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NIHIL NISI IESUM

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Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

# Three Pious Practices for Every Devout Catholic

## *Gloria, Tea and Bee:*

# Recovering the Disreputable

**There are three pious practices** that we no longer encounter and that had been not just customary, but *instinctive* to Catholics — up to 40 or so years ago when the notion of piety fell into disrepute, together with many of the customs long cherished — and practiced — by Catholics, not for years, but for centuries. They are simple things really, that we seldom see because ... well, they are rarely done and yet of themselves, speak volumes of our loss (perhaps a calculated deprivation, actually) of the sacred.

Let me give you both the long and the short of it. Here is the short:

- We no longer bow our heads at the Sacred Name of Jesus (see Philippians 2.5-11)
- We no longer make the Sign of the Cross over our hearts or foreheads when we pass by a Catholic Church where Christ dwells, really and truly, in the Blessed Sacrament.
- We no longer make reparation whenever we hear the Sacred Name of Jesus uttered blasphemously.

We have lost collective memory of things instinctually Catholic. Much of it has been superannuated by "policy" or simply jettisoned in what became a totally unilateral effort at ecumenism in which the Church embraced, en masse, much historically alien to it — with absolutely no other denomination embracing anything remotely "Catholic" in return. The Church surrendered much unique to its identity. The other "communions" wisely surrendered nothing. This is not to say that ecumenism has failed. It has only failed for Catholics — the only ones who have been resolute in failing to recognize the obvious.

Now the long version, a vignette really, that captures much of what once was — not long ago — is no more, and ought to be: (the *Boston Catholic Journa*l wishes to express its gratitude to P.G. of San Francisco, formerly of Massachusetts, for the

following contribution)

*"**A flood of memories** came rushing in upon me one day recently at Mass.*

*I noticed an impeccably dressed elderly woman with stark white hair nodding — not just nodding, but nodding at what I began to realize were predictable times. To be sure, I continued to observe this almost imperceptible movement of her head downward until I became aware that it occurred precisely each time the priest uttered the Name, "Jesus." It did not occur when the priest uttered "Christ" — except when it was preceded by "Jesus."*

*I looked around the congregation and saw to my surprise that this gentle gesture was accompanied by other nods — mostly among what one "Minister of Music" derisively described to me as the "Grayheads." I even observed it, much to my surprise, in one young man. Out of a congregation of perhaps 300, I noticed this almost imperceptible but curious behavior in perhaps five or six parishioners. And always — always and only — at the Sacred Name of Jesus.*

*Memories returned. Memories of my father. A tall man (to me as a child, anyway) with a gentle voice; strong, in the quiet way that only gentleness can be remarkably strong, he walked beside me, straight and assured, but not arrogant. Holding my hand, we walked the several blocks to Church with my younger brother alternately walking and being carried effortlessly in the strong arms of my father. It was Sunday morning 1957. Upon entering Church (Saint Clement's), he removed his hat and made sure we blessed ourselves properly. In those days matrons wore fur stoles that still had the eyes of the poor Minks still in them, which endlessly fascinated my brother, and frightened me. Dad had to prevent Mikey from poking at them during Mass.*

*It was here that I first remembered Dad nodding his head, too. I did not know why ... but he did, and so did everyone else. I remember asking him if his tie was too tight. He put his fingers to his lips and pointed in the direction of the Altar. As time went by I began to understand that one simply nods ones head whenever the name of Jesus was uttered. Catholics just did that. The priest did it. Dad did it. Even Mikey did it! And so did Tommy Mason, the freshest kid on the block! Soon it became second nature, in Church and out of it. I remember my father gently scolding me once when I deliberately said the "Holy Name" several times in a row to make the boys around me nod their heads! I even did it twice to Aunt Vickie!*

*But I also noticed two other peculiar things about Dad (and, in fact, a lot of other Catholics back then). Whenever we walked in front of a Church — even on the other side of the street — Dad would make a tiny Sign of the Cross over his heart in a hidden kind of way, and quietly utter :*

*"Gloria (presumably Aunt Gloria), Tea and Bee, Dom and knee".*

*I thought it a cute riddle that rhymed, although I never had an Uncle Dom. Later Dad unraveled the mystery to me one day when I finally asked him who "Dom" was. I distinctly remember that it was winter, for Dad crouched down beside me in the snow, threw his muffler around our faces to keep out the snow and wind, and told me, "It is Latin, son. "Gloria tibi, Domine", which means, "Glory to You, Lord Jesus." Yup, even as he spoke he nodded his head when he said "Jesus" — and so did I. I was learning. "Whenever you pass in front of a Catholic Church you always say that, son, and make the Sign of the Cross over your heart." But Mom does it over her forehead, I protested. "Well, Mamma is right, too", he said. "The important thing is that you always do it, because Jesus is inside the Church."*

*Walking, driving, on the bus — wherever — Dad did it and I felt it*

*was like a little secret between us, and, of course, Jesus (yes, I just now bowed my head).*

*There was one other thing that Dad did that stayed with me all my life. Whenever he spoke with someone who was either angry or just crude and said something like, "Jesus Christ! I told him he was a crook!" or, "Jesus, was I angry!", I noticed that Dad very unobtrusively did two things! First, of course, he slightly bowed his head. Then he would usually cross his arms and underneath them secretly make a small, totally unnoticeable movement with his thumb, pressing it against his heart.*

*It took a long time for me to catch on to that one. Again, it was something he did so naturally and quietly that it almost escaped me. "Dad," I later asked, after he had a very animated conversation with one of my uncles, "what do you do with your thumb when people are angry, like Uncle Mario was a few minutes ago? And why?" This really escaped me — but stayed with me all my life as perhaps no other gesture he taught me.*

*He paused a moment, as though trying to look for simple words to explain it.*

*"What," he asked me, is the Third Commandment?" I told him, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.", proud that I remembered it quickly (back then we had to memorize them and Nuns taught us our Catechism — and boy, you had better remember!)*

*"Well," Dad continued, "Uncle Mario just used the Lord's Name in vain. Instead of just letting it pass as blasphemy (I did not know what "blasphemy" exactly was at the time, but knew it was not good) against God, I just "finished" the sentence for him, adding, "Have mercy on us" and striking my heart as we do at Mass. That way, it brings something good out of a sin — I make it an opportunity to ask God's mercy both for Uncle Mario and for myself."*

*I began to understand what kind of man my father really was — and what kind of man I should try to be, too. So often it is the little things a person does — especially when they don't know that they are being observed — that leave the most lasting impressions.*

*Dad would not recognize most Catholics today. Neither, I think, would Saint Paul. What was second nature to them seems to have disappeared altogether — except for a few of those beautiful elderly women or old men at Mass."*

*P.G.*
*San Francisco, CA*

*Sad to say,* not only do the laity no longer exercise these pious and beautiful practices — but neither do our priests or bishops. They use what Catholics once called the "Sacred Name" with no reverence, attaching to it a significance apparently no greater than any other name that passes from their lips. But it was not always so. For many, many centuries it was not so. But piety has become so … *disreputable* in our time. It is a term of disdain, a concept fraught with an intolerable "otherworldliness" that no longer has a place in our time, and in our world.

What P.G., I think, was alluding to when he wrote that Saint Paul would probably not recognize most Catholic today, is this:

> "**Christ Jesus**, Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: That ***at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth***. And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father." **(**Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians 2.5-11)

**The very Angels in Heaven bow at the name of Jesus ... and even the demons in Hell.**

But ***we*** are somehow more enlightened than that …somehow *superior* to both — such that what is binding upon those in Heaven and Hell itself, is not binding upon us. How vastly superior, enlightened, (sanctified?) we have become in less than 50 years of the 2025 years of Christianity!

What a quantum leap! But I think not of grace — at least for us *who have been made "a little less than the Angels"* (Heb. 2.7) *who bow in Heaven at the Sacred Name*

— ***us***, who have made ourselves *less subject to God* than even the demons!

Think about it — and perhaps make a very ancient effort at what is "disreputable" to the world and more in keeping with your beautiful Catholic identity — and what gives glory to God ... and not man.

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