



## DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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January 2, 2025

### **Instruction on the Communion Rite**

On January 18, 2003, our former Bishop Bernard Schmitt implemented some norms for the celebration of the Mass, among them one regarding the posture of the faithful after the Lamb of God. Using the permission given to diocesan bishops by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, # 43, he decreed that the posture after the Lamb of God is recited should be to stand.

As Bishop Schmitt pointed out, “the whole question of posture reminds us that the nature of the Mass is to be an act of the whole people gathered together as one. The actions and the posture of the faithful should be a visible sign of their unity in faith and spirit.” He further said that “there are times when all are called to do the same thing” – the communal dimension of liturgical expression – “and times when personal expressions are allowed.”

So, the posture during the Communion Rite, from the Our Father to the Communion Procession, reflecting the communal nature of our worship and our faith in the Lord’s True Presence in the Eucharist, should be the same for all: to stand. After receiving Holy Communion, the faithful may express their adoration and love for the Lord, whose Body and Blood they have received, in the manner they choose: to kneel or sit or to stand until all have received.

I have been asked by individuals to restore the practice of kneeling after the Lamb of God. This is the common pattern in the dioceses surrounding ours. I have discussed the matter with the Presbyteral Council (priests elected by their peers) and the Diocesan Pastoral Council (mostly members of the laity). The results were somewhat mixed; there was no clear consensus.

If you consider the Rite of Communion, the posture at every point from the Our Father through the Sign of Peace and the words, “Lord, I am not worthy,” to the moment when the faithful leave their pews to form the Communion Procession, is to stand. Indeed, the normative posture for receiving Holy Communion in the United States is to stand, although no one will be denied the Eucharist who chooses to kneel (*GIRM* # 160). Kneeling after the Lamb of God, while traditional, actually breaks the continuous posture of the Communion Rite, even if only briefly.

Taking into account Bishop Schmitt’s reasoning, the greater consistency of posture in the Communion Rite if all stand and the fact that West Virginia Catholics have for twenty-one years stood after the Lamb of God, I am leaving in place the decree issued by Bishop Schmitt. This is the posture our younger Catholics have always known. It also reflects in practice the measured liberty that the Latin Rite of the Church allows in some aspects of liturgical practice.

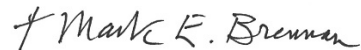
I ask you, the Catholic faithful and the priests and deacons serving in this Diocese, to receive with sincere obedience my affirmation of a good Bishop’s decision on this matter. I also

urge you to see that, in the larger picture, the posture after the Lamb of God does not approach in importance the greater matters of Christ's True Presence in the Eucharist, our eagerness to bring his Gospel to others and the charity and justice we owe our neighbor – all of which the Eucharist strengthens us do.

Jesus once warned against *straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel* (Matthew 23:24). We listen to the Lord when we keep in mind the distinction between things of greater importance and those of lesser. Or, as one of our sayings puts it: "Don't make a mountain out of a mole hill." We have much more important things to do than debate the merits of standing or kneeling after the Lamb of God. We are called to serve the Lamb who was sacrificed for us to take away our sins and rose from the dead to give us new life. That is enough to engage our thoughts and energy, our time and talents.

As a new year begins, I am praying for you. Kindly pray for me. God bless you.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark E. Brennan".

+Mark E. Brennan

Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston