



Boston Catholic Journal

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THE MOST HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS:

A Primer for Clueless Catholics

Part V

A Matter of Uncommon Courtesy

We had left off asking the question, "How, then, will you enter?"

You have just passed beyond the door – and immediately you come face to face with your neighbor whom you have known these many years! You look each other in the eye and then pass as though you did not see him without saying so much as a word or making any gesture of acknowledgement whatever! Your neighbor, expecting at least the minimal courtesy, would very likely take grave offense and wonder what he had done to deserve such shabby treatment. Yes?

Have you ever done this?

Of course not.

If you do, however, it is extremely likely that your next encounter with your neighbor will be less than cordial.

What, moreover, if you had passed him by in your haste to greet, not your very next door neighbor, but some acquaintance with whom you really have little to do, not breaking stride to at least say hello to your neighbor?

What if *you* were that neighbor? Would you take offense? How would you account yourself, in the way of importance, in that person's life? You would say that he behaved as though he did not so much as know you!

What would possibly prompt this discourtesy? Something, surely, is amiss. You have either offended him, wittingly or not – or what is more remarkable still, he had completely forgotten you.

Only one other explanation is possible, even plausible: ... despite all appearances, he did not see you! Had he, he would never have behaved so badly, treated you so poorly.

Let us take it a step further. What if the person you just ignored was the very person who had invited you to his house, and it was his house that you had just entered. He even opened the door for you, but you breezed by to greet the other guests within ... completely heedless of your host.

What could possibly account for such odd behavior? It is either effrontery ... or a total unawareness of who – or where – the person is who had invited you, or somehow, having arrived, you are unable to find him.

I am open to other possible reasons, but can think of none off hand.

The courtesy you extend your neighbor – and remote acquaintances ... surely you would extend no less to God Himself?

And yet you walk into the Church, pass before the Tabernacle (where Jesus Christ *is*, really and truly) and the Altar, chat with this one and that one on your way down the aisle, wave left and right, stop to accord someone a special greeting – careful to offend no one you know by failing to acknowledge them – and finally make your way to a pew, pass right in front of Jesus Christ, and as often *with* as *without* so much as a perfunctory genuflection (for reasons of which you are quite unsure – it simply is done ...) you take your seat ... and begin socializing with everyone ... except Jesus Christ.

Sometimes you will kneel in an attitude of prayer, careful that you do not appear too pious, utter a few words by rote ... and then get back to business: socializing while you await; not to enter *the most significant event of all time which will be enacted before you*, but to be entertained ... hoping that the priest today will be not so much a model of sanctity as an engaging entertainer who will have a well provisioned stock of good jokes and cute anecdotes, and above all, who will make you laugh and feel terribly good about yourself for deigning, this day, to bring yourself to God's Presence.

There is a beautiful verse from the Book of Psalms that is lilting with alliteration, and very apropos of this day;

"Deus sedet super sedem sanctam suam" God sits upon His holy throne. (Psalm 46.9)

The problem, however, is that the throne is right before you – and He Who sits upon it – *and you do not know!* Or worse yet, if *knowing*, behave toward Him as you did to the neighbor you first met at the door.

If Jesus stood before you, visible to your eyes, as you walked up the aisle toward the altar and your pew – would you behave *any* differently than you do at this moment when He is hidden from your eyes? Would you chat and gossip with your neighbors? Would you fail to bow before Him as you passed *right in front* of His eyes? And once seated, turn your attention away from Him to more ... important ... people around you discussing events more important than Him and which have nothing to do with Him?

If you saw with your eyes, you know that this would not be so.

Still ... *still* you fail to grasp that **HE IS THERE** in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar – and expects *at least* some measure of the courtesy you lavish upon lesser beings.

What we have learned today:

God is Present in the Most Blessed Sacrament ... and should be accorded at least ***the Courtesy of Recognition***. After all, ***He is the Host, and you are the guest ... and the House is His***. Remember?

Part 6: "I Die with Thee, O, Christ, on Calvary ..!"

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