

LITURGY CORNER: Why do we do that?

PART THREE: Clapping at Mass

When we are pleased with a performance, we clap our hands to express our approval or joy of a “job well done.” This can happen at a theater, a sports event, or any fine performance. So, this begs the question: Why do we clap at Mass?

This happens most naturally when there is a baptism and the child or adult comes through the rite with a huge smile before us or a robust cry! We are family, proud, and welcoming. Though we have a “musical” clap in our Alleluia, our culture and emotions take over and we clap; then, we sing.

Clapping often follows an announcement of an enduring commitment of a married couple or the reception of an award for one of our parishioners. Possibly, we have a child receiving Communion for the first time or someone joining the Church from another faith. All these “hurrah” moments solicit hand-clapping. Whether necessary or not, it seems appropriate and communicates our pleasure.

Let’s take a look at another occasion for clapping that seems to be recent at our liturgy: Clapping for the music ministers at the end of Mass.

Many of the same reasons apply here: We are appreciative of their talent; they have sung or played very well; we feel joy in our prayer because of their music.

So, why is clapping inappropriate?

We believe that one of our ministers put it best. She is both a cantor and a performer at venues other than church and had this comment...

“If I sing at an event outside of worship and you do not clap, I am insulted. If I sing at church and you clap, I am insulted.” Confusing? Maybe, unless we really hear what is being said—“when I am a performer, I expect your applause. When I am a minister serving the liturgy as every other minister does, I hope you don’t see what I do as a performance.”

What could follow this way of thinking is that we should clap for the lector who reads well, the priest who delivers an inspiring homily, and so on for all who do what they do well to assist our prayer. Of course, we do not willfully insult anyone or ignore those who deserve our appreciation. It is always appropriate to give thanks for the gifts of others and for all they do to make our experience of liturgy the best it can be with God’s power through the Holy Spirit. It is the manner of showing appreciation that is at question. If anyone’s gifts brings us joy, amazes us, or fills us with gratitude, let them know this. Take the time to go up to them and tell them of your thankfulness.

Reflect on what is pointed out in this article—the difference between a minister and a performer.

The Parish Liturgy Board