

The Humility of Conformity

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm 95
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28

The Amish and Saint Benedict have at least one thing in common—they both believe that humility can be found in conformity. The Amish value *conformity* over *individualism* because conformity breeds humility. Saint Benedict, in his Rule for monks, wrote, “The eighth degree of humility is that a monk do nothing except what is commended by the common Rule of the monastery and the example of the elders.” Such conformity can be very difficult for us to understand because we live in a culture that has raised individualism to the status of a virtue and even made it a primary goal of life. However, individualism—our trying to be different from other people—is almost always a manifestation of our ego and pride; we often want to be different so that others will notice us and respect us.

Examples of this can be found in secular culture, like the radical lengths that people will often go to in order to look different, including getting numerous tattoos and piercings, and wearing provocative clothing. We can also find examples in church. I once heard an extraordinary minister of Communion giving out the Eucharist by saying the words, “The Body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” While I’m sure she thought this was just part of her piety, such individualism is usually a subtle form of pride.

The Catholic Church actually offers us an amazing and beautiful experience of the humility of conformity through the common prayers and actions of the Mass. The fact that all of us are saying and doing the *same things* at Mass is not meant to be robotic or rote, but rather, it is an awesome opportunity to experience the humility of conformity!

Beginning next week, we are going to implement some changes in the way we do things at Mass. The reason for these changes is primarily to be in conformity with the Church’s instructions for the Mass, which we find in a document entitled, The General Instruction for the Roman Missal. Last fall, I took the time to re-read the General Instruction, knowing that over time, I have inserted into the celebration of the Mass my own idiosyncrasies. Some of the changes that you will see next week that are described in the General Instruction include—

- Purifying the sacred vessels at the credence table instead of at the altar.
- Not placing anything on the altar other than what the Church requests.
 - This will include placing the book of petitions *in front* of the altar instead of *on* the altar, and
 - Placing a crucifix on the altar for the priest to see as he celebrates Mass.
- The extraordinary ministers of Communion will not approach the sanctuary until after they have prayed the words, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed,” and the priest receives Communion.
- The altar servers will not hold patens during Communion.

In addition to these changes, there will be a few changes that are not specifically addressed in the General Instruction, but that will help with the overall flow of the Mass. These include such things as—

- Additional Communion stations.
- Bringing up the offertory gifts before the collection is taken up.

One of the most important changes that will start next week is rooted in hospitality and love. I am excited to announce that we will begin offering low-gluten hosts for those who suffer from celiac disease or other such ailments. As many of you probably already know, celiac disease is spreading rapidly and affecting many people. In a parish our size, it would not be unusual for there to be 6-12 people who could not consume the Host because of their intolerance to gluten. However, a group of nuns in Missouri have developed a low-gluten Host that is approved by the Catholic Church and can be safely consumed by most people suffering from celiac disease.

For those who are too gluten-intolerant for even the special low-gluten hosts, there will be a special chalice of the Precious Blood available that has not been in contact with any gluten particles. The new low-gluten Communion station will be at the statue of Mary. **It will be the responsibility of those who need the low-gluten Host or Precious Blood to tell the sacristan at least 10 minutes before Mass and to go to the special Communion station at the beginning of Communion.**

In a few weeks, we will also be starting a new vocation prayer ministry. It will center on a special chalice that will be brought home by a different individual or family each week, who will pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I'll explain more about this new ministry when we are ready to implement it.

Last fall, we began using some new wording in the Mass so that we would be in greater conformity with other cultures and languages throughout the world. Next week, we build on that by starting a few new practices that lead us even deeper in conformity with the Church throughout the world, and thus deeper into humility!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ In the Rule of Saint Benedict, monks are instructed to learn humility by not standing out. It says, “The eighth degree of humility is that a monk do nothing except what is commended by the common Rule of the monastery and the example of the elders.” Let’s share with God the ways in which we try to differentiate ourselves from others—the ways in which we try to individualize ourselves—and honestly claim the role of our ego and pride in them.