

Talking in Church

I received the following email from Mary on Sunday afternoon. She writes: "Dear Fr. Tracey: I always read your articles in the Gulf Pines and enjoy them very much. I have a problem that really bothers me and hope you may have a suggestion as to what I can do. It's all the talking in church. Every week, my husband and I seem to sit next to people who insist on talking (sometimes loudly) before mass. We try to go early to say the rosary and our prayers and just talk to God. This past Sunday, three ladies were speaking loudly behind us and visiting the whole 15 minutes before Mass and the fellow in front of us was on his cell phone and was even texting while the Gospel was read.

My 5 brothers and I were taught as young children not to talk in church and to this day I don't. To me, going to church is a time to be with God and talk to God and to pray and get ready for the Mass. My husband seems to be able to tune these people out but it really disturbs my concentration. I think it is so rude and very irreverent. I have turned around and asked people to please be quiet but I feel guilty about asking people to be quiet in church when that is what they are supposed to be doing in the first place. These are adults and should know better. I have even been at Mass when people answer and talk on their cell phones!

We have tried several churches on the coast and it is the same. The priests have even begged people to be more reverent and not talk but it does no good. We move to a different spot in church every Sunday hoping for peace and quiet but to no avail. Why is it like this now? Why are people so inconsiderate of others? I would welcome any suggestion you may have.

Thank you Fr. Tracey. God Bless You. Mary."

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), people were challenged to change from passive observers to active participants. Little did we realize that active participation would include active chatter, active texting, active cell answering as well as active space claiming.

Many people come to church early to have their own private time of prayer in order to prepare their mind, heart and soul for encounters with Word and Sacrament. Instead, they are met with gossiping gatherings. Parking lots, following Mass, resemble the Indy 500. Even before the priest or deacon proclaims that the Mass is ended, people add, "Drivers! Start your engines."

Is what Mary sees happening in our churches a microcosm of what is happening in society in general? Has a certain rudeness, individualism, "meism" crept into our society? Reading the "Sound-Offs" in the local paper, one would have to agree.

You go to a restaurant and, in the middle of a meal, you find people texting or talking on the phone to someone who may be miles away. It makes you wonder how the person sitting next to them feels about being ignored.

It is also ironic that FaceBook participants claim to have hundreds of friends in order to show how popular they are. Yet, recent surveys indicate that any ordinary person has only two real friends. Why do we have this great desire to multiply the number of our friends as if we are in competition with each other?

Some might say that if we return to the Latin Mass with all its "mystery" surrounds, maybe people will have a greater reverence for the church as a sacred space. Yet, it is not as simplistic as that. It is much deeper. Respect for self, for others and for the sacred needs to be rediscovered so that, once again, the sacred replaces the secular, the sense of community replaces individualism and dignity replaces rudeness.

It seems so many people in our society feel alone, isolated and lonely. They feel disconnected from each other. Everyone yearns to be connected. Yet, there are times we all need to be alone with our own thoughts and times we feel the need to be connected. At church, our connection yearns for a higher and deeper connection with the Other who can satisfy our deepest longings and needs. Time is sacred and especially in church. We need to respect each other's time, space and desire for privacy especially in the most sacred of all places.