

Are you dressed for the Lord's Banquet?

By Bishop Victor Galeone

Periodically parishioners write to me, requesting a Latin Mass in their parish. They are well aware that a Latin Mass is celebrated at Immaculate Conception every Sunday, but they would like one closer to home. I am convinced that what these parishioners truly desire is not so much Latin in the Mass as a spirit of reverence - a sense that they have been in contact with the sacred, while worshipping with their fellow parishioners.

As evidence for my statement, I would like to quote from an article that was published less than four years after the new liturgy had been initiated. The article appeared in the July 1974 issue of *The Critic*, a progressive, though now defunct, Catholic monthly:

"Latin was discarded; the celebrant about-faced; laymen were permitted to make themselves heard from the sanctuary; choirs were disbanded in favor of community sings. My God, it was beautiful! Or at least it would be, as soon as a few problems were worked out...By now, however, the evidence indicating the current state of the liturgy is so overpowering that only a cleric could remain unconvinced...So, you ask, what can be done about it? Bring back the Latin Mass! However, I realize we can never go back...but surely something can be done to recover some small part of the enchantment that is so patently missing from the Mass today." - Dan Herr, "Stop Pushing" column

Yes, Dan, something can be done. For starters, the celebrant of the Mass should realize that the liturgy is not his personal property. It belongs to the whole church. Indeed, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first document issued by Vatican II, clearly states that other than the Apostolic See, and as laws may determine, the bishop, "...no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority." (S.C. III, 22)

Second, all the ministers serving at Sunday liturgies should be dressed to indicate that they realize the importance of what they are doing. Our diocesan Liturgical Commission has drawn up a set of Dress Code Guidelines for Liturgical Ministers, which I have approved. Therefore all liturgical ministers are expected to follow these guidelines - lectors, cantors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, ushers, greeters, etc.

I recall the case of an usher in a parish up north, where I had recently become the pastor. This usher's regular attire for a Sunday Mass consisted of walking shorts and a T-shirt. After a few weeks, I asked the head usher to inform him either to come properly garbed for his role as usher or to relinquish his position. During the week, "Joe Casual" wrote me a strong letter, informing me of his change of parish, and accusing me of being a Pharisee, more concerned about the outside of the cup than the inside. I responded by wishing him well in his new parish, while reminding him how Jesus had criticized his host, Simon, for overlooking the basics of hospitality - the kiss of welcome, water for his feet and ointment for his head. (Lk. 7:44-46)

And finally, you, the parishioners, can do so much to contribute to the sacred atmosphere of Sunday worship. Would any of us accept an invitation from the governor of our state, dressed as if we were going to the beach? I am well aware that during July and August the humidity in our area becomes almost unbearable. Still, most of us go from an air-conditioned house to an air-conditioned car to an air-conditioned church. What a contrast between us, who enjoy so much of this world's blessings, and the poor people of Haiti that I personally witnessed, regularly worshipping at Sunday Mass, dressed as if they were attending a wedding!

I could go on adding to the list of those things that are counterproductive to the atmosphere needed for the celebration of the sacred liturgy - like chewing gum, and loud, boisterous conversations in church before Mass. Instead, I would simply like to close by citing God's complaint to his chosen people for offering less than perfect animals as their sacrifice:

"But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?...When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? - says the Lord Almighty.'"(Malachi 1:6-8)