

## ***The Relocation of our Tabernacle – Part 3, “Movements of Grace”***

Hello dear family of God at Corpus Christi, I pray this bulletin article finds you well! Please know of my daily and frequent prayers for you. This weekend will mark the third and final weekend in a preaching and bulletin article series on the relocation of the tabernacle at Corpus Christi. After this weekend, you will be able to find a tab on our website that has the three bulletin articles and audio versions of the homilies from this three-week series.

The first week, we looked at the biblical precedent and significance of God dwelling in the midst of a community in covenant with God. We saw that the word tabernacle means tent and goes all the way back to the Mosaic covenant and the “tent of meeting” or the “dwelling” that was the most wonderful immediate blessing of the Mosaic covenant, that God chose to dwell in the midst of the people. They were instructed to build a traveling sanctuary of sorts (they moved it as they traveled through the wilderness towards the promised land) and this traveling sanctuary was covered with tent cloth. We reflected the first week as well about the reality of *The Most Blessed Sacrament* of the New Covenant, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Catholic Church truly believes is **Corpus Christi**, the body and blood of Christ. We reflected on the gift of the Eucharist and the importance of the tabernacle, which houses the consecrated hosts which have truly become the Body of Christ. The tabernacle, and the sanctuary light next to it, are blessed reminders of his real presence in our midst.

The first week’s bulletin and homily also reflected on the various church teachings regarding the placement of tabernacles and some of the principles the Worship Commission used in their discernment of where the best location for the tabernacle at this season in the life of Corpus Christi would be. The key word from Church documents that was part of the discernment was **prominence**. The Church doesn’t say where a tabernacle exactly has to be placed in each Church, but does emphasize that it should be a place of prominence that helps to foster devotion to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The second homily and bulletin in this series was on just that, the doctrine of **The Real Presence**. This core doctrine of the Catholic faith proclaims and believes that after the consecration of the Eucharist in the mass, there is no more bread and wine, just the body and blood of Jesus...the real presence of Jesus.

This week, I’d like to zero in on **Movements of Grace**, and how the location of the tabernacle in the center of the Church effects some of our movements at Church. During the mass, we pray with our soul, mind, body and voice. Sometimes, the amount of movement among Catholics at mass has been jokingly referred to as “Catholic Calisthenics.” I confess I like that joke...but even more so **I love** what the movements we do at mass mean and how they help us to pray. Here’s a brief review of our movements and what they mean.

- **Standing:** From the earliest days of the Church, the posture of standing in the liturgy has been symbolic as the stance of those who have risen with Christ and seek what is above. It’s also a stance of attentiveness during processions (often accompanied by praising God) and times of prayer. We also stand during the reading of the Gospel as a sign of attentiveness and respect to Jesus, who we believe speaks to us in a special way through the proclamation of the Gospel.
- **Sitting:** This posture in the mass is conducive to listening and meditation.
- **Bowing:** This movement signifies reverence, respect and gratitude. It is common, and appropriate, when passing in front of the altar to bow – at least initially if one will be walking in front of the altar frequently. The altar is both a symbol of Christ and the very place where the sacrifice of Christ is made present again and again in Holy Communion. Bowing toward the altar is an act of reverence and gratitude to the Lord, effectively saying “thank you Lord, for what you continue to do on that altar for me.” Another time it is common to bow at mass is during the creed, during the remembrance of the incarnation of Jesus.

- **Kneeling:** This posture is a way of paying homage and reverence to God. We kneel as an act of love and adoration before the Lord during the liturgy of the Eucharist. At other times, kneeling is a posture of humility in prayer as well. One can certainly pray with a humble heart standing (and even jumping in prayer – as I like to do now and again), and yet there's something about kneeling that indicates a tender love of the sacred before us.
- **Genuflecting:** In this movement, we bring one knee to the floor as an act of recognition and adoration of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist present in the tabernacle. When entering the Church, as soon as we're able, we pay an act of love and homage to Jesus in the tabernacle by either genuflecting towards the tabernacle if we are able to, or bowing. It is a way of acknowledging God's presence in the Church in a most unique way. Indeed, God is present everywhere, we can say this because the scriptures tell us that God holds all things in being. (Colossians 1:17) And yet, when we walk into the house of the Lord, and see the tabernacle and sanctuary light, they are reminders of the living presence of Jesus Christ, body-blood-soul-divinity truly present in this place as a gift to the Church. Often when people genuflect, they make the sign of the cross.... another sign of love, like tracing the signature of your beloved on your heart. Usually, we genuflect if able (or bow) to the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist when entering and when leaving the Church.

The Scriptures show us that one of the ways that we worship God is with our bodies, the very way we move before God. In John chapter 4, in his encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus explains to the Samaritan woman (who would soon become one of the greatest evangelists the world had ever seen) some key truths about worship. We read that Jesus told her, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; indeed, the Father *seeks such people to worship him*. God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." (Jn 4:23-24) The Greek word for worship is **Proskyneo** (pronounced pros-ku-nay-o). An outline of the biblical definition and usage of this word is as follows:

- i. To kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence.
- ii. Among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence.
- iii. In the New Testament, kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make veneration, whether in order to express respect, adoration or to make supplication.

Previously in this article, I referred to the physical movements we make at mass as **movements of grace**, and the reason I like that phrase is because inherent/native to the idea of worship of God in the scriptures (as has been highlighted above), is that our **bodies are involved** in worshipping God. Far more than Catholic Calisthenics, the movements we make at the mass, intentionally done, lead to a fuller experience of worshipping the Lord. I recall being at masses in Trinidad, where **dancing** is a regular part of the worship experience at mass. Every song seemed at least 10 minutes long and you would be hard pressed to find a single person standing still. Even those sitting because of some condition would be clapping and swaying. Dancing has become so native to their worship experience that it happens freely and joyfully throughout the mass...and yes, I loved it! More though, I believe the Lord loved it...and loves **when we** give God our heartfelt worship: soul, mind, body and voice. As we offer a genuflect or a bow towards the tabernacle when entering/leaving the Church, as we participate in all the movements of grace with our bodies at mass, may we continue to be overwhelmed by the infinite love of God who made us, redeemed us, delights in us, and who *seeks such worshippers*. Love you, bless you, praying for you! - Fr. Patrick