

Good morning, Parishioner,

During this Jubilee Year of Hope, Bishop Fabbro has asked us, as a diocese, to reexamine the way we celebrate Mass so this week and next, we will take a look at a couple important issues that the Church reemphasized when the Roman Missal was revised in 2012. This week we will discuss silence in the liturgy. Next week we will talk about liturgical posture, when to sit, stand and kneel and why it is important that we are doing the same things. On December 4, 1963, Pope Paul VI promulgated the first Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, The Constitution on the Liturgy. It says, in part, Holy mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy...In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. Vatican Council II stresses that silence is a privileged means of promoting the participation of the people of God in the liturgy. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which contains theology and instructions for how Eucharist is to be celebrated, speaks at length about the importance of silence in the liturgy.

The General Instruction, building on the Council Fathers' teaching about full conscious and active participation says this about silence in the liturgy: Sacred silence is not seen as empty, or an absence of noise but is an active and integral part of the liturgy. The purpose of silence changes depending on when it occurs, guiding us toward a deeper form of participation.

Silence as a "ritual moment" has its own "content". It is a time for active internal reflection that complements vocal prayer, music, and gestures.

Silence isn't easy for any of us in our time. The Supercomputer-cell phones we carry seem to demand constant attention. The Church gives us silence in liturgy to train our hearts and minds in silent prayer. But attentive, active, "positive silence" takes work. Often, we may find it difficult to focus. The Church encourages us to ask the Lord to help us to experience his presence. As we cultivate silence, we will begin, more frequently, to hear the voice of the Lord.

In silence, without distraction, we see what is real—what is truly before us. We are given the time to better comprehend the true meaning of things.

This is the reason the Church calls for silence, and a great deal of silence, during the liturgy of Mass. Silence amplifies the reality of what we experience. Silence is a proper response to a reality which words cannot express—in the case of the Mass, to the reality of God's presence.

We are invited to silence several times during the Mass. We are first of all called to be silent before Mass begins to allow us to prepare for the sacred action by focusing on God's presence and reflecting on our personal prayer intentions.

In the penitential act, there should be a brief pause after, "let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries" to allow us to recall the attitudes, actions, and omissions that separate us from God and our dependence on God's mercy.

In the opening Collect, which is the prayer right after Glory to God in the Highest, a period of silence follows the invitation, "Let us pray". Pope Francis said that the silence ahead of the Collect gives us the opportunity to gather ourselves, what we bring to the liturgy, and to offer our silent intentions that we have discerned in the silence before Mass began. This would replace what has become a practice in some parishes of time offered at the end of the General Intercessions for personal intentions because the General Intercessions are specifically petitions that apply to all of us. The Collect actually collects all of our prayers into one and offers them to God in the verbal prayer offered by the priest.

Another time for silence is after the readings from scripture. This allows for reflection on the Word of God. Silence and reflection are essential elements in the Liturgy of the Word. After the first and second reading, the Gospel, and the homily, silence allows the us to grasp the sense of what was proclaimed and internalize it so as to better respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The General Instruction says, "A period of silence follows the readings. This silence is an obligatory part of the celebration that allows the assembly to receive this Word in the heart. It should be long enough to allow for genuine reflection yet not so long as to destroy the natural flow of the liturgy."

After the readings, for example, we can, in silence, picture the narrative of the Old Testament or the Gospel. If the readings contained advice, exhortation, or an admonishment, we could ask the Lord how it applies in our lives. The period of silence is a time when the Lord can make alive the word proclaimed. We need only to ask him for this, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

A period of silence is also called for after the homily which provides space for meditation on the priest's or deacon's message.

The Church says that sacred silence be observed for some time after all have received communion. To paraphrase the General Instruction, before the Prayer after Communion is prayed, the assembly may be seated for a period of silent prayer, or the assembly may sing a psalm or hymn of praise in which all participate. If there has been a hymn, then as we stand following "Let us pray," an extended period of silence is observed between the Priest saying, "Let us pray" and the text of the prayer.

As we implement these periods of silence in the coming weeks, please fight the urge to be uncomfortable. The lectors, psalmists, and I, have not forgotten it is our turn or lost our place in the book. This is an opportunity for greater participation for all of us to actively offer our prayers and more deeply absorb the word of God.

Next week, we will talk about becoming a more unified people of God through our postures at Mass. As I go and prepare to begin Mass, I hope you will use these few moments of silence to focus on God's presence and discerning your personal prayer intentions.

Notes about where to find more information in the GIRM:

- before Mass – in the church, and in preparation areas (45);
- within the Penitential Act (45, 51);
- after "Let us pray" of the opening collect (45, 54);
- before the Liturgy of Word (56);
- after the first two readings (45, 56, 128, 130);
- after the homily (45, 56, 66, 136);
- after communion (43, 45, 164);
- after "Let us pray" of the post-communion prayer (165).
- This is an occasion when reverent silence is to be given preference to a hymn or psalm.
- 170 LM, no. 28; GIRM, nos. 45, 56.
- 251