiled in many wars, which dragged out so long that many Roman citizens were unwilling to go into battle. The married men did not want to leave their families; the engaged openly rebelled against leaving their sweethearts. It was growing more difficult to recruit an army.

Hearing this, the emperor, Claudius the Cruel, decreed that for some time there should be no more marriage ceremonies. Not only no more weddings, but those engaged must break off their engagements.

Father Valentine felt sorry for the young people. He was particularly sad at the thought of the complete moral collapse this would bring about among the young. If they could not be married, they would live as married people without the wedding, without the solemn pledge that they would be true to each other. One day, Father Valentine secretly united in holy matrimony a couple who came to him for that purpose.

Others heard, came, and were married. These young people wanted to do the right thing; they wanted to have the blessing of Almighty God on their union: they wanted to enter the solemn contract that is the wedding ceremony. Soon there were as many weddings in Rome as if there had never been the senseless decree against them.

When these things came to light, Father Valentine was seized by the Roman authorities, was sentenced to be beaten with clubs, then to be stoned, and finally to be beheaded outside the Flaminian Gate, which for a time was called the Gate of Valentine. He was martyred on February 14, in the year 270, seventeen hundred and forty-one years ago. His day of death does have some connection, for the reason just mentioned, with the modern celebration of St. Valentine's Day.

While it is not harmful for us to observe the day with non-religious gestures, it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that Valentine's Day is a religious festival.

The heart is a favorite emblem of the Catholic Church. It is traditionally believed to be the center of all emotions and feelings. At least it registers those feelings. We Catholics have a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the heart that throbbed with love for every one of us, the heart that burst with love of us.

May I suggest that we make all our human love harmonize with that Divine Love? May I urge that we put our hearts in tune with the Divine Heart? May I recommend that on St. Valentine's Day we put the Heart of Jesus Christ, that is the love of Jesus Christ, in the center of all our earthly loves?

Jesus died out of love for St. Valentine, just as Jesus died for every one of us. St. Valentine in turn died for the love of Jesus Christ.

Yes, send Valentines on St. Valentine's Day, but don't forget that there is a Divine Heart that would like to be your Valentine. To that Divine Heart we can say with all reverence: "Jesus, be my Valentine."

God's Love

Father Vincent Gilmore, O.Praem

On Wednesday, January 25, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI released his first encyclical entitled "*Deus Caritas Est*", an encyclical on Christian love.

An encyclical is a letter addressed to the entire Church for benefit and reflection of all the faithful. In this encyclical, the Pope is trying to recapture the true meaning of the word love from a culture that has hijacked the meaning of the word to mean almost anything.

The Pope begins with the ancient Greek understanding of love and couples that with human experience and Scripture to build a truly Christian understanding of love.

How did the Greeks define or understand love? Well, they used three words to describe the different aspects of love; *philia*, which is friendship or brotherly love, *eros*, which is the love between man and woman, and *agape*, which is benevolent love, or goodwill.

Eros, the Pope explains is a love of necessity, a love beyond reason and the will, the physical and emotional attraction between a man and a woman. The Greek thought it touched on the divine...

The Pope does not condemn this love, but points out that this love, given fallen human nature, is open to abuse. Undisciplined eros turns the body into a prisoner of lust and other human beings become commodities, objects of pleasure – pornography and prostitution are prime examples of this.

There is a certain ecstasy in eros, a search for the infinite, and a desire for happiness, seeking the divine. However, if eros remains on the bodily level and is not purified and elevated by the spirit, it turns into a hatred of the body and self.

C.S. Lewis described eros, as “need” love and agape as “gift” love. There is a certain necessity in eros, a force pushing out to possess that which is perceived to satisfy. The Holy Father acknowledges this need love, this desire in humans going all the way back to creation. When God created Adam and Eve God said to Adam “It is not good that you are alone, I will make you a suitable companion”. Woman was created. God showed Adam woman and God said, “A man shall leave his mother and father, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. There is a certain drive toward union built into man and woman with a complementarity written in their bodies and souls.

However, the desire of eros, good in itself, must be disciplined and purified otherwise, it can easily turn into selfishness and lust, which is often the case. We all know how hard it is to control eros. It is where many people fall into sin and where the Church gives clear teaching of the use of sexuality precisely to keep eros under control and purified, otherwise it becomes a destructive and abusive force for the person and society. We live in a world that doesn’t want to hear about instructions on eros and is why the Church is so hated on the topic of sexual morality.

It is in this area that most people have problems with the Church. The Church has the truth about eros. She’s had it for 2,000 years for anyone who cares to listen. It’s the way to true freedom, peace and happiness, away from bondage. A culture that gives in to undisciplined eros, like our own, is basically signing a death warrant. The health of marriage and family depends on the proper use of eros.

The truth about eros: it’s good and powerful, full of life, ecstasy, and mystery, but needs to be channeled and purified. Eros needs to make the transition or transformation from self to the other.

Eros begins something like this: I want/need to possess you because you can make me happy. Eros grows and matures into agape when it begins to care for the other person and “be there” for the other person and even wants to make the other person happy. The true test that eros has made the transformation to agape is the willingness and ability to sacrifice for the other person. Sacrifice is the operative word in agape. That’s what Jesus did for us. He died on the cross out of love to save us. God so loved the world...

The Holy Father points out in the encyclical that God’s love for us is both eros and agape. Scripture is full of spousal imagery to describe God’s love for His people. In the New Testament, the Church is described as the bride of Christ. He died for His spouse. His love for her was consummated on the cross. God’s love certainly may be called eros, yet it is totally agape which is gift love/benevolent love.

Eros is usually expressed through the body but is primarily a movement of the soul. This is why throughout Church’s history she has encouraged and promoted consecrated celibacy and virginity.

What this is doing is taking the eros inside a person and directing or focusing it towards God. We see in the lives of the saints a fire; their hearts are on fire for the love of God. This is eros, it drives them to make heroic acts of love and make great sacrifice for the love of God, and they are passionately “in love” with God. God becomes the spouse of their souls. Consider Pope John Paul II, Padre Pio, Sister Faustina, and Mother Theresa, etc, here eros is also transformed into agape. Eros and agape work hand-in-hand. For the Christian eros always turns into agape—need love always becomes gift love, possessive love becomes benevolent love.

Heaven will be the soul seeking God, the soul being perfectly and intentionally united with God, and God giving the soul everything it desires. The soul eternally receiving the gift of God’s love, which will be perfect happiness.

Love is our origin, our purpose of existence, and our end.

I encourage you to take a look at the Holy Father’s encyclical. I think it will be most enlightening and helpful on a topic where there is a lot of confusion today. The Holy Father is helping us discover the true meaning of Christian love. God is love, and Jesus is the perfect expression of that love.

“Love is the Fulfilling of the Law.”

James Cardinal Gibbons

If I were asked what is the underlying principle of the Gospel, what is the essential characteristic of the religion of Jesus Christ, I would say: it is love. Group together the Ten Commandments, the evangelical precepts, and the exhortations of the Apostles. Group together all the admonitions of the Old and the New Testament. Analyze them all, and they are all summarized in one short word, and that word is love. “Love,” says the Apostle, “is the fulfilling of the law,” that is to say, the whole law is fulfilled by love. Love, therefore is the shortest, safest and surest road to righteousness here, and to salvation hereafter. When our Lord was asked to epitomize the Decalogue, He answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your whole mind.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang the law and the prophets.”

Love then is the essence of Christianity, in contradistinction to all other religions.

The Hebrew people, though they were God’s chosen race, lived under the law of fear. They were restrained from vice more by fear of the punishment than by the hope of reward. They were accustomed to address God by the title of King, Ruler, Judge, Lord and Master; but in the whole range of the Old Testament they very rarely presumed to call God by the endearing name of Father. Not so you, says St. Paul, addressing the Christians of his time: “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:16-17).

I do not deny that the Hebrews were commanded to love God, but fear was the predominant feature of their worship. I do not deny that we are commanded to fear God, but love, with us Christians, is the leading motive to draw us to God.

The Pagan or Heathen worshipped his gods. He feared them and prostrated himself before them. He offered sacrifice to them in order to propitiate them. He was too far removed for them to entertain and sentiment of affection for them; for love presupposes some equality between the lover and the person beloved.

Our Savior God discovered a basis of equality between Himself and man. He said: I will descend from heaven to earth. I will manifest Myself to the world. I will clothe Myself with humanity. I will become man. I will become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. I will take upon Myself his sorrow and infirmities. I will become his brother, friend and companion. I will love him so ardently that I shall compel him to love Me. Oh! The wonderful condescension of God, that He should command us to love Him, and is angry with us if we do not love Him. That God should command us to fear Him, is not to be marveled at. But that He should command us to love Him, is calculated to win our wondering admiration. This is the Incarnation in a nutshell.

1st. The love of Christ is extended to all mankind without distinction of race, color, or condition of life: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” His arms are wide-stretched on the cross, to indicate that His love is worldwide, universal, and all embracing.

2nd. But Christ not only loves all men collectively. He loves each one of you in particular. I have always admired the saying of the Apostle: I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.” He does not say: The Son of God loved the human family. He does not say: He loved the Hebrew people. He does not say: Christ loved the Tribe of Benjamin of whom I am descended. But he says Christ loved me individually. You all can say the same. Christ loves each of you as ardently as if you alone existed in the world,—just as the sun’s rays shine as brightly upon you, as if no other being were on the face of the earth.

3rd. Our Savior, like ourselves, had his particular friendships. There are some members of the human family for whom He showed a special predilection. He had a singular affection for children because of their innocence, simplicity, guilelessness of heart. You may observe how frequently His tender regard for children is manifested in the Gospels. When mothers brought their babes in their arms to be blessed by Him, He rebuked His Apostles for trying to repel them. He embraced these infants and said: “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven.”

4th. He loved not only innocent youth, but for your comfort and mine, He loved also repentant sinners. We all know how tender was His compassion for the erring Magdalene.

He loved her because of her humility of heart, her spirit of repentance, and her profound gratitude. "I say to you," He declares, "that many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much." Oh! How great is the power of repentance since it transforms a slave of Satan and a moral leper into an elect of God!

5th. Christ had also a particular affection for Lazarus, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, because of their devotion to Him, and their hospitality towards Him. When Jesus knew of the death of Lazarus, He paid a visit of condolence to his sisters. Martha on meeting Him, exclaimed: "I you had been present, my brother would not have died." She did not yet know that Christ's influence is not diminished by His bodily absence. He was brought to the grave where Lazarus had lain for four days. We are told that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. We read not that he ever laughed. Yet those tears of Jesus have brought more joy and solace to the human heart than all the mirth-provoking books that ever were written. Jesus wept, to show that He had not only a divine Personality, but also a human heart, full of human sympathy for the suffering and sorrowing, that He came to sanctify sorrow and to be the great Consoler to the disconsolate. He wept, to prove to us that those who have drunk of the cup of sorrow, and have sounded the depths of human misery, can most adequately condole with the sufferings of others. He wished also to teach us that a tender sensibility is not only compatible with greatness of soul but is essential to sturdy manhood.

When the Jews observed Christ weeping, they exclaimed: behold how He loved Lazarus! If we are to judge of the love of Jesus for Lazarus by the few tears he shed at his grave, how are we to estimate His love for us by the tears of blood He shed for us during His passion.

Christ, who foresaw all things, knew full well that the raising up of Lazarus would whet the hatred of His enemies and hasten His own death. As soon as the High Priests and Pharisees had heard of the miracle, they became alarmed at the increasing influence of our Lord among the people, and from that very day, they designed to put Him to death. Let us learn a lesson from Christ's heroic conduct. Let us never hesitate to perform a good deed, even though we foresee that it will bring us no earthly recompense but will rather involve us in suffering and humiliation.

6th. Jesus had a very special attachment to His Apostles who were the companions of His journeys, the witnesses of His miracles and good works, the destined heralds of His Gospel. He called them by the endearing name of friends: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). He addressed them also with the affectionate title of brothers. When our Lord was apprehended in the garden and was in the hands of His enemies, when, humanly speaking, He had most need of the loyalty and support of His disciples they shamefully fled from Him to save their own lives. Yet, after his resurrection, what is the first message he sends them? Does He upbraid them for their treachery, their denial, their disloyalty and abandonment of Him? Not a word of reproach does he utter. But He sends them a message of love: Go and tell my brethren: I ascend to their Father and to My Father, to their God and My God." How tenacious is our memory of real or fancied injuries, how treacherous it is in regard to favors received! Let us learn a lesson of forgiveness from our Master. It is far more noble to pardon than to be avenged. It is the part of the animal man to retaliate an injury. It is only God and the sons of God that have the magnanimity to forgive.

7th. But Christ's special predilection was reserved for John the Evangelist. He is called by excellence "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" not that He loved the other Apostles less, but that He loved John more. John was particularly cherished by his Master because of his amiable disposition, his candor of soul, and the purity of his virgin heart. "He that has cleanliness of heart shall have the King for his friend."

The love of Jesus for John was heartily reciprocated by His disciple. There are three different circumstances in which the intense affection of the disciple for his Master was made manifest. At the Last Supper, John had the privilege of sitting next to Jesus, and of reclining on His breast, where he drank draughts of love from its divine fountain.

During the supper, our Savior predicted that one of His disciples at table would betray Him. The Apostles were agitated and distressed by this announcement, and they began secretly to debate among themselves which of them might be the traitor. Peter whispered to John, as being the most familiar with Christ, requesting him to

ask our Lord who would betray Him. John's affection made him familiar with his Master, and his familiarity gave him freedom of speech. Let us love our Lord like John, and our love will prompt us to speak to Him with freedom of speech in prayer. Let us also imitate the beloved disciples by reclining in spirit on the breast of Jesus, in devoutly receiving the Holy Communion.

John also manifested his love for his Master when he stood by the cross at the crucifixion with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. He was the only Apostle that witnessed the crucifixion. He showed a deeper affection for Christ in witnessing His death, and sharing in the ignominy of the cross, that when he reclined on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper.

Does not the faithful wife exhibit a greater devotion and loyalty to her husband by attending him through a lingering illness, than she would manifest by sharing in his social and political triumphs?

"Jesus" says Thomas à Kempis, "has many followers of His Heavenly Kingdom, but few bearers of His cross." We would all like to contemplate with John the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, and to have some of the heavenly rays descend upon ourselves; but we would shrink from standing by Him at His cross on Mount Calvary, and from sharing in the humiliation of His death. We would like to lean with John on His breast, at the Last Supper, but we would not wish to drink with Him of the chalice of His sufferings.

Let us remember that there can be little or no charity without some self-sacrifice. Self-love is the enemy of benevolence. If there were more self-denial, there would be more love. Seneca says: "Take two words from the lexicon, and there will be perfect accord among men, and no more war. These words are mine and thine." Kindness and generosity to others generally involve some self-restraint on our part. You have to put yourself to some inconvenience in order to direct an inquirer to the street he is looking for, or to accommodate him to a seat beside you in church. However, life itself is made up of these little amenities and acts of courtesy and kindness.

John also manifested a genuine love for Jesus by adopting Mary as his mother and taking her to his home. We cannot show a more practical love for Christ than by loving those whom He loved, and for caring for those whom He has commended to our charity. Imitate the beloved disciple by casting around you the searching eye of benevolence and sheltering some disconsolate widow who does not make a profession of beggary, and who is ashamed to obtrude herself before the public gaze. Bring sunshine to her home and joy to her heart. Fulfill towards her the sublime mission of God's almoner and steward, and the rays of joy you will bring her will descend upon yourself. You will enjoy inestimable peace that springs from the unconsciousness of doing good to others. Love your Lord with a filial love as your Father. Love Him with a grateful love as your benefactor. Love Him like Magdalene and Peter with a repentant love, as having washed away your sins in His blood. Love Him with a compassionate love, as having suffered and died that you might live. Say with the Apostle: "I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

A Man's Love for the Holy Mass

During Pope John Paul II's Spiritual Exercises in March 2000, Vietnamese Archbishop Francois Xavier Nguyen Van Thuân preached on the Eucharist with stories from his 13 years in prison at the hands of the communists.

He said: "When they imprisoned me in 1975, a terrible question came to my mind: 'Will I be able to celebrate Mass?'"

The former archbishop of Saigon explained that when he was arrested, he was not permitted to take any of his personal belongings. However, the following day he was allowed to write his family to request essentials like clothes and toothpaste.

He wrote, "Please send me some wine as medication for my stomach problems." His family understood immediately what he wanted, and they sent him a small bottle labeled "Medicine for Stomach Ache." They also concealed some hosts among his clothes.



Archbishop Francois Wavier Nguyen Van Thuân

The police asked him: "Do you have a stomach problem?" He replied that he did. "Then here is your medicine."

He said, "I shall never be able to express my joy. Every day I celebrated Mass with three drops of wine and one drop of water in the palm of my hand. Every day I was able to kneel before the Cross with Jesus, drink with him his most bitter chalice. Every day, when reciting the Consecration, I confirmed with all my heart and with all my soul a new pact, an eternal pact between Jesus and me, through his blood mixed with mine. They were the most beautiful Masses of my life."

Later, the archbishop was assigned to a group of 50 prisoners. They slept in a common bunk. Each one had the right to 50 centimeters (19.66 inches) of space. He said, "We arranged it so that five Catholics were next to me. Lights went out at 21:30 and everyone had to go to sleep. In bed, I celebrated Mass by heart, and distributed Communion by passing my hand under the mosquito net. We made envelopes with cigar paper to conserve the Most Blessed Sacrament. I always carried the Eucharistic Christ in the pocket of my shirt."

With the help of his Catholic companions, the archbishop gradually passed the Eucharist to dozens of other prisoners. "They all knew Jesus was among them, and that He cures all physical and mental sufferings. At night, the prisoners took turns at Adoration. The Eucharistic Christ helped in an unimaginable way with His silent presence: Many Catholics began to believe again enthusiastically. Their testimony of service and love made an ever-greater impact on the other prisoners, and even some Buddhists and non-Christians embraced the faith. Jesus' force is irresistible. The darkness of the prison became a paschal light."

For the archbishop, "Jesus began a revolution on the cross. The revolution of the civilization of love must begin in the Eucharist, and from here it must derive its force."

That is the power of the Eucharist. How often do we even begin to approach the gratitude we should feel for such a gift?

He wrote in his book "The Road of Hope: thoughts of light from a prison cell" (1997): While in prison, everyone waits for freedom, every day, every minute. We must live each day, each minute of our life as though it is the last.

Note: On 21 November 1988, Nguyen Van Thuân was released by the communist government but kept under house arrest in Hanoi, impeded to return to his see, Hô-Chi-Minh-Ville (ex-Saigon). He was allowed to go on a visit to Rome in 1991, but not allowed to return.

On 21 February 2001, Nguyễn Văn Thuận was created a Cardinal Deacon of Santa Maria della Scala. Within a week, Việt Nam's Foreign Ministry eased restrictions and the Cardinal could enter his native country with only routine immigration procedures and was afforded all the privileges normally given to overseas citizens.

Nguyễn Văn Thuận died of cancer in a clinic in Rome, Italy, on 16 September 2002, at the age of 74.

Prior to his death, he had appeared on lists of possible successors to Pope John Paul II.

On 16 September 2007, the fifth anniversary of the cardinal's death, the Church began the beatification process. Pope Benedict XVI expressed "profound joy" at news of the official opening of the beatification cause. Roman Catholics in Vietnam also positively received the news on beatification process opening for the cardinal. In the words of a catechist from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, "Nguyen Van Thuan is an example of holiness for Vietnamese Catholics and for the entire world."

Knees to Love Christ

Bishop Thomas Olmsted

Knees symbolize both strength and humility. Athletes use strong knees to run for touchdowns in football, to block shots, and to slam-dunk in basketball. Knees also bend in adoration of the Eucharistic King and in recognition of the grandeur and majesty of the Most High God.

Already in Biblical times, knees were a symbol of humility and strength. To bend one's knee before God was a profound act of worship; it stated boldly yet simply that God is the source of all power and that the one on bended knee is ready to place his life and all his energy at the service of the Lord.

What we do with our knees gives evidence of what we believe in our hearts. When we kneel down beside the bed of a dying person, when we stand up for the dignity of the unborn child, when we genuflect before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, we say louder than any rhetoric what matters most in our lives. Knees express what we believe and make clear what we will live and die for.

Not surprisingly, then, knees play an important role in the Church's Sacred Liturgy, especially during the season of Lent. What we do with our knees during worship is anything but trivial. It rivals in importance what we do with our voices and our ears, what we do with our hands and our hearts.

When we gather at the Eucharist, our attention is drawn with awe and devotion to the sacramental presence of Christ. While the Body of Christ far exceeds the value of our own bodies, it also gives meaning to them. It reminds us, too, of the human body's vital role in that "full, conscious and active participation in the Sacred Liturgy" called for by the Church at the Second Vatican Council.

It is understandable then why our posture at Holy Mass stirs such deep emotion within us who cherish our Catholic faith, and who know that our greatest treasure is the Eucharist. In three liturgical postures at Mass, our knees play a central role: kneeling, standing, and genuflecting.

Let us look, for a moment, at the practice of kneeling.

Kneeling for the Eucharistic Prayer

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (third edition) speaks of the proper posture for the laity during the Eucharistic Prayer. In paragraph 42, it states: "In the dioceses of the United States of America, they should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the *Sanctus* until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by reasons of health, lack of space, the large number of people, or some other good reason. Those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the priest genuflects after the consecration. The faithful kneel after the *Agnus Dei* unless the Diocesan Bishop determines otherwise".

It is expected, then, that the lay faithful kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer and after the *Agnus Dei*, unless they are prevented "on occasion" from doing so. It is only in exceptional situations and on extraordinary occasions that the laity stand during the Eucharistic Prayer. Of course, it is understood that some of the elderly and disabled will not be able to kneel. In chapels in nursing homes and similar environments, kneeling is often not possible.

Special problems are also posed by those few churches and chapels that presently have no kneelers. In these cases, until the installation of kneelers can occur (which I hope will be soon), kneeling may not be possible.

The practice of kneeling assists our whole person to be attentive to the Lord, to surrender to His will, to lift our soul and our voices in worship. Indeed, it points to the heart of what faith in Christ is all about. We see this reflected already in the earliest days of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that Saint Peter "knelt down and prayed" (9:40), and that Saint Paul "knelt down and prayed with them all" (20:36); we see how the first Christian martyr Saint Stephen fell to his knees and prayed that his enemies be forgiven (cf. 7:60), and we see how the whole community, men and women and children, prayed on their knees. (cf. 21:5)

Even Jesus Knelt to Pray

Jesus Himself knelt to pray to His beloved Father. We see this most dramatically in the Garden of Gethsemane where, on His knees, He speaks those deeply moving words: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done". (Luke 22:42)

The passage of Sacred Scripture that gives the strongest theological foundation for kneeling is that famous hymn found in Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians, 2:6-11, where we are told that, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

Kneeling is more than a gesture of the overly pious. It is a fundamental act of faith, a strong expression about Who stands at the center of one's life and Who stands at the center of all creation. Bending the knee at the name of Jesus is a decisive act of those with athletic souls and humble hearts. There is nothing passive about kneeling in humility and adoration. When the knees act in response to a heart that loves Christ, there is unleashed a force so strong it can change the face of the earth. Grace is the name we give to this force.

The Devil Has No Knees

According to Abba Apollo, a desert father who lived about 1,700 years ago, the devil has no knees; he cannot kneel; he cannot adore; he cannot pray; he can only look down his nose in contempt. Being unwilling to bend the knee at the name of Jesus is the essence of evil. (Cf. Is 45:23, Rom 14:11) But when we kneel at Jesus' name, when we bow down in service of others, and when we bend the knee in adoration, we are following in the footsteps of the Magi, we are imitating Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, and all the saints and angels in heaven.

"Come, let us bow down and worship. Let us kneel before the Lord who made us".

Why We Kneel during Mass

Our knees play an important role in our life in Christ, in our service to others and in our worship of the Lord. Kneeling has always held such a prominent role in the prayer of the Church.

Now, let us consider the other two postures that our knees perform in the Sacred Liturgy: standing and genuflecting.

At key points of the Eucharist, we use our knees to express attentiveness, reverence and love. As we enter and as we exit a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, we genuflect as a reverential greeting of Christ, who is truly present, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

This action toward Christ in the Tabernacle prepares us to begin to pray as we enter the church and makes us ready to witness to Christ as we leave it. Indeed, to bend the knee before Our Blessed Lord in the Tabernacle also shows a desire to bend our will to God's plan for us each and every day.

Standing out of Love for Christ

While we remain seated to listen to God's word in the first readings of the Sacred Scriptures at Mass, we rise to our feet and stand for the proclamation of the Gospel. Our standing in attentive and prayerful expectation is often accompanied by the singing of an acclamation, a procession with the Book of the Gospels and the use of incense. We always stand, too, at times of intercessory prayer, to show how we anticipate that the Father will hear and answer the petitions we bring with confidence before Him.

The priest stands during the Eucharistic Prayer as he acts in the person of Christ, in what the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls "so great and so holy a moment". (#1385) The posture of standing reminds us of that great multitude from every nation and race that "stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes" joyfully crying aloud in praise of God the Father on His heavenly throne and in praise of Jesus, the Lamb of God. (cf. Revelations 7:9) We also remember the words of the Second Eucharistic Prayer in which the priest prays to the Father, "We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you".

Clearly, both the Sacred Scriptures and our liturgical tradition look upon standing, comparable to genuflecting and kneeling, as a reverential posture to express our faith in God and our love for Him. We should keep this in

mind when we process forward and stand to receive Holy Communion, with a bow of the head as a sign of reverence prior to reception.

You have probably noticed that priests genuflect before receiving Holy Communion, rather than bowing their head.

Why would priests genuflect at this time but the laity only bow their heads? Because the laity were kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer while the priest was standing. Since he has not been kneeling prior to Holy Communion, it is appropriate that the priest genuflect at this point to express his belief in the Real Presence of Christ and to manifest his reverence.

A few of our laity still kneel or genuflect prior to receiving Holy Communion, and rightly, they are not denied the Blessed Sacrament. While I appreciate the good intentions that prompt these actions, I invite them to consider again the reverential nature of standing during the Sacred Liturgy and the real value of a unified expression of our fraternal communion in Christ. Taking exception to liturgical norms can distract others and even divert their attention during this most sacred moment of communing with our Savior. It can draw undue attention to oneself. Receiving Communion is also a statement of our union with the entire Church, not just a time of individual experience.

Nine Postures of Saint Dominic

We are told that Saint Dominic had nine different ways of praying, each marked by a different bodily posture. This great saint, who is associated with beginning the Rosary, knew well that praying involves more than just the soul.

Our body plays an important role in our communication with the Lord. Far from being trivial, what we do with our knees, whether we sit or stand, whether we genuflect or kneel, greatly impacts on our inner attitude before the Lord. It can stir our devotion or diminish it. If done sloppily or ignored, it hinders our openness to God's grace. But if done out of love, it assists us in humbly seeking God's mercy and in entering into loving communion with the Lord.

As we celebrate the Sacred Liturgy, then, whether at daily Mass or on a more solemn occasion, let us aim at more than external compliance with rubrics. Let us practice deep reverence before these Sacred Mysteries. Let us use our knees to live our faith every moment of every day and to express our love for Christ.

Bishop Thomas Olmsted, of Phoenix, addressed the significance of kneeling the Phoenix diocesan publication, *The Catholic Sun*, in a two-part article that appeared February 17 and March 3, 2010. Bishop Olmsted's complete article is reprinted here with permission.

Commentary

Are we truly a nation under God?

Victor R. Claveau, MJ © 2019

There seems to be a growing concern on the part of many Americans that perhaps the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City was a prophetic warning from on High. Why did God lift his mantle of protection from the United States of America on 9-11-01 and will He do so again?

The answer, I believe, is simple and it is about time we take our collective heads out of the sand and realize that if we continue along the path we have been following since *Roe Vs. Wade*, we will, most likely, be faced with far more destruction and loss of life. The death of the innocent is an affront to the sovereignty of God. "You should not give any of your children to devote them by fire to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord (Lev. 18:21).

When will we learn that we cannot spit in the face of God without His coming to anger? Scripture clearly demonstrates that man cannot tempt God without experiencing His ultimate retribution. Must we experience the fate of Israel, as described in 1 & 2 Chronicles and 1 & 2 Kings? Must history repeat itself and our nation be

destroyed and we made slaves before we abase ourselves and repent before the Almighty? His words are clear for all to read:

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19).

Have we become so inured, that the number has lost significance or is it that it simply defies comprehension? How can we, as a society, justify the wanton destruction of even one innocent life, never mind 60,000.000? Abortion, in many cases federally funded, has become the most common medical procedure performed in the United States.

Our Heavenly Father and Our Blessed Mother must be terribly saddened by our general complacency. What is staying God’s hand against us?

"Both Christianity and Judaism came into a blood-drenched pagan world and civilized it with their concept of an omnipotent God who demands righteous conduct.... The more Christian, in the true sense of the word, America becomes, the more morally sensitive it will be and the better for all of us -- Christians and non-Christians, atheists and agnostics alike." -- Don Feder, Contributing columnist, *Jewish World Review*.

Christianity was and is the bedrock of American society. Our founding Fathers recognized that a nation without ideals rooted in Christianity would not stand; this concept was true then and it is true today.

Yet, it has been estimated that as many as one-third the United States population have no religious affiliation or rarely darken the door of any place of worship. Most Americans claim to be Christians, yet in reality, many support euthanasia, stem cell research, and the primary scourges of our nation, pornography and abortion.

The America many of us grew up in is long gone. The moral order of our nation has collapsed. Today, half of all marriages end in divorce. 5.5 million couples live together without the benefit of marital commitment. Deviant sexuality is flaunted in gay-pride parades and pornography (an 18 billion dollar per year industry located primarily in the San Fernando Valley of California) is sold openly. Sixty-two percent of Internet sites are dedicated to pornography.

Although kidnapping and child abuse, are illegal, the law protects the selling of videotapes depicting such abuse which only exacerbates the problem. This means that if your child was abducted and abused in a pornographic movie, the movie could be purchased and viewed by your next-door neighbor and you would have no legal recourse.

The state and federal prison populations are overflowing and the criminal justice system is overloaded. Abortion, usury, divorce, drug abuse, child abuse, gang-warfare, drive-by shootings, murder, theft, white-collar crime, racial and religious hatred, euthanasia, etc., are all indications of the failure of our moral and political leadership and the “reformed” gospel that presupposes everyone will go to heaven, no matter what choices he or she makes, as long as a verbal declaration of allegiance to Christ has been made; the gospel that Christians can make individual evil choices yet retain a proper moral orientation.

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

-- Alexander Pope (1688-1744) *An Essay on Man in Four Epistles: Epistle 2, 5.*

The time will come for us to be answerable before God for the slaughter of the innocents, the embracing of homosexual acts as natural, and the prolific spread of pornography. The day may come when God will lift His protective mantle from this nation in a more dramatic fashion.

“Whereas you were as the stars of heaven for multitude, you shall be left few in number; because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut. 28:62).

We must set our sights higher and demand that our religious and political leaders speak out about the moral bankruptcy of our country. It has gone so far that certain pro-abortion politicians have even been allowed to pander for Catholic votes from church pulpits.

Saint Pope John Paul II, summed it up by saying: "A nation that kills its children is a nation without hope." Our nation is dying.

Let us pray that there is still time to turn things around. Speak out about these issues to your friends and neighbors. We've got to redouble our efforts; be vocal, send letters, start petitions, and provide financial aid to pro-life groups. Most importantly, pray and fast as certain demons can only be defeated by these methods (Mk. 9:29). Your efforts will assist the Holy Spirit in cleansing us of our self-inflicted and seemingly mortal wounds.

"It does not take a majority to prevail ... but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men." -- Founding Patriot Samuel Adams.

Our Jewish brethren have a saying: "When you save one life, you save the world." Let us endeavor to save America, one child at a time.

May God have mercy on us and our beloved country.
