

ATTENDING MASS IN PROPER ATTIRE

Like me, I am sure you have noticed a drastic change in the attire of Catholics attending Sunday Mass. In the past ten years it appears that we have decided that anything and everything is acceptable and proper attire for Mass. I am here to say, “No, it is not acceptable” and I will give you Scriptural excerpts, Theological claims, and faith tenets to support my statement. Let’s begin.



If we believe that the God we worship at Mass is the One, True and Eternal God, then please tell me why one would dress immodestly and inappropriately for Mass. If the primary goal at Liturgy is to worship and praise God, why would our attire not reflect the God we are honoring? Though God is pleased to see us in His house every week, why would you think you are doing God a favor by attending Mass? Liturgy is not about us. The Liturgy is about us worshiping and praising our God, the same God who gave us earthly life and eternal life through the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son. Reflect on how you feel when you are dressed formally versus casually. Do you not have a different attitude or

mind set when you wear formal versus casual clothes? Do you not feel more proper, professional or more reserved, when dressed in a suit and tie for men and pantsuit or business dress for women? The answer of course is “Yes.” If we believe this to be true, then our attire at Mass needs to reflect the awe and reverence we claim to have for God.

At every Mass, Jesus calls us to His banquet to partake of His own Body and Blood. I pose these two questions to you. How would you dress if you were invited to a banquet for someone you greatly admired? I would conclude you would dress in your finest clothes. You would dress this way to show respect for the one you admire.

Second question, how would you dress if you were the honoree of the banquet? Once again, I would conclude that not only would you dress in your finest, but most likely it would be a newly purchased expensive outfit. As the honoree, you would want to appear at your best regardless of the cost. How much more should your best be for the King of Glory? Why should God deserve less than what you would do for yourself as the honoree? I am not advocating a new outfit to be purchased for every attendance at Mass. What I am advocating is that you dress to reflect the love and reverence for God you claim to hold. Wearing shorts (applies to both men and women), jeans, T-Shirts (especially with inappropriate images or writings). For women, dresses too short or off the shoulder, backless or cleavage showing are totally unacceptable attire for Mass.

If you accept that the Eucharist is the REAL presence of Jesus Christ, should not your bodily demeanor, your clothing and gestures convey the respect, solemnity, and awe of the moment you receive Christ as your guest in Holy Communion? There is a story about two brothers who were financially poor: yet, rich in love and reverence for God. Due to their meager possessions, the brothers had only one good white shirt between them. Therefore, the brother who was to receive the Eucharist



would wear the white shirt, pray, and then go to the back of the church to exchange his shirt with his brother, allowing him to respectfully and reverently receive the Eucharist dressed in the white shirt. These brothers were deeply aware of WHO they were receiving. Are You?

During my years as a guest speaker on Catholicism, I have heard numerous Catholics say that God does not care what we wear; that God just wants us to be present in His house. Really? St. Matthew would disagree with your premise. In the Gospel of Matthew, we learn the significance of dressing properly for a banquet. When the king invited his subjects to a wedding banquet, one person arrived inappropriately dressed. Was the king grateful to have him there even though he was not properly attired? No! The king was very angry and said. “How is it that you came here without a wedding garment?” The king was met with silence. “Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth’” (Matt 22:12-14). Fortunately, for many who attend Sunday Liturgy not properly dressed, the priest does not cast them out of the church, but maybe he should. Liturgy is about what you bring to God not about what you receive and if you are inappropriately dressed, why would you think that would please God?

The importance of the role of the Priest at Mass, as well as the connotation of what he wears, began with God. In the Book of Exodus, we learn in detail how God instructed His priests, Aaron and his sons, what vestment material to use, the type of tunics to make, and even how to wear their sashes (Ex 39: 1-31). Catholics understand the role of the Priest at Mass though they might not understand their role as a participant is also important. Therefore, do not stand mute. Respond to the priest with confidence in the words you say. Your actions are to stand, kneel or sit according to what is appropriate at Mass. Therefore, the honor, awe, sacredness, and reverence rightly accorded to God should be reflected in the demeanor, gesture, and attire of all those in attendance.

Next Sunday, as you prepare for Mass, please pause and consider, “Should I choose an outfit that is comfortable for me or rather one that reflects the awe, reverence and love I have for God?”

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