

Reverence to God at Holy Mass

(Excerpts of His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Louisville, Kentucky, July 18, 2003)

To Jesus Christ, God and Man, in the sacrifice and sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, are due honor, reverence, adoration, thanksgiving, and love. It is right that we should focus our reflection on reverence due to the Holy Eucharist. Many people have sadly noticed that in our churches there is a worrying decline in reverence. The matter is of great importance because of the central place of the Eucharistic Ministry in Catholic faith and life. What is reverence?

Reverence is that virtue which inclines a person to show honor and respect primarily to God, but also to one's parents, to civil authorities and to religious leaders. Here we are concerned with reverence to God, in the person of Jesus Christ in the august sacrifice and sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

God is holy. He is all holy. "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth, His glory fills the whole earth", sing the seraphim angels before God's throne (Is 6:3). He is holiness itself. He is transcendent. He dwells in light inaccessible (cf. I Tim 6:16). Cardinal Newman emphasizes the importance of this reverential stance before God: "Are these feelings of fear and awe, Christian feelings or not? I say this, then, which I think no one can reasonably dispute. In proportion as we believe that He is present, we shall have them; and not to have them, is not to realize, not to believe that He is present"

Therefore in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist "the Body and Blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained" (Council of Trent, DS 1651; also CCC 1374). This rock foundation that is our faith explains why the Church adores Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. This is adoration, the cult of latria, the supreme act of worship due to God alone, "In the Liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the Real Presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord" (CCC, 1378).

Some Catholics are lacking in due reverence for the Holy Eucharist because their Eucharistic faith is poor and full of defects and doubts. Catechesis of the Holy Eucharist should be systematically imparted. It is also important that the congregation show reverence. This can manifest itself in their coming early to Mass so that they are recollected when it begins, in their singing, standing or sitting together when so indicated and in their maintaining moments of silent prayer. It is sad to see people coming late, reading newspapers during Mass and conversing freely inside the church as soon as the last blessing is given, as if they were leaving a sports stadium or theater.

Many congregations do not observe moments of silence, like after the readings, the homily or holy Communion. Sometimes it is the priest who is in a hurry. At other times it is the choir which wants to fill up every quiet moment with singing. And in some cases it is the people in the pew who find moments of silence difficult to observe, because they have not learned to engage in personal interior prayer. We come to Mass primarily to adore God, to thank Him, to ask pardon for our sins and to make requests for our needs. We are not the center. God is!

<http://www.adoremus.org/1203Arinze.html#sthash.cu1CjwXu.dpuf>