Do Manners Still Matter?
by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on AUGUST 14, 2017.

Most of us were introduced to the world of manners by our parents. This introduction often included certain “do’s” and “don’ts.” We were told the things we should do: Do say “thank you” when someone gives you something, do say “excuse me” when you burp, do wait your turn, do use your “indoor voice” when you are indoors. We were also told the things we should not do: Do not talk with food in your mouth, do not interrupt someone when they’re speaking, do not point and stare at people, do not hit your brother.

At the time we didn’t realize it, but these small do’s and don’ts were rooted in a fundamental attitude toward life. People with manners are aware that others exist, and they care about them. It’s as simple as that. People with manners do not think of themselves as the center of the universe. They demonstrate this every time they open a door for someone, cover their sneeze, refrain from talking during a movie, and drive responsibly.

One of the authorities on manners and politeness was Emily Post. She wrote, “All good manners are based on thoughtfulness of others, and if everyone lived by the Golden Rule—‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’—there would be no bad manners in the world.”

We were taught manners as children. (Source: pexels)
Being polite and thoughtful can have a positive effect on people. The other morning in the grocery store, I arrived at the “20 items or less” checkout line at the same time a man did. I had about six items in my basket. He was holding two items in his arms and looked like he was in a hurry. I motioned for him to go ahead of me saying, “I have more things.” He smiled, thanked me, and went first. After he was checked out, he turned to me and said, “Thanks again,” and left. Obviously, he was happy that I had let him go first. And I was happy to do this small favor for him—and to be thanked politely for doing it.

Are we less polite than we used to be? Some people think we are. They blame our “growing impoliteness” on our glorification of individual freedom and tolerance. Some believe that manners inhibit freedom of expression. Or they say manners are obsolete because we should tolerate all behaviors no matter how rude or obnoxious they appear to be.

What complicates things is that manners are partly conditioned by culture. What is considered impolite in one culture might not be considered impolite in another culture. When traveling to other countries, therefore, it is good to check out beforehand not only the local cuisine, but also the local etiquette. Also, manners evolve over time—to keep up with changes in society. The invention of the cellphone has made it necessary to formulate new “rules of etiquette” for its use. I came across this one recently: “Don’t talk on your cellphone in a waiting room, checkout line, restaurant, train, or (heaven forbid!) bathroom stall!” (A friend told me she saw this sign in a public restroom recently: “The only call you should answer in here is Nature’s!”)

Whether I say “thank you” for every kind gesture, or hold the door open for you, or step outside to use my cellphone, or pour your coffee before I pour my own—all these polite acts have few, if any, cosmic ramifications. But the tiny, numerous courtesies of everyday life are extremely important because of the moral foundation upon which they rest. With every polite gesture, we are saying to another, “You are important. And I care about you.” Such an attitude can have cosmic ramifications.
Ultimately manners are rooted in love. (Source: pexels)

Here is a beautiful song by Chris Tomlin that celebrates the kindness of God. It's called simply "Kindness."

What are your thoughts on manners? Do you think they're important or not?

What manners did you teach your children or grandchildren?

Be aware of every act of politeness or kindness you give today and every act of politeness or kindness you receive. How did these acts make you feel?
PS: I will be giving a weekend retreat at Benet House Retreat Center in Rock Island, IL from September 15-17. The retreat is called “Celebrating Four Gifts of Autumn: Beauty, Harvest, Letting Go, and Hope.” Visit their website or call Sister Bobbi at 309-283-2109 for more information. I’d love to see you there!

Kathleen Magiera  August 14, 2017 at 5:17 am

Beautiful reflection Sr. Melannie.

I think manners are extremely important. As a teacher educator, I am always explaining to future elementary school teachers how to behave in schools. The etiquette of education is crucial part of teacher preparation.

God bless!

Kathleen

Mary  August 14, 2017 at 10:00 am

I don’t think I’ve ever seen more beautiful nature photographs than in this view. Today just seeing the word “Kindness” on the screen gives me some glimmer of hope about our world. We are better than what we’ve been seeing in the news.

Joe Johnson  August 14, 2017 at 10:46 am

When I woke up, I chose “kindness” as my word of the day- then I went to your website and noticed that you focused on kindness. Good karma? At the entrance to our hospital in San Luis Obispo, Ca., there is a saying that goes- “the three most important things in life are 1. Be kind to others; 2. Be kind to
others; 3. Be kind to others- I would add a fourth: be kind to yourself! Thanks for the good karma.

Jean  August 14, 2017 at 10:36 am
Thank you

Patty  August 14, 2017 at 10:39 am
Yes, Sister, I think that manners are important.

Barbie  August 14, 2017 at 10:53 am
I couldn’t agree more, Sister! Thank you for writing this article.

john hopkins  August 14, 2017 at 11:03 am
Good Morning Sr. Melanie,
I like what you say about the evolution of manners, how they change from one generation to the next. I agree, too, with your insight that manners are a way of indicating that you are not the center of the universe. Some like to say today’s youth are devoid of manners, but I have a feeling this sentiment has been around for ever. During my last years of teaching, I was always pleasantly surprised with the number of students who said “thank you” when the class was done. I can assure you no one said that when I was in high school!

Ardy  August 14, 2017 at 11:14 am
Love your idea to notice acts of kindness given and received today. Thank you for reminding me that manners matter!
Shirley  August 14, 2017 at 11:22 am
By all means manners are very important, some how in our society today manners have become lost as well as respect. Thank you Sister for your wonderful blog. I will be praying for you for your upcoming retreat.

REPLY

Rose  August 14, 2017 at 11:26 am
Yes! Manners absolutely do matter, now more than ever. I am also sure to add “please” when enlisting the help of customer service, ordering at a restaurant, etc.

REPLY

Sparky  August 14, 2017 at 12:08 pm
THANK YOU THANK YOU. Manners have been passed from generation to generation. We taught our children, they taught their children and now our great grandchildren are being taught by their grandmother.

Wish I could share in your up coming retreat. Awe less.

REPLY

Kathleen Pforr  August 14, 2017 at 11:00 pm
Thank you, sister Melanie, for this very timely reminder. Kindness is what makes us human and humane. Manners are key to making peace in the world. And, yes, may it always begin with me. The song and video are a true balm to my broken heart in light of the tragic events in Charlottesville and a reminder to always be kind to the Other, no matter who they may be. God Bless You!
Lu  August 15, 2017 at 7:47 am

Bless You Sister Melannie, I enjoy and appreciate your positive messages every week. I thank God more Grandmothers are spending time with their Grandchildren now. The most important things my Mom and Grandmother wanted us to learn besides Love and Kindness was Honesty, Compassion, and Ethics! I pray the World will tip back toward living each day with Goodness, in PEACE!

REPLY

Bunny Hennessy  August 15, 2017 at 11:10 am

Thank you, Sister Melannie! I think you were “right on,” concerning manners. It takes us a step “out of ourselves” to recognize the person next to us. Manners are truly a visible sign of love and kindness. Thank you for all of your good and inspiring thoughts.

REPLY

cal  August 15, 2017 at 2:21 pm

Dear Sr. Melannie,
I will keep you in my prayers for your upcoming retreat. You share so many beautiful lessons of living a good Christian life that your attendees are in for a treat.

Yes, manners are the foundation of a polite society. We can teach our children, grandchildren to be kind and considerate to others from the moment they start to speak but unfortunately, they are surrounded by rudeness everywhere. Reverence and respect have been replaced by a false sense of self importance and entitlement and no healthy fear of hurting Our Lord. Liberalism does not help.

REPLY

sister Marilyn T.Sabatino  August 16, 2017 at 9:07 am

My mother and grandmother taught me that...good manners were an extension of God’s action towards another or even ourselves.

Grazie mille mama e’ nonna
Carol Kapostasy  August 22, 2017 at 9:02 am

Manners is a dying art we must strive to perpetuate. Random acts of kindness is the antidote! For me the first. And most important “manner” I attitude! If your attitude is positive and rooted in God then you will exude manners in your interactions with people. Once you get in the habit of focusing on looking for the good & beauty in others it catches on with everyone you meet and I like to think they will pass it on as well. I would rather expend my energy on building positive connections than wasting it on complaining, anger, gossip, resentment…etc.

Sr. Bernadette Okulicz, FSSJ  August 22, 2017 at 7:05 pm

Sr. Melanie, your commentary on manners is timeless. My frequent reminder to students was that no matter what “Manners are never out of style.”

Marianna  October 24, 2017 at 7:25 pm

I finally found you sister, on the www! Today is truly another gift from our Lord! Praise God!! Two woman from our Rosary Group speak of your email posts’ so enthusiastically, I wanted some of their joy in my inbox too. I'm a stay at home nonna (grandmother), of two lil'boys, Buddy 3, & Zephyr 1) manners do start in the home, right after catechesis! I’m living the dream, praise be to God.