

Why Do Some Oppose the 'Sign of Peace' at Mass?

There are numerous reasons why faithful Catholics object to a 'sign of peace' among the laity during Mass. For example:

- It turns one's attention away from Christ, who is truly present on the altar.
- It is NOT appropriate to socialize during a solemn sacrifice - the very re-presentation of Calvary.
- It forces people to turn their back on Christ in the Holy Eucharist in favor of their neighbor.
- It tends to harm belief in the Real Presence. Note that when 'the sign of peace' occurs, the Eucharist is ignored - it is left alone on the altar with no one adoring it... people are instead exchanging handshakes or ? with their neighbor...even the priest may leave the Holy Eucharist alone on the altar to shake hands with others.
- It does *not* honor God to turn our back on Christ and toward our neighbor.
- Socializing with our neighbor is *inappropriate* in a place of worship.
- It turns our thoughts away from God and onto ourselves and our neighbor. This action occurs at the very moment when Christ is present at the altar - our attention is drawn away from Him and on to our neighbors *during one of the most solemn and sacred parts of the Mass.*
- It gives a false sense of peace. "True peace isn't a worldly peace, a superficial peace, or a mere act of politeness. True peace comes from Christ and is wholly incompatible with sin. In fact, true peace is lost upon committing a single mortal sin." In fact, one may offer "peace" during the Mass to strangers - strangers who may have had an abortion, be abortionists, have recently committed adultery, be living in sin, be using contraception, be dressed scandalously (e.g. tight or revealing clothes, showing cleavage, bare stomachs or shoulders, etc.). It is wrong to offer such persons "peace" - it gives them the impression that they already have Christ's peace and leaves them uncorrected. *"Peace, peace!" they say, though there is no peace.* (Jer. 8:11) Scripture commands us to love one another, but never commands us to offer one another a "phony peace". Rather, consider St. Paul's instruction to "Reprimand publicly those who do sin, so that the rest also will be afraid." (1 Tm. 5:20)
- Instead of preparing quietly and internally for the worthy reception of Holy Communion, our attention is directed to superficial gestures to our neighbors.
- It does not help our neighbor, but rather distracts him from Christ, present on the altar.

- It brings a profane spirit into the church: "They shall also banish from churches all those kinds of music, in which, whether by the organ, or in the singing, there is mixed up anything lascivious or impure; as also all secular actions; vain and therefore profane conversations, all walking about, noise, and clamour, that so the house of God may be seen to be, and may be called, truly a house of prayer." (Council of Trent, Twenty-second Session)
- "This single action has done much to turn the Mass from a sacrifice to a fraternal banquet".
- It can become an occasion of sin (flirting and romantic kisses are not uncommon).
- It creates much noise, contrary to biblical (and other important) admonitions:

"But the LORD is in his holy temple; silence before him, all the earth!" (Hab. 2:20)

"Silence in the presence of the Lord GOD!" (Zeph. 1:7)

"Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the LORD! for he stirs forth from his holy dwelling." (Zech. 2:17)

"As in all the churches of the holy ones, women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. But if they want to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home. For it is improper for a woman to speak in the church." (St. Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 14:33-35) (emphasis added)

"Let all mortal flesh be silent, standing there...in fear and trembling; for the King of kings, the Lord of lords, Christ our God is about to be sacrificed and to be given as food to the faithful." (St. James)

"Nothing so becomes a church as silence and good order. Noise belongs to theatres, and baths, and public processions, and market-places: but where doctrines, and such doctrines, are the subject of teaching, there should be stillness, and quiet, and calm reflection, and a haven of much repose." (St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church)

"When you are before the altar where Christ reposes, you ought no longer to think that you are amongst men; but believe that there are troops of angels and archangels standing by you, and trembling with respect before the sovereign Master of Heaven and earth. Therefore, when you are in church, be there in silence, fear, and veneration." (St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church)

"Holiness befits the house of the Lord; it is fitting that he whose abode has been established in peace should be worshipped in peace and with due reverence. Churches, then, should be entered humbly and devoutly; behavior inside should be calm, pleasing to God, bringing peace to the beholders, a source not only of instruction

but of mental refreshment... The consultations of universities and of any associations whatever must cease to be held in churches, so also must public speeches and parliaments. Idle and, even more, foul and profane talk must stop; chatter in all its forms must cease. Everything, in short, that may disturb divine worship or offend the eyes of the divine majesty should be absolutely foreign to churches, lest where pardon should be asked for our sins, occasion is given for sin, or sin is found to be committed." (Second Council of Lyons)

Other complaints include:

- It is distracting.
- It causes commotion.
- It causes confusion.
- It is generally superficial; a trivial gesture that has no deep or lasting significance. It is *"contrived community"*.
- It is often hypocritical and phony (as witnessed by behavior in the parking lot).
- Many people dislike it (especially men).
- It is often presented as 'mandatory' (even though it may have originally been a mere option).
- It is disorderly [*"...he is not the God of disorder but of peace."* (1 Cor. 14:33)]
- It does not create peace! It doesn't even represent peace! True peace comes from Christ alone.
- It often causes hurt feelings by those "whose hand wasn't shaken by enough persons" or were passed over by someone.
- It puts pressure on people to make physical contact with strangers simply because they are in close proximity.
- It has left many people with the impression that it's the most important part of Mass. In fact, *many people actually consider the 'sign of peace' to be the highlight of the Mass!*
- It is promoted by liberals and others with an agenda to change the Church.
- People are forced to participate / unwelcome gestures are forced on people.
- It causes strange men and women to make physical contact with one another.
- It causes strange men and women to make physical contact with children.
- It is an unsanitary practice and causes the spread of germs. Note that one doesn't just shake hands with a few persons, but essentially with all whom they've touched as well (as well as picking up germs from the filthy, dollar bills, collection baskets, kneelers, etc. that they have just touched). This spread of germs is a special concern for those with sensitive immune systems. And, further, this practice is often followed by the handling of the Holy Eucharist with *unwashed hands.*

Continued on reverse...

- It makes people (especially women) more concerned about their appearance, rather than focusing on important spiritual realities.
- It is distracting even *long before* it actually occurs (e.g. when a neighboring person has a cold, sneezes into their hands, wipes their nose, etc. and one knows the sign of peace is coming they may become bothered).
- It has affected where people sit - people have selected seating based on who they want to / don't want to shake hands with.
- Is notoriously noisy and uncontrolled (e.g. people wave, hug, kiss, pat on the back, have conversations, roam throughout the church, "pew hop", greet as may as possible, etc.).
- As alluded to previously, this practice makes it difficult for faithful Catholics to follow certain scriptural admonitions, such as:

"Silence in the presence of the Lord GOD!" (Zeph. 1:7)

"Serve the LORD with fear; with trembling bow down in homage" (Ps. 2:11)

"...As in all the churches of the holy ones, women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. But if they want to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home. For it is improper for a woman to speak in the church... what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord." (St. Paul, 1 Cor. 14:33-37)

"... we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe." (St. Paul, Heb. 12:28)

- It can be personally offensive - sometimes strange people may come up and grab and touch you against your will.
- It is uncomfortable for many people. It should be noted that not all people are demonstrative.
- It may be considered pointless - an external 'sign of peace' may have nothing whatsoever to do with how "peaceful" we are.
- True 'signs of peace' should be spontaneous and heartfelt - not scheduled and planned.
- It is really meaningless - and potentially harmful - considering that it is given to all people nearby - even those you don't know. One may be offering 'peace' to those in mortal sin, Jews, heretics/Protestants, schismatics, etc. (Note: See 2 Jn. 1:10-11 for how we are called to treat heretics who come to us with strange doctrine.)
- It is *not* a spiritual activity or a liturgical action and therefore seems inappropriate for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
- "No matter how many hands you shake, you are no better spiritually."

Further, those who do not wish to participate may find it difficult to refuse. This may occur even if one is concerned over another's inappropriate dress, their coughing into their hands, wiping their nose, etc. They may not want to appear unfriendly or unsociable to others. Even if they have a compromised immune system, they may find it difficult to refuse to participate.

Those who do refuse to participate may be judged as unfriendly, uncharitable, grumpy, weird, etc. They may be ostracized or even harassed. They may be touched by others without their permission. If they refuse to join in, they may experience glaring looks, hurtful/nasty comments (by those wishing others 'peace!'), or have to feel bad that they may have hurt someone's feelings. If they choose to kneel during this time and focus on the Holy Eucharist and preparation for Communion, they may be considered rebels - whereas those who ignore the Holy Eucharist and roam the church, pat persons on the back, hug, shake hands, etc. are considered "friendly" or "virtuous". It appears that the order of the Commandments is forgotten - God is *first*, our neighbor is *second*.

And, interestingly, it often seems that some persons who offer "peace" to unknown people inside of Mass, are far less "peaceful" in the parking lot. Not only might they seem reluctant to receive physical contact from a stranger outside of Mass, but they may positively refuse such gestures. In contrast, many who refuse to participate in a 'sign of peace' during Mass are happy to offer appropriate peaceful gestures to Catholics they don't know outside of Mass.

In any event, people should act neighborly towards each other voluntarily in a genuine manner - in their own way - outside of Mass - and not a forced way inside of Mass. Such actions create confusion, harm faith, and do not belong inside the Church - a "house of prayer" (Mt. 21:13). Rather, we should be happy to appropriately greet one another *outside* of the Church.

Those who point to early Church history as the basis of this practice should consider the following:

- Scripture does not show a 'kiss of peace' as being part of a liturgical service - and certainly it does *not* show such an action occurring during a solemn *sacrifice*.
- The 'kiss of peace' of old was *not* for any persons - e.g. any unknown person in close proximity - and especially not for those in a state of mortal sin.
- The 'kiss of peace' before was not an ordinary kiss, but one that was to show "forgetfulness of every injury". The new 'sign of peace' has "taken an ancient symbol and striped it of its symbolism."

Clearly, today's contrived 'sign of peace' at Mass is *nothing* like a 'kiss of peace' from apostolic times.

Further, it should be noted that those who want to go back to 'earlier practices' are *quite selective* about those they wish to adopt. For example, consider that men and women were separated in the early church (and therefore could not make physical contact), and that those who committed certain sins were entirely excluded from the church for years and had to remain outside the church as "weepers", begging for prayers. To illustrate this practice, consider this early writing which illustrates how certain sinners were treated in the early Church:

"Let him who has been defiled with his own sister, the daughter of his father or mother, not be permitted to be present in the house of prayer until he cease from his iniquitous and unlawful conduct. After coming to an awareness of that dread sin, let him be a weeper for three years, standing at the door of the houses of prayer and begging the people entering there for the purpose of praying to offer in sympathy for him, each one, earnest

petitions to the Lord. After this let him be admitted for another three years among the hearers only; and when he has heard the Scriptures and the teachings let him be put out and not be deemed worthy of prayer. Then, if he has sought it with tears and has cast himself down before the Lord with a contrite heart and with great humility, let him be given submission for another three years. And thus, when he has exhibited worthy fruits of repentance, let him be admitted in the tenth year to the prayer of the faithful without Communion. And when he has assembled for two years in prayer with the faithful, then let him finally be deemed worthy of the Communion of the good." (St. Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church, c. 375 A.D.)

By contrast, today, the same sinner may enter the Church, possibly receive Holy Communion, and would be freely wished "peace" by those around him - and this might occur not only after he has stopped his shameful conduct, but even *before* he has stopped! Further, it should be noted that non-Catholics were previously *forbidden* to view certain parts of the Mass (including the part in which the 'sign of peace' now occurs in the Novus Ordo Mass). Given the above, even *if* a 'kiss of peace' were to be offered in olden times, many of the dangers that now exist would *not* have existed then (since the people were segregated and all persons in church could be presumed to be Catholics "in the peace of Christ" - and assuredly they would not have dressed or acted inappropriately or have had doubts about the Real Presence, etc.).

Note that in the traditional Latin Mass, an exchange of peace was limited to the priest and deacon, whose actions were symbolic and reminded us that we must be at peace with others. It is important to note that being at peace with others primarily comes from within, and does not arise from merely hugging or shaking another's hand - especially considering that those we may need to reconcile with may not be sitting in close proximity to us.

Similar objections may also be raised to the abuse of hand-holding which is common even among strangers or near strangers in some parishes (e.g. during the Our Father). Additionally, hand-holding has been considered an "intimate gesture" and is therefore *especially* improper in Church. Further, it "takes a personal prayer to our Father in heaven and makes it a 'community event'". This practice is thought to be connected with the Protestant-inspired Charismatic movement.

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