



Archdiocese of New Orleans

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Parishes

From: Archbishop Aymond *+ dlc*

Date: May 29, 2018

Attached please find my upcoming column, which will appear in the next Clarion Herald. Please feel free to use in your parish bulletin anytime you deem advisable.

GMA/mk

Attachment

How Should I Dress for Mass? by Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond

Summer is here, which in New Orleans usually means dressing down even more casually than we do at other times of year. I know the issue of church attire is a sensitive one – especially in an area where it's hot nine months out of the year.

What's your perspective on how people should dress for Mass?

I have a variety of feelings about this. There's a part of me that remains grateful to God that a person is in church, regardless of how he or she is dressed. I certainly realize there are individual circumstances where a person may have other responsibilities and is not able to dress in what we might consider an appropriate manner, so I want to be sensitive to that. At the same time, the church is a sacred place – truly holy ground. It is a consecrated place where we meet God in a unique way through the Scriptures, through the assembly and through the Eucharist. At some level, our attire speaks to the importance or unique nature of what we are doing in that sacred space, worshipping God in the Sunday assembly. When people go to social events such as weddings or anniversaries or graduations, they most often dress with care. That's not to say they are in formal attire, but they are dressed appropriately. Shouldn't we also take the same care as we go to church to experience God's presence in a unique way through the Mass?

What's been your experience of how people dress for church?

I think we've all been aware that there are some who at times dress too casually for Mass. In some cases, one might even question the level of modesty in attire. I think it's important for all of us to note that our attire should not be a distraction to other people. This goes for both men and women. I don't think we need to wear T-shirts that advertise beer or that have inappropriate words that could bring offense to someone else. Again, I think the responsibility lies with each individual. We should act with charity and responsibility and not be a stumbling block to someone else's worship experience.

Is the problem also just a general relaxing of dress codes in the culture?

That does have something to do with it. Everybody knows about "Casual Fridays" and events like that. Fewer people wear coats and ties to the workplace. It used to be that to get into a fancy restaurant in New Orleans, you had to be dressed appropriately. Men had to wear a jacket and tie. Nobody could walk into a restaurant in flip-flops. Those days are largely gone. I realize that the more we live in a casual society, that relaxed dress code becomes more the norm. I want to be sensitive to that reality. At the same time, I'd like to continue posing the question: Does the way we dress for church say something about how we view the importance of the event? I'd like to reiterate: I am always grateful to God that people are in church with the desire to celebrate the Eucharist. To me, attire is always a secondary consideration. Nevertheless, it is worthy of our consideration. I'm not sure how much God cares about our attire, but dressing appropriately is a way of our saying to God and to others that we value the Eucharist and see it as sacred and as the source and summit of our lives as Catholics. My prayer would be that people truly would understand what it means not to be a distraction to others in such a sacred moment. I'd love to encourage more people to live up to the adage of wearing their "Sunday best" – not to show off but as a concrete way of thanking God and caring for our neighbors in the next pew.