

Sunday, February 21, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Lenten Fashion

Because all kinds of things fascinate me, I find new ideas and insight almost everywhere I look. Sometimes I get surprised as I was the other day while reading the fashion columns. Haute couture doesn't seem to have much in common with spirituality. Fashion and design, however, continually explore new possibilities, pushing beyond the borders of the comfortable and expected and re-inventing reality. This, in fact, is the express purpose of Lent, to re-imagine and re-draw the lines of life. Lent is not about last year's style because all of us, and certainly the world, need improvement.

Fashion, furthermore, appreciates novelty and experimentation. It resists sameness, betting instead on the future. It is instinctively visionary, creating new perspectives, filled with excitement and hope. Ultimately, fashion is more about ideas and introducing new concepts than it is about clothes. Most of the clothes on runways are never intended to be worn. They challenge old patterns and hope to determine new directions and tastes. In that sense, fashion is akin to diplomacy which similarly proposes alternate approaches, abandoning the failed policies of the past. The detente with Cuba is a good example. Fashion is also flexible, consistently changing to meet new circumstances, in direct contradiction to the all too prevalent ideologies plaguing our contemporary world. Let politics and religion take notice. Give me the fashionistas over the current slate of office seekers. At least fashion wants to add beauty to the world. We have enough hatred, violence and war. Fashion also is inclusive and understands the importance of women. The Catholic Church would do well to take some pointers.

Fashion is enlightening, not just entertaining. It ultimately is about style, but that also is the real motive of Lent. Style, of course, means more than mere appearance though, for some, improving their personal looks and living space might be a good Lenten practice. Civility and courtesy are other worthwhile Lenten goals. Calling people stupid, and ranting, raving and shouting, especially in public, exhibit poor style and example. We would not tolerate this behavior in children, let alone in adults, particularly in those aspiring to political office. President Obama and Governor Kasich of Ohio have called on all Americans to respect one another despite philosophical and political differences and to recognize that diversity is the source of our country's uniqueness. Indeed, let us make America great again and begin to act in more tolerant ways.

Style is a personal characteristic and choice. It signifies how we want to visibly present ourselves. Do we want to be perceived as genuine, kind, generous, and reliable? Fear and worry, over-confidence and bullying all are counter-productive and evidence lack of style. A sign of individuality, style also is altruistic, revealing thoughtfulness, grace, and humaneness. Otherwise we are just dressed-up brutes.