

Mass Manners Matter

“Do I believe that Mass Matters?”

“Do I believe that what happens in the church building and the people gathered there has some singular importance in my life?”

While each individual will answer these questions a little differently, Catholics as a whole answer them with a resounding, “Yes!” For Catholics, our celebration of the Eucharist is a joyful and profound occasion of the gathering of God’s people to bring forward the saving action of Jesus into our lives.

How do we as churchgoers express the importance of this gathering in our lives? How do I express that the Mass matters? Our common understanding and practice of church etiquette or manners helps us to be unified, supported and whole-hearted in our prayer together. While there might be necessary exceptions, the following are a few general practical reminders of how we can show our love for God and others in the context of worship:

1. Please dress respectfully and appropriately. Remember that what we wear to church demonstrates our interior respect and disposition to God and others. Short shorts/skirts, tank tops, flip-flops, halter tops, men’s caps/hats, scanty/revealing or sloppy attire are inappropriate. We should dress as we would dress to go to a nice dinner at a very fine restaurant or to meet a pope or president.
2. Take care of bodily needs before Mass thus cutting down on the traffic flow to the bathroom.
3. Moving to the center of the pew is a gesture of hospitality.
4. Observe the one-hour fast before Communion; this includes candy, coffee, soft drinks and chewing gum. Medicine and water are O.K.
5. Chewing gum by anyone (any age, Catholic or not) is not ever acceptable, at any time, during Mass. Reason? (1.) Respect (2.) The one-hour fast prior to Communion.
6. Young children and babies are ALWAYS welcome. If they cry and become too disruptive, it is OK for parents to take those young children to the entrance area of the church in the vestibule where they can still hear Mass and the children can be cared for.
7. Please turn off, silence, or leave at home (or the car) any cell phones, smart-phones, pagers, MP3 players, iPods, etc. No reading e-mails or texting. Remember: “*God **will** call you, but it probably won’t be on your cell phone*”.
8. Avoid unnecessary conversation and keep necessary conversation to a very low whisper in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist before and after Mass. There may be people seeking a little quiet time to pray and “de-stress” with the Lord.
9. Please do not come late, scoot out after Communion or rudely leave before the Liturgy is ended - including the closing hymn. Remember: “*Judas was the first to leave the Last Supper.*”
10. Please participate in the Mass - Body, Mind and Spirit - singing, speaking, praying, listening, and attending within your heart and body.

The question may be asked of these points of etiquette, “Why?” The answer is reverence, respect, and full, active, conscious participation. Our obligation is NOT bodily presence in the church during the time the Mass is being celebrated; our obligation each Sunday is active participation in the Liturgy, in which the saving, transforming mysteries of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are celebrated in a way that we may enter into them... If that sounds heady, well it may be, but that’s how it is. It is our right and responsibility as Catholics to take part in the Eucharist by prayerfully lifting up our minds and hearts to God, to grow in holiness together, and to proclaim the Good News of Christ in the world.