

DEAR DEACON BULLETIN INSERT

❖ Dear Deacon Jim,

Why do people hit their chest when they say the Lamb of God? Are we supposed to? Also, why do people bow at the creed when we say, "by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man."

❖ Response

In answer to your first question, striking one's breast is a gesture that implies penance and admission of sinfulness. Technically, in the current rite striking of the breast is done within the context of the first form of rite of penance at the beginning of Mass when the "I confess" (*Confiteor*) "*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault*" is prayed and then when the celebrant uses the Roman canon (Eucharistic Prayer 1) at the words "*though we are sinners.*"

It was customary, *before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council*, to strike one's breast at the "Lamb of God" (*Agnus Dei*) and the "Lord, I am not worthy," when prayed during the Mass.

However, following the reforms of the Council, this gesture of striking the breast at the Lamb of God is **no longer prescribed** and no longer required or mentioned in the rubrics. Yet, I think it would be going a bit too far to say it is forbidden to those who have been raised in this custom. I suspect this is the reason you may see some people still practicing this gesture.

Regarding the next question, a bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. Please note, that there are two kinds of bows: a bow of the head and a bow of the body (*profound*).

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) indicates that the faithful are to make a **profound bow** at the words of the *Creed* "*by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man*".

A bow of the body, profound bow, is made to the altar when praying the Creed at the words *Et incarnatus est* as stated in GIRM #137 and #275.

Deacon Jim