



10-2015

# Dressing for Mass

Brian Doyle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape>

## Recommended Citation

Doyle, Brian (2015) "Dressing for Mass," *Inscape*: Vol. 35 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape/vol35/iss1/7>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inscape* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## DRESSING FOR MASS

by

Brian Doyle

It is not now the fashion to dress meticulously for Mass, and I cannot say that I completely mourn the old custom, for it is inarguably more comfortable to wear khaki pants and my Boring 1950s Dad Sitcom Jacket than a suit; but on days when I see young men wearing surfing shorts to Mass, I find myself drifting back to the hour before Mass when I was a boy, many years ago, in a large family, which featured many boys, but only one girl, which was a fortunate state of affairs on Sunday morning, for my sister would claim the bathroom like a disputed territory long before dawn, and marinate in there for hours, apparently addressing each of her many long hairs by name, and cooing to it lovingly, and asking it gently about its emotional state, and taking eight or nine baths and showers alternately, while snarling at her brothers, who hammered on the door so assiduously that our dad twice had to putty over the places where his sons had thrummed on the door, begging in the most polite and courteous tones for just one moment of ablution, shy murmured requests that were denied with the most shocking and vulgar language, and this before we were to go to Mass and



our father (fat ties) and older brother (narrow ties); the black shoes, polished by your breath and a brother's stolen sock; the utilitarian unfashionable black belts issued to all American male children at birth; the crisply ironed white handkerchief that each male in our clan carried by command of our mom, who grimly lined us up by the front door and checked for clean handkerchiefs before we were allowed out into the soiled world. Showers not being part of the program, what with our sister camped out in the bathroom since Tuesday, we did what we could to tamp down the unruly thickets of our hair; and more than once, I now confess, we tamed our youngest brother's hair with the spit that God had seen fit to grant us as part of the amazing salivary system, without which you cannot properly eat or digest your food.

It took time to get dressed for Mass; our poor mother ironed everything in sight for hours, preparing us for public inspection; and yes, there were times that we moaned and whimpered and complained about the custom, whining and mooing and bleating like professional soccer players. Yet even now that I am long past the habit of dressing in my best for Mass, I sometimes feel that I should, and not just for nostalgic reasons, or to hint to the boy with surfer shorts that he ought to get a grip. No; it has something mysteriously to do with respect, and humility, and ritual, and reverence. When I was young I thought dressing for Mass was silly and empty performance art; now I wonder if it was more a gesture of something like awe. For great moments in life you prepare slowly and carefully, and present yourself buffed and polished and shining, as a way to say something for which we do not yet have particularly good words.