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Dear Friends,

In recent days, following the implementation of the Revised Roman Missal, I have received a significant number of letters from various quarters of the Archdiocese expressing concern, confusion, discontent and consternation about the interpretation of number 43 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Particularly distressing for some people is the issue of standing from after the consecration until everyone has received communion.

Some find that the standing is too long; others feel that it is an imposition on the elderly or on children. A few see it as a forced behaviour which goes against their personal practices and devotions. For these persons, standing after the reception of Holy Communion appears to particularly interfere with their habit of sitting or kneeling in private prayer after receiving the Lord.

I can appreciate all of these reactions and comments as we cope with the unfamiliar language, postures and expectations, I can even add my own personal struggle with the implementation of this new translation of the liturgy. After all, for the last 40 years or so I, as well as all of our priests have celebrated Mass with the previous translation. We were used to the language and familiar with the rhythm of the phrases; we experienced and developed elements of eucharistic spirituality around that form and expression of the Mass. Now we must re-learn and re-form all of this. Implementing the new Roman Missal is not just a matter of using a new book. It's a change which affects the whole person. My hope is that all of us will discover in this Revised translation of the liturgy a greater presence of the sacred and a new awareness of what, in faith, we are doing when we offer the sacrifice of the Mass and celebrate the Eucharist.

The new practices and postures expected of us all, of course, will become familiar with a little more time and patience. The concerns about the "appropriateness" of them will only be significant if we grasp and appreciate the "why" of the different expected postures. Kneeling at the consecration, for instance, is an expression of worship and adoration for the Lord made present in our midst, as well as gratitude for the Sacrifice of Christ, which the Mass recalls and represents sacramentally. By kneeling in this instance, we express our unworthiness for the merciful grace of Christ's passion and death, as well as, our gratefulness for the sacrificial gift and sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood given for our salvation.

However, as soon as the consecration is completed, “the Mystery of Faith” is acknowledged by the standing of the whole assembly. This is because “the Mystery of Faith” not only refers to the passion and death of Christ, but also to His Resurrection. Consequently, liturgically and sacramentally, we stand, as disciples of Christ, filled with faith and hope in the Resurrected Christ. In the early church standing was promoted by the Fathers of the Church (e.g. St. Irenaeus) and by the Council of Nicaea as an expression of new life and joy in the Risen Lord and as a promise and conviction of the Christian disciple’s own resurrection.

We are being asked in our own time to recognize this heritage and respectfully remain standing to demonstrate that we are united in Christ by receiving the Lord; that we are the one Body of the Church in communion through Christ and with each other. Thus the General Instruction states that the assembled faithful remain in the standing position until the Rite of Communion is completed.

There are some in present circumstances who feel that the more respectful posture after receiving communion is to kneel. Of course, kneeling is also a posture of respect and reverence, one which many of us have long practiced and appreciated. When we do kneel therefore, it is reflective of one’s faith and personal prayer disposition and no doubt, a more private manifestation of the union and intimacy of being one with the Lord. The General Instruction recognizes the need for both the personal and communal aspects of our worship and proposes that in our liturgy, there should be different times and moments which allow and encourage both the communal expression of who we are as an assembly of believers, as well as the more individual and private expression of who we are as disciples of Christ.

When we sit and listen to the Word of God, it is clearly a posture intended for individual reception of the Word. When we receive communion, the sacrament is received personally and individually. There are moments meant to be communal, such as our responses to the celebrant’s greeting; our recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and our communion procession to mention a few. Standing at the indicated times, therefore, can also be a communal symbol expressive of our unity in body, mind and spirit, a unity perhaps best expressed if, while standing, we also raise our voices in a communion chant. This change of posture is an invitation to recognize and acknowledge that as Christians we are in a communal relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, not just a private one.

After communion the General Instruction also calls for a sacred silence. This is the intended and more appropriate moment for personal devotion, private worship and prayerful acts of thanksgiving. This sacred silence can be realized in the posture of one’s preference, whether that is by kneeling or by sitting quietly, but always with special insistence on an atmosphere of silence. In our past liturgical habits, customs and practices however, sacred silence has not always been given the time and careful attention it deserves and so as we re-acquaint ourselves with this practice, it will necessitate some

effort before most of us will become sufficiently familiar and comfortable with this sacred silence which is a personal as well as a communal form of prayer.

Some have written to me quoting various authorities to support their point of view. These references make clear that kneeling is not prohibited or that standing is not something to be imposed. These remarks and references are not incorrect if understood in proper context. The adaptation of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on this matter is a norm which received the formal support of the Conference members and the recognition from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, and this norm calls for standing during communion. It is important to understand what underlies this norm for our liturgies. In response to letters questioning the practice of all standing until everyone had received communion, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments responded: "The rationale is that by the prescripts of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 43 is intended to give, on the one hand, within broad limits some uniformity of posture in the congregation for the various parts of the celebration of the holy Mass, and at the same time, on the other hand, not to regulate posture so rigidly that those who wish to remain kneeling or to sit would no longer be free to do so."

Here the Congregation is acknowledging that a particular norm can have a different weight or obligation. The fact that the standing position is not rigidly imposed does not mean that it is optional. It is the expected stance. If one cannot stand, then sitting is perfectly understood. A bishop can call for, or Conference of Bishops can agree on, an appropriate application of the GIRM and, without rigidly imposing it, make that the expected practice. I have done just that and in doing so, I am proposing, in solidarity with my fellow Canadian bishops, what I understand the intent of the General Instruction to be saying.

The General Instruction which we in the Canadian Church are following is the officially approved translation of the GIRM for Canada granted on July 14, 2011. This is the only authorized English text for Canada. It is not the same one approved for the United States in 2002. The General Instruction establishes unity in the general points to be followed in the liturgy, but it also allows for particularities and expressions of uniqueness which may arise in each particular Conference of Bishops. The Canadian translation of the GIRM – with its particularities due to our languages, practices and cultures – came some eight years after the American one. Remarks which were made in 2003 and obviously intended for the Church in the United States, whose culture and practices were different and continue to be different to those of the Canadian Church, must be recognized as such before conclusions are drawn which do not conform to our Canadian approved practices.

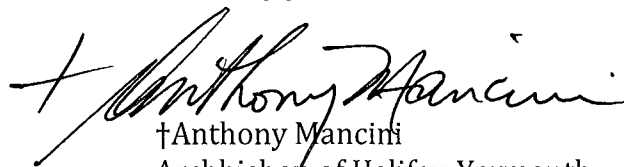
With regards to the issue of conformity to our practices, I was asked if our diocesan guidelines on the matter of posture were under obedience. The answer to this question requires an understanding of obedience which goes beyond our usual appreciation of this concept. As posed, the question implies that obedience is conformity in behaviour derived

from some kind of force or external coercion. Obedience, by some form of external pressure, is not obedience, it is forced behaviour. Any behaviour which is forced is not the best practice for, while it may effect conformity, it may only be an external appearance.

A fuller understanding of obedience, especially in a religious context, is to appreciate it as a positive response to what the authority has said, because the request has been heard, received, reflected upon, accepted and put into action, by giving it internal assent which refers to one's mind and heart. This is obedience understood in its highest form and no doubt requires time for this form to be truly appreciated and put into practice. Nevertheless, it is important to see that a "yes" which is forced is not a "yes". When one accepts to go through the above process, the result is that the one who speaks (authority) and the one who hears (obedience) will have come to be of one mind and heart. Anything else falls short of the expected standard for the assembly of Christ's disciples. This process is reflected in the attitudes and actions reported in the Acts of the Apostles about discernment and decision making in the Christian community. (Acts 15: 22-35; 16: 4-5) If we do not enter into such a spirit of discernment or try to understand or be open to each other's best intentions, "obedience" produces nothing but an appearance of religiosity, rather than an authentic expression of faith.

In the implementation of the new Roman Missal, let us take the time to discover its richness, its intention to be more expressive of the transcendent and its desire to be a source of unity. All of this will take time. I ask you to be open and to let time provide us with some new experiences. We will have opportunities to review our experience and, no doubt, we will learn and we will adjust. Let the Mystery of Faith, however, be at all times, the primary focus of our attention as a faith community gathered in thanksgiving by the Risen Christ.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Mancini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

†Anthony Mancini
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth