

A question on genuflecting came up in our catechism class. Can you explain genuflecting; when and on how many knees?

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states: “A genuflection, made by bending the right knee to the ground, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as for the Holy Cross from the solemn adoration during the liturgical celebration on Good Friday until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.” (#274)

We genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, not before the Crucifix except on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and not before the altar. At Sacred Heart the tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament is behind the altar and below the crucifix. When we genuflect facing the front of the church, it is good to remember that we are doing so out of adoration for the Blessed Sacrament. If we go to another church, we should always look for the location of the tabernacle so that we can face in that direction as we genuflect before entering our pew.

The GIRM also sets out when the priest and other ministers should genuflect: “During Mass, three genuflections are made by the priest celebrant: namely, after the showing of the host, after the showing of the chalice, and before Communion. ... If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself.” (#274)

We genuflect whenever we pass in front of the tabernacle, unless we are in a procession. Coming up for communion is considered a form of procession and we do not need to genuflect. The GIRM states: “The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm. When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister.” (#160)

It has been tradition to genuflect on both knees when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the monstrance during Holy Hours. However, the document Eucharistiae Sacramentum, from the 2nd Vatican Council, states: “Genuflection on one knee is prescribed before the Blessed Sacrament whether it be reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration.” (#84)

Deacon Joe