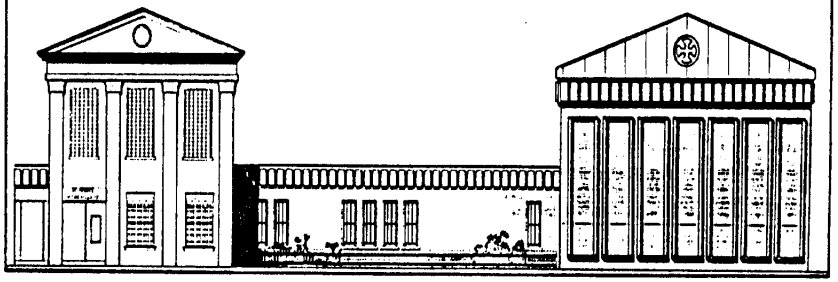
SAINT JOHN'S IN THE VILLAGE

NEW YORK CITY

The Body Language of Worship



Visitors to an Episcopal Church always notice the different things that Church members do. Some make the sign of the cross, others do not. Some bow at various places during the liturgy, others do not. Some drop to one knee when passing the altar, others bow, others do nothing. As with most matters concerning ceremonial, there are no rules in the Church about these sorts of things, there are customs and traditions, some of which are clear, others of which are buried deeply in allegory and tradition, but all of which may be helpful for a newcomer to learn.

The guiding principle behind all ritual gestures and movements is the idea of the incarnation. The incarnation is about God having taken a human body in Jesus of Nazareth and lived a human life among us in that body. This tells us that what we do with *our* bodies is important.

Further, we Episcopalians believe that worship should involve the whole human person, not just the mind. Therefore, while we do listen and think about our faith, we also worship using our sense of smell, which perceives the fragrance of the incense and the odor of candle wax; and our sense of taste, which perceives the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist. Our need to touch is met by our greeting each other at the Peace. The whole person is involved in worship.

There are three major gestures which are common in our tradition, and this tract will say a little about each of the three: crosses, bowing, and genuflection.

The Sign of the Cross

The cross is made by touching, with the right hand, first the fore-head, then the abdomen, then the left shoulder, and finally the right shoulder. (Persons from the Orthodox tradition reverse these last two points.) The sign of the cross recalls the sign made upon us at our baptism, when we were chrismated (anointed with sacred oil) with the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross is the sign of Christ and our commitment to him. Many make the sign of the cross as they are sprinkled with baptismal water in the rite called the asperges, which frequently opens the celebration of the Eucharist. This sprinkling recalls our baptism, when we were first signed with the cross, so that sign is especially appropriate here.

We make the sign of the cross whenever the sacred name of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is invoked, either in acclamation or blessing or absolution. Thus, we make the sign at the beginning of the liturgy when we proclaim, “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. Somewhat by extension, many make the sign at the other acclamations which occur at the beginning of the liturgy, “Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins,” and Alleluia. Christ is Risen.” At the end of the hymn “Glory to God in the highest,” we make the sign of the cross because the hymn concludes with praise to the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We make the sign of the cross at the end of the Creed because any recitation of the Creed is a remembrance of our Baptism, in we were sealed for “... the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” We make the sign of the cross at the absolution following the confession of sins, because the absolution is made in the name of the Trinity and because it is the cross of Christ which opens the way for our forgiveness. We make the sign of the cross before and after receiving communion because, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, we recognize Christ crucified, risen, and present with us. Finally, we make the sign of the cross at the blessing at the very end of the liturgy because the blessing is made in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Some make the sign of the cross at the end of the hymn called the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy Lord"), right before the prayer of consecration. The origin of this cross is somewhat more obscure than the others, but the Sanctus does conclude with praise to the one who comes in the name of the Lord, and that is Jesus.

A peculiar form of the cross is made before the gospel is read. A small cross is made with the right thumb upon the forehead, the lips, and the bosom. This gesture is a form of prayer for Christ's presence in one's thoughts, upon one's lips, and in one's heart.

Bowing

Many Episcopalians bow at the name of Jesus wherever it appears in the liturgy or in hymnody. This is a little tribute to that line written by St. Paul in the letter to the Philippians in which he says that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (2:10). While actually bending the knee at these points would be awkward (to say nothing of strenuous), a bow of the head gives passing acknowledgment to Paul's exhortation about the sacred name of Jesus.

Many Episcopalians bow when the procession cross passes them. This bow is, again, a recognition of the centrality of the cross in our theology and a way of honoring and praising God for the mystery of our redemption achieved upon the cross.

In the midst of the Creed, we bow at what is called the *incarnatus*, that line in the Creed which speaks of Jesus who "for us and for our salvation ... came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." This bow is a gesture of reverence for the sacred mystery of the incarnation. Some also bow near the end when the Creed proclaims the Spirit as "worshiped and glorified." Bowing is a gesture of worship and adoration.

Most of us bow at the beginning of the Sanctus. This bow is made as a recognition of the divine name, "Lord, God of power and might," and we bow here for the same reason that we bow at the name of Jesus.

Genuflections

A genuflection is a momentary dropping to the right knee. It is a sign of adoration or respect. Some people genuflect whenever they pass the reserved sacrament which is kept in the Church for communion of the sick and as a sign of God's presence with his people. You can tell when the reserved sacrament is present; there is always a white candle burning on or near the altar or other place where the sacrament is kept. In St. John's Church, the sacrament is kept in what is called a "hanging pyx" over the altar, and so there is a white candle burning near the credence table just to the south (or right) side of the altar. Genuflections before entering or leaving a pew are made for this reason. In our parish custom, a deep bow before the reserved sacrament is also appropriate.

Some people genuflect in the middle of the Nicene Creed, at the point called the *incarnatus*, described above in the section devoted to bowing.

A few people genuflect whenever the Bishop passes in procession, although this custom is rapidly falling out of use. The reason for making such a reverence is not veneration of a person, but respect for the apostolic office which connects us to Jesus and the early Church. It also recognizes the role of the Bishop as a symbol of the unity of the Church.

A more exotic custom is the double genuflection, which is actually a brief kneeling upon both knees. This is rather rarely seen, but for the record is, in the Western Church, the appropriate reverence when the sacrament is exposed. The sacrament is exposed, for example, on Maundy Thursday when it is placed in the aumbry at the Altar of Repose.

The following pages contain the text of the Eucharist marked with symbols. This summarizes what has been said in this tract and gives the reader a visual presentation of the common crosses and bowings made by an Episcopalian.

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Here is a guideline to common practice and how the symbols are used

✚	The sign of the cross is made
(**Bow**)	A simple bow of the head is made
(Deep Bow)	A deep bow is one where the congregation could touch

The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

The Word of God

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

	✚ Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People	And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.

In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Celebrant	✚ Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People	The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In Lent and on other penitential occasions

Celebrant	✚ Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.
People	His mercy endures for ever.

The Celebrant may say

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

When appointed, the following hymn or some other song of praise is sung or said, all standing:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

(Bow) Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer. ***(Bow)***

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen. ✚

On other occasions the following is used

Lord, have mercy.		Kyrie eleison.
Christ, have mercy.	*or*	*Christe eleison.*
Lord, have mercy.		Kyrie eleison.

Or this

Holy God.
Holy and Mighty.
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy upon us.

The Collect of the Day

The Celebrant says to the people

The Lord be with you.
People *And also with you.*
Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Celebrant says the Collect.

People Amen

The Lessons

The people sit. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read, the Reader first saying

A Reading (Lesson) from _____.

A citation giving chapter and verse may be added.

After each Reading, the Reader may say

The Word of the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

or the Reader may say Here ends the Reading (Epistle).

Silence may follow.

A Psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each Reading.

Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

✚ ✚ ✚ *(forehead, lips, breast)*
The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to _____.
People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.
People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

On Sundays, and other Major Feasts there follows, all standing

The Nicene Creed

The Deacon or Celebrant says

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, ***(Bow)***
the on ly Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made..
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
(Deep Bow) by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
(Bow)With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
✚ and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Prayer is offered with intercession for

The Universal Church, its members, and its mission
The Nation and all in authority
The welfare of the world
The concerns of the local community
Those who suffer and those in any trouble
The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

See the forms beginning of page 383.

If there is no celebration of the Communion, or if a priest is not available, the service is concluded as directed on page 406.

Confession of Sin

A Confession of Sin is said here if it has not been said earlier. On occasion, the Confession may be omitted.

One of the sentences from the Penitential Order on page 351 may be said.

The Deacon or Celebrant says

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Bishop when present, or the Priest, stands and says

Almighty God have mercy on you, ✚ forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Peace

All stand. The Celebrant says to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

Then the Ministers and People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.

The Holy Communion

The Celebrant may begin the Offertory with one of the sentences on page 376 or with some other sentence of Scripture.

During the Offertory, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant. The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.

The Great Thanksgiving

Alternative forms will be found on page 367 and following.

Eucharistic Prayer A

The people remain standing. The Celebrant, whether bishop or priest, faces them and sings or says.

The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.
Celebrant Lift up your hearts.
People We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Then facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Here a Proper Preface is sung or said on all Sundays, and on other occasions as appointed.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name. Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and
Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name.

Celebrant and People

(Bow) Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
✚ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The people stand or kneel.

Then the Celebrant continues

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks. He gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Celebrant and People

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and ✚ drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also ✚ that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy,

and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. *AMEN.*

And now, as our Savior
Christ has taught us,
we are bold to say.

As our Savior Christ
has taught us,
We now pray.

People and Celebrant

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.

A period of silence is kept.

Then may be sung or said

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. [*Alleluia.*]

In Lent, Alleluia is omitted, and may be omitted at other times except during Easter Season.

In place of, or in addition to, the preceding, some other suitable anthem may be used.

Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

And may add Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people.

The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ ✚ keep you in everlasting life. [Amen.]

or with these words

The Body of Christ,✚ the bread of heave. [*Amen.*]
The Blood of Christ, ✚ the cup of salvation. [*Amen.*]

During the ministration of Communion, hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.

When necessary, the Celebrant consecrates additional bread and wine, using the form on page 408.

After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray.

Celebrant and People

Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us a living members

of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or the following

Almighty and everlasting God,
we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food
of the most precious Body and Blood
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ;
and for assuring us in these holy mysteries
that we are living members of the Body of your Son,
and heirs of your eternal kingdom.
And now, Father, send us out
to do the work you have given us to do,
to love and serve you
as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen. **(Bow)**

✚ *The Bishop when present, or the Priest, may bless the people.*

The Deacon, or the Celebrant, dismisses them with these words

	Let us go forth in the name of Christ.
People	Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon	Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People	Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon	Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Sprit.
People	Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon Let us bless the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

From the Easter Vigil through the Day of Pentecost "Alleluia, alleluia" may be added to any of the dismissals.

The People respond Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

This has been a general outline of the body language of Anglican worship. Its purpose is to outline why we do certain things, the traditions behind them, their allegorical or symbolic meanings, and to provide some suggestions about what sort of gestures you might want to incorporate into your worship.

It is better not to attempt to get every gesture down just right in just the approved position within the liturgy. It is better to begin to do a few of these gestures, based upon what seems comfortable, natural, and edifying to you. There is a very good reason why there are no rules about these things within Episcopal practice. They are meant to be ways of helping you worship, not standards of uniform practice to be attained. These are personal enhancements to worship and should arise from your growing relationship with Christ and your growing awareness of the traditions of Anglicanism which give rise to the body language of worship.

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Sunday Eucharist at 8:00 am
Solemn Eucharist at 11:00 am

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: Eucharist at 6:15 pm

Holy Days at 6:30 pm

Monday-Friday: Morning Prayer at 8:00 am