

# dear Padre

June 27, 2010

## What does the Church teach about body art?

What does the Church teach about tattoos, body piercing, and shaping?

Jane

Dear Jane,

I'm a bit squeamish when I see a piercing in a place other than an ear, and when I see tattoos covering a large part of a person's body I wonder what they'll think about that tattoo in ten or twenty years. But these things are a matter of taste; for example, I don't think there is anything wrong with earrings, but others might.

The Church has no teaching on tattoos, piercings, or shaping (when a body part is purposely reshaped to fit a cultural ideal). Leviticus 19:28 says, "Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead, and do not tattoo yourselves," which clearly forbids both tattoos and piercings, but then the next verse says, "Do not clip your hair at the temples, nor trim the edges of your beard." I broke that law this morning when I shaved.

In the introduction to the *Book of Leviticus*, the bishops teach us that "the laws contained in this book serve to teach the Israelites that they should always keep themselves in a state of legal purity" ([www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/intro.htm](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/intro.htm)).

We may not have the same obligation of legal purity, but it is important for Catholics to remember 1 Corinthians 3:16: "You are the temple of God." We should do nothing to *deface* the temple of God. So if you do get a piercing or a tattoo, never forget you are God's temple.

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