

With the formalization of the Ministry of Hospitality at the English Mass, the Ministers of Hospitality and I have been asked why latecomers have to wait at the back of the church if they come in during the Readings, the Homily and the Consecration and wait until there is a break in the Readings, or until it is over. What is the reason behind this? Let me explain.



I don't think there is a written church rule on this. It is just assumed that common sense dictates it. It is something educated people and educated Catholics should know.

During the Readings, we are listening to the Word of God. Jesus is the Word. (The Evangelist John starts with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".) Jesus is the one talking to us, not the Lectors. It is Jesus that we are hearing. Also, all the Readings are from the Bible. And we know that God is the principal author of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write the different books in the Bible. The second commandment also tells us

not to "take the name of the Lord your God in vain." If the Word is God, and it is God talking to us, then we owe Him the utmost reverence as the Word is being read. And how do we show

reverence for the Word? During the first two Readings and the Homily, the General Instructions of the Roman Missal states that we should be seated so we could listen attentively and reflect on the Word of God. And during the Gospel Reading, the congregation should stand and listen attentively because during the Gospel it is Jesus' words that we are hearing. So when latecomers come in, trying

to squeeze themselves between people, the reverence for the Word is lost. Attention to the Word is lost.

When one goes to the theater for a live performance or show, ushers do not let you into the theater or auditorium during the performances. They make you wait outside and just let you in when there is a break in the show or in between the acts. If you follow this for a performance by ordinary people like ourselves, should it not be more the norm when we come to attend Mass and listen to the Word of God?

Then you have the Lectors proclaiming the Word of God. You have the Main Celebrant giving the Homily. They are there doing their role as priest and prophet. But they are also lay people just like us. They do get distracted from the movements in the congregation. It can also be annoying sometimes. As a catechist, I do forget or lose my trend of thought when someone disturbs the class. And I would think it is the same with others. So we do owe them some courtesy to be quiet, so as not to be disruptive and distractive.

Then there is the rest of the community listening to the Word of God. Just like the priest or the lectors, latecomers walking down the aisle looking for seats, or squeezing themselves between you and the next pew, they could also get distracted and miss some parts of the Reading or the Homily. And for all you know, it may be the main point or the highlight of the Readings or talk. So here you have people who have come to listen to the Word of God, but someone coming in late distracts them. So again, out of courtesy and consideration to others who have come to listen to the Word of God and be nourished, do we not owe them some respect and

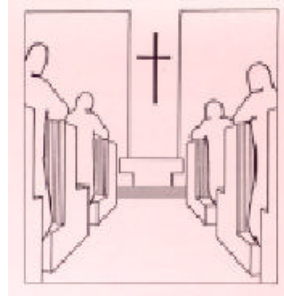


courtesy? And we, who are supposed to be so-called Christians, shouldn't we love our neighbors and respect their space?

The same thing is true during the Consecration. At the Consecration (from the time we kneel down for the Eucharistic Prayer until we stand up for the Our Father) the greatest mystery of our faith takes place. It is the highest point of the Mass. The most perfect prayer we could offer God. Here we have Jesus in the person of the priest, offering Himself again as a sacrifice for our sins. At this part, the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. It is Jesus Himself present in the bread and wine by the mystery of transubstantiation. Jesus is present body and blood, soul and divinity in the bread and wine. The bread and wine still looks and tastes the same, but by the mystery of our faith, we believe that during this part of the Mass, more specifically at the words "This is my Body" and "This is my Blood", the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. So again, should we not give Jesus all the respect and reverence due Him?

Knowing and understanding what the Mass is, is crucial in knowing why we do what we do at Mass. There is something more to attending Mass than just being physically present in church. The

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that we are to be led to "full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations". The Mass is a liturgical celebration. The Mass has two main parts, the Liturgy of the Word where we listen to the Word of God, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist when we partake in God's banquet. To be fully conscious and active at Mass means, listening to the readings, responding to the prayers, singing praise to God with the rest of the community and finally partaking in the Eucharistic meal.



So all we are doing is remind you of what is happening and what you should be doing. Of course there are some exceptions. It's all a matter of respect and courtesy.

One young volunteer had made a comment that instead of being Ministers of Hospitality, they are instead "law enforcers", making sure that latecomers do not distract other people who are attentively listening and participating at Mass. So please learn more about the Mass, then you will understand what it is you are attending.

Action of the Assembly at Mass:

- Signing ourselves with the cross – when we enter the church, at the Gospel reading
- Genuflecting - before we enter the pew, when we leave the pew
- Bowing - in place of genuflecting or kneeling, at the Confiteor, at the name of Jesus and when the names of the Three Persons are said at the same together
- Kneeling – at the Consecration
- Singing – entrance procession, Kyrie, Gloria, Alleluia, Offertory, Our Father, Lamb of God, Communion, Recessional
- Saying the proper responses at the proper time
- Actively listening to the Word proclaimed