



The Laity's Mass Obligations—Part I **by Joe Sixpack**

Most readers won't remember this because you aren't old enough (yeah, ladies, you can take that as a compliment), but prior to Vatican II you could go to Mass at any church in the world and feel right at home. Why? Because everybody did exactly the same thing, in exactly the same way, and at the exact appointed time. The reason for that was, just as in the divinely instituted worship of the old covenant, everybody knew how God wanted to be worshipped... right down to our every gesture. As the Jews of old were being obedient to God in worship as given to Moses, we were being obedient to God, as directed by His Catholic Church, in the Mass. It's sad, though, that I had to use the word "were" in the previous sentence, because we're *still* obligated to do things in Mass as directed by Christ through His Church.

It was the confusion that occurred after Vatican II that changed things. While it is true that the Council Fathers revised the Mass to make it more like the Mass of the early Church, they really didn't change much else on anything they dealt with. Just as the extraordinary form of the Mass (Latin Mass) had its rubrics to tell us how to act in unison to worship God, so too does the current ordinary form.

When you go to Mass today, you see people doing all sorts of things that are rubrically incorrect, and you might even see several different things being done all at the same time. For example, some people might kiss at the sign of peace, while others turn to the folks next to them to shake hands, while still others may leave the pew to seek out other people for a hand shake. Yet since the rubrics only call for one action, all of those mentioned above can't possibly be right. Well, we're going to try to help you do it the right way, because God commands it. Intentionally doing things wrongly is sinful, if only venially so, but we're obligated to avoid even venial sin if we can.

I plan to tackle the rubrics here, and even some things that aren't in them, as you'll see shortly. When I'm expressing opinion, I'll tell you so. When you have legitimate options, even though I may not personally like an option and may express my dislike of it, I'll still make it clear what your legitimate options are. And you'll notice the end of the title on this installment indicates it is the first of more than one on this topic, so expect to see lots covered. Oh, and I'll do my best to get everything in order, but don't take the order of my presentation as absolutely accurate.

Let's begin by talking about those things *not* covered by the rubrics. First of all, both Church law and the Third Commandment oblige us to participate in the Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days

of Obligation. We're permitted to not go to Mass if we have a very good reason. Vacation, going to visit grandma, family outings, fishing, *et cetera*, **are not good reasons**. Illness or taking care of one who is sick *are* good reasons. So if you decide to skip Mass because you're traveling, you would be guilty of a mortal sin. Period.

Related to this is arriving late or leaving early. By arriving late or leaving early, you have not fulfilled your Mass obligation, and that is mortal sin. But for those of you who might be chronic violators of this, there may be a glimmer of hope. Good and competent moral and sacramental theologians (some of whom I've known or do know and have discussed this issue with) can't seem to agree on a definition for arriving late and leaving early. The theological views on this are so varied, I can't even get a majority opinion! So taking all their answers *in toto*, I have been able to boil it down to this: don't be late for the Sign of the Cross at the beginning of Mass, and don't leave before the Final Blessing. In other words, just don't be late or leave early even a smidgen to avoid mortal sin.

"But, Joe, we can't help being late, because the kids always drag their feet." So? Whose fault is that? Are you a parent or a buddy? If the kids drag their feet, get them out of bed an hour earlier so there's no excuse. And if they still drag their feet... well, that's why God added extra padding to their bottoms. There, problem solved!

Are you one of those people who receives Communion then heads for the door instead of your pew? *"But, Joe, I've got to beat the traffic in the parking lot."* Why? Is someone going to set your house on fire if you're five minutes later getting home? Stay until the final blessing. An extra five minutes at church beats even one minute in hell.

There are a couple more things I'd like to mention before we get into the rubrics in part two.

I'm very happy to see people having conversation with their friends, forging new friendships and generally enjoying good fellowship. But inside the church is not the place to do it. Wait until you get outside. Believe me, your head won't explode if you wait until you're outside. It should be as quiet exiting the church as it is during Mass. Not observing silence is very disrespectful to Our Lord in the tabernacle.

Not everybody can dress up for Mass. I get it. Because of the brace I have to wear to be able to walk since my stroke, I can't get any of my trousers legs down over it. I've got an excuse (although I despise it); what's yours? The vast majority of people *can* dress appropriately. Show Jesus some respect. Dress up. Far too many people go to Mass dressed like they're going to a picnic. Men, wear a coat and tie, or at least a decent pair of slacks and shirt.

Ladies usually (even if not always) dress up when they go to Mass. But, ladies, there isn't any sort of a contest going on to see who can expose the most flesh. Mary should be the inspiration for the way you dress, not Stormy Daniels.

Let me ask you, would you dress the way you do for Mass if you were invited to a private dinner with the Holy Father? You'd dress better, wouldn't you? So why would you dress better for the Pope than you do for the Pope's only Boss? Does that even make sense? It shouldn't, because this is What We Believe... Why We Believe It.

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