

Why I Am Catholic

Promotion of the virtue of modesty

The Church continues the promotion and protection of the virtue of modesty. Modesty is required of followers of Christ and we must encourage its practice.

Modesty applies to many aspects of life, but often refers to issues of appearance and clothing. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet." (2522)

It further teaches that: "Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity. . . It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons." (2521)

Modesty increases in importance as it is ignored. A central aspect is: "Avoiding attracting attention to oneself by moderating one's actions or appearance." (*Wikipedia*) Sometimes a person may choose certain clothes for church hoping to attract attention. Their appearance becomes a moral issue when they take the focus off of Jesus. Is a person seeking to impress others or show proper respect and reverence to Christ?

In 2005, several members of the Northwestern University women's lacrosse team received heavy criticism for wearing flip flops to the White House to meet the President. Others have received criticism for not dressing up for the Queen of England. Jesus is the King of Kings. The Church is His House. The altar is His Throne. He invites us.

When we are invited to a formal party, we do not show up in clothes for a picnic. The invitation may have said Black Tie and we would not be allowed in. In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus teaches: "When the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside.'" (Matt 22:11-13)

To us this may seem harsh, but for God it is about respect and dignity. He has given us our bodies and we are called to cloth them in a dignified way, especially in his house. At Mass, we are at the Wedding Feast where Christ marries His Bride the Church.

But it goes further than church. Christ calls us to a certain mindset, attitude and way of presenting ourselves. Clothing is a form of advertising and says a lot about the individual. We send messages by what we wear. Once at a high school football game, an attractive female student walked by wearing a T-shirt with a handwritten message: "You know you want it." Many young females want to wear sexy clothes and not be treated as sex objects. It will not happen. I am frequently asked, "Why won't guys respect me," by females who are often underdressed and wear revealing clothes. Guys see them as prostitutes. Young males say: "Father, it is hard to tell the good girls from the bad girls."

Fashion does not dictate what is right and wrong to wear. God does!

At the same time, all of us need to guard our eyes and not look lustfully at anyone. "There is modesty of the feelings as well as of the body. It protests, for example, against the voyeuristic exploitations of the human body in certain advertisements, or against the solicitations of certain media that go too far in the exhibition of intimate things. Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies. . . Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person." (2523, 2524)