

What Does Modesty Mean for a Catholic?

by Kristy Linehan

If you are like me and peruse different examinations of conscience regularly, you probably notice that dressing immodestly is often on those examinations. But what does modesty mean as a Catholic? Does it matter how we dress and behave? How does that affect the people around us? More importantly, how does it affect our souls and the souls of others? Do we care? Spoiler alert: we **SHOULD** care.

I admit that I am a convert when it comes to modesty. In the not-so-distant past, I wore pants, leggings, jeans, and capris because they were “comfortable”. I had scarcely a dress or skirt in my closet because I was never a “girly girl”. But then something changed. After reading those examinations of conscience, I realized that I was sinning and may have caused others to sin by what I chose to wear... but I clung to those beloved pants and leggings until I had a divine nudge. Maybe that nudge originated from my guardian angel, one of my favorite saints, or Mother Mary herself.

Let us first visit the virtue of temperance which purity and modesty evolve from. Temperance is one of the Four Cardinal Virtues which help guide us to make good moral choices and lead us toward God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods.” Modesty is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and helps us perfect temperance. “Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance... It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden...It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them.” (CCC, 2521-2522)

Here we see that modesty not only relates to our clothing choices, but also our behavior. Modesty is important for the salvation of our own souls as well as the souls of our Christian brothers and sisters.

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In 1917, Our Lady of Fatima said: "Certain fashions will be introduced that will offend Our Lord very much." Our Lady of Fatima also shared that "more souls go to hell for sins of the flesh than any other reason." I might add here that modesty does not only apply to women but to men also.

I don't know about you, but I think those are some powerful words from our Blessed Mother and very true in our society today. You do not have to look far to find someone dressing immodestly, even in a sacred place like a Catholic Church at Mass where we receive the very body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in Holy Communion.

How would we dress and behave if we all truly believed we are in front of our Lord at Mass, Adoration, or an empty church where Jesus is in the tabernacle? That is a question to ponder. Is how we are dressing offending God? Women, young ladies, and girls: are we properly covering our legs with flowing dresses and skirts well below the knee and covering our shoulders and chests properly? Veiling our heads is also a good and holy practice. Men and boys: are you covering your legs with nice pants or slacks that are not too tight? A suit jacket over your shirt is also a respectable practice.

Let us think twice about our behavior and before we dress for the day so we do not lead ourselves or others into sin. Let us practice temperance, modesty, purity, and charity toward one another in how we dress and act which will lead to a greater respect for each other and for God.