

Church Etiquette: Respect In God's House

When we are guests in someone's home, we most likely practice our best manners and teach our children to do the same. If we're guests in God's House, how much more important should our manners be!

Everything in life has rules, including church. How can we pray if we are distracted by needless noise and commotion? Proper etiquette is about relationship building and can apply to all areas of our lives.

Tips On Manners At Mass

Attire: The idea of "Sunday best" should be honored; churchgoers of all ages should dress conservatively. Coat and tie is appropriate for men, but not required. Women should wear modest dress. Tank tops, very short skirts, low cut necklines or tight-fitting clothing would be considered disrespectful. Shorts are not appropriate for either men or women.

Arrival: Prepare your offering envelope ahead of time. Arrive at least 10 minutes before Mass begins. This helps reduce distractions and provides time to get settled. Latecomers should wait to be seated by ushers so as not to disrupt the service and the congregation. Gum or candy should never be in your mouth when coming to Mass.

Entering the church: Once you leave the gathering space, refrain from socializing with your friends. Remember that others are already engaged in prayer in their seats. It is optional to bless yourself with holy water, but as a sign of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, genuflect (or bow if unable to genuflect) before taking your seat. Move over to the center of the row as a courtesy to accommodate others who arrive after you.

Quiet time: Turn off cell phones and pagers. It is understandable that children have difficulty sitting quietly, but when they become distracting, take them out briefly until they settle down. They may be too warm and need a change of environment.

Sign of Peace: People usually shake hands briefly or exchange a quick kiss, but if you have a cold or cough, you can politely say, "Peace be with you," without shaking hands. **Consecration:** Elevation of the Host and the Chalice after the words of consecration are spoken is a sacred time, and there should be silent reverence with no movement around the church, except in an emergency.

Communion: Again, refrain from socializing when leaving the row to receive Communion. Receive the Holy Eucharist with reverence, bow slightly and respond "Amen."

Leaving the church: It is still part of the Mass to sing the closing hymn. Leaving before the hymn ends is inappropriate. After the hymn, genuflect (or bow) toward the altar before leaving. Refrain from greeting and visiting each other until out in the gathering space. Have respect for those who wish to remain in prayer.

* Taken from "Church Etiquette Review" by Suzanne Molino Singleton, published on the web at *Catholic Online*