

February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday

ALD Circular 2020-10
RE: ABSTINENCE FROM CLAPPING

Reverend Fathers and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Ash Wednesday which opens the season of Lent gives us a good occasion to reflect on the value and importance of sobriety, silence and self-restraint in the pursuit of holiness of life.

In particular, let us review the practice of applauding in the Church whether within the liturgy or after its celebration.

The often quoted instruction is that *Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy (SC 14).*

In that spirit, clapping is used to signify joy and alertness; contributing to an atmosphere of gratitude and friendship and promoting active participation from the congregation.

REVISITING THE PRACTICE

Let us revisit these so called motives for clapping in the Church.

When we clap at an ordination Mass after the calling of the candidate, the applause is a sign of consent with the calling that has just been done. The clapping is not for the

ordinand but for the Lord who calls. This is not the case with many of our applauses in the church.

Is clapping the antidote to boredom in the Church? Is clapping in the midst of the homily or after it, a sign of liturgical vitality? Is not this boredom coming from a misunderstood sense of worship and prayer? The community of prayer becomes just an audience in need of entertainment; liturgical ministers become performers; and preachers become erudite toastmasters. It should not be so.

Saint Pius X said *“It is not fitting that the servant should be applauded in his Master’s house”*.

Pope Benedict XVI on the same matter said *“Wherever applause breaks out in the liturgy because of some human achievement, it is a sure sign that the essence of liturgy has totally disappeared and replaced by a kind of religious entertainment”*.

Is not a spirit of gratitude needed for growth in holiness? Does clapping not promote a spirit of encouragement for ministry well done by the choir or servers? Is not clapping to recognize the benefactors a sign of courtesy which may inspire them for greater generosity?

Clapping can be shallow and cheap. We need to inspire our benefactors to seek treasures that *“moth cannot decay destroy, and thieves cannot break in and steal”* (cfr. Mt. 6:19). In fact it can even brood unpleasant competition, jealousy and resentment because somebody received less applause than the others.

Instead of promoting a feeling of satisfaction for liturgical ministry well done, let us lead our people to aim to *decrease so that the Lord may increase* (cfr. John 3:30). In public prayers and liturgy, self-consciousness must bow down to God-consciousness. We are a Church called together by God not a self-organized mutual admiration club.

When our parishioners rush to express their appreciation for our homily or liturgical action, please resist the accolade and remember Paul at Lystra “*Men, why are you doing this? We are of the same nature as you, human beings* (Acts 14:15) Resist the ego booster and aim for greater things. Be an arrow pointing to God.

ABSTINENCE FROM CLAPPING

In the spirit of sobriety and prayer, let us attend to the following emerging practices which, if not nipped early, can rob us of the true meaning of Christian liturgy and worship.

1. Refrain from using applause to keep our parishioners alert and awake during the homily. A well prepared, brief, inspired and inspiring homily has a longer lifespan than intermittent clapping as you preach.
2. If you need to give a Post Communion message, do not name particular persons or groups whom you wish to appreciate for their work or donation made to the Church. You must do this appreciation outside the Mass, by sending a greeting card, sending a text message or even visiting them in person. Be God centered and to Him alone be the glory.

3. Do not clap for me after Mass when I visit your parish or chapel. You and I are both guests in the House of God. We are only waiters at the Table of the Master. The Eucharist is a happy feast AND a memorial of Calvary. Who would have clapped at Calvary? Would the Blessed Mother and John the Beloved have clapped? The breaking of the Bread is a commemoration of the violent death that the Lord went through. Who claps while others are in pain? It is pain with love; yes, but it still pain.

The season of Lent has a somber purple color. It has a sober and calm aura. The altar decors are restrained. The musical instruments are subdued. We fast from pleasure and restrain our appetite.

Let us add more abstinence to this sober season.

Let us abstain from applause in Church.

May this abstinence from clapping flow over into the other days of the year.

That in all things, God alone and Him only may be glorified!

Sincerely yours,

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan