

Burning Questions about the Liturgy

Week 2

There is much more talking in the back of the church before Mass and even during Mass than there used to be. Don't these people get it?

Things have changed. Far gone are the days when we did not dare to even whisper after we had entered church. Today, many people enter a church in the same manner as they might enter a restaurant. And worse, they continue their chatter even after the liturgy has begun.

Of course, there is something really beautiful about the joy people express upon seeing fellow Christians when entering church. They shake hands, hug and kiss. New babies are crooned over while visiting college students receive jovial slaps on the back.

I also marvel at the people who engage in their pious routine after quietly slipping past the entire hubbub. They walk to the font, bless themselves, pause briefly and remember their baptismal commitment. From there they go to the shrine to light a candle. Finally, they make their way to a pew. All of this is done in perfect silence somewhat hassled by the friendly banter all around them.

Though both are valid, at times the sounds of enthusiasm and the silence of prayer collide. In order for both to coexist, contemporary churches often have a gathering space where arriving parishioners can meet and greet. They also have a Blessed Sacrament chapel where silence and reverence prevail.

Many older churches like ours have neither a gathering space nor a Blessed Sacrament chapel. This requires churchgoers to exercise liturgical patience and honor the spiritual needs of others. Those who are more inclined to visit ought to make sure they control their decibels of enthusiasm and end their socializing before the liturgy begins. Those who prefer quiet prayer over joyous encounters are at a disadvantage as their silence is often drowned out. One solution would be to pray for ever deepening patience as well as for the needs of those people who annoy them with their enthusiasm.