

## APPLAUDING LIFE – AND DEATH

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The Mass is over, the presiding Archbishop goes out the door to a round of applause, instigated by our pastor, whose flushed face indicates his pleasure at the prelate's visit to our parish. Aren't we lucky to have him here? He seems to say. As *el Obispo* makes his exit, followed by his acolytes – men (no women) - we are asked to applaud the choir, which still stands – a bit expectantly – adjacent to the altar. Earlier, we applauded the Indian dancers, then the mariachis that played on this, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint. All that is lacking is a standing ovation for Juan Diego, the Indian to whom *la virgen* appeared and immortalized. There has been little mention of him this morning. *Nada* for the humble man who staked his life and reputation for the glory of Our Blessed Mother

I ask: When did it become proper to clap hands in church? Where in the Bible do we read where the apostles applauded Jesus after he fed the multitudes from a mere loaf of bread? When at the wedding in Cana he turned water into wine did folks stand up and cheer?

As children we were taught "church manners"; *en la iglesia*, we were to be silent, not jump around, but pay attention to what *el padrecito* said. So why the song and dance? My friend Celia feels it only proper to render praise to the Pope; she frowns on today's celebration. "Since when did church become a nightclub, she spews! Do we really need Mariachis and half-naked Indian dancers prancing around the altar? *Jesus, Maria & Jose!!*

Social manners – like language – are always in flux; they change over time. Etiquette is reflective of a society. In southern California we have become extremely casual. Which is why today kids run around inside markets and in church, while parents look the other way. In the old days deportment was taught at home, but today few parents have the time or inclination to instill behavior in their offspring. Which is why – in quiet desperation - affluent parents now send their kids to "manners" classes to undo what they learn on at school – or at home.

Where in the past applause was reserved for a significant event or performance, lately it seems that we applaud – or are asked to applaud – most anything, even the mediocre. Recently, when at a civic affair, folks were impelled to stand, then clap for each dignitary present. While our food got cold, we applauded ad nauseum. At evening's end my feet hurt and my hands were sore.

I grew up applauding movies and football games played at San Fernando High School, especially after a touchdown. When my children played Little League I screamed at a loud pitch, jumped up and down, and yes, clapped my approval. Today we seem to applaud for any reasons. I wonder: Must we acknowledge other than outstanding achievements and achievers? Rites-of-passage: baptisms, graduations, weddings are deserving of applause, but aren't we overdoing it?.

Not long ago, I attended the funeral of an elderly – but prominent Latino. Just when the coffin was about to hit pay dirt, folks began to clap. As mortuary attendants scrambled to remove funereal wreaths from the casket, the mourners – in somber black – applauded with great vigor. I was shocked at what I perceived as a lack of dignity. Were they inferring it was "good riddance to bad rubbish? Relieved to know he was now six feet under? Or were they expressing their appreciation - not for a performance – but for a life well lived?

Which begs the question: If birth is celebrated, why not death? Why not an energetic ovation as we exit this earth? Me? I want to depart this world with mariachi's blaring. Forget clapping.