

Mass Etiquette

Who remembers Emily Post?

At one time the book published by Emily Post was required reading in the home and in school. Published in the 1920's this book was a manual on proper behavior of virtually every social activity. The 38 chapters covered such subjects as greetings, sending cards, dress, marriage preparations and formal dinners – just to name a few categories. This is what Emily had to say about how to act in church from chapter 3:



“People do not greet each other in church, except at a wedding. At weddings, people do speak to friends sitting near them, but in a low tone of voice. It would be shocking to enter a church and hear Babel of voices! Ordinarily in church if a friend happens to catch your eye, you smile, but never actually bow. If you go to a church not your own and a stranger offers you a seat in her pew, you should, on leaving, turn to her and say: “Thank you.” But you do not greet anyone until you are out on the church steps, when you naturally speak to your friends. “Hello” should not be said on this occasion because it is too “familiar” for the solemnity of church surroundings.”

The Do's and Don'ts of Mass

While the text from Emily Post may sound a little old fashioned – it speaks of a time when people treated people with respect and with social graces. Some people think good etiquette is knowing which fork is to be used for the salad. However, in today's world, when your food may be wrapped in wax paper and tossed out of a drive in window – knowing which is the salad fork is not likely to be a concern!

In fact, the matter of dining is just one symptom of the greater problem. More than likely, families today spend less time together at the dinner table. When I was growing up, TV did not exist so the dinner table was family time. We talked and

listened and learned. This is also where we learned some of our basic manners.

So let's take a look at some of the Mass Etiquette Do's and Don'ts:

- **Do** remember that you are in a sacred place while in church. This is the house of God and we should act as such. Keep in mind that there may be several physical areas within the church building. The Sanctuary section is usually elevated and contains the altar – and perhaps the Tabernacle. The seating place is called the Nave. Both of these places are sacred ground and are often separated from the entrance – or Narthex (also called a Foyer).
- **Don't** spend time visiting with friends while inside of the sacred part of the church. The Narthex is the proper place to greet others. Others may be in prayer and we should respect their need for silence.
- **Do** remember to raise your kneeler when you leave your seat for communion – so others do not have to trip over it.
- **Don't** bring your electronic devices inside of the church. If you must – you should turn them off or place them on mute.
- **Do** genuflect or bow when you pass the Tabernacle – as Jesus is truly present there.
- **Don't** dress in inappropriate ways. In times past men and women dressed up for church with the clothes you would wear to a grand party or to dine out. It was a sign of respect for the occasion – and dressing with modesty.
- **Do** make a small reverent bow when approaching the minister to receive communion from the Chalice and/or Ciborium.
- **Don't** visit with friends on your way back to your pew after receiving Jesus.
- **Do** participate fully in the mass. We are not spectators – as we actually assist at mass.
- **Don't** use the mass time for personal prayers. While small prayerful expressions during the mass may be appropriate other prayers such as a rosary are not – which would distract us from the order of the mass.
- **Do** come to mass on time. Plan ahead with adequate time to allow for unexpected events.
- **Don't** leave mass after communion. The priest should be the last one in and the first one out.