

# Proper Catholic Etiquette at Mass and Away

[Theresa Thomas](#) | December 13, 2011



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During the beginning of Advent, I always hope to come up with something more meaningful, amazing and inspiring than the previous year. This is silly. While we've done, as a family, some wonderful Advent readings, made some pretty nice Advent calendars, and spent fruitful time lighting Advent candles and trying to integrate spiritual reading with family traditions, I never seem to remember, until after I've fretted about the current year's preparations that Advent is not about outdoing oneself year after year. It's about making a simple preparation for Jesus and His birth at Christmas.

The best Advent "kickoff", if I may borrow a phrase from the Thanksgiving football hubbub, is a trip to Confession with the family, followed by frequent reception of the sacraments, and a renewed determination to make room in one's heart for the Christ and the graces He wants to pour forth each Advent season. It really is that simple.

I was searching last week for an old document and came across something very special that I had almost forgotten about. I am sure it was no coincidence that God allowed me to find it just when I did. It was a memo written by a dear priest to his students, and is a gem of wisdom for all of us.

I would like to simply share a few choice points as we continue "setting our souls" right for Advent. Not following some of these recommendations does not necessarily mean we are committing sin, but adhering to them makes us better people, for sure. It was written for young people, and should be shared with them, but I'm thinking that we can all use the reminders. I know I can. Thank you, Father James Seculoff in the Fort Wayne, South Bend Indiana diocese, for your advice and wisdom, given so many years ago, which still lights our paths and leads our way in practical and yet timeless ways.

### *Etiquette at Holy Mass*

- We should wear clothes to church that will not draw attention to us.
- We should keep a proper mental attitude at Mass. We should remember we are going to worship God and by offering the same sacrifice that Jesus offered him. Everything we have comes from Him; He is our whole future.
- Inside church – charitable silence
- On arriving at the place we plan to worship, we should genuflect and go to the middle. We should not sit on the end and make everyone else stumble over us to get in. If we are with a friend or relative, we stop at the place. The woman genuflects first and enters, and the man genuflects and follows the woman.
- Once inside, we touch our right hand fingers to the holy water and make the sign of the cross. While doing so, we quietly pray, “May this holy water cleanse my mind from all vain, evil or distracting thoughts.”
- Since at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we offer with the priest we are expected to fully participate in the prayers and singing. We are not attending a performance or a movie and simply observing.
- At Communion time we must remember to be sure there are no personal mortal sins and that the Eucharistic fast (one hour) has been observed. To receive Holy Communion in mortal sin is another mortal sin of sacrilege (disrespect of Jesus). It is bad form to consciously look to notice who receives communion and who does not.
- At Communion time, we simply follow the pattern established in the church where we are attending Mass. When it is convenient, it is good manners for the man to step back and allow the woman to precede him to the Communion line.
- Once the recessional song is finished it is a sign of proper church etiquette to once again kneel and pray for a few minutes in thanksgiving for receiving our Lord.

A few non-church related suggestions include the following and struck me as excellent codes of behavior that I am going to strive towards this Advent season. I’ve already shared them with my children. Perhaps you would like to share them with yours.

### *Etiquette Outside of Church*

- Do not ridicule anyone or be witty at another’s expense.
- Avoid criticizing and fault finding. This is a defect which grows, and it can develop to such an extent as to make one unbearable in conversation
- Abstain from all low and vulgar words of expression
- To mimic peculiarities of others is disrespectful and offensive.
- Always speak of God, of the saints, of holy things, with the greatest reverence.

May you and your family have a blessed and holy Advent!

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