

DOING THINGS PARROT FASHION

I was in church waiting for the mass to start when I realized that I was not thinking about the mass; my mind was wondering. The priest had arrived and kissed the altar, then started the mass by asking us to bless ourselves.

It was then that I realised that many things we do in life are done automatically, such as driving a car or crossing the road carefully. We also do things in our religious life that can become like this if we're not careful, such as saying well-known prayers, blessing ourselves and saying Amen. Back at home, I thought of these three things and wondered if there were more.

PRAYING

How often do we say prayers without thinking of what we're saying? When I pray, I find it sometimes helps if I do what my teachers used to say when I was a teenager: to say what we think and think of what we say.

Do you do things in your religious life automatically and in a Parrot Fashion manner, such as the responses required of the congregation during mass?

The words used throughout the mass have been seriously thought out and are sacred and meaningful.

Consider the small prayers and responses used during the Introductory Rite of the mass. Whoever thought of these must have been cloaked in the Holy Spirit. They are beautiful and meaningful, designed to make us acceptable to God before we start the mass.

Think about them when you say them, making them meaningful to God. Don't say them automatically because, in a way, you'll be insulting God, not seriously asking him to forgive your sins.

BLESSING OURSELVES

When I thought about blessing myself, I realised I was doing it parrot fashion. We all bless ourselves before starting or during religious activities. It can be done without saying anything, but usually, we say the following short prayer:

**"In the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit"**

I then remembered what I'd been taught as a child. It was that when we bless ourselves, it's to remind us:

- Of the Blessed Trinity.
- That Jesus died for us on the cross.

This is all true, but was I doing these things, and what about when I use that simple prayer? Did I realise and understand what I was saying? In my own simple way, I realised that the answer is in the first four words

“IN THE NAME OF”.

In the past we heard this phrase used by the police when they wanted to enter a building. They would shout “Open up **in the name of** the law.” It’s the same when we bless ourselves. We’re saying that what we are doing or are about to do is:

In the name of **THE BLESSED TRINITY.**

Understanding this makes the little four-line prayer special, profound, and sacred. Blessing ourselves should not be a quick flick of our hands around the upper part of our bodies. Rather it is a sacred act that we should treat with care, dignity and feeling and not done ‘parrot fashion’, but do we?

SAYING AMEN

As I thought about that word AMEN, I knew I’d been doing this parrot fashion as well, and it’s possibly the most used word of the Christian liturgy. According to different contexts, ‘Amen’ means: “This is it, this is the truth, so be it, I believe in all that has just happened and been said”.

When used, some people pronounce it AHmen, others AYmen. Ahmen is from the Latin, and Aymen is from English. It doesn’t matter which is used so long as it’s used with reverence and meaning.

We use the word AMEN regularly during religious activities, usually when we end our prayers or by the presiding priest when he ends prayers during religious services.

Saying ‘amen’ has real meaning:
**It is a unique way of uniting us with
 what has just been done or said.**

To many people, it is just a movement of lips, but during religious ceremonies, it is used to involve us all effectively in the proceedings:

- When we end any prayer with it, we are saying that we truly mean what we have just said.

- At the very start of the mass, when we bless ourselves, saying that what we are about to do is in the name of the Blessed Trinity, and ending this with the word Amen adds to our true belief in this.
- Following the CREED during mass emphasises our belief in the words of this prayer. So be it, I believe in what I've said.
- Following the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer is what is known as **THE GREAT AMEN**. It is the most solemn Amen of the Mass. With this 'Amen', the congregation declares their belief in what has just happened, part of which was the Consecration.

The word AMEN is a great prayer. It can mean 'Yes' to answer questions, It can be used to approve or agree with things done and said. These are just some of the uses of the word AMEN. Like many small parts of our Catholic faith, it too has very sacred meanings and should always be treated with respect and reverence, not used parrot fashion.

It is very easy to treat ceremonies and services of all kinds without thinking about the meaning of the words. Where our Catholic religious services are concerned, try not to do or say them parrot fashion.