

# "Snacks in Church?"

Father Cippel wrote this article a few years ago at another parish. You may find it helpful.

*"So many people are showing up late, eating and yakking on phones that pastors are writing books on etiquette."* This is a quote from an article in the Sunday edition of the St. Petersburg Times a number of years ago, Sunday, November 14, 2004 to be exact. The title of the article was *"Casual Sundays."*

That article reported that congregations of all denominations are taking a more relaxed view on proper church attire and conduct. But a by-line added: *"That's no excuse for being rude. Tip: turn off the cell phone."*

This article caught my attention, and I cut it out because I have detected the same tendencies surfacing in the conduct of some who worship here during Sunday Masses. The laid-back habits and lack of reverence that are creeping into our own congregation are a symptom of our entire society. In fact, it shows that the attitudes of our secular society are so strong that some people do not even know how to act or dress appropriately in church. Some find little distinction between going to a movie or a sports event and entering a church.

Presently about 5,000 people worship in our church every week for the Saturday Vigil and Sunday Masses. When so many gather in one place, there is bound to be a small percentage who fail to act appropriately. The vast majority does act and dress appropriately, (for this I am grateful) but a percentage does not. And these create an atmosphere that dulls the respect and reverence we owe to God and the respect and courtesy we owe to each other.

It may be unfair to categorize the entire parish family on the lax attitudes of some, but I am concerned that these can slowly influence the many. We are forgetting those small acts of kindness and courtesy that hold together the fabric of any society. But, as Christians, there must be more than mere social convention to motivate us. We are to act out of love of the other and the desire to serve. We must become conscious that self-serving attitudes offend not only our neighbor but also God. What we simply slough off as *"my convenience"* can be a cop-out to excuse ourselves for habitual centeredness on self.

Jesus clearly states, *"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me."* We can easily drift in a direction that is dictated by a secular mentality which has little regard for the sacred presence of God anywhere, *even in His own House.* This lack of reverence for God can unconsciously extend to human persons who are also temples of God. How do these attitudes seep into our minds and hearts? Many of us watch far more hours of TV than we spend reading the word of God or in quality time with family and friends. There is EWTN and other Christian media. But do we tune into these?

I was surprised and edified by my mother who in the later years of her life (She died at 87 and was blind on one eye) asked me to bring her some good literature from the library because she

was sick and tired of endless sit-coms and talk shows that left her empty and angry. She was turned off by the sarcasm and humor at the expense of others and violence that TV constantly portrays. She wanted to grow old and die with a rosary in her hand rather than a TV monitor. (She jogged my conscience!)

I believe the following direct quote from that St. Petersburg Times article sums up what is creeping into our parish church and dulling our awareness of God:

*"Cell phone ringing.*

*Gum under the seats.*

*Skintight jeans.*

*People showing up late. Then leaving early.*

*Crumbs in the pews.*

*Chitchatting during prayer time.*

*And, oh yeah, the presence of God.!! Welcome.*

*You have entered the 21st Century church. "*

I might add that the 21st century secular mentality has entered us more than we realize. And the presence of God-as expressed above-is merely an afterthought for the secular person who looks out for her or his own convenience and considers "self" the number 1 priority.

To that above list from the "Times" article, I can add: leaving all sorts of litter in and under the pews: candy and chewing gum wrappers, tissues, empty cough drop boxes, etc. and not returning the hymnals to the racks but strewing them aimlessly in the pews. Smokers neglect to deposit their cigarette butts in the receptacles at the doors and they and others litter the entrances of the church. Occasionally (especially for weddings, baptisms or special events) I have had to ask people to leave their coffee cups or soda cans at the door.

What can we do? Well, **"What would Jesus do?"** Don't litter, and pick up the litter others leave. Return your own hymnals to their proper place and likewise the hymnals of those who forgot to do so. **Recall, kindness and courtesy are ways of loving.** Dress for church and make that a symbol of your reverence for the Lord. Have patience in the parking lot when arriving and leaving. Yes, be hospitable. Greet the people around you when seated, and exchange a few words with those who have become "church friends" and who sit in the same pew every week. A brief nod or greeting is encouraged. It is the prolonged conversations that create an atmosphere of a theatre and disturb those who want to pray.

By your manner of acting, singing and praying, reflect God's presence within yourself and respect his presence in others--especially reverence the altar and Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. **You are in God's home.** Simple yet profound are the virtues of our Lord-kindness and concern for others--which bring us communion with God, an awareness of our own dignity as a members of his family, strength and hope for daily living and peace to our restless hearts. Yes indeed, **"What would Jesus do?"**

Father John A. Cippel

# *Sacred Silence*



Please remember to turn off all cell phones and electronic devices prior to entering church. Please, also, silence conversations and talk before entering the holy sanctuary of the church, and while you are in church. Many are praying, meditating and preparing themselves for Holy Mass; and as well there are those who stay afterward to pray and meditate. Thank you and God bless you.

COME  
CELEBRATE  
JESUS!