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Lines in the Sand by Carl E Beyer

I attended mass at a different church the other week and it got me thinking about where the line should be drawn concerning proper behavior at church. We sat behind a row of parishioners who were obviously there to baptize a baby. Not one went up for the Eucharist. Two were chewing gum the whole time. They talked continuously throughout the mass. In addition the lady in front of me kept pulling up her halter top. There are two options to go from here. The first is to tell me to take the plank out of my own eye. The second is to say that we need to draw a line in the sand for proper behavior in our Lord's House.

I pick the second option and draw a line in the sand. I do not come before you standing on a high altar of moral authority but rather as a simple man. A simple man whose mind, at times, may be influenced negatively but a man who can still strive for higher standards where our Lord is concerned.

I know that right now many of you are going to quote to me: Matthew 7:1-5: *“Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the splinter from your eye,’ while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.”* Many misinterpret this to mean not to judge others while a closer reading will clearly reveal it to mean ‘not to judge others hypocritically’. There is a big difference between the two and I choose the latter while realizing that I may indeed place myself in the state of hypocrisy for the sake of this article.

The line in the sand is a difficult one when it comes to religion. Do we risk driving parishioners away from the church by setting our standards too high? Do we set our standards low enough to encompass everyone and by doing so disrespect our Lord? Or do we try to draw a line in the sand where we pay respect to our Lord while encompassing the most parishioners? Not only do I believe we need to draw a line in the sand, but we need to draw lines in the sand for different areas.

Let me first choose to not draw a line. The one line I would not draw is a line based on sin. This line must never be drawn since our Lord welcomes all sinners to his church. The biggest joy of our Lord is when the worst sinner comes to the church and turns his life over to our Lord.

So let us start drawing lines in the sand starting with proper dress at church. There are two purposes for dressing appropriately for church. The first is to show respect for the Lord; the second is so that your improper dress is not distracting to other parishioners. If you accomplish the first purpose then the second purpose will be fulfilled. There are three easy guidelines for proper dress; no shoulders; no knees; no private areas. No shoulders means no bare shoulders. Simply speaking, just wear garments with sleeves. No knees means no bare knees by wearing shorts or dresses with hemlines above the knees. No private areas covers two concerns. One is

clothing that is too tight. I do not need to see your silhouette at church. Wear loose, respectful clothing. The other is that any part of your body which you would not be comfortable with your parents touching should not be exposed. Bluntly speaking, I do not go to church to see cleavage. Keep that private. As a man, I would like to see all our men entering church wearing at a minimum non-jean pants and a button down shirt, but that is not a line in the sand, just a preference on my part.

The next line in the sand is punctuality. A simple rule here is to show up for church five minutes early and leave after the priest does. The entrance song is a common problem when people think the entrance song for them. No, the entrance song is the entrance procession of the Gospel, the Cross and the Priest; not you. You are supposed to be there to join in with the singing of the entrance song; which leads me to the next line.

The next line in the sand may be more of a preference than a line. All should sing to raise a joyful sound to the Lord. Notice I said joyful not beautiful. I know sometimes the music volunteers sing so beautifully that you may hesitate to join in. Do not be mistaken, the Lord wants all to sing joyfully to Him. Sing joyfully so the Lord may smile at your joy.

Another line in the sand concerns recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist. The very foundation of our Roman Catholic faith is our belief that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In our belief in the Eucharist we believe that our Lord's presence is in the tabernacle. With this recognition we genuflect to the Lord whenever our path crosses in front of the tabernacle. This is easily accomplished. When you leave the row you are seated in, genuflect to the tabernacle. If you cannot genuflect then bow. Leaving your row and turning your back to our Lord's presence without giving this recognition is highly disrespectful.

The importance of the Eucharist draws us another line in the sand. When the Eucharist is exposed in church, you are not to be sitting on your rump unless you have a medical reason. You should kneel or stand to show the proper respect. You may be asking "when is the Eucharist exposed?" So, let me clarify this. To start with, you should be kneeling when the priest is preparing the wafers for the transubstantiation. While the faithful are receiving the Eucharist you should be kneeling. After the distribution of the Eucharist and until the priest has completely cleaned the ciborium and the chalice you should be kneeling. A simple rule here is that after the distribution you should be kneeling until the priest is seated.

The next line in the sand is a matter of respect for God's House. During Mass, no conversations should occur. I believe that we, at St. John Vianney, do show this respect quite well. There is nothing in our lives so pressing that is has to be discussed during Mass. Wait for Mass to end, and if you forget what you wanted to say by then, maybe it was not so important. As parents, this is the time to show a good example to our kids. If your kids speak to you, be sure to remind them that they are in church and talking is not allowed.

The bulletin is the last line in the sand. All parishioners should be required to read the bulletin and then be tested on it. OK, just kidding on this one, but you know I have a leaning about reading the bulletin. I do so appreciate all those who read the bulletin faithfully, and thank you all for the many compliments.

Go forth and try not to cross those lines in the sand. God Bless you all.