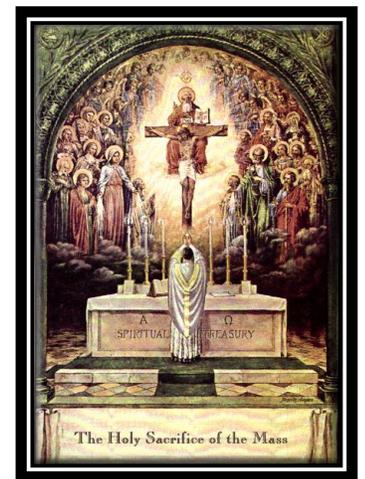


MASS ETIQUETTE

When people think of Mass etiquette, what probably comes to mind most are the obvious: having cell phones turned off, no chewing gum, keeping quiet etc. While these are valid points to remember, Mass etiquette is not only a listing of “do's and don'ts” but an invitation to all who come to church to remember where they are and to act accordingly.

The basic idea of how we should behave in Church is summed up by the Second Council of Lyons, A.D. 1274:

It is fitting that He Whose abode has been established in peace should be worshipped in peace and with due reverence. Churches, then, should be entered humbly and devoutly; behavior inside should be calm, pleasing to God, bringing peace to the beholders, a source not only of instruction but of mental refreshment. Those who assemble in church should extol with an act of special reverence that Name which is above every Name, than which no other under Heaven has been given to people, in which believers must be saved, the Name, that is, of Jesus Christ, Who will save His people from their sins. Each should fulfill in himself that which is written for all, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow; whenever that glorious Name is recalled, especially during the sacred Mysteries of the Mass, everyone should bow the knees of his heart, which he can do even by a bow of his head. In churches the sacred solemnities should possess the whole heart and mind; the whole attention should be given to prayer.



In this handout, you will find the Mass Etiquette broken down into the various categories of: Before Mass, During Mass, After Mass and Common Practices.

BEFORE MASS

Important Things To Remember

- The Mass is Holy
- Dress Appropriately (See “[What to Wear and What Not To Wear](#)”)
- Turn Cell Phones and other electronic devices Off

Be On Time: It can be distracting when others arrive late at Mass. If you do arrive late, be thoughtful and considerate, by sitting or standing at the back so as not to disturb the Mass.

Sit Quietly: Once we have found a seat, we should sit or kneel to quietly pray, reflect or meditate. This is not a time to socialize with those who we know. If we must talk, it should be done very quietly and kept extremely brief. Respect must be shown for Christ, whose Eucharistic presence is amongst us in the tabernacle and for all our fellow parishioners.

Stay Until Mass Is Over: Judas was the first to leave the first Mass at the Last Supper, let us not follow his footsteps. The Mass ends when the priest says, “The Mass has ended, go in peace,” after



which we reply, “Thanks be to God.” It is proper for the congregation to remain in their pews until the completion of the recessional hymn. Respectfully waiting for the celebrant and those accompanying him to leave the Nave, is expected and only then do individuals begin to leave the pews. If an emergency or unforeseen or uncontrollable event should arise, every effort should be made to leave the Mass in a discreet manner, so as to not disrupt the Mass.

Leaving The Church: As a matter of respect, leaving the Church does not mean the beginning of socialization and chatter. Out of reverence, we must always remember our Savior and Redeemer’s true presence, only a few feet away in the tabernacle. Leaving quietly is proper to our respect and reverence. There are those who desire to remain after Mass and continue with personal prayers and as such, the proper respect should be accorded to these individuals with our quiet conduct and considerate departure from the church.

Smoking: Smoking is not permitted in the Church, near the Church or by the entrance/exit areas. If you are a smoker and must smoke, please keep a significant distance from the church to ensure that no second hand smoke will enter the church itself.

Keys and Other Personal Items: Prior to the entrance of the church, all keys and personal items should be dealt with. It is inappropriate to be dangling keys and making any type of noise with any personal items once inside the church.

Welcoming Others

Every effort should be made so that all who come to Mass feel welcome. We can begin this by not judging others who do not know or understand the proper attire and etiquette. Properly done, our behavior and disposition toward others should be respectful. It can be tempting to give others improper looks, appear uncomfortable in their presence and in general, display a lack of charity in attitude and action. Our approach when dealing with those who are new to the faith, visiting our parish or lacking in understanding should be one of providing an example for others. If we must speak in a corrective way, let it be loving and gentle.

Promptness For Mass

Arriving to Church on time is important! Certainly, some things cannot be helped or foreseen, that results in a late arrival. Every effort should be made to plan ahead for coming to Mass and to allow for some personal time, for prayer and adoration, to prepare for Mass.

Children

Although children can be a little noisy at Mass, it is understandable that some level of noise will exist. If children become out of control, enough so to be disruptive and distracting to parishioners, then it would be appropriate for the child or children to be taken to the quieting room in the back of church. An effort should be made by parents, in the home, to teach children the importance of the Mass and how best behavior and proper manners are expected. Parents should endeavor to discuss the “do’s and don’ts” in Church. Some examples are standing on the pews, chewing

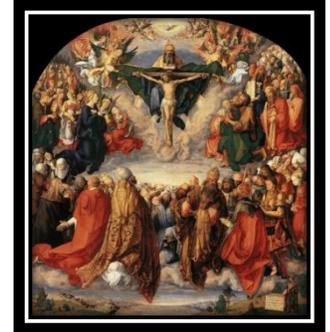


gum, eating, bringing toys, looking at parishioners in the other pews, screaming, running, etc. Of course, infants and very young toddlers are exceptions to the rule!

What To Wear and Not To Wear

As a sign of respect for our Savior and Redeemer, it is important that special consideration be made to attire. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church. Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest.” (CCC, 1387)

Specifically, we should endeavor to be modest in dress, clean and decent. Immodest dress distracts others and could cause them to sin in thought. Clothes that draw attention to ourselves due to color, style or quality are not appropriate to wear at Mass. Wearing one’s best is always encouraged and certainly reflects the importance of the Mass and our respect for Christ.



Shorts and Sweats: not appropriate

Blue Jeans/Jeans: nice jeans, plain in style with no holes are permitted

Ties and Jackets: for men, this is considered to be the mark of a “well dressed” man

Special To Women: a dress or skirt is considered most appropriate, but with hemlines that cover the knees, shoulders should be covered and necklines modest. Tight fitting clothing should be avoided!

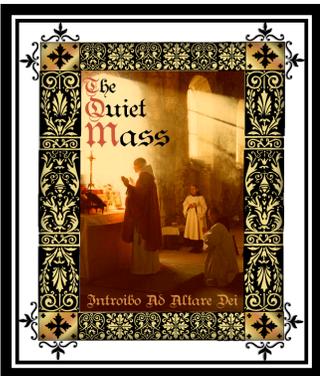
Any clothing that is revealing is never acceptable. Specific to each gender:

- Men: any type of shorts and tank tops
- Women: any clothing that bares midriffs or cleavage, miniskirts, sleeveless tops, tight clothing that accentuates body parts

DURING MASS

Sacred Silence

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that “sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times...Even before the celebration itself, it is commendable that silence to be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner.” (45)



Sacred silence as a part of the celebration is to be observed at the designated times. The avoidance of unnecessary conversation should be maintained coupled with an attitude that the Church is a holy place. Every effort should be made to keep the atmosphere of the Church a quiet one. Keeping quiet is a must in a library, how much more so is it in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

Bowing and Genuflecting

A bow signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bows: one, a bow of the head and two, a bow of the body. The *General*

Instruction of the Roman Missal section on Genuflection and Bows provides guidelines for when a bow is to be made:

- Bow of the Head: A bow of the head is made when the three Divine Persons are named together and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated.
- Bow of the Body: A bow of the body, that is to say a profound bow, is made to the altar; in the Creed at the words *Et incarnatus est* (by the power of the Holy Spirit . . . and became man); in the Roman Canon at the words *Supplices te rogamus* (Almighty God, we pray that your angel). The same kind of bow is made by the deacon when he asks for a blessing before the proclamation of the Gospel. In addition, the priest bows slightly as he speaks the words of the Lord at the consecration.



Genuflecting is the bending of the right knee all the way to the ground. This signifies adoration and is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as the Holy Cross from the solemn adoration during the liturgical celebration on Good Friday until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

The *General Instructions of the Roman Missal* states that genuflecting is made by the clergy, deacons and other ministers and the laity:

- Clergy: During Mass, three genuflections are made by the priest celebrant: namely, after the showing of the host, after the showing of the chalice, and before Communion.
- Priests, Deacons and Other Ministers: If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it and before the tabernacle is closed.

Ministers carrying the processional cross or candles may bow their heads instead of genuflecting.

- Laity: Otherwise all who pass before the Most Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are moving in procession.

Sitting

Be seated at Mass in such a manner that it signifies attentive listening and readiness to be instructed. Sitting up straight, quietly and reverently is proper. Remember, that being in Church is not the same as sitting in one's couch or living room lounge chair. One's posture while sitting should be indicative of one's intention to listen to scripture. This posture should reflect attentiveness and alertness.

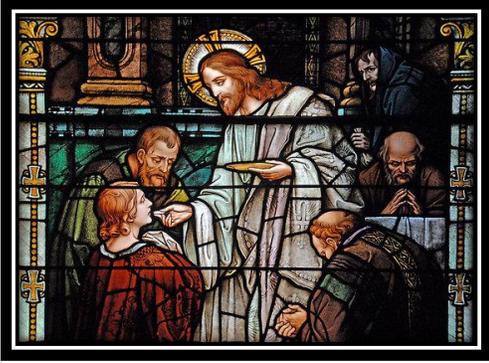
State Of Mortal Sin

There is a moral obligation by each Catholic to examine one's conscience prior to arriving at Mass for the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. Special attention is drawn to those who are in a state of mortal sin, which does not permit them to receive Communion until after having received Confession. To learn more about mortal sin, please review the following resources:



Catechism of the Catholic Church: THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON - ARTICLE 8 SIN

Receiving Holy Communion



All Catholics who are properly suited (those who have received their First Sacraments, who are not in a state of mortal sin and have fasted one hour prior to Mass) to receive Holy Communion may do so on their hand or tongue. The obligation to receive Holy Communion is once a year during the Easter Season.

When walking up to receive Communion, be conscious of what is happening and who you are about to receive. You are about to receive the Lord Himself. Be on guard for any lack of reverence.

After Receiving Communion

After receiving Communion, keep a “custody of the eyes,” that is be conscious to not let your eyes wander around. Instead, it is proper to keep your focus in front of you, with your head toward the floor.

The traditional posture of walking with your hands together, either in prayer position with palms facing each other at chest level is certainly acceptable. Common is to simply keep hands held together at the waist level, with one hand overlapping the other.

“Custody of the eyes” is also important for those who are in the pews who have yet to join the Communion line. It is not proper to stare at those who have received Communion. The time of Communion is a very intimate, personal and for many an intense time. Respect and courtesy should be forthcoming.

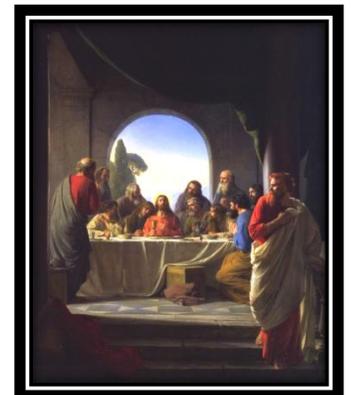
Upon returning to the pews, kneeling in prayer is considered appropriate. If you have been standing at Mass, standing and prayer is acceptable under such circumstances. If for some reason you cannot kneel, sitting in silent will suffice.

It is important to remember that when receiving Communion, we are receiving Christ, therefore, be on guard against any lack of reverence.

AFTER MASS

When To Leave

Mass ends only when the celebrant states, “The Mass is ended, go in peace,” and the congregation replies, “Thanks be to God.” If there is a recessional hymn, it is most polite to stay in the pew until the hymn is completed. If there is no hymn, the proper order of departure from the Mass first allows for the celebrant, concelebrant and assistances to descend from the Altar and proceed down the middle of the nave. It is only then, does the congregation begin to leave, starting with those in the front pews and followed by others in the successive pews. This order is important because upon leaving the pew, we are required to genuflect in the direction of the location of the tabernacle, where Christ’s true presence remains always. When one leaves the pew, one should not be confronted with people walking toward one as one genuflects!



Christ's true presence remains in the tabernacle always and as a sign of fidelity and respect to our Savior and Redeemer, after Mass has ended, we should endeavor to leave the church in a quiet and reverent manner. This should also be done as a courtesy to those who have remained after Mass to pray!

COMMON PRACTICES

The Sign Of The Cross

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of Saint John, stated "The sign of the cross is a trophy raised against the power of the prince of this world; when he sees it, he is afraid; when he even hears of it, he is filled with terror." The sign of the cross is our hope, our salvation therefore, let us make the sign of the cross in a purposeful and meaningful way.

When making the sign of the cross, ensure that you are attentive to the act. Do it carefully, deliberately and with reverence. When we cross ourselves, instead of a small embarrassed, cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, make a large measured sign, one that extends from the forehead to the naval, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it envelopes you.

Sign of Peace



Making the sign of peace should be done without any undo noise or commotion. The celebrant, as the guardian of the Eucharist, generally does not leave the altar.

Under normal circumstances, the congregation is permitted shake hands, make a sign of peace or simply say, "peace be with you."

