

# A Mother's Point Of View—

## MODESTY IN HEADCOVERINGS

In last month's issue of *Catholic News & Commentary*, we discussed modesty and purity in thought, word, action and dress.

Another way women can practice modesty is by properly veiling their heads while in a Catholic Church, while at Mass, in processions, or any time or place where Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Paul says that an unveiled woman is a dishonor: "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head, for it is the same as if she were shaven" (1Cor. 11:5).

When I was growing up, every woman came to church with her head covered. We never questioned it or asked why we practiced the custom, it was just a routine and common practice, at least to me.

Today, most women who assist at the Traditional Latin Mass cover their heads, but many do not. Some will wear a veil at a Latin Mass, but when they are in church for other reasons they do not wear the veil. There are also those women who come into church unveiled, go to their pew and pull a veil or a chapel cap out of their purse and put it on.

In all honesty, I would venture to say most of them really don't know why women should come into the presence of Our Lord veiled – not only during the Latin Mass, but any time they enter a Catholic Church wherein Our Lord is present in the Blessed Sacrament.

As I mentioned, as a child growing up in the Latin Mass, head coverings were a must, whether it be a veil or a hat. In fact, and rather unfortunately, the one thing I remembered about Easter Sunday was getting a new Easter bonnet, and the conversation on the way back to the farm was always about who had which hat and which ones we liked the best.

After we were married for a number of years (before our return to the Traditional Mass), my husband bought me a beautiful white outfit trimmed in black. It included a broad-brimmed white hat with a black band and feather. I was holding my 18 month old son, and just as the Easter procession at Mass was beginning, he reached up with both hands and pulled the hat down over my face – all the way to my chin. Each time I'd get one hand loose and attempt to adjust it, he'd grab it somewhere else. Mind you, my eyes were covered under the hat and he was hanging on with both hands, laughing – as was everyone standing

within eyeshot. After turning to see why everyone was chuckling, my husband was able to loosen our son's grip. Needless to say, I was distracted, but at the time I thought it was funny. After having come to a better understanding of the Mass, however, I am embarrassed to know it was an occasion of sin to all of those around us. Not a good way to start such a Holy Day. One thing good came out of it – I have never worn a hat to church since.

It isn't that I have anything against hats – I realize that there are women who choose to wear them to Mass in preference to other forms of head coverings. In the research I did for this article, and others that I have written about the same theme, I found nothing which prohibited the wearing of hats, but perhaps that is not the real issue.

Hats can be a distraction to others; they can call attention to oneself if they are colorful or busy, plus, they sometimes are large and block the view of those behind. In this way they can become an occasion of sin for others.

Another distraction to me personally is the little doily-like covering, or small chapel cap, that sits on top of the head.

St. Paul is clear in stating that the reason for the woman's head to be "covered" is to remove the hair, the woman's "crowning glory" from public view. With this admonition in mind, it seems only reasonable that it would be proper to cover as much of the hair as possible with a simple, modest veil or head covering.

Again, this is but my personal opinion as I have found no information indicating it would be wrong to wear a chapel cap.

Let's look at this from a different perspective. Why is it customary for a bride to wear a veil? Is it just for looks? Just a custom?

Before the bride goes down the aisle, the veil is pulled over her face. Properly considered in its sacramental sense, her beauty is humbly veiled as she approaches her bridegroom, in the presence of God in His majesty, for it is before God that the couple will make their vows. Only after the vows are made is her face uncovered for her bridegroom. The hair, her crowning glory, is still veiled as she leaves the church.

Upon coming back to the Latin Mass, and before becoming aware of the reason, I knew in my heart that it was proper to have my head covered at Mass. I had been seeking the truth of this, and God put the truth on my heart.

A Catholic church should be a quiet place where the faithful come to worship our All Loving God with the least amount of distraction possible.

Jesus Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament. Should one dare to come into His presence immodestly dressed, heavily perfumed, drawing attention from the Holy One that the faithful come to worship?

We should always keep in mind that when we go to Mass we are coming to a re-enactment of Calvary. Our Blessed Mother, all the angels and saints, are gathered around the altar to unite their prayers with our prayers, the priest's prayers, and our Lord Jesus' prayers for the praise, honor and glory of His Almighty Father, and for the salvation of souls. We should be in awe of such a holy place where we are surrounded by Christ, His Mother, and all of Heaven!

We definitely would not want to be a distraction, or to draw attention away from such a Holy One, or to cause anyone to sin during this holy time.

Sacred Scripture presents several reasons for wearing the veil. St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians (11:1-16) that women must cover their heads because it is a sacred tradition commanded by Our Lord Himself and entrusted to Paul: "The things I am writing to you are the Lord's Commandments" (1 Cor. 14:37).

The 1917 Code of Canon Law made it clear that women were required to cover their heads in a Catholic Church (Canon 1262.2). When the revision was published in 1983, the matter of women's head covering was not addressed, but that certainly did not mean that the previous 2000 years of practice and custom were meant to be abandoned for no cause and with no explanation.

In the Nov. 24th 2002 issue of our local church bulletin, the following was written:

Now one reason for the use of veils is wrapped up in the mystery of a woman's femininity which can bear chil-

dren. At the moment of conception, when God creates a soul and it joins its body in the womb of its mother, God's creative hands work within her, and since whatever God touches becomes sacred, we veil it. And since a woman's hair is her glory (1 Cor. 11:15), we veil what is her dignity. We do the same thing in our church, for the glory of the Tabernacle is veiled because of the sacredness inside; furthermore, the glory of a consecrated Chalice is veiled before Mass because of the sacredness of what it holds.

Thus, head coverings should not be considered a sign of inferiority; rather it is a sign that women are different from men and even further, that women aren't men. As a result, it is a noble act for women to continue this practice, especially to express their love for God for the womanhood He has given them.

It is an honor for me to wear the veil. Committed and cloistered nuns wear the veil, brides are veiled.

I once read that it is proper for virgins and singles to wear white veils, whereas married women may wear colored or black veils. It was the custom for widows to be veiled in black.

"Christian women around the world have other reasons to wear a hat, mantilla, rebozo, gele, scarf, shawl, or veil. Some wear it out of respect for God; others, to obey the Pope's request, or continue family traditions. But the most important reason of all is because Our Lord said: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

"We should always be ready with our bridal veils, waiting for Him and the promised wedding (Apoc. 22:17), following the example of our Blessed Mother Mary, who never appeared before the eyes of men but properly veiled. To those who still think the wearing of the veil is an obsolete custom, remember that 'Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday today, and forever'" (Heb. 13:8). (*Veil Article*, Jackie Freppon). †

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