

Dear Friends in Christ, on the third Sunday of Lent, Father Ravi preached about the need for Catholics to show a profound respect for the “temple” of God. On one level, Father was referring to the way we are called to respect our bodies, that is, by keeping it undefiled from certain kinds of sins, especially as they relate to the sixth commandment. St. Paul put it this way: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). On another level, however, Father was addressing the way we are supposed to act whenever we encounter Jesus hidden in the tabernacles found within our sacred places (e.g., our parish church, chapels, other places of worship, etc.) Everyone should refrain from speaking to one another in church. Everyone should try to keep a spirit of recollection and silence. Everyone should be respectful to both the Lord and his/her neighbors. Regrettably, this has not happened within our parish community. I must admit that I have been greatly disappointed and disturbed by the great noises that often resonate within our church before and after many Masses - noises that make our church resemble more like a marketplace than a solemn place of worship.

What does our faith teach in regards to talking in Church? Is it a sin? Are we disrespectful to the Lord and others when we act in this manner? Colin B. Donovan, STL, addressed these questions when he wrote the following response: “Assuming that what is being said is not itself sinful, it is morally neutral to talk. However, Catholic moral teaching tells us that “circumstances” change the moral character of actions. Talking in Church when not demanded by necessity is at least venially sinful for the following reasons: 1) It is the Lord's House, which Jesus taught was “a house of prayer” (Mt 21:13) and thus should be used according to its purpose. This is a violation of justice against God, for whom we should have reverence. 2) It is a violation of justice against actual neighbors who are trying to pray. Again, necessity permits talking, just as it permits practicing the music before Mass and so on. However, most conversations are trivial and take place elsewhere at another time. This puts them in the category of unnecessary. The truth of this is shown by the strict guard for silence maintained in the chapels of the Roman basilicas where people are praying. Even in the areas where the tourists are viewing the architecture and art, talking above a whisper is not permitted. This is an accurate reflection of the Catholic respect for the church and for others. 3) Finally, it is a violation of charity, since as Christians we should be going “out of ourselves” to look after others first. If a person crassly and knowingly disregarded others trying to pray, or worst of all did so with malice or contempt, it could even be a mortal sin against charity. These are basic principles of Catholic moral theology and need no other authority than that” (cf. EWTN website, my emphasis added).

I humbly ask everyone to please refrain from all unnecessary and trivial conversations and talking within our church before and after Mass. If you must talk, please do it in the foyer or outside the church. If necessity requires that you speak inside the church, please do it quietly. If every-one observes these basic principles, we will be showing respect not only to our neighbors, but especially to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. By refraining from all unnecessary and trivial conversations and talking, everyone can assist in making our church into a solemn place of worship, instead of what it often resembles today, a boisterous marketplace!

Pax Christi, *Fr. Thomas*