

REVERENCE IN THE LITURGY

Before we start talking about reverence in the mass itself we need to focus a bit on the atmosphere as we enter the church precinct.

I stayed at Ampleforth Abbey recently and was very impressed with their whole approach to the Liturgy. For instance while the monks in the sacristy were vesting before Mass (along with myself) there was almost total silence among the 30 or so monks. No chit chat. You could have heard a pin drop. The entry and exit processions with all the monks, along with myself, were also in total silence. It was very impressive. But here in St Vincent's we're not taking about that sort of monastic silence or procedure.

One of the hallmarks of the Catholic Faith in general is reverence in Church and all things associated with it. But we seem to be losing that these days. The church itself is the house of God and has been specially consecrated by the Bishop for worship. In Catholic Churches Jesus is always present in the tabernacle for private prayer. I think that was downplayed a bit after Vatican 11.

In the Narthex there is a large sign on the pillar as you enter this church which reads in big print: SILENCE. As I said we're not talking here about a monastic silence but an atmosphere of quietness which puts us in the right frame of mind for entering the house of God to celebrate Mass. We're moving from the secular to the sacred. Prolonged chatting before mass in the Narthex or Church is best limited to short exchanges. I think we're doing reasonably well in that regard. After Mass however, if you want to chit chat about all and sundry the hall or the Narthex are the best places to do it if at all possible - not the church. Someone might want to stay on in the church after mass for quiet prayer and that's not easy with people milling about chatting, sometimes loudly. I'm sometimes remiss in that regard myself. A gradual change of culture is needed. I'm aware it won't happen overnight. Unnecessary talk and especially loud laughter or chatter should be avoided if at all possible even in the sacristy before Mass but also when the singers and musicians are rehearsing in the meeting room. It's a conjoined effort.

Refraining from talking to people at church when it isn't necessary doesn't mean that you are snubbing them or being less than friendly. On the contrary you're respecting their sacred space for quiet prayer which nourishes their spirit. You may very well be praying for them. There is plenty of time to talk to them after mass. If you're so concerned you can

always phone them up during the week like you did during the pandemic to your credit or have a cuppa with them after mass.

Welcomers, who do a wonderful job, could also find themselves drawn into extended exchanges with long standing parishioners in deference to strangers as they arrive for mass which is understandable, but you'll have to 'play that one by ear' if you'll excuse the pun. Best keep at the back of our minds the Lord's words: 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome'.

Of course if there is little or no silence in your ordinary lives in the world, then all the above may very well sound meaningless. People talk about polluting the atmosphere in reference to climate change but noise pollution comes top of my list. How far up the scale is it on your list of priorities?