

Common Questions About

VEILING AT MASS

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Why do Catholic women wear chapel veils at Mass?

The veil is meant to be an **external** sign of a woman's **interior desire** to humble herself before God, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. As women, we are symbols of the Church - the Bride of Christ - and, as a priest once said, "the veil is meant to be a visible reminder of the perfect submission of the Church to the loving rule of Christ."

"The veil is a visual sermon ... a public proclamation before the Lord that He IS the Lord and that we love Him and that we are ready to obey him. It's a totally counter-cultural statement proclaiming obedience in the midst of a culture that is totally permeated with this attitude of 'I will not serve.'"

The veil is also a sign of the great dignity inherent to a woman, who has the potential to receive life within herself... both human life and the supernatural life of God. This is an important message the world needs to hear, now more than ever!

Did the Church do away with veils after Vatican II?

For 2000 years, Catholic women have worn some kind of head covering in Church. Though the particular reasons for doing so have varied (for example, modesty in the time of St. Paul), this practice has always focused on the transcendence of the place - the church, the very dwelling of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Having been given this magnificent Gift by Jesus himself, every Catholic church holds something not found anywhere else: the true, living presence of our Bridegroom, hidden under the appearance of bread and wine.

An article in The Atlanta Journal of June 21, 1969, titled "Women Required to Cover Head, Vatican Insists," stated: "A Vatican official says there has been no change, as reported, in the Roman Catholic rule that women cover their head in church. The Rev. Annibale Bugnini, secretary of the New Congregation for Divine Worship, said the reports stemmed from a misunderstanding of a statement he made at a news conference in May. Bugnini stated: "The rule has not been changed. It is a matter of general discipline.'"

However, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, currently in force, does not contain a requirement that women cover their head in church. As Cardinal Burke, then Prefect of the Supreme Apostolic Signatura, stated in a private letter: "The wearing of a chapel veil for women is not required when women assist at the Holy Mass according to the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite. It is, however, the expectation that women who assist at the Mass according to the Extraordinary Form cover their heads, as was the practice at the time that the 1962 Missale Romanum was in force. It is not, however, a sin to participate in the Holy Mass according to the Extraordinary Form without a veil."

Just as the Church does not mandate that every person pray the Rosary, neither does she mandate that every woman wear a veil. This does not mean, however, that either is not a worthy devotion. On the contrary, these devotions are pleasing to God when done out of love for Him.

Why don't men wear veils?

In 1 Corinthians 11:7, St. Paul says, "A man, on the other hand, should not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man."

Throughout the Bible, nuptial imagery is used to represent the love of God. In Ephesians 5:25, St. Paul says "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the Church" and this, taken in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 11:7 (and the rest of that passage), reveals this nuptial imagery: man is to Christ as woman is to the Church. Since the Church is the "bride" of Christ, it makes sense that the bride should cover her head "as a sign of authority" (1 Cor 11:10) and submission to the bridegroom, Christ, whom men represent. The Church submits to Christ, not the other way around. It is a submission of love, not repression. Who wouldn't submit to Him Who loves her unto death?

When should I wear my chapel veil?

Wear your veil anytime you are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether in a Catholic church for Mass or simply passing through.

Do I have to wear a lace mantilla? What about hats and other types of head coverings?

When we say "veil," we simply mean "covering" of any kind. Although many women choose lace mantillas because of their femininity, more important than the type of veil we use is the need for a **proper interior disposition**. Similar to a religious habit, your veil is a public proclamation of your desire to submit to the will of God for your life, and of your commitment to answering the universal call to holiness and continual conversion. Keep these things in mind when you wear a veil in the presence of God.

What should I do if I'm worried about what others might think?

It is natural to be concerned about what other people think. Some may think the veil is an outdated practice with no meaning in today's culture while others may judge us as trying to be holier-than-thou. Love, however, seeks to ornament love with beauty and to worship in humility. An act of devotion like veiling does both, while drawing to the fore our love of God above all else.

If you are worried about what people will think, remember that people (Including ourselves) are always making judgments. It's how we are wired, a consequence of original sin. Whether it's about what shoes we're wearing, how we look when we walk, whether we genuflect before entering our pew, whether we stay after Mass to make our thanksgiving when everyone else is chatting and leaving... Any action could be done with a pure intention or with a not-so-pure one, but people can't see our hearts - only God can. Do we volunteer at the food pantry because we really care about people? Or because we want to be recognized? Or because we don't have anything better to do? Regardless of what the action is, what matters is that we do it for the right reason - that we do it for love. The same applies to veiling. If we do it out of love for God, what people think shouldn't matter.

Shouldn't I avoid drawing attention to myself at Mass?

We should never seek to become the object of others' attention, especially at Mass. However, as explained in a sermon on the theological significance of the veil (see veilsbylily.com/sermon), our veils are meant to be a visual statement, "a public proclamation before the Lord that He IS the Lord and that we love Him and that we are ready to obey him."

In considering this question, the key point we should ask ourselves is, what is my motivation? Am I seeking the attention of others or am I simply wanting to love and honor my Lord? Do I wish to draw attention to myself or to the reality of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

If you think about it, nuns in habits *do* stand out in the midst of a world that has renounced God. Indeed, we are all called to be the light of the world - witnesses to Christ's love, which is real and alive in the world.

Is it vanity to wear a beautiful lace mantilla?

The fact that a veil makes us look beautiful doesn't mean we are necessarily being vain. In the same way that we would dress up to meet a king, we dress up to meet our God and King.

If you do find yourself focusing on the veil as a way of seeking the admiration of others, rectify your intention by an interior act such as, "Lord, I am wearing this for you alone, and I don't wish to care about what other people think." You might also consider wearing a veil that you don't feel strongly about, or saving a nicer veil for feasts and solemnities and a more plain one for normal or penitential days.

Is there a meaning behind veil colors?

Traditionally in the United States, married women would wear black or darker colors and unmarried women, white or lighter colors. However, since chapel veils are just now coming back, there are no hard and fast rules to follow. In some churches, some women wear veils to match their outfit, others wear colors they have simply decided they like, etc. In parishes where few women veil, it is common for women to want to wear something that blends in with their hair. Often, women will save the more special-looking veils for feasts of the church. A more recent trend some women are starting is that of matching their veils to liturgical colors.