



Episode 25: Bow in the Creed

SUMMARY

There are two types of bows in the Catholic Mass: a simple bow of the head and a profound bow or bow of the body. During the recitation of the Creed, the Church asks all the faithful to make a profound bow. It is meant to be a tremendous sign of the reverence we have for the mysteries we celebrate in Holy Mass.

As a foundational dogma, Catholics believe that the Eternal God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity humbles himself when he comes down from heaven to take on the earth of our human flesh. This is the mystery of the Incarnation. God grounds himself when he leaves heaven to walk among us on earth. This mystery is literally embodied during the Creed. Catholics put into their bodies what we believe.

On two occasions during the church year, instead of a bow, the rubrics call for a genuflection at the words that express the Incarnation. Those two solemnities are the Annunciation (March 25) and the Nativity of the Lord (December 25). They are the two great feasts which celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation. In a genuflection, we physically touch our bodies to the ground. The bow

during the Creed signifies the same mystery as the genuflection. When the knee touches the ground in a genuflection, or the body bends toward the earth in a profound bow, let us recall the Incarnation. Let us put into our bodies what we believe. Let us imitate in our human flesh the humility of God himself. In the end, may our prayer make us more like Christ.

The Roman Missal

The Symbol or Creed is sung or recited by the Priest together with the people with everyone standing. At the words *et incarnatus est*, etc. (*and by the Holy Spirit... and became man*) all make a profound bow; but on the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

General Instruction, n°. 137

A bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bow: a bow of the head and a bow of the body... A bow of the body, that is to say, a profound bow, is made ... in the Creed at the words *et incarnatus est*.

General Instruction, n°. 275

IN THE TRADITION

The LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

All the earth shall bow down before you, O God, and shall sing to you, shall sing to your name, O Most High!

Psalms 66:4

Jesus humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 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.

Philippians 2:8-11

“The truth is that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges. And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen for the service of God, it is the flesh which actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God.”

Tertullian

On the Resurrection of the Flesh, 8

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The flesh is the hinge of salvation. We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°. 1015

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God, on those who bow before your majesty, and by your mercy may they merit the rewards you promise to those who do penance.

Ash Wednesday
Prayer over the People

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what other ways do we manifest in our bodies what we believe as Catholics?
2. How does the celebration of the various sacraments involve the use of the human body?
3. How can we more fully imitate the humility of Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis, MO: Pio Decimo Press, 1956).
Prosper Gueranger, *On the Holy Mass*, (Farnborough, UK: St. Michael's Abbey Press, 2006).