

What to wear today

I suppose there are several practical reasons why Catholics school and some public school students wear uniforms. For some students, it is a slap in the face to freedom of expression and for some parents it is one less thing they have to worry about once they have outfitted their child for the school year. For a school, a uniform is a statement of identity, character and belonging. For a student, it may be a statement of sameness and lack of uniqueness and identity.

A student who belongs to a school that doesn't require uniforms, there is the freedom to decide what they are going to wear each day, depending on the school dress policy. Often this leads to the proverbial frustration of the student who says, "I have nothing to wear today." It really doesn't mean that they have actually nothing to wear, it actually means that either they have worn all the clothes in their closet to school in recent days or else they have nothing clean to wear. In others words, there is more dirty laundry around than clean clothes.

As priests, on duty, we never have to say, "I have nothing to wear" or "there is nothing clean to wear. You see, our on duty wardrobe is very simple and practical it seems – just black, black shoes, black shirt, black pants,

Of late, I have begun to realize that even the simple black outfit is not so simple after all. I rarely wear a black coat except for very rare formal occasions – Christmas, Easter, Weddings, Funerals. So, my coat gets less wear and tear than a pants.

I have been on a shopping spree of late to purchase extra pants to match my black coat. I found out that it can be a complicated process. I not only have to worry about the material but now I have to worry about the waist as well. You see, either the makers of such pants in some overseas warehouse do not know how to measure waist lines or use a different tape measure or my waist line has expanded.

In shopping for a pair of black pants, I didn't realize there were so many different shades of black. I have tried to envision the blackness of my seldom worn coat in order to find the same shade of black in a pants. So often, I have ended up close but not a match.

The whole experience has reminded me of something interesting about the Catholic Church. There is a certain sameness and at the same time, a certain diversity and uniqueness. Recently, a visitor to our church for Mass one weekend remarked that what she loved about the Catholic Church is that no matter where she goes to Mass or in what country, she understands what is going on irrespective of the language differences.

I am reminded of that famous quote from Irish author, James Joyce in "Finnegan's Wake" where he describes Catholics as "Here comes everybody." We confront diversity every day. Catholics can, for instance, accept the same basic social teachings and disagree about the strategies that should be pursued to achieve them. They can accept the same basic theological teachings and be devoted to a variety of pious practices. The problems are not as often between the official Church and the believer as between the believers themselves. Clearly, there is a difference between disagreement and dissent. The difficulties arise when individual believers think that their point of view in these matters is the only one that is correct,

Fr, Andrew Greeley showed the uniqueness and diversity of Catholicism when he wrote, "The Catholic religious experience is sacramental: it encounters God in the events, objects, and persons of every day. The Catholic imagination is analogical: it pictures God as being similar to these events, objects and persons. The Catholic religious story is cosmic: it believes in happy ends in which grace routs both evil and injustice. The Catholic religious community is organic: it is based on a dense network of local relationships that constitute the matrix of everyday life."

So, tomorrow morning when I get ready to get dressed for the day, there is one question I will not have to ask because I know that no matter what shade of black my black pants is, I won't have to worry about matching outfits, color coordinating or having nothing clean to wear. Instead I will wear my usual black pants no matter what color it is.