



The Orans Posture is one of the oldest gestures of Christian prayer. It simply means praying with arms extended and hands open, a sign of openness to God and trust in His mercy.

In the Catholic Mass, this gesture has a very specific and regulated purpose. It is the posture used by the bishop or priest when he offers prayers addressed to God on behalf of the entire assembly, most notably during the Collect (Opening Prayer), the Prayer over the Offerings, the Prayer after Communion, the Eucharistic Prayer, and when he prays the Our Father. During these moments, the priest or bishop stands before God acting in the person of Christ the Head (in persona Christi capitis), representing all the faithful and interceding for the Church.

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], nos. 30, 54, 147, 165)

Only bishops and priests, by virtue of their sacramental ordination, may preside over the Mass or concelebrate it. This is not a matter of preference or custom, but of Church teaching and law. As the Church clearly states, “The priest celebrant... presides over the assembly and directs the prayer” (GIRM, no. 93). Deacons and lay faithful do not preside at Mass and therefore do not assume the gestures proper to presidential prayer, including the Orans posture.

(Code of Canon Law, can. 900 §1; can. 907).

For the faithful in the pews, the Church does not ask—nor permit—their use of the Orans posture at any point during the Mass. The liturgical norms do not envision this posture for the assembly. The active participation of the faithful is expressed through listening, responding, singing, and interior prayer, not by assuming gestures reserved to the ordained minister.

(GIRM, no. 42)

Using gestures proper to the priest or bishop can unintentionally blur the distinct roles within the liturgy and weaken the visible sign of Christ’s headship exercised through the ordained ministry. For this reason, the Church invites the faithful to pray with hands folded, joined, or simply at rest, while the priest alone carries the Orans posture that belongs to his ministry of presiding and interceding.

At its heart, the Orans posture reminds us of the beauty and harmony of the liturgy: each person has a sacred and irreplaceable role, and when every member of the Body of Christ embraces that role with humility and obedience, the Church’s prayer becomes clearer, richer, and more faithful to what the liturgy truly is.

(Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 28)