

## IS APPLAUSE OR APPLAUDING APPROPRIATE DURING THE HOLY MASS

During a recent Diocese of Colorado Springs' Bishop-Priest Leadership Conference, Bishop Sheridan asked all of the priests to please discuss and, if/as needed, to re-catechize the parish faithful on the subject of applauding during the Order and Liturgy of the Holy Mass.

In a previous online article by EWTN, a question was posed and answered by Legionary of Christ Father Edward McNamara, Professor of Liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum University.

**Q:** The parishioners in our church used to be spontaneous in their reactions to excellent homilies that the priests deliver [or music by the choir, for example]. The parishioners, sometimes, respectfully applaud after the homily, either to communicate that they are in agreement with the priest [on a subject] or to offer their appreciation. However, when a newly ordained priest came, and this happened after a homily he gave, he quickly discussed with the people the inappropriateness of the use of regular applause when they are attending a Mass—since it is not a performance or a theatrical show. Could you enlighten us on the propriety of people applauding after the homily? [from D.B., Denver, Colorado]

**A:** First of all, it is a very hopeful sign of overall improvement in the quality of homilies that the faithful consider them worthy of applause. That said however, the young priest was correct in that, in general or overall, applause is to be discouraged during the Order or Liturgy of the Mass.

While respecting cultural differences (such as between the solemn European and jubilant African continents), I would agree that the practice is not to be encouraged or become a habit in Western parish settings.

First of all, the Roman liturgical tradition is usually sober in its external manifestations. After the homily in fact, the liturgy recommends a solemn moment of silence in order for the listeners to reflect upon and assimilate the message heard. Applause breaks the concentration; making it harder to gather one's thoughts and bring them to bear on essential questions of living the Gospel.

[In our Western culture today, applause has become common as a sign of approval and respect after a baptism or wedding; special community recognition; or a Christmas concert, for example.]

Not being expected to applaud also frees both priests and parishioners from the danger of making unintended comparisons among priests [cantors or choir members]. Father X's homily received timed respect; Father Y got a standing ovation, while Father Z's preaching on Christian morals got a silent response. The point is that any element that might induce disharmony should be avoided.

In his book *"The Spirit of the Liturgy"* then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote: *"Whenever 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 been replaced by a kind of religious entertainment"*.

The principle ... of not applauding the merely human achievement of one or more of the liturgical ministers would be a good rule of thumb for deciding when or if applause is appropriate or not. If the person's superlative work was noteworthy, person-to-person accolades are most appropriate.