



Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School

Gestures of the Liturgy



Gestures of the Liturgy

Sunday School Association of the Diocese of South-West America

Introduction

Orthodox worship involves the whole of the human person. It utilizes all of the senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and even taste. We see the candles, icons, vestments; we hear the sounds of the bells, singing, reading; at times we use our own voices for praise; we smell the sweet fragrance of the incense; and we taste the Body and Blood of Christ. The entire person is involved in worship, not just our thoughts or voices. Therefore, the actions and very posture of our body play a role in worship and affect its quality and nature. The quality of humility, which is a key character of Orthodox worship, is reflected in certain types of movements, positions, or gestures. Humility, reverential piety, and awe of God can be developed within us when we stand, bow, prostrate, make the Sign of the Cross, hold our hands in certain positions and so on. Accordingly, there are several types of actions, gestures,

Liturgy

“leitos” = people

“ourgos” = work

“leitos” + “ourgos” = work of the people

When we come together to pray as the **ONE** Body of Christ, the Church, we should pray with **ONE** voice, **ONE** mind, and **ONE** heart. Prayer should **NOT** be chaotic, distracting, or disturbing. Rather, prayer should help us focus our attention towards God so that we may glorify Him and become like Him. To help us focus our minds and ensure we pray with one voice, we pray with written liturgical prayers so that **EVERYONE** can pray together. The entire community prays during the Holy Qurbana and other liturgies, not just the priest or a few individuals. Prayer is the work of **ALL** the faithful people.

Before We Begin...

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How are we supposed to enter the Church?

- We enter the Church with respect.
- We walk into the Church, never run.
- We stop at the entrance of the Church, bow our head, and make the sign of the Cross saying, "With reverence I enter Thy house, and offer my vows to Thee".

We also remove our shoes...

Why do we remove our shoes?

When Moses stood in the presence of God at the burning bush, God commanded Moses saying, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

Whenever we stand in God's presence we stand on holy ground, meaning that ground is "set apart".

The dust and dirt our shoes have collected from the outside should not enter into the holy place of the Church.

What do *we* do when the priest says a prayer?

- Pay close attention
- Remember that the priest is praying on our behalf
- Try to make the priest's prayer our pray
- Say "Amin" with strength in our voice to show that we are also offering the same prayer to God as the priest.

Where do we stand?

You can stand on the right or left side of the Church and as far to the front as possible.

Often the boys stand on the left and the girls stand on the right side of the church.

Why do we stand on different sides?

- Many of our hymns are meant to be sung back and forth by two sides;
- When we stand on both sides we no longer stand with our immediate family, instead the Church is our family.
- We have 6 days a week to pray with our immediate family so that we can be prepared to pray with our larger Church family.

Stand

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What is it?

Standing is the most common posture of prayer and is used with almost all the other gestures and postures.

How do you do it?

You stand up straight, not leaning or slouching, with a straight back, and both feet on the ground. It is good to have a slight bend at your knees for circulation. It is good not to rock back and forth or to shift your weight from foot to foot.

When do we do it?

We stand for almost the entirety of our worship.

The word, “Qaumo” means to stand. Thus, all of our prayers begin standing.

We should especially stand when the Holy Scriptures are read as well as in the presence of the Holy Mysteries.

We are called to attention by the deacon when he calls, “Stoumen Kalos” or “Stand well!”

The only times that have been accepted for sitting is during the Homily and the Diptychs.



What does it mean?

It is a sign of great respect and reverence. It develops a high level of attentiveness and eagerness to participate in the service and to know Jesus Christ. Imagine if he were a guest in your presence, you would stand up, honor Him, and attend to Him.

Prostration

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What is it?

A prostration is the action in which a worshipper bows completely to the ground and touches their forehead to the ground.

How do you do it?

After making the Sign of the Cross, a worshipper places his/her hands on the ground in front of him/her and touches his/her forehead to the ground.

When do we do it?

This gesture is used:

When we say, “Crucified for us, have mercy upon us” during the Trisagion;

When we say, “and He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and by the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God” during the Nicene Creed;

When we say, “and he was crucified for us in the days of Pontius Pilate” during the Nicene Creed;

When we say, “and on the third day, He rose again according to His will” during the Nicene Creed

When we say “Blessed is the glory of the Lord in His place forever” during the Praise of the Cherubim;

During especially important moments during the reading of the Sedro and certain hymns during the Nineveh Lent, Great Lent, and Holy Week.;

40 times following the Prayer of the 9th Hour during the Nineveh Lent and the Great Lent;

*We do **NOT** prostrate on Sundays, on Feast Days of our Lord, the 50 days following the Feast of the Resurrection, or on any day after having received the Holy Qurbana. This is because these days are all considered festal days on which we partake of the Holy Qurbana. In the spirit of these holy celebrations we do not prostrate.



What does it mean?

This action has many meanings that are helpful for us to learn, namely:

It is an act of complete submission to God. We put ourselves in a vulnerable position and are at the complete mercy of God;

It is an act of humility in which we bow before God, our King and Master;

It brings us to repentance like the sinful woman who kissed the Lord's feet and wept for her sins (Lk 7:36-50);

Falling down reminds us of our death to earthly desires and sin;

Sign of the Cross

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What is it?

The Sign of the Cross is one of the most ancient, universal and frequently used gestures in worship.

How do you do it?

The thumb and the tips of the first two fingers of the right hand at the tips are put together;

The remaining two fingers touch the palm;

The thumb and first two fingers are touched to the forehead, then to the midsection, then to the left shoulder, and finally to the right shoulder.



When do we do it?

All the time – there is no wrong time to make the Sign of the Cross;

Whenever the “cross” or “crucifixion” or “Christ crucified” is mentioned;

Whenever we enter the Church

Whenever we mention the Holy Trinity or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

When we begin and conclude a prayer;

When we approach Holy Qurbana and after we have partaken of it;

When we are blessed by the priest or the smoke of incense;

Anytime we feel that something significant is taking place or a time of dedication.

What does it mean?

The thumb and the first two fingers, which have been joined together express our belief in the Most-Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

The two fingers on the palm represent the perfect divinity and humanity of Christ;

The touching of the fingers to the forehead, stomach, left then right shoulders demonstrate that Christ descended from heaven to the earth to bring those who lived in sin to salvation;

It can also signify that the Holy Trinity has sanctified our thoughts (forehead), feelings (midsection), desires (left hand shoulder) and acts (right hand shoulder) to service of God.

It signifies that Christ has saved us by His suffering and death on the Cross;

It connects us to Christ, the Crucifixion, and our Salvation;

It gives us courage and strength to overcome temptation and be victorious over Satan;

Reverence

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What is it?

It is a simple bowing or inclining of the head downwards.

How do you do it?

You bow your head gently downwards and look towards your heart.

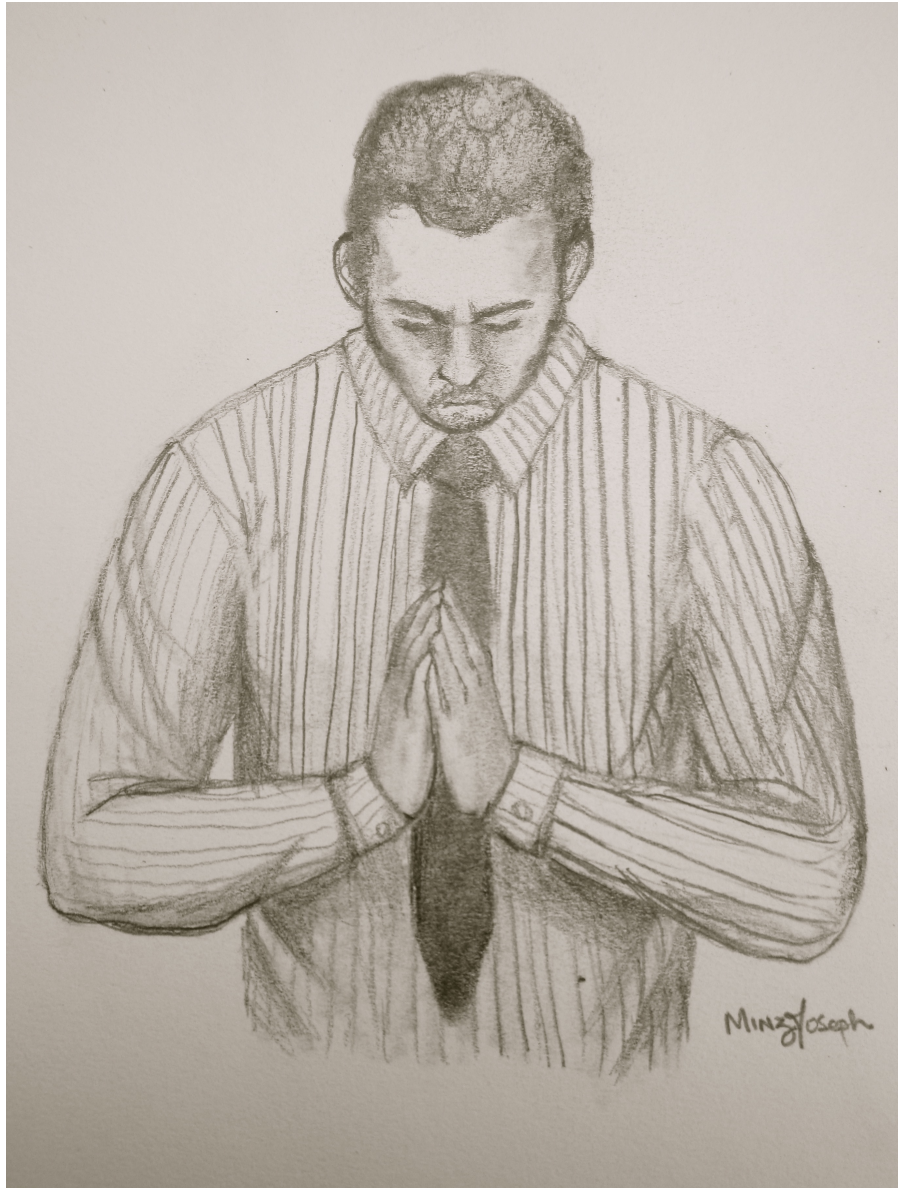
When do we do it?

We bow our heads during prayer. This is an acceptable position for any time of reverence and importance.

During the Holy Qurbana, there are two specific times when the deacon calls the congregation to bow their heads before the Lord. The people respond saying that they bow their heads before the Lord.

We also bow our heads when making the Sign of the Cross or when receiving a blessing from the priest.

We also bow to the priest when he asks for our prayers. This is when he turns and bows down before us during the Holy Qurbana.



What does it mean?

This is a symbol of respect to God.

It also helps keep us away from other distractions. When we lower our heads we do not allow outside images or sounds to divert our attention.

It also focuses us on Christ who dwells within our hearts.

Receiving Incense

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When do we do it?

We do this gesture anytime incense is offered. The most common times incense is offered is during the reading of the Promion-Sedro, following the Blessing of the Censer, during the reading of the Etro, and during the Intercessory Prayers (Quqlion)

What is it?

The priest offers incense multiple times during the Holy Qurbana and the Hours of Prayer.

The priest offers the incense and then either the priest or the deacon turns towards the congregation with the censer and bless the congregation.

How do you do it?

You bow your head in reverence and then take your hands, palm upwards, and guide the smoke of incense towards your face in a calm wafting motion.

What does it mean?

The priest offers incense to God and the fragrance of the incense is the blessing of the offering that the congregation receives.

The Incense is representative of Christ, Himself, and when it burns the fragrance reminds us of the sweetness of Christ and the Salvation He offers to us.

This gesture allows us to receive the blessing of God and Christ into our lives;

Fire also was used to purify the air, in the same way, receiving the incense is meant to purify ourselves.

Hands Upwards

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What is it?

Stretching our hands out slightly in front of us with palms facing up is a standard praying posture.

How do you do it?

You can keep your hands slightly outstretched in front of you and keep your palms facing up

When do we do it?

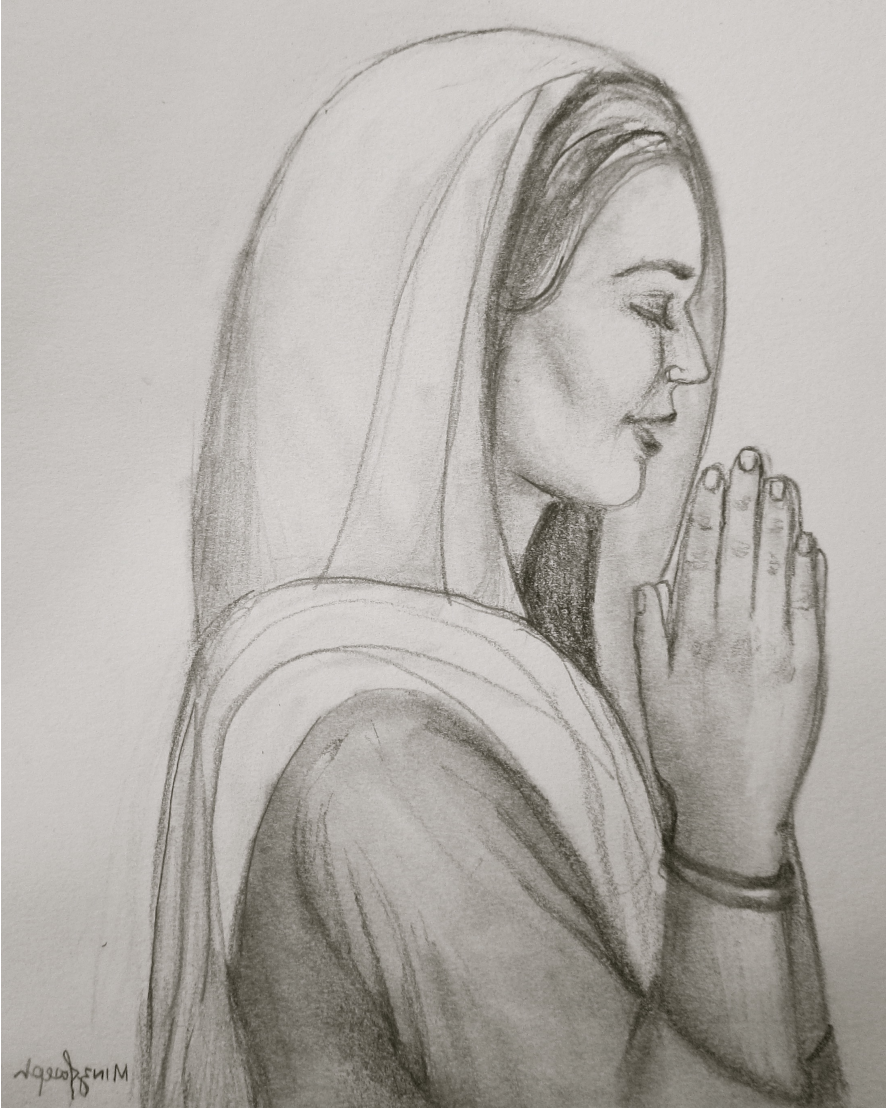
This prayer position is acceptable throughout the service and in for most prayers. In particular, this is the proper position when praying the Lord's Prayer.

What does it mean?

Like a beggar who seeks the charity and mercy of those who pass by him/her, we stand before God, acknowledge our weakness and faults, and beg God for his mercy and plead for charity from His bounty.

Hands Folded

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What is it?

Keeping our hands together is another standard position for prayer.

How do you do it?

You join your hands together, palms touching, in front of you.

Your hands can either be held at chest level or face level.

You typically use this posture when bowing your head.

When do we do it?

What does it mean?

This posture normally indicates a high level of reverence and is used to keep the body centered in the spirit of prayer.

It also indicates pleading with God for something, whether His mercy, blessings or so on.

This prayer posture is acceptable at almost all times. It is also a posture that we use when we supplicate God.

In particular, this is the proper position whenever the Holy Mysteries are present.

This posture is most appropriate during the Procession of the Holy Mysteries, the distribution of the Holy Mysteries, and when you partake of the Holy Mysteries.

Kneeling

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What is it?

Kneeling is an almost universal sign of humility and worship

How do you do it?

You kneel with both knees on the ground.

Unlike a prostration, you do not touch your forehead to the ground.

You stay on the ground, as opposed to rising immediately.

When do we do it?

We almost never use this posture on Sundays or Feast Days as kneeling and prostrating is prohibited.

However, it is used on the Feast of the Pentecost as the Holy Spirit descends.

It can be used for any time of private prayer.

Kneeling is also commonly done when confessing before a priest during the Holy Mystery of Confession.



What does it mean?

Kneeling indicates submission before God. It is a posture of penitence and supplication.

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