

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL - SACRED SPACE - Part II

So, if the *New Roman Missal* has called us to reclaim some attitudes that sacred space demands, a question we might ask is: what do we need to **leave behind** when we enter into *sacred space*? Gum chewing, coffee and water bottles would be a place to start—unless, of course, it's a hospitality weekend after Mass. Sure, little kids might need their Cheerios to keep them happy and quiet, but we adults should be able to last for an hour without hydrating or feeding our faces. I remember a few years ago (at another parish) going around cleaning up the pews after Confirmation only to find several McDonald's bags under one pew! Really??

We also leave behind our gym and ball park voices and trade them for the indoor voices most parents teach their kids (or at least used to teach them) to use at home. Now that doesn't mean silence, by any means. Church is indeed the place where we who *are* the *Church* gather, not only to pray but also to share the stories of the week, the joys and challenges of life that are part and parcel of our prayer. The time we spend after Mass sharing those stories with friends and neighbors can only strengthen the bonds that bring us together in our sacred space. And when we come to church, it would also be nice if we left behind the sweats and tank tops and reclaimed just a bit of that "Sunday best" from time to time. One of the things that really impressed me when I came to St. Joseph is the respectful attire of our ushers—something I hadn't seen in many years!

So, if we leave all that behind, what do we bring **with** us into our *sacred space*? We bring a sense of reverence, of course—not a reverential fear and trembling, but an awareness that we really are stepping onto "holy ground", entering into a place like nowhere else. We bring, I hope, an expectation that something wonderful is about to happen, that an intimate encounter with the God who loves us is waiting behind those church doors. If we translate that into one of the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, I'd say that we should bring with us a sense of "wonder and awe" because we are about to enter into the amazing presence of a God who is both immanent and transcendent—closer than we could ever imagine, yet so far beyond our capacity to fully understand, at least while we're still in this world. For better or worse, that seventh gift of the Spirit has just recently reverted to its ancient form: *Fear of the Lord*. I hope that when our children learn that new/old name, they'll understand that it doesn't literally mean "fear" but rather the "wonder and awe" that the intimate presence of God should inspire in us.

Now our time in this sacred space is not going to be perfect. There will be crying kids and other distractions, including the worries we brought with us and the challenges that await us when we return home. But for that one hour or so, we have a chance to claim a bit of peace, to seek some extra strength, to be embraced by beauty, and to remember all the reasons we have to be a truly thankful people. Considering all of that, I can never understand why anyone would want to leave **early**, as some still sadly do.

If we return to the days of Moses, toward the end of the book of Exodus, we find the Israelites completing the “dwelling place” for the Ark of the Covenant—literally the dwelling place for God. But we learn that, when “the glory of the Lord filled the Dwelling”, even Moses couldn’t enter; the place was too sacred even for him. How fortunate **we** are! God’s glory fills **our** dwelling, our church, and we **are** able to set foot on that holy ground. We are invited to enter into our sacred space and bask in the loving presence of our Creator. We hear God’s Word and share in the gift of Jesus’ own life poured out for us in the Eucharist. When we come to the Second Sunday of Lent five weeks from now, we’ll hear Peter say “Lord, it is good that we are here!” Those words should be in our hearts, if not on our lips, each time we enter into our own sacred space.

Fr. Bob