

On Our Knees

(excerpted from *For Your Love Alone* by Michael Syslo)

Just recently, I was looking at a picture of our Lord nailed to the cross. My eyes drifted to His knees which were depicted as bloody in this picture. On many crucifixes and pictures of the crucifixion, the knees pretty much look normal and most attention is placed on the primary wounds of His suffering. In praying the Stations of the Cross, we reflect on Jesus falling three times and that can easily account for His injured knees. But this got my mind to reflecting.

When I was a kid of about ten, I used to play with my friends in Von Humboldt School yard. It was about a block and a half from where I lived in Chicago and was a gathering place for lots of the neighborhood kids. The school yard was not grass as many are today. It was not even just dirt. For whatever reason, the school yard was covered with gravel. I remember once that I was running pretty fast and fell forward dragging myself across the gravel and ended up with two terribly cut up and bleeding knees. I limped home the best I could and placed myself in the loving hands of my Mom. She knew just what to do.

After slowly extracting all of the little bits of dirt and gravel, she cleaned my knees and readied them for bandaging. Unfortunately, at that time, the best way to treat open cuts was with alcohol or iodine. It seemed like the pain would never end. Eventually they were bandaged, and I was allowed to go sit in front of the TV and feel sorry for myself. I walked with sore knees for about three weeks.

The story does not end there. Medical technology had not reached a point of stick-less bandages. My bandages had to be changed on a regular basis and alcohol or iodine reapplied so there would be no infection. Every time my mother removed the gauze, she ended up tearing away some skin. I have to admit, at ten, I was not too much of a man to not cry. Eventually, my mother got some black gooey stuff from our doctor and this helped keep the gauze from sticking. My knees finally healed. Lord, at least from the standpoint of your knees, I believe I can feel your pain.

When my daughter was only about a year old and was just starting to talk, she fell down and hurt her knee. She cried and a small bandage helped a lot. It is amazing what a bandage will do for a little one. However, one of the first words she learned to say was “knee.” Whenever she fell or got hurt in any way, she would come to us saying: “knee-knee.” We knew what she meant. When I was young, I was an altar boy (today they’re called “acolytes”). I spent a lot of time in church serving for Masses (regular, funerals and weddings), Holy Hours, processions, you name it. Being on my knees was a natural part of who I was. I even went to the seminary for a few years and spent a lot of time on my knees during that period of my life. Besides genuflecting and kneeling at prayer, there is also the reverent genuflection before the exposed Blessed Sacrament. This includes kneeling on two knees, a bow, and a short prayer.

I used to play quite a bit of baseball and did a lot of running. Bending at the knee was really important because I usually played third base or shortstop. That was just for recreational purposes.

One of the jobs I had as a kid at home was edging the lawn. We did not have much of a lawn. It was more like two small patches of grass – one in front of the house and one in back. But my parents still wanted it to look good. We did not have an edger. It was me, a pair of heavy-duty scissors and my knees. Some fun, huh! There was even a point in my life when I jogged for exercise.

Since I have gotten older, arthritis has set in and I struggle with my good days and my bad days. The weather affects me quite a bit. When I travel to various parts of the country, the climate changes play havoc with my knees. I know there are many readers of this article who can sympathize. Although I can walk normally, I have trouble when I have to do anything with or on my knees.

Our knees are extremely important to us and we don't realize how much until we are limited in some way. Besides walking, bending, and crawling, it is recommended that we use our knees when we lift. This gives us the proper leverage and reduces the risk of back strain. When we push heavy objects, our knees come into play again.

Another place where the knees come into play for us is in honoring special people. This, however, is not a daily occurrence. It was common in ages past. To honor some important person, a man would kneel on one knee and bow; a woman would curtsy and bow. This is proper protocol when going before a king or queen. When you sit or stand while greeting royalty, you do not place yourself on an equal or higher standing than they are.

When was the last time you went into church and failed to genuflect before the tabernacle? Or maybe not you, but you observed others just wandering in and sitting down. Is not a King present? During the Mass, there are a number of places where we should be kneeling in prayer. I have observed more and more people just sitting during this time. Is not a King still present? He is in fact present – both in the tabernacle and on the crucifix.

Going down on our knees before our Lord says we humble ourselves before Him. We set our pride aside. We thank Him for bloodying His knees while carrying the heavy burden of our sins. When it comes to being before our Lord, remember, on our knees is the best posture. The saints spent many an hour on their knees and they were people just like you and me.