

“My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?” Like many scriptural passages, this one has been interpreted beyond its literal sense, and beautifully so. St. Gregory the Great described that the wedding guests were lacking something essential. Faith opened the gate, but they lacked the proper garment. And that garment was the virtue of charity, woven of two threads, love of God and love of neighbor:

“...if anyone were invited to a human wedding, he would change his clothes and manifest by the very beauty of his clothes that he will rejoice with the bridegroom and the bride; he would blush to show himself with neglected clothes among the jubilant people celebrating this feast. And we who go to the wedding of God, we do not care to change the garment of our soul!<sup>1</sup>

As valid as this spiritual reading is, it is equally true that questions surrounding appropriate behavior and attire in Church have been with the Church for centuries. Customs and styles change over the centuries, and yet, there is a timelessness that transcends all cultures. The Church responds to pressing needs of its age. This topic was even addressed by an ecumenical Council in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, responding to the challenges of secular courts using churches for judicial inquiries and public speeches. And yet, the exhortation of the council fathers is timely in our own day:

*Holiness befits the house of the Lord; it is fitting that he whose abode has been established in peace should be worshipped in peace and with due reverence. Churches, then, should be entered humbly and devoutly; behavior inside should be calm, pleasing to God, bringing peace to the beholders, a source not only of instruction but of mental refreshment.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 38, given at Basilica of St. Clement on 10 February 592.

<sup>2</sup> Second Council of Lyons, 1274 A.D. cf. psalm 92,5 and 73,3

The sacred liturgy is our sacred “work”. The word *liturgy* comes from the Greek (*leitourgia*) **meaning** a public duty or work, a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. It was appropriated into the Church. We come to church for a sacred work, sacred worship. This demands a decorum commensurate with the dignity of the holy work to be done.

It especially pertains to us priests. How we treat the sacred vessels and objects directly relates to the worship of God. The lay faithful ought to be able to trust that priests will show due reverence for the sanctity of worship and that they will carefully guard sacred vessels and objects from any possibility of profanation. For example, Church Law is clear that the priest is responsible for the careful maintenance of the tabernacle key.”<sup>3</sup>

To be clear—there are no official and specific Church norms regarding clothing for those attending Mass. But common sense does speak to it. Sunday is different from all other days and the way we treat it, including in our dress, matters. “The Church, the house of God, is... the privileged place of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>4</sup> We ought to dress differently for Mass than we do around our backyard.

When parents teach their children the value of dressing for Church at an early age, it becomes a habit, one they will remember. I vividly recall my brothers and I lining up so Dad could comb our hair. It stuck with me.

We also show reverence by being on time. Please know that I appreciate your many sacrifices, especially with getting children ready. It means planning for contingencies, so that you might arrive on time, without always feeling rushed. The weekend work on the freeway does not help any and our visitors may not be familiar with our parking challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> Code of Canon Law Canon 938, §5 “[T]he person responsible for the church or oratory is to take care that the key of the tabernacle in which the Most Holy Eucharist is reserved is safeguarded most diligently.” Recount the story of an Archbishop paying an unexpected visit to a country pastor, all too often gone from his parish, leaving the tabernacle key (which he had discovered carelessly left out) in the priest’s Breviary. The priest called the next day, wondering where it was... “Look in your breviary,” quipped the Archbishop!

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 2691

This is all because God's house must always and everywhere be treated differently than other buildings. It is blessed and consecrated for worship. We will celebrate the anniversary of the Cathedral consecration this Wed. October 14 at the 7:30 a.m. Mass. I hope some of you can join us.

God judges the heart, not by mere appearance. We could be dressed in our Sunday best and be leading hypocritical lives, absent of the virtue of charity. This was the point of St. Gregory's homily. Yet, our appearance does communicate the reverence we owe to God in His holy temple, the Church. This is God's house, and we are privileged to be able to worship Him in spirit and in truth.