

Sacred Gestures

In previous videos, we've looked at how sacred music and sacred silence reflect the holiness or sacrality of the sacred liturgy. In addition to sacred postures, the Church, in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, also highlights sacred gestures. There are many different gestures throughout the Mass that lend holiness and sacrality to the celebration of the liturgy, but I want to highlight two in particular that will take us, trust me, all the time we have, to look at where they come from in Scripture and Tradition. I'm referring here to the gestures of genuflection and bowing as expressions of reverence and adoration in the Holy Mass. Let's turn to the *General Instruction*, paragraphs 274 and 275. It actually has a fairly detailed description of both of these gestures and gives some direction for how they're to be carried out in the sacred liturgy. We'll begin first with genuflection. It says this:

A genuflection, made by bending the right knee to the ground, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament...¹

All right, so if you pause there for a second, it's going to go on to describe the fact that genuflections are made at particular points in the Mass, and they usually revolve around adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, present body, blood, soul, and divinity. For example, according to the rubrics of the Missal, it says that if the Tabernacle is in the sanctuary, the priest, deacons, and ministers, when they process in, will genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, and when they recess out after Mass, they will also genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle, but not during the celebration of the Mass itself. So you'll see the priest and deacon genuflect at the beginning; you'll see them genuflect at the end. You might note also that the servers, who might be carrying the candles—they're just going to bow instead of genuflecting for the obvious practical reason of not dropping whatever it is they may be carrying. But you have priests and deacons genuflecting at the beginning and at the end.

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no 274.

Also, during the Mass itself, the rubrics will say that the priests will make three genuflections during Holy Mass: first, at the elevation of the host; second, at the elevation of the chalice; and then third, before the communion of the priest. So each one of these three genuflections, what are they doing? They are manifesting visibly adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, recognizing that Christ is fully present, body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Holy Eucharist. And as I mentioned in another video, kneeling and prostration—*proskynesis* in Greek—are ancient signs of worship of a divinity. Therefore, it's fitting that the genuflection of the knee would be something offered in adoration to God because the Eucharist is God made present, body, blood, soul, and divinity—the God-man. So, we're going to worship Christ in the Tabernacle as we approach it, but also on the altar when the bread and the wine are transubstantiated into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Okay, so much for the priest and the deacon. What about everyone else? What about the people? Well, if you look here in paragraph 274, the *General Instruction* says this:

Otherwise all who pass before the Most Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are moving in procession. Ministers carrying the processional cross or candles bow their heads instead of genuflecting.²

So pause here for a second. You can think about it—there are several processions that take place during the Mass. So if you're an altar server or you're in the entrance procession, you're not going to genuflect to the Tabernacle. If you are bringing up the gifts for the procession of the Offertory, you're not going to genuflect before the Tabernacle. Or if you're in the procession to receive Holy Communion, you're not going to genuflect before the Tabernacle. But outside of that, otherwise, according to the *General Instruction*, all who pass before the Most Blessed Sacrament genuflect. That's the ordinary expression of adoration to Christ present in the Holy Eucharist.

Okay, so much for genuflections. What about the sacred posture of bowing? This is a posture that I think there's actually a lot of confusion and ignorance about with regard to the current *Roman Missal*. So let's see what it actually has to say. First, the meaning of the bow. Paragraph 275 states:

² *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no 274.

A bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bow: [1] a bow of the head

Sometimes called a simple bow.

and [2] a bow of the body.

Sometimes called a profound bow. So first:

A bow of the head is made when the three Divine Persons are named together and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated.³

Pause here for a second. This norm in the *General Instruction*, I think, is one of the traditions of the Church that is not very widely known or at least not very widely practiced, in my experience. But it is part of the current Roman Missal, and it is part of the tradition of the Roman Church to show reverence through a bow of the head—not from the waist, not a solemn bow, but a bow of the head—at the name of the Most Holy Trinity when the three persons are named in the context of liturgy, whenever the name of Jesus is spoken, the holy name of Jesus, or even the Virgin Mary, and the name of the saint of that particular feast day. So if Mass is being celebrated on the feast of that saint. When that saint is named, for example, like in the Eucharistic Prayer, it is the norm of the Church for the head to be bowed, a bow of the head, out of reverence and respect for the person that is being named, the saint in whose honor the Mass is being offered.

You may have noticed, I've certainly noticed, more and more priests and ministers, deacons, doing this because I think it seems that this norm is becoming more

³ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no 275.

widely known in our day. But this is a tradition of the Church, and it's part of the current Roman Missal. What about a profound bow or a bow of the body? This one will be made in particular by the priest to the altar during certain prayers. So, for example, when the priest prays his secret prayers like "Cleanse my heart," or "With a humble spirit," or in the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, when the priest says, "In humble prayer we ask you, Almighty God," or even at the consecration, the priest is going to bow from the body either slightly, like at the consecration, or profoundly to the altar. The deacon will make a profound bow from the waist when he receives the blessing before he goes to proclaim the Gospel. You might notice as the priest would give the deacon a blessing before he proclaims the Gospel, and the deacon is supposed to make a profound bow. And then finally, the people make a profound bow from the waist during the Creed.

So whenever we're professing our faith in the Creed, if you look at the actual rubrics in the Missal for the Creed, you'll notice that when we get to the part of the Creed that is professing faith in the Incarnation, and we say, "And by the Holy Spirit became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man," from the beginning of that expression to "and became man," we are to make a profound bow during the profession of the Creed. Again, this is something that is in the Roman Missal but not as widely practiced as one might expect, given the fact that it's part of the current norms.

And then finally, too, the Church will also commend, and we've mentioned this elsewhere, that in the reception of Holy Communion before the consecrated host or before receiving the chalice if Communion is given under both kinds, the faithful are to bow to the Blessed Sacrament. Now, notice this: the bow, according to the Missal, is to the Blessed Sacrament, not to the back of the person in front of you. It is a sign of adoration reserved for the Eucharist alone, and it's supposed to be given to both kinds if it's under one kind or both, both the host and the chalice, according to the Missal, the faithful are to bow before receiving, unless they receive on the knees, and then the kneeling itself is the sign of adoration, the sign of veneration of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. And then one final example of a profound bow is at the end of a Solemn Mass. Sometimes you'll notice that the deacon will get up and say, "Bow down for the blessing," right? So that too is a profound bow

to receive the blessing, the final blessing of the priest or bishop at the end of Holy Mass.

Okay, so that's the instructions and norms of the Roman Missal. Now the question is, where does all this genuflection and bowing come from in Scripture and Tradition? What's the biblical root of bowing and genuflecting, and also, what's the mystical meaning of these sacred gestures? Let's begin with the Old Testament as always. If we go back to the book of Exodus 34, one of the first examples we see of bowing the head is Moses when God appears to him on Mount Sinai in the famous theophany atop Mount Sinai. So the book of Exodus says this:

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...." ⁸ And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped.⁴ (Exodus 34:5-8)

Now, notice this—this is really crucial—when it says, "The Lord, the Lord," we sometimes think of "the Lord" as the title for God, but it's not a title; it's a name, right? So the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is more of a title, but the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, "YHWH," the sacred name translated as "LORD" (all caps) in your English Bibles, that's actually a proper name. That's not a common noun. There are many different gods, but there's only one LORD, and the LORD is the God of Israel. So here, when the LORD reveals His name to Moses, what does Moses do? He bows his head and then he falls down and worships in the presence of the LORD, at the name of the LORD.

Also, fast forward to the time of the Temple. In the book of Sirach, we're actually going to see Israelites bowing as part of liturgical worship in the Second Temple. There's a beautiful description of worship in Sirach 50. If you want to look at what

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

the Temple might have looked like at the time of Christ, go read Sirach 50. It's an amazingly beautiful description of the liturgy of the Second Temple. And here is how it describes not only the posture of a priestly figure like Moses but the posture of the people during the liturgy. It says this:

And the people besought the Lord Most High in prayer before him who is merciful, till the order of worship of the Lord was ended; so they completed his service. Then Simon [the High Priest] came down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to glory in his name; and they bowed down in worship (Greek proskynēsei) a second time, to receive the blessing from the Most High. (Sirach 50:19-21)

So, notice here, the people not only bow down in worship of God, but they bow down to receive the blessing, to receive the high priestly blessing of Simon the High Priest in the Second Temple. All right, so that's just two examples of bowing in the Old Testament. What about in the New Testament? If we look here, we're going to actually see two descriptions of kneeling, which although in your English Bible you won't be able to see it, in the Latin translation of the Greek text known as the Latin Vulgate, we have a copy right here if you want to take a look—dig into the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. If you look at the Latin Vulgate translation of Matthew 27, as well as Philippians 2, in both cases, the expression for kneeling is going to be translated as “genuflect.” So Matthew 27:28 says:

And [the soldiers] stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him (Greek gonypetēsantes; Latin genu flexo) they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:28-29)

Now, pause there for a second. Notice—this is important—they are mocking Him, but in mocking Him, they are actually giving Him the adoration that is His due. Because if He were a king, especially if He were Caesar—remember that in the Roman context, several of the Caesars declared themselves to be “Lord,” to be “God,” to be divine. And one of the things that the Caesars who made divine

claims would require was *proskynesis*, or kneeling in worship, as a kind of expression of adoration. So the soldiers, obviously in this context, do not believe that Jesus is the King of the Jews, certainly don't believe that He's divine or the divine Son of God. But they're going to mock Him with the sacred gesture that would be reserved for a king and would be reserved for a Son of God, but obviously in jest here, they're doing it to taunt Him, right? The irony, though, is that they give Him, in doing so, the kind of royal and divine adoration that He is rightly due because He is, in fact, not only King of Israel but the divine Son of God.

So if we talk about sacred postures, the posture of genuflection, of bending the knee, was present in the mystery of the crucifixion. It was present at Calvary. So you can already see why it would be fitting that genuflection, bending the knee, kneeling, would be a sacred posture in the sacred liturgy at which Calvary and the sacrifice of Christ is re-presented and made present to us now. But that's not the only time genuflection is described in the Latin translation of the Bible. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, which we've mentioned before when we were talking about the posture of kneeling, on the last day, Paul talks about everyone bending the knee. But let's look at the language in the Latin Vulgate. St. Paul states:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* (Greek *pan gonu kampsē*; Latin *omne genu flectat*), *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 2:9-11)

Gonu (Gk) is the name for the letter word for knee, right? Every knee is going to bow, but in Latin, it is *omne genu flectat*. In other words, everyone will genuflect. When? Note this: at the name—when the name is pronounced, when the holy name of Jesus is said, everyone, whether they are believers or unbelievers, whether they are the saved or the damned, whether they are in heaven or on the earth or under the earth, every knee is going to bow to Jesus Christ the Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So this sacred gesture of kneeling, genuflection, is not only tied to Calvary, it's tied to the Last Judgment. It's tied to the final judgment, the final

coming of Christ in glory in Philippians 2. So if everybody's going to genuflect on the last day, why don't we practice doing it now, right? So there's a kind of anticipation of the final glorification of Christ and final consummation and the second coming happening now with the genuflection.

Okay, so that's the scriptural roots of bowing and genuflecting. What about tradition? Well, if we look at the tradition of the Church, especially the Roman Church, when it comes to liturgy, bowing and kneeling and genuflecting are very widespread, and they develop over time in certain ways. So let's look at how that happens. For example, in the late 4th, early 5th century, according to the *Book of the Pontiffs*, known as the *Pontificalis*, Pope Anastasius not only decreed that the Holy Gospels, when they were read, that people were to stand, but he also said that the priests should bow their heads when the Gospel is read. Obviously, this is again a sign of veneration and reverence for the Gospel reading.

With regard to genuflection, the most ancient reference that I could find to the practice of the priest genuflecting during the Eucharistic Prayer comes not from the Western tradition, but from the Eastern tradition. There was an ancient church writer named Narsai of Nisibis. Nisibis is in East Syria, so Narsai was an East Syrian Christian writer. And listen to what he says. This is a very interesting description of the Syrian liturgy and the way the priests will kneel and bow in the midst of the Eucharistic prayer. He says this:

Three bows does the priest make [during the Eucharistic prayer] before God; and by them him openly adores the divine majesty... Three times he genuflects before the descent [of the Spirit]; yet he does not genuflect again because the mystery of the resurrection has been accomplished. He accomplishes the mystery of the resurrection by completing the mysteries; and he does not again symbolize the mystery of the Lord's death by a genuflection. The 318 bishops [of the Council of Nicaea] enjoined that on all Sundays and feasts there should be no kneeling. No one therefore is allowed to bend the knee at the mysteries, only *the priest who by genuflecting signifies a mystery*.⁵

⁵ Narsai of Nisibis, Homily 17. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 3:296.

Okay, now there's a lot we can talk about with this passage. For our purposes here, I just want to make two key points. First, Narsai is highlighting that the priest will bow to the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer, and that this is a sign of adoration and reverence. Second, he also points out that the priest will genuflect several times in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer, and this he sees as a sign of the mystery. And what mystery in particular is it? It's the mystery of the Passion. It's the mystery of the death of Christ. It's the mystery of the Cross. For Narsai, once the priest has actually consecrated the elements and they have been changed into the body and blood of Christ, he doesn't genuflect again because it's not just the Passion that has been accomplished, but also the Resurrection. And he ties it back here to something we saw in another video on how kneeling and the joy of the Resurrection do not go together, so that the Council of Nicaea forbade the faithful to kneel on Sundays and feast days, but not the priest. The priest was actually able to kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer because he was effecting the sign of the mystery of Christ's Passion and death. Now, obviously, this is going to be one of those disciplines that changes over time. It's no longer practiced in the Roman rite today, but it's an interesting window into the mystical significance of kneeling as being tied not only to penitence or to humility, but to the mystery of the Passion itself.

If we fast forward to the 6th century, and now we go back to the Latin west, away from the East, back to the West, a very important saint in the Roman liturgy is St. Caesarius of Arles. He lived in modern-day France. And St. Caesarius, in the 6th century, actually not only commands the faithful to bow but actually gives a little bit of an explanation for the meaning of bowing in the liturgy. Listen. He says:

Beloved, I petition and with paternal affection exhort that at the beginning of each prayer you should immediately bend down or bow the head, except those whom infirmity perhaps restrains from kneeling...

So pause here. Notice that in the early Church, as today, there's always been exceptions made to certain postures if the elderly or the frail or disabled or those who might be sick are unable to do so. These are norms, but they're not absolute laws that apply to every person without exception. He continues:

My brothers and sisters, I ask that as often as you pray at the altar you bow your heads. Doing so, you will avoid what was written about the Pharisee who, standing erect, praised his own merits... This also, my brothers and sisters, I both exhort and request: each time you are told to bow down for the blessing, you should not find it difficult to incline your heads, for you are not bowing to another human being but to God.⁶

All right, so notice here—this is really interesting—you see the emphasis on the bowing of the head, right? So that's one of the forms we see in the current Roman Missal. Secondly, we see exceptions that are made for people who can't do it. Third, we see that in particular, the bowing to the altar is an ancient practice going back at least to the 6th century AD. And fourth, notice the mysticism, the kind of biblical mysticism of the rite. St. Caesarius says, "If you bow, you will avoid being like the Pharisee in the temple." And this is, of course, alluding to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. If you recall, the tax collector was humbled, bowed, he would not even look up to heaven, but he looked down and beat his breast, saying, "Be merciful to me, a sinner." Whereas the Pharisee stood erect. So here, standing erect and refusing to bow for St. Caesarius is a sign of pride, whereas bowing is a sign of humility. So the sacred gesture of bowing cultivates humility in us because when we bow, we're not bowing before humans, as he says, we're bowing before God.

Sure enough, that's going to be why bowing continues to be practiced in the Roman liturgy in particular. We've looked at this already, but I'll just mention it again. In the first description of an early medieval papal Mass that we have from *Ordo Romanus I*, the Pope bows to the altar at the entrance, and he also bows before the altar at the time of the offertory, the offerings being offered to God. So, bowing to the altar is just part of the Latin tradition, part of the Roman tradition. It is an ancient and medieval practice that has continued in the Church up to today.

What about bowing during the Creed? I've mentioned this in another video, but I would highlight it one more time: one of the saints who popularized bowing during the Creed was St. Louis IX. In a biography of St. Louis IX, it actually tells us that in the High Middle Ages, when Louis was king, he noticed a religious community

⁶ Caesarius, *Sermon 76*. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:106-107.

that would bow at the mention of the Incarnation in the midst of the Creed. Louis himself was so impressed by that, and he liked this practice so much, that he:

*he had it implemented and maintained; not only in his own chapel for his own use, but also in many other churches, so that at that line the choir would not only bow but devoutly genuflect.*⁷

You actually still see this in the current Roman Missal to this day. Although the faithful, on an ordinary Sunday or a feast day when we're saying the Creed, we are going to bow at the reference to the Incarnation, when it comes to more holy days, especially solemn days dedicated to the mystery of the Incarnation, like the Feast of the Nativity or the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25th, the faithful are instructed not just to bow but to genuflect as an even more powerful and solemn sign of reverence in the face of the Incarnation.

Okay, so that's some little windows into the tradition of bowing and genuflection in the liturgy. What about the mystagogy? What's happening invisibly when we bow or when we genuflect in the liturgy? Well, here I'd like to end with three key quotes from the writings of various Fathers and ecclesiastical writers. Let's begin with St. Augustine. This is a really crucial text—one of the earliest witnesses that we have to bowing in adoration before receiving Holy Communion, in other words, bowing to the Blessed Sacrament, is from St. Augustine. Before I read this passage from St. Augustine, I just want to emphasize this is one of the most important early witnesses to a sign of adoration or reverence or worship before receiving Holy Communion. But when people quote it, they often take it out of context. You'll see it quoted sometimes that Augustine says, "No one eats the Eucharist without first adoring it, and we would sin if we did not adore it," right? And that's fine, but in isolation, that can be taken to mean just, "Oh, well, we have to adore, we have to

⁷ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Life of Louis, King of the Franks*, 36. In M. Cecelia Gaposchkin and Sean L Field, eds., *The Sanctity of Saint Louis by Geoffrey of Beaulieu and William of Chartres* (trans. Larry F. Field; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), 113. Cf. King, *The Liturgy of the Roman Church*, 267: "The custom of kneeling at the *Incarnatus* in the Creed... was introduced at the behest of St. Louis IX, king of France (1215-70)." Also Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred*, 44: "In late medieval editions of the Sarum Missal, the rubrics for the Creed direct the choir to bow toward the altar during the words '*and was made incarnate by the Holy Spirit...*'"

worship it." It doesn't necessarily imply some gesture, some sacred gesture of adoration or veneration. But if you look at the whole context in which the statement occurs, it's actually much more than that—there's a theology of the Real Presence that is really powerful. So let's just look at the whole context, and I'll try to explain it to you. This is what Augustine says:

*I am afraid to hold back from adoring the footstool of my Lord when the psalm tells me, "Worship (Greek *proskyneite*; Latin *adore*) his footstool" [Psa 98:5 Vulg.]; and when I ask what that is, scripture informs me, "The earth is my footstool." [Isa 66:1] ...[Christ] walked here below in that flesh, and even gave us that same flesh to eat for our salvation. But since no one eats without first worshipping it (Latin *nisi prius adoraverit*), we can plainly see how the Lord's footstool is rightly worshipped. Not only do we commit not sin in worshipping it; we should sin if we did not.⁸*

Now, let me break that down for you and just kind of open up what he's saying here. First, notice what Augustine is doing: he's quoting one of the Psalms which says, "Worship His footstool" (Psalm 98). Now, in Greek, the word worship there, *proskyneite*, means to bow down, like prostrate or kneel before a footstool. The Latin is *adore*, to adore—so it's adoration, the kind of worship given to God alone. But the Psalm says, "Worship His footstool," which is puzzling because if you look elsewhere in Scripture, what is the footstool of God. According to Isaiah 66:1? Well, it's the earth—"The earth is His footstool." So, am I supposed to worship the earth? Well, obviously not in the sense of nature worship, but you are supposed to bow down to the earth in worshipping God.

But Augustine plays on the language here, and he pulls out something amazing because he says, "If the Psalms command you to worship the footstool of God, and the footstool is the earth, well, how does that translate into worship with the Eucharist?" It's real simple—it's because when God became man and took on human flesh, He was the new Adam. And what was the first Adam made from? He

⁸ Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 98.9. In Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 73-98 (trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B.; The Works of Saint Augustine III/18; Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2002), 474-75. Augustine appears to assume some gesture of adoration, presumably *bowing down* or *prostration* on the ground, given the overarching context of "worshipping" the "earth."

was made from the earth; he was made from the dust. And so the new Adam, Christ, has taken on the earth in His flesh; He's become the new Adam and united that flesh to divinity so that we can now worship Him not only in His earthly flesh of His human body as He lived and walked among us but in the Eucharistic flesh of Christ.

So what he's saying is, because no one eats the Eucharist without first adoring it—that's the same word as in the Psalm—we can plainly see that we fulfill the Lord's command to worship His footstool, namely the earth, when we worship the Eucharistic flesh of Christ, the new Adam. So, it's a brilliant theology here of the Eucharistic Presence. And what it shows us is that if you look at the verse in context, just as the Psalm commands the Israelites to bow down to the earth in worshipping God, so too we now, implicitly, Augustine says, we adore by bowing down before the Eucharist. So Augustine, by quoting the Psalm, implies a physical act, a sacred gesture of adoration before receiving the Eucharist. And not only does he imply that, he implies that if we don't adore the Lord with that gesture of reverence, we actually sin in omitting it.

Okay, what about the symbolism of genuflecting? Well, we've seen this before, but I just want to emphasize it again. William Durand, in the 13th century, said that when it comes to the Creed, the reason we genuflect when we say, "And became man," is because:

we adore Christ for becoming man for us and being crucified for us.⁹

In other words, we genuflect at the mystery of the Incarnation because the primary reason Christ became man was so that He would die for the sins of the world, right? So, it's both in honor of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion that we kneel at that moment in the Creed.

And then finally, last but certainly not least, what about bowing at the name of Jesus? This is one that might seem a little odd to us, like, "Wow, are we going to

⁹ William Durand, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, IV.25.10. in Durand, *Rationale IV*, 220. Cf. Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred*, 44: "In late medieval editions of the Sarum Missal, the rubrics for the Creed direct the choir to bow toward the altar during the words 'and was made incarnate by the Holy Spirit...'"

bow our heads every time the name of Jesus is said during the liturgy?" And the answer is, yes. Why? Well, because the name of Jesus is not like any other name. The name of Jesus is holy, and if Moses bowed before the name of the Lord in the Old Testament, how much more should we bow before the name of the Lord who has become man in Christ in the New Testament and in the Incarnation? Indeed, if you turn to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2666, there's a beautiful paragraph on why Jesus's name is unique. It's uniquely holy, and this is something I think especially those of us in the West often forget—the holiness of the name of Jesus. But there's a very strong tradition of the Holy Name of Jesus in the Eastern Church. Listen to what the Catechism teaches here about the name of Jesus:

The one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: JESUS. The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity The Word of God hands it over to us and we can invoke it: "Jesus," "YHWH saves." *The name "Jesus" contains all: God and man and the whole economy of creation and salvation. To pray "Jesus" is to invoke him and to call him within us. His name is the only one that contains the presence it signifies.* (CCC 2666)

Now, man, there's so much being said here. Let me just try to boil it down. In Hebrew and Aramaic, the name Jesus—either *Yehoshua* in Hebrew or *Yeshua* in Aramaic—is the name Joshua, and it's made up of two key words, two roots. *Yeho* is a shorter form of the name of God, the name of the Lord, YHWH, right, the Tetragrammaton, the holy name. And then *Yeshua* is from *yasha*, which means "to save." So literally, the name of God is built into Jesus's name in its Hebrew form, and the purpose He comes into the world for, salvation, is also built into the name. So the name Jesus means "the Lord saves." So it contains both His identity—the Lord—and His mission: to bring salvation, to save. And because it contains the name of the Lord, it itself is now eminently and preeminently holy. It's a holy name because it actually contains the presence it signifies, according to the teaching of the Catechism.

And just in personal experience, if you've ever noticed this, if you ever bring the name of Jesus into a conversation, there's power in that name. You can talk about God all day long in a secular context, and people will have their opinions about

God. But you bring up Jesus, and it changes the whole conversation. There's a power in the name—that's a real power—because it actually contains the presence it signifies and is a sacred name. And so what the Church is doing by instructing us in the liturgy to bow every time the name of Jesus is spoken, is to recognize and to reverence the holiness of the name above all names, as St. Paul says in Philippians 2. If at the name of Jesus on the last day every knee will bow, then it's fitting that at the name of Jesus in the sacred liturgy, in our own day, every head shall bow in honor of that blessed name.

This was really driven home to me last year when one of my books, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, was translated into Ukrainian. So I have here a copy of *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary* in Ukrainian, and I'm very proud that this book was translated into Ukrainian, especially with everything that's going on in Ukraine these days, that my Catholic brothers and sisters there would still see that this book was important enough to translate it. But one of the things they asked me—they had to get my permission throughout the book to change Jesus and Mary's name to "Holy Jesus" or "Holy Mary," to put an epithet of holiness before each of the names. Because in Ukrainian Catholic tradition, it's not seen as appropriate or fitting to just say "Jesus" or just say "Mary" without saying an epithet of holiness, like we will say in the West "the Blessed Virgin Mary," right? And they had to ask my permission. Of course, I gave it to them, and at the same time as I was giving it, I thought, man, I wish we had greater reverence for the holy names of Jesus and Mary in the West, just in our contemporary parlance.

But you know what? We do have it in the norms of the Roman Missal. So the Roman Missal says not only do we bow the head at the name of Jesus but also at the names of the three persons of the Holy Trinity when they're named together, and at the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and whatever saint might be named for that feast day. So this custom, this tradition of bowing at the holy names of Jesus, the Holy Trinity, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and some certain of the saints—this is one of the ways that we distinguish what we're doing in the liturgy from just everyday life, with what are known as sacred gestures: the sacred gesture of bowing, which connotes both respect and veneration, and the sacred gesture of genuflection, which connotes not only reverence but adoration and worship.