

## Suitable attire for Mass: the moral dimension

Bishop John W. Yanta

**As the hot weather has descended on us and we are in summertime or vacation time, it is appropriate to speak of modesty of dress especially in participation in the Holy Eucharist, the receiving of Our Lord in Holy Communion, the privilege of being a lector of the Sunday Bible Readings, and serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.**

This time of the year, I (and am sure many of you also) hear complaints about a lack of respect and reverence for the house of God, the sacredness of the Lord's presence in the liturgy, and lack of respect for others and the lack of consciousness of the battle for purity in which the opposite sex finds itself even while attending Sunday Mass.

Immodesty in dress is governed by two citations from God's Law:

- 1) The Ninth Commandment: 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife' (Exodus 20:17).
- 2) Jesus said: 'Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matthew 5:28).

To live our daily Faith as children of God (baptism), disciples of Jesus, and temples of the Holy Spirit, we are faced with moral choices constantly, many times a day. Conscience can either make a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law, or on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them (CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1799).

Dressing, or putting on one's clothes, is a moral act and wearing them is a moral act. There are different appropriate modes of dress for different occasions, e.g., in the privacy of our home, with our spouse only, or with our children in our home, at work or school, in mixed company, at the lake or swimming pool, grocery shopping, at church, etc.

The four cardinal virtues are in play here (Wisdom 8:5-7). The wise person is guided by wisdom, the highest of riches that guides us to be prudent (doing and saying the right thing), justice (respects the dignity of other persons), fortitude (courage to go against popular, suggestive, provocative styles), and temperance (insures mastery over sensual temptations as occasions of sin).

You can read more about these four cardinal virtues that play a pivotal role in our lives (CCC 1803-1809).

All of us are beset with concupiscence or covetousness: 'Human appetites or desires that are disordered due to the temporal consequences of original sin, which remain even after Baptism and which produce inclination to sin' (CCC, Glossary).

St John identifies and distinguishes the three kinds of inclinations of all human beings: 'For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world' (I John 2:16).

### Modesty

The road to modesty starts with the purification of the heart: 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication É' (Matt 15:19). Bible beginners should be encouraged to get the basic overview of Jesus' teaching by starting with the beatitudes (Matt 5) in Jesus' first sermon: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt 5:8). Part of the essence of that teaching is a wholesome, orthodox,

first hand appreciation of God's plan for our sexuality - its sacredness, its fulfillment in marriage, its place in family, Church and world.

The *Catechism* speaks next, after the purification of the heart, about 'the battle for purity'. We, the baptized and the forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation struggle against concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires (CCC 2520):

\* 'Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate centre of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden' (CCC 2521).

\* 'Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It is discreet' (CCC 2522).

\* 'There is a modesty of the feelings as well as of the body. It protests, for example, against the voyeuristic explorations of the human body in certain advertisements, or against the solicitations of certain media that go too far in the exhibition of intimate things. Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies' (CCC 2523).

\* 'Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person' (CCC 2524).

\* 'Christian purity requires a purification of the social climate. It requires of the communications media that their presentations show concern for respect and restraint' (CCC 2525).

\* 'So-called moral permissiveness rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom; the necessary precondition for the development of true freedom is to let oneself be educated in the moral law. Those in charge of education can reasonably be expected to give young people instruction respectful of the truth, the qualities of the heart, and the moral and spiritual dignity of man' (CCC 2526).

Yes, we can help the devil in many ways, including the way we dress. In the Act of Contrition we promise 'to avoid the near occasion of sin'. St Paul writes about 'provoking another' (Gal 5:26).

When the community of believers comes together for the Eucharist (Mass) let no one be a distraction from Jesus or provide temptation (an occasion of sin) to another because of the manner of dress.

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### **For Divine Mercy of Our Lord Parish We Propose the Following for Your Consideration**

#### **For Men**

- 1. A head covering of any kind is not appropriate for mass or receiving our Lord.**
- 2. Are my clothes clean, will they be a distraction to anyone sitting near me.**
- 3. Does the shirt I am wearing have a Satanic symbol or disrespectful graphic.**
- 4. Was my first choice for dress for something I will do after mass instead of for the Lord.**

#### **For Women**

- 1. Will the clothes I wear distract anyone from the true purpose of mass.**
  - a. Should I wear a low cut blouse to receive the Holy Eucharist, is this a distraction for the priest or the minister of communion.**
  - b. Can the same be said for the spaghetti straps on my blouse.**

- c. Should I be wearing a skirt that falls midway between the thigh and knee, won't this be a distraction, am I trying to draw attention to myself.
2. Is workout clothing appropriate for mass, won't this be a distraction for others.
3. Are my clothes clean, will they be a distraction to anyone sitting near me.
4. Does the blouse I am wearing have a Satanic symbol or disrespectful graphic.
5. Was my first choice for dress for something I will do after mass instead of for the Lord.

The Virgin Mary said "woe to women wanting in modesty" when she appeared to three children in Fatima, Portugal in 1917.

"More Souls go to hell for sins of the flesh than for any other reason" Message of Fatima



1. **"Mary like" means modesty without compromise, "like Mary," Christ's pure and spotless Mother.**
  2. **Mary like dresses have sleeves extending at least to the elbows; and skirts reaching well below the knees.**
  3. **Mary like dresses require full coverage for the bodice, chest, shoulders, and back; except for a cut-out about the neck not exceeding two inches below the neckline in front and in back, and a corresponding two inches on the shoulders.**
  4. **Mary like dresses do not admit as modest coverage transparent fabrics -- laces, nets, organdy, nylons, etc. -- unless sufficient backing is added. However, their moderate use as trimmings is acceptable.**
  5. **Mary like dresses avoid the improper use of flesh-colored fabrics.**
  6. **Mary like dresses conceal rather than reveal the figure of the wearer; they do not emphasize, unduly, parts of the body.**
  7. **Mary like dresses provide full coverage, even after jacket, cape or stole are removed.**
- ††† **"Mary like" fashions are designed to conceal as much of the body as possible, rather than reveal. This would automatically eliminate such fashions as slacks, jeans, shorts, culottes, tight sweaters, sheer blouses, and sleeveless dresses; etc.**