25 November 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and peace in the Lord.

As we begin Advent and approach Christmas, these are not only two important occasions in our calendar year, but also two significant seasons in our liturgical year. Since Advent is the start of our liturgical year, it is also a good time to tweak our liturgical practices so as to ensure that our liturgies "are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity,' namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops."[i]

Posture

At our recent Study Days, the clergy of the diocese discussed 'posture' during Mass. Subsequent to our discussions and following the instructions of *The Roman Missal,*[ii] I have decided that our diocese will join with our neighbouring dioceses in BC by kneeling at the following times:

1. After the 'Holy, Holy' until the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the congregation kneels.
2. After the 'Our Father' and before the priest says the 'The Lamb of God', the congregation kneels.
3. After a congregant receives Holy Communion, he or she kneels or sits.

**A person can sit if they cannot kneel for reasons of ill health or a medical condition.

In addition, Pope Leo, in a Wednesday General Audience, reflecting on the liturgy stated that, "the gestures and words of the sacred liturgy are critical," and that the liturgy is all of our responsibility that "while respecting liturgical norms, shines with noble simplicity and thus manifests the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."

In light of Pope Leo's words, and following the liturgical discipline of the Church, I need to address the issues of applause and gestures during the Mass as well.

Applause at the end of Mass

In the past few years, I have noticed the practice of clapping at the end of Mass in different parishes. Since Mass is the celebration of the Eucharist, where we remember and celebrate the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, receive His Most Body and Blood, and are conscious that in "the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, the work of our redemption is accomplished,"[iii] it cannot be seen or even perceived as a performance by applause at the end of Mass.

This does not mean that we cannot show our appreciation for the music or other liturgical ministers at Mass. Instead, any show of appreciation should be directed by the priest toward those we want to thank. Therefore, in respect and in reverence for what has just been celebrated, please refrain from clapping at the end of Mass unless specifically directed to do so by the priest.

Gestures

All of us are familiar with the gestures that the priest uses at Mass when he celebrates the Eucharist. These are specific gestures with a specific meaning tied to the liturgy and are meant to be used by the priest when he celebrates the Mass. For example, when the priest holds his hands up, in a certain way, it indicates that he is praying for the people. This is called the "*orans* position." Confusion can occur when these same gestures are used by people at Mass. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, please refrain from imitating the gestures used by the priest at Mass.

Thank you for your help to bring unity and reverence to our sacred liturgies.

May your Advent prepare you and fill you with the hope of Christ's birth this Christmas.

Sincerely in Christ our Lord,



✠ Gregory J Bittman
Bishop of Nelson

[i] Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II, 4 December 1963, no. 33.
[ii] *The Roman Missal*, Canadian edition, 2011, no. 43.
[iii] Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II, 4 December 1963, no. 2.