

Modesty Rules for Men and Women

by Mary's Little Remnant

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Modesty Rules for Men and Women

“Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh.”
(Philippians 4:5)

The modesty rules in this article apply to all men and all women and thus to believers and unbelievers. However, modesty rules for Catholic religious men and women are more restrictive to one degree or another according to the rule of their Order.

Whoever violates a rule of modesty commits a fault or a sin (venial or mortal) depending on the severity of the immodesty.

Extreme vs. less-than-extreme immodesty

Extreme immodesty is the exposing of the flesh of a man or woman that is so immodest that all must turn away from viewing it unless the situation allows or requires it. If the situation allows or requires it, it is not immodest at all.

All other forms of immodesty are less than extreme and hence persons can view less-than-extreme immodesty in all situations without committing a fault or a sin. But the person who is immodest commits a fault or a sin (venial or mortal).

On looking at immodesty

While persons who are immodest are guilty of a fault or a sin, not all those who look at immodest persons are guilty of a fault or a sin.

- Regarding persons whose immodesty is extreme, one must never look at them unless the situation allows it (such as spouses looking upon one another in private) or requires it (such as a doctor or nurse examining a patient). Outside of these and similar situations, one must turn away from extreme immodesty as soon as one sees it if possible. Hence videos or pictures that show extreme immodesty must be censored by covering the extreme immodesty.
- Regarding persons whose immodesty is less than extreme, one can look at them in all situations without having to turn away from them. Hence videos or pictures that show less-than-extreme immodesty do not have to be censored.

Men must not look like women, and women must not look like men

Men must look like men, and women must look like women. Hence men who try or desire to look like women, or act like women, or be women commit a mortal sin against the natural law. And women who try or desire to look like men, or act like men, or be men commit a mortal sin against the natural law:

“A woman shall not be clothed with man’s apparel, neither shall a man use woman’s apparel, for he that doeth these things is abominable before God.” (Deut. 22:5)

An exception would be to disguise oneself for a just cause. For example, a man who dresses like a woman or a woman who dresses like a man to escape detection from an enemy is not guilty of a fault or any sin for doing so:

Roman Martyrology, 4/28: “At Alexandria, the martyrdom of the virgin St. Theodora. For refusing to sacrifice to idols, she was sent to a place of debauchery; but one of the brethren, named Didymus, through the admirable providence of God, delivered her by quickly exchanging garments with her. He was afterwards beheaded and crowned with her in the persecution of Diocletian, under the governor Eustratius.”

General appearance

Men and women must not dress or appear in any other way to be immoral, ostentatious, idolatrous (such as by dressing like a Hindu), or heretical (such as by dressing like an Anglican or a Pilgrim).

Tattoos and body painting

Tattoos and body painting are forbidden. Tattoos previously done must be removed or must be hidden if they cannot be removed. Tattoos to identify slaves or prisoners are not immoral as long as they are not immodest or do not represent false religions or false gods.

Masks

Masks must not be worn unless a situation requires it (such as hiding one’s identity from an enemy, or for a health reason). Masks must not be worn as do the pagans for Halloween or other entertainments and feasts as this is immoral, vain, buffoonery, and also idolatrous if the masks represent false gods or false religions.

Facelifts and other reconstructive surgery

Facelifts and other reconstructive surgery are not allowed except for health reasons or to eliminate gross physical defects (this does not include defects caused by natural aging). Hence men and women must accept their natural God-given physical attributes and the natural aging process that God has ordained. Therefore they must not do anything to change their natural physical attributes or natural signs of aging (such as doing anything directly to remove skin wrinkles, although skin moisturizers are allowed because the purpose is not to remove wrinkles but to moisturize the skin, even though wrinkles may be incidentally removed).

Perfumes and other scents

Perfumes and other scents that are pagan or overwhelming are forbidden.

Churchwear differs for the rich and poor

Richer people dress more formally than poorer people, and this is normal. White-collar workers dress formally and blue-collar workers do not, and this is normal. However, what is not normal but sinful is to respect richer people over poorer people, white-collar workers over blue-collar workers, based solely upon the fact that one is

richer than the other or more formally dressed than the other. Hence it is sinful when churches or chapels require those attending Mass to dress the same (such as by commanding poor people to dress like rich people, or blue-collar workers to dress like white-collar workers). They violate God's commandment, as spoken by St. James, to treat the rich and poor, the richly dressed and poorly dressed, the white-collar worker and blue-collar worker the same in the church:

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with respect of persons. For if there shall come into your assembly a man having a golden ring, in fine apparel, and there shall come in also a poor man in mean attire, and you have respect to him that is clothed with the fine apparel and shall say to him: Sit thou here well; but say to the poor man: Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool: Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts? Hearken, my dearest brethren: Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you by might? And do not they draw you before the judgment seats?” (Ja. 2:1-6)

Hence to command blue-collar workers to wear white-collar clothes (such as formal shirts, ties, and suit coats, or some other formal wear) in order to attend Mass is sinful respect of richer people and white-collar workers and to dishonor poorer people and blue-collar workers. Thus Catholics are forbidden to attend Mass at these sinful churches.¹

The churchwear required for people attending Mass is to wear their best and cleanest clothes according to their means and station in life. Hence farmers should wear their best and cleanest jeans or overalls and cleanest shirts. And extremely poor persons must wear the least dirty of all their clothes and rags; and when they attend Mass in dirty clothes and rags (because they have no choice), let no one mock them or think himself better because of their poor condition.

Must dress for the occasion

Rules for modesty differ according to the occasion, such as when sleeping, working, playing, attending Mass or some other formal event, or visiting a church or some other holy place. For example, men can wear shorts and go shirtless when swimming or playing a sport and this would be modest for these occasions. However, they would be immodestly dressed if they were to attend Mass or some other formal event in shorts and shirtless. Another example is that a king can wear pajamas when he is sleeping and this would be modest, but it would be immodest for him to wear pajamas when he is ruling from his throne.

“A fruit of the Spirit is...modesty.”
(Galatians 5:22-23)

¹ The only people who must be given a higher place in church are those whose office, rank, or title demands it, such as bishops, priests, and secular rulers. They are favored and respected not because they are rich or poor or richly dressed or poorly dressed but because of their office, rank, or title.

Modesty Rules for Men

Extreme immodesty

Extreme immodesty for men is the exposing of their flesh in the area that is around their buttocks and private part, from their waist down to the bottom of the buttocks. The waist starts just above the cleavage where the upper thighs meet the upper body. This cleavage must never be exposed. And the cleavage of the buttocks must not be exposed in any position, whether while standing or bending over. Therefore men must wear pants or shorts that cover the cleavage of the buttocks in all positions. The exposing of flesh in this manner is more common among heavy-set men when they bend over. The solution is to wear their pants higher or wear a longer shirt.

Extreme immodesty for men is also the exposing of the outline of their private part by tight-fitting clothing. However, while it is immodest, it is not extremely immodest for the outline of a cup that covers a man's private part to be exposed by tight-fitting clothes (such as when playing certain sports like boxing, wrestling, and football).

It is extremely immodest to expose the cleavage of men's buttocks by tight-fitting clothing. However, it is not immodest in certain situations (such as when playing certain sports like boxing, wrestling, and football) to expose the buttocks of men by tight-fitting clothes if the cleavage of the buttocks does not show.

Arms, upper body, and legs

The flesh of the arms and upper body of men from the waist up can be exposed. The flesh of the legs of men can be exposed from halfway between the bottom of the buttocks to the top of the knee. Men can go shirtless and thus expose all of the flesh of their upper body during certain situations (such as when swimming or playing certain sports). Hence men can go shirtless and wear shorts. However, there are certain situations in which one or more of these things would be immodest (such as when attending Mass, visiting a holy place, or attending a formal gathering). And it is immodest for men to work or eat without a shirt, thus exposing all the flesh of their upper body. Therefore when working or eating, men must wear shirts, whether long-sleeved or short-sleeved or sleeveless.

Garments

Men must not wear pants or shorts that hang below the waist. Men must not wear pants or shorts in such a way as to expose their underwear. Men must not wear shorts that are shorter than halfway between the bottom of the buttocks to the top of the knee.

Men must not wear tight-fitting clothing unless the situation requires it (such as when scuba diving, wrestling, or playing football).

Men can wear tunics or gowns (such as religious attire, togas, and kilts) as long as these garments do not look like women's dresses. When wearing short tunics such as kilts, they must wear an undergarment to cover the parts of their flesh that must not be exposed.

When wearing shirts, men must not show the flesh of their chest deeper than four fingers breadth below the pit of the throat. To expose the chest lower than this when wearing shirts is to show off one's chest, which is pride and vanity.

Churchwear

When attending Mass or visiting churches or other holy places, men must wear pants and shirts that are not tight and shirts that are long sleeved. If they wear tunics or gowns, their garment must reach at least to the bottom of the calf muscle. And their garments must be as clean as possible. They can wear shoes, sandals, or go barefoot. They must not wear hats or other head coverings (with the exception of bishops and priests and others whose office requires headwear in the church).

Sleepwear

Sleepwear must meet the modesty rules for non-churchwear.

Perfume or cologne

Men must not wear perfume, cologne, or aftershave with a lingering odor, as this is effeminate.

Makeup

Men must not wear makeup unless the situation requires it (such as to prevent glare when filming in a studio or playing sports, to change an actor's appearance, to cover facial defects, or for camouflage).

Fingernails

Men must not have long fingernails or wear fingernail polish, as this is effeminate.

Hairstyles

Men can have long or short hair as long as the hairstyle is not effeminate, ostentatious, idolatrous, or heretical. Men must not wear wigs or toupees except to disguise themselves or for a just cause (such as to cover a physical defect or when acting). However, men cannot wear toupees to cover natural baldness, as this is vain. And men must not dye their hair, as this is vain.

Jewelry

Men can wear jewelry (such as required by an office or as a gift from a loved one) as long as it is not effeminate, immoral, ostentatious, idolatrous, pagan, or heretical. Men must not have pierced ears or other body piercing or wear earrings. Pierced ears for slaves or prisoners are not immoral as long as they are not immodest or do not represent false religions or false gods.

Modesty Rules for Women

Extreme immodesty

Extreme immodesty for women is the exposing of their flesh that is from just above the cleavage of the breasts down to the top of the knee, excluding the arms. And it is also the exposing of the outlines of the breasts, private part, or cleavage of the buttocks by tight-fitting clothing.

Arms

Women can expose their arms.

Pants and shorts

Pants and shorts are not to be worn as outer garments by women. Women can wear pants as undergarments under modest dresses or skirts to aid modesty when climbing ladders, hiking, riding a horse or bike, or to stay warm or some other good reason.

Dresses, skirts, and blouses

Dresses or blouses that show the flesh of the breasts or its cleavage in any position are immodest. Tight dresses, skirts, and blouses are immodest. Halter, strapless, and thin-strapped dresses or blouses are immodest. Dresses that are backless or deep-cut are immodest. The backs of dresses or blouses must not be cut lower than the level of the arm pit. Skirts or dresses must cover the knees in all positions. Slits in skirts or dresses must only show the flesh below the knee.

Fabrics

Fabrics that are transparent, laces, nets, organdy, or any other see-through material can only expose the flesh of the arms and below the knee. Flesh-colored fabrics when used to blend in with the flesh other than the arms or below the knee are immodest.

Churchwear and veils

When attending Mass or visiting churches or other holy places, women must wear modest dresses, skirts, or tunics that reach at least to the bottom of the calf muscle. Slits are not allowed for churchwear. Women must wear full-length sleeves. The neckline of their dresses in front and back must not be cut more than just below the pit of the throat, and their garments must be as clean as possible. Women are not allowed to wear perfume in church.

When attending Mass or visiting churches or other holy places (including an altar or shrine in the home), women must wear veils. The veil must not be transparent. The veil must cover all of the hair except for the hair in front (on the forehead).

Behavior in church

When St. Paul says “Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak” (1 Cor. 14:34), he means that they must not teach in church during Mass

(such as by reading the Epistle, Gospel, or giving a sermon). And he also means that women must not assist at the altar or preside in any other way (such as by distributing Holy Communion, or being altar girls). However, they can pray aloud in responsory prayers and respond when asked questions by the priest or other presiders.

Sleepwear

Sleepwear must meet the modesty rules for non-churchwear.

Perfume or cologne

Women are allowed to wear perfume, cologne, and perfumed items that are not overwhelming or pagan.²

Makeup

Women are allowed to wear makeup but it must not be overwhelming, clownish, outlandish, idolatrous, or heretical.

Fingernails

Women are not allowed to wear fingernail polish, and the white of their nails must be no longer than 1/4 inch.

Hairstyles

Women's hairstyles must not be masculine, ostentatious, clownish, idolatrous, or heretical. Women must not dye their hair. And they must not wear wigs except to cover baldness or some other defect or when acting.

Jewelry

Jewelry can be worn but must not be masculine, immoral, ostentatious, idolatrous, pagan, or heretical. Only one piercing and earring is allowed per ear, but all other body piercing is forbidden.

*For the glory of God, the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints,
and the salvation of men.*

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² When visiting Mary's Little Ranch or House, these things are not permitted.