

## Do you mind me asking....

It was a Sunday afternoon. I had just stopped in to check on a “Life in the Spirit” ceremony that was taking place in a nearby parish. I left the ceremony about halfway through it. On exiting, I heard a male voice calling, “Are you a priest?” Hesitatingly, I pretended not to hear it, only to have the question repeated again, only this time, a little louder.

How did they know I might be a priest. I thought to myself. I didn’t have any clerical garb on except a black pants. Earlier that morning, I had travelled to celebrate Mass at a parish some fifty miles away while the local priest was on vacation. To the folks at that parish, they were able to identify me when I donned the full priestly vestments to celebrate Mass.

I turned around to see a couple a few paces away. It seemed as if they had dropped in to visit the historic church without realizing that there was a service in progress. Like myself, they exited the church at the earliest convenient moment without creating a disturbance.

Anyway, did the gentleman recognise my black pants and conclude that I must be a priest or, the fact that I showed up at a church on a Sunday afternoon, then I must be a priest or, maybe, deep down, there was something about my aura and gait that allowed him to conclude that I was a priest.

I answered, “Yes,” to the question as I turned around to discover an older couple. He was dressed immaculately, color coordinated, hair neatly groomed. The woman, also was dressed in a style more fitting her age and style of the day.

The gentleman spoke in measured tones, enunciating every word with the precision of a surgeon’s scalpel. His wife, too, spoke with a very refined accent without any trace of a local dialect.

After a few minutes of warm-up conversations, the gentleman surprised me by asking, “Do you mind me asking: how old are you?”

I was tempted to tell him that I had some rhinoplasty to correct my nose; some tummy tucks to get rid of any protruding extra baggage and of course that I had some Botox injections to smooth out my face wrinkles. And of course, my full head of grey hair. That was because, on retirement, many of my brain cells had died and were not trying to stifle my hair roots. I declined the thoughts of leading them up the wrong garden path.

I told him the truth. I could see the surprise on both of their faces. “You really look amazing for that age?” I looked at the gentleman with his fine, full crop of black hair and, thought to myself, that some potion from a bottle might have made him less aged.

“I would never have thought it, (that you were that old)”, he commented, “How do you do it?” Again, I could have fed him lots more untruths – about exercise, diet, sleep and work patterns, healthy lifestyle and that my genes complemented that; not the Levi’s you wear but my family chemistry ones.

“We got married late in life?” he indicated. “We are married twenty-eight years,” she chimed in, “In fact, today is our anniversary.” I congratulated them.

We chitchatted some more, discovering the couple lived in a nearby city and were checking out the church where her niece would be married in two weeks. I concluded that they were professional people; used to a certain standard of living and engaged in certain social settings. Their polished, measured and proper demeanour, showed their level of sophistication.

Some minutes later, we parted company. As we did, I could hear their faint conversation, blown in my direction by the prevailing breeze, as they talked about that young looking priest they just met.

As I climbed into my car, I did so with a sense of satisfaction, solidified by the thought of how well I looked in spite of my age. Why not enjoy it, and I did.

The whole experience brought a fun-loving question to my mind. Why is it okay to ask a man his age and not a woman? Why, when you ask a man his age, he has no hesitation in telling you his real age; whereas; even the thought of asking a woman her age, would be done so with fear and trepidation of receiving a tongue lashing and a very firm – it is none of your business?

I rest my question!