

THE REV. KNOW-IT-ALL'S
GUIDE TO
HOW TO BEHAVE
IN A
CATHOLIC CHURCH



CAUTION! This is easily the most insulting series of
Articles the Rev. Know-it-all has yet written.)

Dear Rev. Know-it-all

I am tired of all those people who come late for Mass and cause a ruckus as they walk up and down looking for a place to sit. I always arrive early and sit in my usual spot three rows from the back door. I have to endure the late comers and the distractions they cause. Can't you do something about it?

Sincerely, Ed T. Kette.

Dear Ed;

No, I can't. But you can. It really is a manner of courtesy as you point out, but the discourtesy is not always on the part of the late-comers.

This is probably the only time you are going to hear a pastor say this, but there a lot of good reasons to be late for church. The hamster died, Grandma got into the cooking sherry again. The youngest of eight children managed to get his head stuck in the laundry chute, etc. etc. Any one whom God has blessed with children knows that getting to church on time is like trying to organize a hurricane.

I would venture that the real discourtesy rests with those who come to church and see plenty of empty seats in the front and plop themselves down in the back of church. Leave the pews in the back of church for those who come late. If you are fortunate enough to have successfully raised your children who are now away studying at the Hackenbush Institute for Advanced Advancement, sit up in front. I know it's harder to get a nap up in front, what with the clergy waving their arms and shouting. (That's called the homily) But hogging the back benches really isn't the kind thing to do.

If you see an empty pew in the front of church, go and sit there. This brings up a whole area of concerns. I would like to take the occasion of your letter to write "The Rev. Know it all's Guide to How to Behave in a Catholic Church." There are a few ground rule assumptions for appropriate behavior in Church.

1. The Mass is the unbloody re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. That means you shouldn't do anything at Mass that you wouldn't do at Calvary.

Imagine that Mass is a kind of time machine that transports you back to Calvary. Our Blessed Mother is there weeping, as John, the Beloved Disciple consoles her. There is the good thief joyful even in his suffering to know that this day he will be with Christ in paradise, There is sorrow, and there is joy caused by such wondrous love, but there is no sitting in the back pew gossiping about your irritating neighbors. There was singing at Calvary. Jesus led the onlookers in Psalm 22, and psalms were chanted, but there was no applauding the choir. There is no chit chat, there is no reading the bulletin, and above all there were no cell phones at Calvary. I remember once having to leave the altar to ask a woman who was up in years, to turn off her cell phone. It had rung three times and she just let it ring. After mass her daughter apologized and explained that Mama never answered her cell phone because she was deaf as a stone. The mind boggles.

2. Mass is an act of worship, not an entertainment. In fact, we Catholics believe that it is the only perfect and complete act of worship. Everything else is more properly called praise. At Mass we stand on Calvary, placing our lives in the hands of the Father. The Catholic life is a continuous sacrifice to the Lord.

Perhaps you know the beautiful prayer called the morning offering:

*O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
I offer you my prayers, works, joys, sufferings of this day,
in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world.
I offer them for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart;
the salvation of souls, the reparation for sin, the reunion of Christians;
and for the intentions of the Holy Father. Amen.*

"In union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." Our whole life is offered at Mass, with both its joys and sorrow. St Paul says, "I make up in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's sufferings." (Col.1:24)

What could possibly be lacking in the sufferings of Christ? Simple: my participation. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I do, and even greater works." (John 14:12) Is there greater love than Calvary? Jesus wants

us to do what He does. He wants us to be co-redeemers of humanity. He want us to sacrifice our lives with His.

We go to Mass, in order to offer our lives with Christ. It's hard to climb up on the cross when you're sitting in the back pew. Jesus said "Where I am, my servant also will be." (John 12:26) I imagine that, in the wider sense, our Lord is in the back row, but He is present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity up in front. It is no great act of humility to sit in the back row. Sometimes it is real act of sacrificial love is to sit up front, allowing those beleaguered late comers to have a seat instead of standing in back with their eight children who have tried their best to get here, despite their grief at the untimely demise of the hamster.

To be continued.....and continued....and continued.....

The Rev. Know-it-all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 2

Upon entering a Catholic Church the first thing one should do is shut up. We Catholics believe that Jesus — the Messiah, the Second Person of the Trinity, The Son of the Father, the Visible Image of the Invisible God, the Word through whom all things were made — is present in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

He is there, present in the way that substance is present, in that little box in the center of the front of the church. We call it the Tabernacle, in memory of the dwelling of God in the camp of Israel. (“You must make the tabernacle and all its furnishings following the plan that I am showing you.” Exodus 25:8-9)

In Hebrew there is something called the *shekinah*, which means the presence of God, the cloud of His glory. The tabernacle, called the *mishkan* in Hebrew, a derivative of the word *shekinah*, means the place of the presence. That means that God lives in every Catholic church where the Body and Blood of Jesus is kept in the tabernacle (*mishkan*), even more surely than in the tent of the Old Testament, or in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon.

This is what we Catholics believe. If you don't believe this, at least humor us, or maybe you should find a nice Protestant Church, somewhere they don't claim to have God physically present, and they can chatter with each other as much as they please.

(Note to the bewildered: If you enter a Catholic church and you don't see the tabernacle (*mishkan*) front and center, that may be because some liturgist has hidden it behind the potted palms or put it in a little side room somewhere near the janitor's closet because they are embarrassed by the rather odd idea that God's infinity could be present in a box on an altar. In that case, just ask an usher or a liturgical dancer or someone official looking where the Blessed Sacrament is kept. You can even quote scripture to do so by saying as Mary Magdalene said on the first Easter Sunday “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have put him.” - John 20:13)

The renowned Dr. Hahn tells a story of someone who was being questioned about his Catholic faith by a Muslim. The Catholic was asked, “Do you really believe that God

became man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth?" To which the Catholic answered, "Yes. I do." "And do you really believe that Jesus lives in the little box behind the altar in your churches?" To which the Catholic again answered, "Yes I do." The Muslim finally said, "If I believed what you claim to believe I would find the nearest Catholic church, I would go in, fall on my face in worship and never leave the building again."

"What you claim to believe..." Interesting way to say it. Some people are better behaved in a movie theater than they are in Catholic Church. When you come into a Catholic Church acting like you've just arrived at happy hour at the V.F.W. Hall, it means that you don't believe it, no matter how much you claim to.

I once quoted the statistic that only 30% of Catholics believe in the real presence of Christ in the tabernacle. My hearer said, "Oh no, Father. 100% of Catholics believe in the real presence." The point being made is that if you don't believe in the real presence you aren't a Catholic.

Remember, that the word "believe" means "trust" You may not understand how such a thing can be. You may have a thousand questions, but if you trust what Jesus said, "This is My body and this is My blood", then you believe. To believe is not to be of a certain opinion, or simply to sign off on a set of assumption. It is to trust. The idea that what appears to be a piece of bread is actually God among us, well, that takes real trust. And if you trust, you begin to know and even to feel that the infinite treasure held in that small box is the most powerful vehicle of the divine presence. It is the very substance of God's passionate longing to dwell with us.

Everyone thinks that the great commandment is twofold "Love God" and "Love your neighbor." In fact, the Great Commandment is threefold: (Mark 12:29-31) "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." There are three imperative verb forms in the passage: Listen, Love and Love. Allow me to paraphrase

- 1) Shut up and listen! I'm God. You're not!
- 2) Love God and
- 3) Love your neighbor.

How many times do I have to tell you that God has this problem: He thinks He's God. And 99.99% of what He does in our lives is done to make that point. Some people think that with all this wanting to be worshiped, the Almighty has issues and should see a good therapist. Think for a moment, what is worship?

There is no worship like the mindless gaze of two young lovers. Perhaps you've had your little prince or princess come home from their freshman year at Watsamata U. and say something like "Oh Ma, she's perfect and I think her bright orange hair, Daisy Duke shorts and multiple navel rings are charming," or "Oh Daddy, I've met the most wonderful boy. You'll love him. He doesn't have that many tattoos and he's only been arrested twice."

Human love is deaf, dumb and stupid. We choose a life's partner with less care than we'd take to buy a used suit of clothing. But that's worship. To worship is to fall in love. Unfortunately we fall blindly in love with imperfect human beings who are bound to disappoint us. The Infinite and Almighty God is the only being worthy of that absolute love called worship. God wants us to fall absolutely in love with Him because He has already fallen in love with us and He knows that falling in love with Him is the greatest possible happiness for human beings.

Now back to chattering in church. Have you ever been on a really bad date? It usually consists of some narcissist droning on and on about themselves. "I can't stand phonies! Can you stand phonies? They're just the worst. My friend Becky Sue is such a phony! She's says she doesn't like phonies, but I know she does. That just makes me so mad, doesn't it make you mad..." or "Yeah, I got a lot of trophies for sports, I'm the captain of the school curling team. I'm really into curling it's the greatest sport there is and I'm the greatest curler in the state. I got the state award for curling two years running You have to have real upper body strength for curling I can do 312 one armed pushups. I can show you. I'll do them right here in the restaurant....."

This is the point at which you realize there won't be a second date. Or has the cell phone made first dates even worse? You're getting acquainted and... "Hold on! I've got take this call. Where were we? Oh, yeah, you were just telling me about how you were kidnapped by pirates when you were two and you have real trust issues... Hold on I've got another call...."

The invention of the cell phone may be the reason that monasticism is once again popular. If behavior like this is disrespectful to some schlub on a first date, do you think it more respectful to God almighty. When people are in love they capable of long silences in one another's presence. Sometimes silence says more than words ever can. Listening matters, especially when it is God to whom we are listening. "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10).

So the first thing do upon entering a Catholic Church is to shut up.

The Rev. Know-it-all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 3

More talk about shutting up....

Perhaps you are thinking, "I have always realized that this guy wants to take the church back to the stone age. Doesn't he realize that since Vatican II we are a resurrection people and the church is the place of gathering for the people of God? It is impolite not to greet our spiritual sisters and brothers in the house of our heavenly Parent. Doesn't this troll realize that God is present in the community and that She is pleased by our affection for one another? After all God is Luv." (Note to the humor impaired: the preceding was satire.)

Au contraire, mon cher! (That's French for "Nope!") Have you read the GIRM (General Instruction to the Roman Missal)? It says in paragraph 45, "Even before the celebration itself, it is commendable that silence 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."

Mass is the unbloody re-presentation of Calvary. It begins with a confession of sin; it then offers the Father the sacrifice of His Son, and then goes on to the joy of communion with the Risen Lord. The resurrection follows the crucifixion even at Mass. Mass is both sorrowful and joyful. It is repentance and forgiveness. It is death conquered by life. It isn't a pep rally. So rejoice your little hearts out after Mass. That's what the recessional hymn is for, followed by doughnuts and coffee in the parish hall. (I have heard this called the laying on of food, a laudable custom.)

The great offenders are, first of all, the clergy. We used to be silent in prayer and preparation for Mass. Sacristies were places where you could compose yourself and realize the amazing thing you were about to do. Now we scan the gathering crowd to see if we can catch the president of the finance committee before he ducks out early for his golf game. We yak with the best of them. We modern clergy are always "on" always ready to do the entertaining. God forbid that someone shouldn't like us!

The next bunch of offenders is the ushers. They generally stand in a clump at the back of church, whispering at the top of their voices because, as ushers, like the clergy, professionalism makes them exempt from the rules. And then there is the blue-haired brigade, little old lady land, as Max Bialystock called it. I have great sympathy for them. They are the saints who keep the church going. Their generosity makes everything possible, but they don't get out much and half of them are deaf as stones. They are the sweetest people on earth and the joy they have at seeing someone they care about in church is genuinely touching. HOWEVER, they cannot resist chatting with the girls. They sit there talking over the week's news with their "homies," thinking they are whispering, but the batteries in their hearing aids must be dead because they too are whispering at the top of their voices. This is not as I remember it from my long distant youth. I ask myself, "How has it come to pass that the moments before Mass have come to resemble a cocktail party after the second martini?"

You think I exaggerate? Once I was asked to say Mass in a much more progressive parish than my own, no kneelers, no vigil lights, tabernacle over on one side of the church, orchestra pit and piano over on the other, 30-year-old burlap banners everywhere urging us to rejoice or to dance in the forest or some such nonsense — you know the kind of place I'm talking about. An usher literally yelled across the church, something on the order of "Yo, Fred! When did you get back from Boca?"

I was once at a church in another diocese attending Mass with relatives. I knew things were not going to go well when I saw a wide screen television in the place where the tabernacle used to be. The noise before Mass was deafening and the noise during Mass wasn't much better. We used to have nuns whose mere glance could freeze water. They could quell any disturbance with a well-placed glare. Now most of them are off at native-American spirituality centers trying to get in touch with their spirit guides. We are just going to have to police ourselves.

"Well," you may ask, "Are we just to ignore our neighbor?" No, you can greet them with a nod and a smile, even a peck on the cheek, but if they insist on schmoozing, just whisper, "Let's have coffee together after Mass," or "Wait for me in the vestibule after church." If it's something really important like cousin Maude's complications after her latest nose job, just tell them, "Oooh! I want to hear it all. Let's go to the vestibule."

“Well,” you may counter, “I’m just going to talk for a couple seconds!” No, you’re not. You’re going to talk until the organ drowns you out, or someone wrestles you to the ground, and even then you will probably keep yakking! I remember the story of two ladies who were having a wonderful conversation in church. The organist increased the volume in an attempt to silence them. This merely encouraged the two to overpower the organ. When, at the end of the song, the organ abruptly stopped, one of the raconteurs was shouting at the top of her voice, “I always baste mine in butter!!!” Take it outside, because no matter how quiet you think you are being, you are stopping people from encountering the Lord and they have a perfect right to prepare for Mass, even if you don't think you need to prepare to meet the maker of the universe.

“All right! I’ll shut up before Mass. But the GIRM doesn’t forbid talking after Mass!” You’re quite right. The GIRM doesn’t forbid talking after Mass. Common decency does. If you see people praying after Mass, have the courtesy to be quiet. A big part of spiritual maturity is realizing that there are other people than you on the face of the earth. You think that you are the belle of the ball and that all your chatter is an expression of your good will to all the world. It isn’t. It is narcissism. Church doesn’t exist primarily to enhance your social life. Remember that the Scripture tells us that, “...even in the fool, silence is mistaken for wisdom.” (Proverbs 17:28)

Don’t get all huffy. I warned you this would be insulting.

The Rev. Know-it-all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 4

The Odor of Sanctity

You have entered the Church. You have shut up. Now what? The guiding principle is, in the words of St. John the Baptist, "He must increase I must decrease!" (John 3:30)

There are people who bathe in the holy water fountain, and then weeping, prostrate themselves on the church floor. This is unnecessary. Remember that the word "hypocrite" in the Biblical text doesn't mean a sneaky liar. It simply means a play actor.

When you perform an exaggerated gesture, are you doing it for God to see, or for your neighbor to see? *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."* (Matthew 6:5)

I am reminded of a joke. One Good Friday the pastor of a rather well-to-do parish, a very spontaneous fellow who believed deeply that it was his job to impress the congregation with his sanctity, fell to his knees in the middle of the service, crying out to heaven, "Oh, God! I am unworthy!" The deacon, not to be outdone, also fell to his knees shouting, "Oh, God, I too, am unworthy!" It was great theater and Schultz the plumber in the back row was overcome by the performance. He fell to his knees in the main aisle, shouting, "I am unworthy too, Lord." The deacon leaned over to the priest and whispered, "Look who's in back claiming to be unworthy!"

Just cross yourself at the Holy Water fountain, go the pew as far in the front as possible, genuflect or — if it would take a crane to get you back on your feet, as is the case with the author of this embarrassing screed — a bow to the tabernacle will suffice. If some clever liturgist has managed to completely hide or remove the tabernacle, a simple bow to the altar, which is a symbol of the divine presence, will do. Remember, "He must increase I must decrease!" The trick is not to draw attention to yourself.

This also applies to the reception of Holy Communion. I personally think it is a mistake to have stopped kneeling for communion, but I am not a bishop. At the current time, standing is the normal posture for receiving our Lord in Holy Communion. However, a priest or minister may not deny communion to someone who chooses to kneel. There are many who prefer to kneel, and I believe that we should make allowance for them.

They can kneel at the communion rail and the minister can bring them communion when there is an opportunity or at the end of the regular communion line. If there is no communion rail, a kneeler can be put at the side of the celebrant, for the convenience of those who insist on kneeling. Even as someone who wants to discuss the wisdom of the current arrangement, I still get irritated when someone flops to their knees in the Communion line, causing the people behind them to trip. (They aren't paying any attention anyway, as the assembly line of grace meanders down the aisle). There is an important liturgical principle at stake here: DON'T MAKE A SCENE!

I have heard horror stories about some progressive communion minister or priest trying to drag a kneeling communicant to his feet while the communicant wrestles to stay down. That sure glorifies God — Not! You think you are giving glory to God, but you are more probably grinding an axe. I think it is a fine thing to kneel for communion, but obedience is much more pleasing to God than dramatic prostrations. "To obey is better than sacrifice." (1Sam. 15:25)

Another issue comes to mind. Perfume. Your favorite scent, "*Nuits de Oui*," — imported in industrial tankers from some seaport in southern France — may, as far as you're concerned, smell like a garden on a warm spring evening. To those around you it may smell like a bad afternoon in Gary, Indiana. If you insist on wearing perfume, don't bathe in the stuff. You don't have to warn people from a block away that your arrival is imminent like some bus spewing diesel fumes. A little goes a long way, especially if your victims have asthma.

This goes triple for the celebrant and the ministers of communion. If you feel it is necessary to douse yourself with scent on like some red herring, perhaps you shouldn't be a communion minister. When you are on to help with Holy Communion DO NOT WEAR ANY COLOGNE OR PERFUME AT ALL!!! There are few things more disturbing than receiving the body and blood of the Lord and tasting something like cleaning fluid, instead of "bread from heaven containing in itself all sweetness."

THIS APPLIES TO YOU, TOO, FATHER. Lose the cologne. You shouldn't smell that good anyway. Remember your promise of celibacy. (While I'm thinking of it, it is also a little nauseating to see a schmeer of "Red Sails in the Sunset Brand Industrial Strength

Lipstick” on the chalice. I have no idea what to do about that. If anyone has a suggestion, I’m open to it.)

There is the flip side to the olfactory coin. I would encourage everyone to bathe at a reasonable interval of time before coming to church. You may be comfortable with a certain earthy naturalness, but the person two rows back who has just fainted is not as comfortable with earthiness as you are.

And another thing, Father — Incense. Incense is beautifully symbolic. It is a symbol of the prayers of the saints which rise to heaven. It is a symbol of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit, unseen yet powerful. Scripture enjoins its use. It brings us back to the temple in old Jerusalem and forward to the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. It is an integral part of the Roman liturgy. However it should not set off the smoke alarms. I have seen priests and even altar servers ladle on enough incense to clear a swamp of its mosquitoes. God is in all places, friend. It doesn’t take a lot of incense to reach heaven’s throne. Liturgists seem to love the dramatic effect of incense, something like a smoke machine at a discotheque.

I will never forget a glorious liturgy back in my seminary days in which the entire student body of 300, one by one, was to throw a pinch of incense into a Weber kettle barbecue grill that had been set up in the sanctuary. (I kept looking around for the statue of a Roman Emperor.) Anyway, about half way through the liturgy, visibility was down to about two feet and people were beginning to crawl out of the chapel on all fours.

Ah, the glory days of liturgical improvisation immediately following the council... Good times. Seriously, lighten up on the smells. The liturgy should draw us into the mystery of God, not send us to the emergency room. The odor of sanctity should not gag a goat nor knock a buzzard off its perch.

The Rev. Know it all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 5

I am reminded of the old monsignor who hated music. His parishioners told him, "But Monsignor, music bridges every gap. It reaches the untouchable. It speaks the ineffable."

He shot back "I don't care if it unscrews the inscrutable. I just don't like it!"



Perhaps he was thinking of the organist in the parish of my childhood who looked and sounded exactly like Jimmy Durante. I can still remember the white knuckles of old Monsignor O'Brien as he clutched the arms of his chair while the organist slaughtered Gregorian chant. A very traditional priest once told me that he couldn't bear to hear the Salve Regina sung at gatherings of priests. He said it sounded more like the Notre Dame fight song when the clergy got their mitts on it.

There are a few guiding principles when it come to church music. The first is the guiding principal of all Eucharistic Liturgies. (A fancy-schmantzy edumacated word for "Mass").

1. Mass is the unbloody re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary. It ain't a stage production.
2. The only star at Mass is Jesus on the altar.
3. Prayer is as much, if not more, about listening than it is about talking. Even congregational singing is about listening, listening to the people around you with whom you are singing. It isn't my venue, or yours, for self expression. It's a sacrifice and it's about God.

There are three groups of people who need to be taken out to the woodshed and reasoned with on these three points: first, the congregation; second, the choir, cantors and music directors; and third priests and deacons.

I will first insult the congregation. It is said that he who sings prays twice. Why? Try an experiment. Say something, and then sing it. (You might want to close the door. Your spouse might think she has grounds to commit you to an asylum. Lord knows, she's been looking for just such an opportunity for years.) When you say it, it comes out your nose and mouth. Or at least your nose. When you sing it, you can feel it in your chest right near your heart.

C.S. Lewis makes the point that we aren't souls trapped in flesh, we are incarnate spirits. What we do with our bodies we do with our souls. That's why gestures and physical things are integral to Catholic worship.

St Paul says. "*I will sing with the spirit, I will sing the mind also.*"(1Cor. 14:15) Spirit means breath! You worship God with your body, your spirit and your mind when you sing. When you say a prayer, especially if you are half awake because of one of my long, tedious sermons about Greek verbs, you pray only with your mind, and let's face it, with some of us, our mind is not our strong suit. So I urge you to heed the words of my high school choir director who used to tell us "Sing! @\$%@ Sing!" (I'm not making this up. He was a bit salty, and a little frightening. We sang for fear of physical violence.)



HOWEVER! Listen as you sing. Don't outshout the people around you. You may think you sound like Luciano Pavarotti, when in fact you sound like Elmer Fudd. We are trying to express our oneness and harmony in the Lord. By the same token, don't mumble like some frightened child. Open your



mouths! And while I'm on the subject, I can never figure out why some people think that whether speaking or singing, the first person to finish the prayer wins. It's about breathing, that powerful symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Breath of God. Breathe, slow down, listen to the people around you. That's how you participate at Mass.

Next, I will insult choirs and choir directors. I will never forget when we welcomed the new bishop of Frostbite Falls at the Basilica of St. Hyperdoulia. It was a real battle of the bands; two choirs, one director and the children's kazoo orchestra accompanying the liturgical dancers. The breathless choir director rushed up to me after the service and asked "How was the music?"

I told him that I had thoroughly enjoyed it, and hoped that God had enjoyed it half so much! I remember an old choir director at my theology school, Bathsheba Bible College, who led one of the finest choirs in all of upper lower Minnesota. Someone once asked him why there were no recordings of this truly exceptional 300 voice choir, He simply said, "Madam, this music is meant for the glory of God, not for your entertainment."

Perhaps he was a bit less pastoral than he should have been, but his point was well taken. I recall attending a day-long seminar for folk choirs. It was titled “How to Avoid Crimes against Humanity and Other Musical Faux Pas.” The competition between folk choirs can get truly vicious, because it seems that every lead singer thinks he or she can make a paying career out of playing four chords on a mail order ukulele. Amazingly, some church musicians have been able to do this, especially immediately following the council. I digress. I asked a simple question. “How many of you go into an empty church and perform before the tabernacle, just as a gift to the Lord?”

I was astonished that out of twenty choirs present, one choir said that they did that regularly. I was astonished because I had expected no one to have done it. Music in church should lift the mind and heart to God. It should have a balance between music that is heard and music that can easily be sung, thus involving the whole congregation. It is never about the performance.

Above all, it is the Mass that is sung. Hymns and chants should be integral to the structure of the Mass, and not just a song selection for our morning’s entertainment. The musical low point of every liturgical year usually comes at First Communion when the little dears stand on the sanctuary steps, face the congregation and sing some maudlin thing sweet enough to give you diabetes. Their parents get all misty eyed, crawl over pews, knock down those who are between them and their little thespians and snap pictures. God has nothing to do with it at that point. It is the children who are being worshiped. Perhaps if they faced the tabernacle and altar and sang to the Lord, it would be excusable as merely bad taste instead of idolatry. The proof that it is idolatry is that about 10% of the idolaters who have just presented their children for First Holy Communion will be in church next Sunday. I rest my case!

Now, on to the clergy. I am reminded at this point of a very sad funeral of one of the students back at my old seminary. He died after a long illness and was buried from the seminary chapel. The celebrant who fancied himself a great liturgist, crooned and emoted with arms outstretched and face contorted. It was a performance worthy of Greek tragedy. I was so tempted to sneak up behind the altar, tug on his vestment and remind him that the guest of honor was in the coffin.

Remember, Father, the liturgy is not about you. It is about the Lord. Once again I quote the renowned Fr. Zuhlsdorf, "Say what's in black, do what's in red." To this I would add, "turn off your microphone when there is singing going on. With music, louder is not always better. You may think you are motivating and leading the congregation, when, in fact, you are giving them a migraine. When you sing into a microphone all the congregation can hear is you, Father. As I said above, you may think that you sound like Luciano Pavarotti when in fact you sound like Elmer Fudd, so just back away from the mike, and give other people a chance to sing.

There seems to be an inverse relationship between amplified music and congregational participation. The louder a cantor or priest sings, or an organ plays, the quieter the congregation gets. If the cantor, the celebrant and the organ are blazing away, the less the people are going to have to sing. They hear noise, so people must be singing. When the noise lessens, people realize that no one is actually singing, and they just might try to join in.

Another great obstacle to congregational singing is what C.S. Lewis calls "the fear of the same old thing." Some priests, cantors, and choir directors, in an effort to shine, constantly look for new material with which to prove their virtuosity. They are tired of singing the same old thing. Catholicism is all about the same old thing, "*Christ the same yesterday today and tomorrow*" (Heb. 13:8), and by the same old thing I mean Gregorian chant.

Here at St. Dymphna's We have been singing a lot of Gregorian chant in English. The same dreary old Alleluia, Our Father, Great Amen, and the same tedious melody for the entrance verse and offertory verse. After about a year, people really started to belt it out. Your improvisations may be lovely, but they are obstacles to congregational singing.

To sum it up. It isn't all one thing or the other. There are moments in Mass for listening, for being uplifted, there are moments for joining together in sung prayer, but Mass is never about performance, and never about the cantor, the choir, the organist, or the celebrant. It is about the Lord and His Bride, which is all of us together.

The Rev. Know it all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 6

And a few more issues.....

“Worship the Lord in holy attire. Tremble before Him, all the earth.” (Psalm 96:9)

This doesn't mean clothes that are full of holes, even designer ripped blue jeans. Clothing is important. It says something. I am reminded of the story of a man, who, long after the current binge of informality was in full swing, always wore a suit and tie to church, even in the dog days of August. His children tried to get him to loosen up reminding him that nobody got dressed up for church any more.

He glared at them and said, “I'm not Nobody. I'm Somebody and I will continue to dress like somebody.”

When we fail to dress appropriately for a gathering of people who deserve our respect, we are not just saying I'm nobody, we are saying that they are nobody. Still worse we are saying that God is nobody. If it's true that every Mass is the heavenly wedding feast of Christ and His Church, why should we pay more attention to how we dress for a wedding party in this passing world?

It is a biblical principle that what is covered is sacred. The Ark of the Covenant was veiled. The Holy of Holies was veiled. Even the face of Moses was veiled. That is why we always used to veil the chalice and it is still recommended that we do so. That is why women used to wear a veil or head covering in church. We had the silly, archaic notion that women and feminine beauty was sacred. (Again, note to the humor impaired; this is sarcasm.) Now of course we know that the beauty of women is just an advertising gimmick, to be flashed at the super bowl. There's nothing special about women now and their ability to be, like the holy ark, unique vessels for the creative presence of God. If, in this modern age, you still think that you are special in the sight of God and that the human body is sacred, please wear something a little less revealing. This applies to men and women, young and old alike.

There are two ways to dress inappropriately for Mass. One can overdress and one can under dress. Overdressing usually happens at Easter, at weddings or at funerals. Perhaps it is imprecise to call it overdressing because, in certain instances, it seems to involve very little actual cloth. It is amazing to see people dress seductively for Easter or

for a wedding, but to see someone dressed seductively at a funeral borders on the morbid! One should be thinking of the brevity of life, not the brevity of the lector's skirt. The other extreme is when a man or a woman comes in dressed like a parade float at Mardi Gras. At least they are covered I suppose, but the whole spectacle is a little intimidating.

One is reminded of the conversation between Mae West and a young starlet. Ms. West descends a spiral staircase wearing a diamond necklace that could blind the incautious onlooker. The starlet gasps, "Goodness!" Ms. West shoots her a look and says, "Goodness had nothin' to do with it!"

Well, there are those who dress very formally for Mass for whom goodness has nothing to do with it either. Mass is Calvary and the Resurrection all at once. In a sense, it is both funeral and wedding. You shouldn't outshine the bride, nor for that matter the deceased. Weddings, funerals and Masses are not about you and who you are trying to impress, or, for that matter to seduce. A person should dress at Mass in a way that honors the Lord and His Bride, the Church, and not in a way that draws attention away from the Lord or the Church. Mass is about God and not about me or you!

In our times it is not usually overdressing, but under-dressing that is the problem. Heaven forefend that we should be uncomfortable. Many of us come dressed for the beach, not for the wedding of the Lamb that is attended by untold numbers of saints and angels. When we go to Mass we are taken to the heavenly throne of God whether we know it or not. Christ is the same yesterday today and tomorrow. For God all times are now, all places are here.

There is only one Mass in all of history. The upper room, Calvary the inn on the road to Emmaus, the early weekday Mass and the 5PM Vigil Mass on Saturday evening are all the same thing. You aren't just lounging in the 3rd row from the back near the closest door to the parking lot. You are standing before God's throne in the presence of untold billions of saints and angels. Perhaps you can't see them, but they can see you, and I think I hear some giggling among the smaller cherubs.

There you stand at the most exalted gathering in all of human and angelic history, wearing old plaid gym shorts a ripped T-shirt and flip flops. I suggest wear something a

little more presentable. The seraphim and the patriarchs don't think your knobby knees are quite as attractive as you do. It's all about being comfortable, isn't it? It's a big enough bother to have to go to Mass anyway, God should be grateful just to see me there! And now you want me to wear actual clothing?

If the president were to invite you to the white House for dinner, would you wear flip flops and a T-shirt? The White House is small potatoes compared to Mass.

“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:22-24).

All the powers of Heaven and all the saints of Earth are there even if you can't see them. And they are looking at you. And they think that outfit you're wearing is ridiculous.

The Rev. Know it all's guide to how to behave in Church Part 7

Still more complaints..... There are a few more things that are crazy making that I would just like to mention.

Genuflecting! It is customary to genuflect upon entering a pew. The word genuflect is a Latin word meaning "to bend the knee" by this gesture we fulfill what St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians (2:10) that "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

Parents, teach your children to genuflect. Let them know who lives in that little box behind the altar (or in some churches hidden behind the potted palms). If one is old, dignified, and not petite, like the present writer, a simple bow of the head will suffice. The point is to honor the Lord who is truly present in the tabernacle. I have seen people fall to their knees and prostrate themselves as the people immediately behind them trip on the sudden speed bump that has magically appeared in their path. All our gestures should draw attention to the Lord, not to ourselves.

One can under-reverence or over-reverence. The two extremes are the same. If I bob into the pew with my baseball cap jauntily set backwards on my head, and plop into the bench and start texting while waiting for the show to start, or if I am the show, demonstrating my great piety by exaggerated gestures, the motive is the same: ME and how I feel! Remember it's the sacrifice of the Mass and it's about the Lord and His bride, the Church.

If you are in one of those nice modern churches where the Blessed Sacrament has been given His own room near the broom closet, where the congregation won't bother Him too much, it is customary to bow toward the altar, which, though not the REAL presence of our Lord, is still a symbol of Christ. Speaking of genuflecting....

Kneelers! I have two complaints. First of all, try to let the kneelers down gently when it is time to kneel. The sound of a hundred or so kneelers hitting the floor is a bit distracting as we enter the most sacred moments of the Mass. Second, if you are among those irritated by the sound of kneelers hitting the ground, stop telling me, your pastor, to do something about it. It makes me crazy too! I have mentioned it and now am writing about it. I might as well tell the wind to stop blowing.

The sign of peace! The sign of peace is an ancient gesture that was shared as a preparation for Holy Communion. In the earliest days of the Church it seemed to precede the offertory. In the Latin Rite it is exchanged after the Our Father. In the sharing of a gesture of peace, the person next to you symbolically represents the whole Church and the whole of humanity. That person answers the lawyers question to Christ, "and who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29)

It is sufficient to greet the person next to you. In greeting them you have greeted all believers. You needn't climb over the pew to hug some perfect stranger in the back row. In some churches this ancient and beautiful custom has come to resemble the pep rally before a high school basketball game. I particularly enjoy the wave of peace done at smaller Masses. The small congregation is dispersed through the entire church and, being unable to physically greet those in distant pews, everyone begins to wave and rotate. It looks pretty funny from up at the altar, something like the Disney World ride "It's a small world after all..." Everyone waving and rotating and smiling. At larger Masses, people hug and smooch and stretch as far as they can reach, so as not to offend anyone by leaving them out.

Remember, it's a symbolic gesture, not a cocktail party! Just greet the people on either side of you. That will do. You can kiss them all at the coffee hour after Mass. Trying to get the congregational focus back on the Lord is near impossible after the festivities break out. I have seen visiting non-Catholics put on their coats and prepare to leave when this happens. They assume now that pandemonium has broken out the church service must be over. Sometimes they are correct. It's like half time at the football game and people are about to go to the concession stand for a beer, except Holy Communion substitutes for a beer and a hot dog. I've seen celebrants go down into the congregation and kiss all the babies and hug all the parishioners from the first row to the last as if they were running for county treasurer. I have seen the sanctuary mobbed as the whole congregation comes up to kiss the bride at the wedding. It's all about as sacred as a beer bash.

Sometimes the festivities begin at the Our Father, when someone grabs your hand and holds it, sometimes raising it over his head and yours, ending with a sudden upward lunge at "the kingdom the power and the glory..." You have been holding hands with a

perfect stranger for a few minutes, and then, when you are about to be set free, the priest invites the congregation to exchange some sign of peace. Then the perfect stranger squeezes you in a bear hug and you are praying that his or her intentions are honorable.

There are some people who actually don't enjoy holding hands with strangers or being hugged by people to whom they have never been introduced. One man's expression of love for all humanity can be another man's signal to contact the proper authorities. If a person doesn't want to hold your hand or embrace you like a long lost cousin, then respect that. Don't force anyone to participate in your personal expression of Christian bonhomie (That's French for "Won't you be my neighbor?" I, for one, always found that song a little creepy.)

Now, for those of you who don't like hand holding and bear hugs. No one is forcing you to hug back. If you are adverse to even a hand shake, my advice is nod and smile. You don't have to raise your hand if you don't want to. If a person insists on hugging you, you are free to discreetly whisper, "I'd rather not, please." Try to smile when you are saying it. If they then glare at you as if you were Attila the Hun, that's their problem. The normal gesture in this part of the world is a simple handshake, not a bear hug nor a threat to call a lawyer if someone so much as touches you. Once again I repeat the words of the great American philosopher Rodney King, "Can't we all just get along?"

Oh, two more things: If you have a crying or chattering child, quietly go to the vestibule. If there is a cry-room don't sit there unless you have a crying or chattering child. If you are behind a beleaguered mother (or father) of the crying or chattering child, don't glare at them as they wrestle with their little dear, offer to help them! Remember, you were probably a pretty awful child yourself. One of my earliest memories was banging my little white baby shoes on the back on the wooden pew in church. The noise was glorious and the look of panicked distress on my parents' faces was wonderful. I was a horrible child. Or so they tell me.