

From the desk of Fr. Jim

Faithful Participation

In the pattern of our week, the focus is directed to the Sunday Mass. Even though we offer the Mass every day at least twice, and the day seems to revolve around that offering, even the daily pattern is eclipsed by the Sunday Mass. It is certainly the self-giving of Jesus and the hope that we have in him that calls us to make the Sunday Mass such a pinnacle event. The truth is that the Christian faith does not have its intended value without this. It is possible that a person could go through life calling themselves a Christian, and even honestly believing that they are, without ever functioning as one. The manner of our participation in the Sunday Mass dictates a great deal more than we may think about how we regard our relationship with Christ and his Church.

Perhaps because we have grown so fast (our Mass attendance is three times what it was seven years ago) or it may be because of some characteristic of our suburban life, we have developed a particular “culture” regarding our Mass that is in fact quite foreign to Catholic life. A particular laxity is, however, evident in many parts of the Church since Vatican II, or since the decline of respect in life generally since the 60’s. There are a number of things that are noticeable:

- A lack of attention to the Mass, the readings, homily and prayers.
- A disrespect for the Church building and its furnishings. The pews are vandalized almost every week with people carving the wood. There are foot prints on the walls wherever people stand for the Mass. Trash, gum, children’s food and other debris are left throughout the pews and on the grounds with no regard for those who follow.
- The degree and number of people late for Mass is a constant disruption. There are some who enter the Church just before communion and leave just after. Such participation is a gross offense against the Blessed Sacrament and, therefore, the grave sin of sacrilege.
- The number of no-shows for altar servers, readers, Eucharistic ministers and ushers creates confusion and chaos. There are some Masses when none of the participants are those who were scheduled.

Undoubtedly, we are suffering from a decline of respect in our culture. Our Church was vandalized last week. Spray painted words and symbols desecrated the west transept doors. I am relatively certain that such an act was motivated by people who have little self-confidence or self-respect. I can almost hear their thoughts as they left their deed behind, that they had “shown us” what they can do. Truly, what is more significant is what they have shown to themselves - to what depth of disregard they had fallen. What was once a childhood prank changes when the object is the Church. It is not just our God that is represented here. It is the God of all who is the object of our offense. And, it is the soul of a people that is visible in spray paint.

To stand by and do nothing as a culture unravels is the height of arrogance. Parents are examples to their children, whether they like it or not. Other people’s parents are examples, too, whether they like it or not. Whatever our children see adults doing, they will also do. If the parents exhibit disrespect in even the smallest way, children will magnify this in their own behavior.

In order to assist our parish in developing a spirit of respect for the Mass, we will do the following:

- Latecomers will not be seated during the prayers and readings or the homily. If you are late to Mass you will be asked to wait at the back of the Church.
- The narthex or aisles of the church are not gathering places for those not involved in the Mass. All participants (including those in the narthex and aisles) are asked to kneel during the consecration, except those who are elderly or infirm.
- We will not continue to schedule for service those who do not appear.
- Toys and food are not allowed in the church.
- Do not leave your pews ahead of the procession.

It should be noted that it is an expectation that children be present in Mass and as participants in the Mass from the time they are preparing for First Communion (first grade). The narthex is intended as a place for parents who are dealing with a crying baby. It is not a play area for toddlers.