

## Silence in Liturgy

“The quieter you become the more you hear.” How true this contemporary proverb is in our world filled with so many sounds and so much noise! Our lives are marked by physical noises, as well as the inner noises of stress, worry, preoccupation, and negative attitudes. It is often only in moments of silence that we can hear the song of a bird or the cry of a child, the growth of a flower or the cry of our own hearts.

The Church recognizes this reality and invites us to moments of quiet in our liturgical celebrations. For, it is often only in the stillness and the silence that we are able to hear God’s voice (See 1 Kings 19:12).

In the revised GIRM (#45), we read, “Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times.” This means that silence is an integral and important part of every liturgy. It is called “sacred” for in this silence we meet God, the Holy One. We also meet there the holiness to which each of us is called by our baptism.

In the Mass, the GIRM tells us, we are invited to silence at these five times:

- at the Act of Penitence
- after the priest says, “Let us pray”
- after each Scripture reading
- after the homily
- after all have received Communion.

Following the opening greeting at the beginning of Mass, the presider invites each member of the assembly to call to mind our sins and reflect on our need for repentance. Such reflection needs to be done individually, and we do so, briefly, in silence.

Several times during the Mass, the presider precedes a prayer, called a “collect prayer,” with the words “Let us pray.” He then pauses for a brief silence. He is inviting

each of us to individually and silently “collect” our whole self—body, mind, and spirit—to recognize that we are in God’s presence and to call to mind our own prayer at this time. The presider then “collects” all of our individual prayers into the one prayer he prays aloud.

After each of the readings and the homily, we are given some more moments of quiet. During this time we are given the time to take in more deeply what it is we have just heard. The silence invites us to receive God’s Word, grasping it with our hearts (GIRM #56) and make it our own.

The last of the designated times for silence during the Mass is after all have received Communion. As people are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we are to symbolize our union by singing together the Communion song. We are then given time for private prayer, praise and thanks to God in our hearts when the distribution of Communion is finished (GIRM #88). It is a time when we can feel deeply our own unique oneness with Jesus Christ, whom we have just received. We can also prepare ourselves to go out and BE Eucharist to all whom we will meet in our daily lives.

We are also invited to some time of personal silence once we have quietly greeted those near us, even before Mass begins. This is so we (presider, ministers, and assembly) might each prepare ourselves well for the great mystery we are about to celebrate (GIRM #45).

And so, we are grateful for the recognition our need for quiet, even in our liturgies. For, with silence, interspersed among the prayers, readings, songs, and actions of the Mass, we are better able to really hear, not just with our ears, but also with our hearts and our whole selves, what God is saying to us.