

*“Dress so people respect you, not inspect you, especially in warmer weather. Select modest attire for church.”*

## **Regard every Mass as “the interview of a lifetime”**

**by Callista Gould**

If you had an interview for the job of a lifetime, what would you do?

First, you would clean up. Scrub behind the ears, even under the fingernails. Then you would dress to impress. Wear your best suit or at least a pressed shirt and slacks or a skirt. You would not wear anything too flashy or too revealing, which might be a distraction.

You would show up on time . . . maybe a few minutes early, to collect your thoughts. Of course you would have prepared by reading up on the company. Your cellphone would be off.

In the interview, you would sit up straight. You would pay close attention to the interviewer . . . hang on every word. You would want to make a lasting, favorable impression.

Why should it be any different when you meet with Christ Himself?



That is exactly what we do each time we go to Mass – we meet with Jesus Christ, who is truly present. It is the most important meeting of our week (or day, for daily communicants).

With that in mind, here are some etiquette guidelines for meeting Christ in the Mass:

**Cellphones.** If you were meeting with Christ, would you whip out your cellphone and say, “Hang on, Jesus, I need to take this?” Do not text or check messages from the pew. Turn cellphones off before Mass.

**Preparation.** Arrive early. Enter and acknowledge Christ with reverence. Bend the knee and genuflect toward the Tabernacle. Say a few prayers before Mass and mentally prepare yourself. Fast at least one hour before Communion. Do not chew gum in church.

**Late for Mass.** If you enter late (for a very good reason, of course), enter discreetly. Find the nearest available seat and slip into it.

**Seating.** Some people seem glued to the end of the pew. If you are able-bodied, slide in. Be considerate of those on the ends because of mobility issues (possibly a painful back or joint condition not visible).

**Dress appropriately.** Dress up, not down for Mass. Don't let First Communion be the last time you really dressed up to receive Christ. Every time you receive Christ is special. Dress so people respect you, not inspect you, especially in warmer weather. Select modest attire. Cover your tummy, tuck in the bra straps, pull up your drawers.

That goes for teenagers, too. If you feel like you need to show a lot of skin to get attention, then it is time to work on the other gifts God gave you. Stick with the hairstyle you came in with. Do not put your hair up, take it down, and so on. Do not readjust a scrunchy, hair clip, or headband. Gentlemen must remove hats when entering church.



**Pay attention.** Give the priest your full attention. Remind squirmy children of the importance of focusing forward, especially during the Consecration. Sit up straight. Those past Confirmation age should not rest their head on their parents' shoulders. Mass is not sleepy time for Soldiers of Christ.

Teens should be cognizant of their behavior, because younger children look up to them. Do not stroke the hair or rub the back of your spouse, your date, or adult child during Mass. Think interview, not petting zoo. Would you pick up the *Wall Street Journal* and start reading it during an interview? Do not read the bulletin during Mass.

**Unruly children.** In the absence of a cry room ("bawl room"), parents should remove a child behaving badly to the back of the church, to minimize distraction.

**Other people's children.** Infants discover early that an echo in a Gothic-style church is better than the Grand Canyon. It's important to remember we were all small once and certainly had a good scream in church. So hold the angry look and give a sympathetic smile instead. Give parents the benefit of the doubt. Most are doing their best to keep their children calm and quiet. The rest of us must exercise patience.

**Chatty people in the next pew.** Make people feel welcome. The church experience should not be, "The person sitting in front of me scolded me." Give "the look." Not an angry look, but a blank "I can hear you" look. If that does not work, sit away from the offenders next time. If you say something, couch it in friendly terms. "It's good that you are here, but could you please lower your voice?" After Mass, smile and say, "Thank you. I appreciate your kindness."



**Sign of Peace** As in business, shake an offered hand. You can wash your hand later. If you are under the weather, do not offer your hand, but say, "I am sorry, I have a slight cold and I do not want to pass it on. Peace be with you." Most are grateful. "Justice and Peace shall kiss," but you should not during the Sign of Peace. This is not the time to pucker up with family and friends. If the priest skips the Sign of Peace, you should, too.

**Bathroom breaks.** Take children to the bathroom before Mass. When a child sees another heading to the bathroom, there is a reflex action and immediately that child has

to go, too. Soon, children are popping out of the pews everywhere. If you have a medical condition that causes frequent bathroom visits, sit near an exit.

**Listen, or read along?** Some people are very focused listeners. Others may use the missalette, even with familiar prayers, to keep their mind from wandering. The missalette is also helpful when teaching children the parts of the Mass.

**Singing.** You would never sit in silence in an interview. You must contribute. Participating in the praying and the singing is part of the communal aspect of our Faith. A great voice is not required, but if you have one, don't drown out the rest of us. Blend in.



**Receiving Communion.** The Communion line is not a conga line where you wave to all your friends. Focus your attention forward and contemplate Christ's Real Presence in the sacrament. Treat every time as if it were your First Communion.

**Exiting** Where's the fire? Do not leave early, unless you have a really good reason. It's like walking out on God. Wait until the priest leaves the altar at the end of Mass. Coffee and donuts will still be waiting.

In sum, prepare for your meeting with Christ like it's the interview of a lifetime. Practice proper church etiquette, be courteous to those around you, and make every time you receive Communion like it was your First.

Some day, you might get the promotion of your life.

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