

## *RENEWING REVERENCE: PART 1*

*Our series on the Mass is over, but we received a final submission to our question box that I haven't had a chance to answer yet: "Why don't people show reverence at the consecration anymore?" I'm not sure exactly what this question means, but it presents an opportunity to address the broader issue of a growing lack of reverence in our society today, a feat that I will attempt in this column over the next few weeks. I hope that my reflection on that broader issue may help answer the question above, at least in a general way.*

We call the special kind of respect that we show to sacred people, like God, and sacred things, like sacraments, "reverence." Not surprisingly, we can trace the loss of reverence in our society today to a loss of respect in general and a loss of a sense of the sacred. In this week's column, I will discuss the loss of respect. We will continue next week with a reflection on the loss of a sense of the sacred.

The word "respect" comes from the Latin word meaning "to look again." We look again at things that deserve a closer look. Because of their importance, they call for special attention, which we show by honoring them with special words and gestures. When reflecting on respect, therefore, we have to consider what makes something or someone worthy of special attention, marked by special words and gestures. On one level, we each respect certain people and things because of their value and meaning to us personally. For example, someone who has a special devotion to a particular saint might show his or her respect by hanging a picture of that saint in the house. On another level, society determines who or what deserves respect, and how to show that respect, by the values it imparts to its members. For example, we stand and remove our hats during the national anthem out of respect for our flag and, by doing so, pay special attention to the values the flag represents.

Society's role in determining who or what deserves respect and how we show it provides the reason behind the apparent loss of respect today. Society constantly changes, from one generation to the next, and the values of society also change. As a society's values change, so will the things it deems worthy of respect, as will the ways that the people of that society honor them. Thus things that previous generations respected and honored in certain ways may not be respected by the present generation, even as the present generation respects new things and honors them in new ways. This process has played out since the dawn of humanity, inevitably experienced by previous generations as a loss of respect. The present generation, however, inevitably experiences the process as social progress. Remove the parties involved, and the process in and of itself proves value neutral. Like a river, unconcerned with those who may be swimming in it, it rolls on toward its goal. The swimmers, individually and together, must determine their own course within the river's flow.

*Tune in next week for part 2 of RENEWING REVERENCE!*