



Before I give my two cents, I want to make clear that I want people to come to church and feel at home, at least to a certain point. Also, I understand that currently the attire we decide to wear to Mass is dictated more by the secular culture than by the Church. This is unfortunate. Historically, this hasn't always been the case. In my opinion, how we dress in church, and I've been guilty myself of being rather relaxed while on vacation, is symptomatic of a weak Church and at least partially brainwashed souls. I'm convinced the Lord wants it to stop and I've said it publicly. Another local priest wrote the below note to his parishioners. With his permission, I think it's worth prayerfully reflecting on.

### THE PERENNIAL WAR ON SHORTS

My goodness! It's not even spring, and shorts are already appearing. .. on Men! Incredibly, male knees are appearing in public, and threaten even the sanctity of the Temple! Gentlemen: Please stop this. The Levites were forbidden to show even their ankles in the Temple! Please help to preserve the sanctity of the house of God: No exposure of flesh, please! Protect chastity by the exercise of modesty. Ladies, dresses? Veils? Actual blouses, shawls, draperies of some kind? Please forbear skintight skirts and leggings, deep décolletage, transparent garb! Just as the celebrant of the Mass should reveal only hands and head in order to offer the Sacrifice, that is an excellent standard by which to gauge the dress appropriate to the liturgy, where resource permits. (BTW, the resurgence of the dress shirt and necktie is greatly to be commended!)

To expand a bit on Father's remarks, I'd like you to think of something else. Before I continue, I am not saying wearing jeans in Church in 2018 is flat-out wrong. I realize cultural norms change. That stated, how they change can be interesting and even sinister. For instance, after World War I, communists, who in theory are atheists, made a strong push for men and women to wear jeans. They wanted people to identify themselves with the working class, whether they were working class or not. Obviously, there's nothing wrong with being working class or sympathizing with the working class. However, that doesn't mean jeans are appropriate for every occasion either. It was Christian tradition up to that point that how you carried yourself in public (Manners 101) was an outward manifestation of your inner Christian virtue. You were supposed to always present your best self in public. You can see this lived out in old films and old clips from sporting events. For instance, men wore suits to ball games through the 1950's. It all came crashing down in the 1960's, along with centuries of Christian tradition. In other words, we lost the culture war. Many religious stopped wearing their habits. Priests began to wear a black suit instead of a cassock. It was supposed to make us more relatable. Meanwhile, lay people began to dress casually, in some cases very casually, in Church. Perhaps, a change of pace was needed in that era. That acknowledged, haven't things swung a bit too much in the opposite direction? Our relaxed attire certainly hasn't attracted more people to the Mass. Church attendance has plummeted in the last 50 plus years for an array of reasons. Religious life is essentially on life support, unless interestingly enough, they follow a strict rule and wear their habits. In those Orders, they're enjoying a rebirth. Maybe, there's a lesson there to be learned.

For those challenged by this article, please keep in mind that as a Father, it's my responsibility to set the tone for the house, in this case, the Lord's House. Finally, in keeping with the Passion, if what I said is not true, point out the error. If what I say is true, why do you strike me?

A gentleman after a Sunday Mass last week, in a respectful manner, expressed his annoyance with my bulletin article questioning why we dress the way we do at Mass. He felt there were much more important things to write about. That may be true, but I don't agree with him that the subject of Mass attire is not worth writing about. How we prepare for just about anything in life matters. As the saying goes, "failing to prepare is preparing to fail," and I believe that applies to Mass too.

I know highly successful high school sport coaches who say that without knowing the talent level of a given team, they can tell how well coached and determined a team is just by watching them get off the bus and warm up. Winning teams approach preparation with a certain purpose that, frankly, losing teams don't.

Do you think there isn't some analogous comparison that can be made toward how we present ourselves to the Lord and others on Sunday? What is more important than the Mass? At the Mass, Heaven and Earth intersect. The angelic and human worlds come together. The salvific death of Jesus on the Cross becomes present in an unbloody manner during the Eucharist. In a very real sense, we witness a miracle every time we attend Mass! Shouldn't we be bringing a certain intensity and focus to Sunday? If the Super Bowl Champion NY Giants football players under Coach Tom Coughlin had to be in their seats five minutes early before a meeting, why shouldn't we be in our seats five minutes early properly dressed, quietly praying and reflecting before Mass?

Once as seminarians we had to go to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center for a ministry day. One of the things the leaders told us is that they made the men get up early and shower and shave every day. That small discipline sets the tone for the whole day. They also felt that it was important for these men to maintain that habit once they left. Do you set the tone for your life, or do you let life set it for you?

There is a great saying from AA that captures the spirit of our religious practice: "It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting." That is another way of saying that if you want to get more out of the Mass, your Faith, and your life, approach them with a little vigor. Better yet, approach them on Sunday, on fire, and in your Sunday best.

