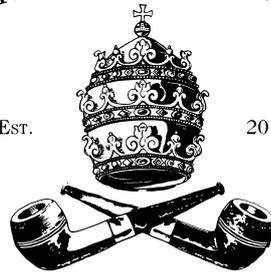




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DRESSING LIKE A MAN FOR MASS

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Many are beginning to recognize the severe Catholic “man-crisis” and the necessary imperative to aggressively “emangelize” *Casual Catholic Men*. While new ardor,

methods and expressions are needed from the Pope to the parish priest, laymen need to step up to their personal responsibility and respond to Christ's commandment to make disciples ([Matt 28:19-20](#)).

But the average Catholic man who is beginning to take Christ seriously about His call for all men to bring Him disciples, might be at a loss: "How can I evangelize other Catholic men? I haven't been taught."

For those men (and all men), here is a simple but powerful way to immediately begin to make a difference: *Dress like a man for Mass*.

Why Men's Clothing at Mass Matters

The Catholic "man-crisis" is widespread and is having a devastating effect on men, women, children and the Church. 1 in 3 men who were baptized Catholic have left the faith. Of those who remain, 50-60% are *Casual Catholic Men*, not knowing the faith and not practicing the faith, men who in essence have left the faith. Sadly, large numbers of young people are following their lukewarm fathers out of the Church.

One obvious marker of the loss of faith among Catholic men is revealed in how men approach the Mass. Only about 1/3 of Catholic men attend Mass weekly and many of those have not grasped the miraculous nature and absolute necessity of the Mass. Research gives insight as to the root of the problem: men don't understand the Mass – 49% of Catholic men are bored in the Mass and 55% of Catholic men don't believe they "get anything out of the Mass".

Boredom has its roots in a lack of catechesis. Men's attitude of being "bored" in the Mass reveals the catechetical failure of the Church. Clearly, men who are properly catechized could not be bored in the Mass, for they would understand that the Mass is the "source and summit" of the faith in which men have a direct encounter with the Eternal King Jesus Christ. A man can't be bored in the Mass if he has been taught and understands the Mass.

Boredom also results from the desacralized way some priests and parishes participate in the Mass. The desacralized Mass has many insults to Christ, including the lack of reverence of some priests, syrupy pop music that no one would listen to unless forced, a focus on community rather than Christ and a parish culture of

casual attire. A desacralized Mass appears common and casual, leading to *Casual Catholic Men*, men who are casual about the faith.

Men who are bored by the Mass, dress like they are bored. On any given weekend in many parishes, the majority of men show up for Mass dressed, at best, like it is “Casual Friday” at work or, at worse, like they are going to a tailgate party. Men don’t wear suits or ties, choosing instead to wear khakis and polo shirts, jeans and sports jerseys, flannel shirts and cargo pants or even worse.

Casual clothing at Mass contributes to a sense of commonness about the Mass. When the people at the Mass look like they are going to the multiplex to see a movie, there is a loss of awe. Helping restore a sense of awe in the Mass is essential for over 8 out of 10 men never or rarely participate in a parish activity other than the Mass. If men are not being reached in the Mass, they are not being reached. Wearing clothing that reflects the awe that a man should feel as he approaches the King of the Creation sends a signal to other men that Someone awesome is present.

Unmanly Excuses for Casual Clothing at Mass

Men have all kinds of excuses for why they wear casual clothing to the Mass. Each of these excuses exposes both a lack of reverence for Jesus Christ and an unmanly lack of virtue.

The Personal Convenience Excuse – Some men don’t dress reverently for Mass because they want the convenience of wearing casual clothing, perhaps because it is relaxing or to avoid going home to change before the next Sabbath activity. These excuse-makers might say something like “I don’t feel like dressing up for Mass” or “I just want to relax on Sunday.” This is simply an excuse for sloth, revealing an unmanly lack of discipline and willingness to sacrifice.

The “I never dress up” Excuse – Some men have a personal ethic of wearing casual clothing, perhaps out of a non-conformist rebellion against authority or orthodoxy. For most, this excuse doesn’t hold up to scrutiny, for many of these same men do in fact dress up in various outfits, conforming to their chosen “posse”. Examples include men who wear expensive jerseys for their chosen sports teams, wear expensive “leathers” to ride motorcycles, dress in tuxes for big social events, buy

expensive fishing or hunting clothing, buy all kinds of expensive athletic wear or dress up themselves up with permanent (and expensive) tattoos. This excuse is often two-faced, an unmanly trait.

The “God doesn’t care” Excuse – Many men use the excuse that “God doesn’t care about clothes” to justify why they choose to wear casual clothing. This opinion is conjecture and incorrect, for God actually does care about clothing (see below). It is unmanly to blame God for one’s own laziness.

The Money Excuse – Some men use the excuse that they can’t, or others can’t, afford appropriate clothing. Most American men across economic classes have plenty of money to buy all kinds of expensive clothing and other things. For those who truly have limited financial resources, discount/thrift stores sell very inexpensive clothing. It is unmanly to falsely use a lack of money as an excuse for disrespectful attire.

The “Parish Culture” Excuse – Many parishes celebrate a deliberate culture of a casual dress for Mass. The rationale is that somehow dressing down encourages parishioners to be more comfortable and friendly, as if community building were the point of the Mass, rather than the worship and communion with Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is unmanly to be a cowardly conformist or to be ignorant about something as important as the Mass. Catholic men need to be countercultural, even in their own parishes.

Dressing like a Man for Mass

In contrast to unmanly excuses, here are some manly reasons why dressing like a man for Mass is important:

The Mass is infinitely more important than any worldly event – A man should wear his very best clothing for every Mass is of infinite value. While cultures around the world vary, a reasonable standard in the U.S. for men’s dress for Mass is a dark suit, collared shirt, a tie and dress shoes (for examples of how men dress for important occasions in the U.S., see presidential portraits, presidential medal awards, Heisman Trophy finalists, wedding attire or even what young men wear to prom, etc.). Every single Mass is infinitely more important than even the most important worldly event, for Jesus Christ Himself is present.

Justice demands that men give their best to Christ – Post-modern men need to become re-acquainted with virtue, especially the cardinal virtue of Justice. The word “virtue” comes from the Latin *virtutem*, meaning “moral strength, high character, manliness and excellence.” The root word of “virtue” is the Latin, *vir*, which literally means “man.” Men have always been called to virtue and to be virtuous is considered “manly.”

The cardinal virtue of Justice is giving God and one’s fellowman his proper due. Man, in his sinful nature, can never fully give God his due, for Man owes everything to God and has little to give Him except thanksgiving and praise. One concrete way to show thanksgiving to God is to meticulously dress to approach Christ in the Mass (e.g. mirror-shined shoes, a crisply pressed suit, a starched shirt and a carefully knotted tie, etc.). The least that a just man can do when attending Mass is to dress like he is meeting a King.

Christ explicitly demands respectful attire – In Christ’s parable of the Wedding Banquet ([Matt 22:1-14](#)), Christ says this:

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The broader principle of proper spiritual preparation to approach Christ does not negate Christ’s most basic teaching about respectful dress. Clothing is one aspect of a man’s inner preparation and is also a signal to other men about his reverence of his Lord and King. Paul also warns men to not approach the Eucharist in an unworthy manner to avoid bringing down wrath and judgment of God upon themselves ([1 Cor 11:27](#)).

Each man’s life hangs in the balance – The eternal lives of every man and woman and their children hang in the balance when they face Judgment at the time of death: each and every soul will end up in Heaven (with first perhaps some necessary time in Purgatory) or Hell. Each man will face Jesus Christ alone in the Final Judgment. Men on trial in the temporal world, pleading their case before a worldly judge, almost always wear respectful clothes. The respect that a man should give the eternal Judge is infinitely more than any worldly judge, for He will decide each man’s

eternal destiny.

Every man desperately needs the help of our King – Given the array of forces that Satan is continually assembling against men, each man desperately needs the supernatural graces of our Lord and King Jesus Christ. A man approaching Christ in the Mass should dress like he is beholding to Christ.

Being in Mass is a man's greatest honor – Jesus Christ the Eternal King, in His full Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity is really and truly present in the tabernacle. When a man enters the parish, he is coming into the presence of Almighty God, the Greatest Man. The fact that sinful and puny men can actually come into the presence of the Greatest Man is an honor above every honor. Consider: if the President of the United States invited you to the Oval Office, it would be a great honor and you would certainly wear your best. Meeting the president is nothing compared to the divine honor of being in the presence of our King Jesus Christ.

Each man owes God everything – Each man is born and kept alive exclusively by God's Grace. The fact that a man's lungs breathe and his heart beats and his body converts food into flesh and blood is a gift from God. Every person in a man's life, be his wife/girlfriend, children, family and friends, are all living breathing miracles given to a man by God. Christ recognized man's need to give God thanks by establishing the Eucharist (literally means "thanksgiving"). If a man truly understands his dependence on God and wishes to give God thanksgiving, each man should at least dress like he means it.

Each man should instill the awe of Christ in his family and others – A man's greatest responsibility is to lead his family to Christ so that they may receive the life-changing, miraculous Body and Blood of Christ. Children observe and pattern their father's behaviors and a man should do his best to communicate an awe of the Eucharist to his children. Men who take the trouble to dress well, and to help their children dress well for Mass, send a clear sign that awe and reverence is required when approaching the King. Each man also has an obligation to his brothers to help lead them to Christ; dressing in one's Sunday best will make an impact on other men.

Dress for the King

Stopping the hemorrhaging of Catholic men from the Church will require a broad

and sustained effort enlivened by the Holy Spirit. But each man, in every parish, can do his part this Sunday by dressing like a man who knows he is coming into the Presence of the King.

Dress like a man who is awed by the Mass. Other men will notice, including Christ the King.

Matthew James Christoff is a Catholic convert. He is the founder of The [New Emangelization Project](#) which is committed to confront the Catholic “man-crisis” and to develop new ardor, methods and expressions for the re-evangelization of Catholic men. Matthew is also a co-founder of [CatholicManNight](#), a parish-based men’s evangelization effort that has drawn thousands of Catholic men into Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, fellowship and lively discussion. Matthew lives in Minnesota with his beautiful bride (and childhood sweetheart); they have 4 adult children, 3 “in-law” children and two grandchildren.

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