

Coming to Mass at Uxbridge

Like any ordinary family, we need **house rules** to ensure that everyone knows they are valued and respected. What follows is an attempt to outline some of the areas in which we can co-exist more happily and fruitfully. I hope they do not sound patronising but it is good to sometimes be reminded of the obvious.

Our parish family meets in the church, which is a consecrated building. Of course, the Church is made up of people, living stones, but the place where we worship **is** important. We believe that the Lord is present in our church – not only through the words of **Sacred Scripture** read during the liturgy, the **priest** who acts in the person of Christ, and the **people** who gather in His Name but, in a special and unique way, in the **Blessed Sacrament**.

Jesus loved the Temple in Jerusalem: he became visibly distressed when he saw its peace being upset (Matthew 21: 10-17) and he said those famous words: “*My house shall be called a house of prayer*”. We have to do everything we can to make Our Lady of Lourdes and St Michael “**a house of prayer**”.

Our lives today tend to be stressful and noisy. The busy-ness of running a home, commuting to work and bringing up children means that in our church building we have a unique resource. It ought to be providing “**a holy space**” where individuals can find the chance to recharge their batteries. The church should be an oasis of peace for those who live in Uxbridge – and this depends on **everyone doing their bit**.

When you come into church, try to be as quiet as you can. Genuflect whenever you pass the tabernacle (in the centre of the church). Restrict conversation to the porch (though sound does carry from here into the church), the parish hall or outside the building itself. Greet one another with a nod and a smile, be warm and welcoming, but **resist the urge to chat at length**, especially before Mass! **Give those around you the chance to be still – it may be the only opportunity they and you have in the week to spend quality time with God.**

If you need to speak to the priest, please do so after Mass – he, too, needs to get ready, both spiritually and by preparing the altar, and he will not be able to give you the time you deserve beforehand. Remember that the sacristy is part of the church and not meant to be a meeting room or parish office!

One cause of occasional irritation is the ringing of **mobile phones**. Please make sure that if you have one, it is turned off or switched to silent/vibrate mode before coming into church. And try to arrive in good time, so that you have the chance to settle yourself and your family before Mass begins.

Our **children** are our future and we love them. We are very happy that they come to join in our worship. Jesus famously said: “*Let the little children come to me: do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs*” (Mark 10: 13-16). Please help your children understand that when they come to church, they are entering the house of God, and encourage them to be as quiet and reverent as possible. **Please do not let small children run in the aisles, climb on the benches, throw candles around or otherwise cause an unnecessary distraction. Nor should they be allowed to wander around the altar area where there are dangerous things that can be knocked over!**

If your children are crying or fractious take them into the porch or the room at the back of the church until they are calmed. Here you can still follow what is happening through the speakers. You will also find a box of books under the table at the back of the church which might help to settle them. You can then return with them when they are calmer.

If possible, pushchairs should be stored safely away from fire exits, aisles and doors.

Please make sure that no food or drink is consumed within the church.

Although we have toilet facilities, please only use them if necessary. In particular, **try not to use the toilets between the offertory and the end of Mass.** Nor should they be used (quite obviously) immediately after receiving Holy Communion!

One ever-present problem is **car parking**. There is some space around the church and presbytery to accommodate vehicles but please park considerately and sensibly, taking special care not to block the entrance to the BT exchange, which is in constant use (including Sundays).

When Mass has finished, do not forget to take your copy of the *Newsletter* home with you for reference during the week. It would be a great help if litter is taken home with you and Mass books, unwanted sheets etc are returned to the porch and/or back of church, so that everything is left tidy for the next Mass. **Please remember that there will be people who want to remain in prayer, so try to respect their wishes and leave the church as quietly as possible.** After the 10.30am Mass (and hopefully some other Masses) there is usually a cup of tea/coffee available in the hall and the chance to greet one another. Please do come along and make some new friends. The proceeds from this go to help the poor.

The **choir loft** is available for extra seating, especially during the 10.30am Mass. However, there should be no more than 30 people there and children under the age of 14 should not be left unaccompanied.

Holy Communion is one of central moments in our week. At the 10.30am Mass please let the choir and those in the side aisle come forward first. It is good to bow or genuflect just before receiving Holy Communion. Some people choose to use the kneeler (but if you do so make sure you don't trip people up!). After the priest or minister says 'The Body/Blood of Christ' respond with '**Amen**' (not 'thank you'!) – this is not an empty ceremony but a profession of faith in Him who you receive. You can receive the host either directly on the tongue or in your hand – please do not take it between your fingers or dip the host in the chalice (this is allowed in some countries but not in England and Wales). If you receive the host in your hands, consume it immediately and do not wander away (this will probably lead to the priest chasing after you!!!). Please also remove gloves and put down anything you are holding. If you are **holding a child** it is easiest to receive on the tongue.

Non-Catholics or those unable to receive the Eucharist for whatever reason are warmly invited to come for a **blessing**. Please clearly indicate this by crossing your arms on your chest and if you have children who have not received their First Holy Communion, make sure they are doing this.

This is a wonderful parish and following these house rules will help us all benefit more deeply from the celebration of the sacraments. In everything, may we be true to the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper: *"May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me"* (John 17: 21-22).

May God bless you – and if there is anything I can do for you, please let me know.

Fr Nicholas Schofield (Parish Priest), January 2011