

# Silence

*One aspect of the liturgy we must foster in our communities with greater commitment is the experience of silence.*

Silence is an important element in all communication. It is particularly important to allow for silence as a part of the dialogue between God and the community of faith. It allows for the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard in the hearts of the people of God and to enable them to unite personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the Church. During liturgical silence all respond in their own way, recollecting themselves, pondering what has been heard, petitioning and praising God in their inmost spirit.

Liturgical silence is not merely an absence of words, a pause, or an interlude. It is a stillness, a quieting of spirits, a making of time and leisure to hear, assimilate, and respond. Any haste that hinders reflectiveness should be avoided. The dialogue between God and the community of faith taking place through the Holy Spirit requires intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, so that all can take to heart the word of God and respond to it in prayer.

Sacred silence is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Penitential Act and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the Homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts.

SPIRITUS ET SPONSA 13, CTM 91–92, GIRM 45

## Some Questions

- Where is liturgical silence well observed?  
Where might it be improved?
- What opportunities are there for *Lectio Divina* and/or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament?
- How is reverence shown to Christ present in the liturgy?

## Further References

*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*  
45, 56, 88

*Celebrating the Mass*  
91–92, 150, 160, 173, 199, 215

*Redemptionis Sacramentum*  
39

*Spiritus et Sponsa*  
13

## Practical Points

- The different types of liturgical silence can be introduced in different ways. Some, such as the pause for prayer after *Let us pray*, depend on the confidence of the presider. Others, such as in the Liturgy of the Word, require the collaboration of various ministers.
- When introducing silence in the Liturgy of the Word and after Communion it may be best to introduce it to people as well as give some guidance on how to use it.
- Movement during a period of silence should be marked with grace, dignity and purpose.

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## Questions for Groups

1. What is good about current practice?  
What concerns do you have?

4. Who is most directly involved in these matters, e.g. liturgical ministers?  
What formation/information is necessary to engage them in the renewal of current practice?

2. In what ways does the documentation affirm or challenge your current practice?

5. How will the assembly be engaged in the process?  
What, in particular, needs addressing at Sunday and/or weekday celebrations?

3. Prioritise the issues you have identified.

6. How will you know whether the formation has worked?