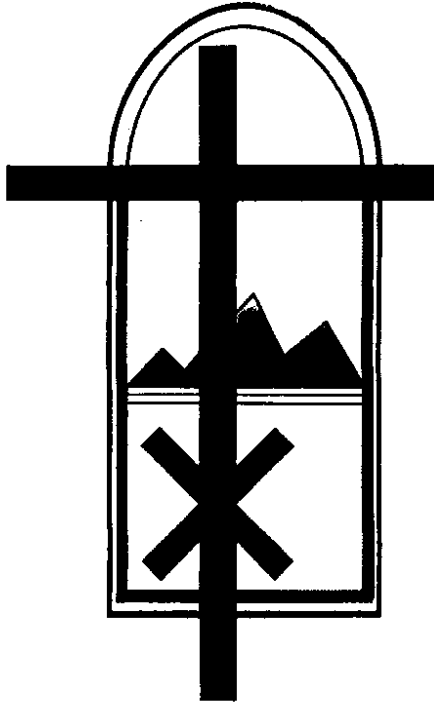
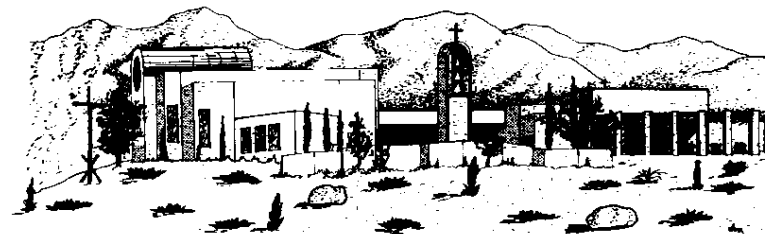


St. Andrew's Catholic Community



*Silence
during our
Liturgies*

1399 San Felipe Dr.
Boulder City, NV 89005



Here at St. Andrew's we acknowledge the need for meaningful silent moments during our liturgy; after each reading, after the homily, before prayer, and after communion. These moments of reflection enhance the quality and dignity of our celebration. The following article written by David Philippart and published in the May/June, 1997 issue of Liturgy 90 by the Office for Divine Worship of the Archdiocese of Chicago best expresses our feelings and concerns regarding silence during the liturgy.

Silence at Mass

by David Philippart

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How was your vacation?" I asked Denise, the head of the lectors at Gate of Heaven, one Sunday about 17 years ago.

"Good," she answered. "But I went to church and, I don't know, it just didn't feel like Mass."

"Was it a Catholic church?" I asked her.

"Yes," came the reply.

"Maybe it didn't feel the same because you didn't know anybody there," I suggested.

"No, that's not it," Denise said. "I think it's because it was so, I don't know, *rushed*. I was out of breath by the time we reached communion!"

Now I knew: "Didn't they pause after the readings or have some silence after communion?" I asked.

"No," Denise answered. "And I'm glad we do that here."

We hadn't always "done that here," but for the past year we had made a conscious and careful effort to introduce periods of silence into our Sunday celebration — after the first two readings and after communion. And Denise's observations proved that those efforts were beginning to pay off. After this conversation, I paid attention to the periods of silence and noticed that a year later, they had grown deeper and more deliberate. There was less throat-clearing and bulletin-rattling and bench-creaking. Fewer people were looking at the cobwebs in the rafters or examining their fingernails. And a good number of people appeared to be deliberating, contemplating or otherwise praying!

● ● ● Breathless

No wonder Denise was left breathless by a liturgy without periods of silence. Try this: Get out the sacramentary and read the Order of Mass from start to finish without pausing. Even though you're not engaging in the gestures and postures, you'll still get an idea of how the liturgy can be reduced to a torrent of words if periods of silence (more than mere pauses) are not included. Or better yet, try this: Get out the sacramentary and have *someone else* read the Order of

Mass from start to finish without pausing. As you listen, note when and for how long you cease paying attention.

Like any good conversation, the liturgy needs periods of silence. You can't have a dialogue if no one listens while another speaks. Like any good activity, the liturgy needs a pace that is metered by moments of quiet. Thanksgiving dinner, a date with the one you love, a ride in the car with a friend, a symphony, an opera, a stage play or a movie — all human activities are paced by spurts of doing and lulls of being still. (And the lulls aren't necessarily boring.)

● ● ● The Sounds of Silence

What kind of silence does the liturgy require? There is the awkward silence of elevators and waiting rooms, where otherwise unconnected strangers are thrown together incidentally for a time. This is not the silence of the liturgy. There is the angry silence of people who have just quarreled and who, for the moment, believe that there is nothing else to say. This is not the silence of the liturgy. There is the passive, apathetic silence of the bored and the disengaged. This is not the silence of the liturgy. There is the dead silence of a stage, classroom or meeting room as the unprepared sweat and panic and the uninvolved yawn and fidget. This certainly is not the silence of the liturgy.

Rather, the periods of silence in the Mass are more akin to these: the silence that gestates between people who know and love each other so well that words are not always necessary; the awe-filled silence evoked by an encounter with beauty; the calm quiet that befalls those who gaze, listen or touch with their hearts as well as with their eyes, ears and hands.

The liturgy's silence is *communal*. The assembly keeps a communion of quiet. Each one tries to the best of his or her ability to be still, but it is more than just a bunch of individuals not saying or doing anything coincidentally. It is the Body of Christ listening for and attending to the voice of

God. Sure, not every member of the assembly will be able to participate in the communal silence to the same degree. Babies will fuss, children will fidget, adolescents may sigh and those with short attention spans will be distracted. So all in the assembly should show tolerance and forbearance. But the assembly should nonetheless strive to be silent together at certain points in the Mass. People with greater capacity for keeping the silence — especially liturgical ministers — can be role models for those less able to be still.

Silence in the liturgy is silence kept *on purpose*. It is deliberate and therefore active. It's not an interlude, not an intermission, not an interruption of the action. At its time, it *is* the action: *We keep the silence.* “*Be still and know that I am God,*” the psalmist sings. Silence in the liturgy is the active attending to God that Samuel showed when, upon being awakened from his sleep by the voice of God, he replied, “Here I am: I come to do your will,” and then stood quietly before the Divine. This is one reason why regularly keeping silence as part of the liturgy is so difficult. Liturgical silence is hard work!

● ● ● It's Not an Option

Silence in the liturgy is not an option. To say so is not heartless rubricism. It's a fact, a recognition of the dynamics of liturgy as a divine-human activity. The communal, deliberate silence of the liturgy is an integral element of the ritual. Without it, the ritual doesn't work well: It is less likely to draw people into the mystery.

So it's almost too obvious (except for the fact that it is rarely done) for the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* to say in the rubric for the collect prayer:

Next the priest invites the people to pray, and together with him they observe a brief silence so that they may realize they are in God's presence and may call their petitions to mind. The priest then says the opening ... (32)

And it's simple common sense when the introduction to the Lectionary for Mass requires periods of silence in the liturgy of the word:

The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders reflectiveness must be avoided. The dialogue between God and God's people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer.

Proper times for silence during the liturgy of the word are, for example, before this liturgy begins, after the first and second reading, after the homily (28)

The GIRM is less insistent about a period of silence after communion:

After communion, the priest and people may spend some time in silent prayer. (56j)

But given all that has been said above, "may" probably should be interpreted as "usually."

These rubrics offer helpful hints about silence in the liturgy. First, periods of silence differ in length: The silence between the priest's invitation "Let us pray" and the text of the collect is "brief," whereas the silences after the readings constitute "short intervals," and after communion, the silence is kept for "some time." (But "brief" surely is longer than the millisecond required to take a breath before saying the collect.) Second, the introduction to the lectionary points out that the use of silence must be "suited to the assembly." So the intervals of silence at the morning Mass — crowded with children — are briefer than those at the Saturday vigil Mass, where the majority of the assembly are the elderly, long-experienced in prayer and worship. And at children's liturgies during the week, silence is not skipped but is kept according to the children's capacity for it: Know that some will fuss and fidget, expect that all will try to be still as best they can, and stay calm!

● ● ● The Silence of the Ministers

The length of the period of silence is determined by the minister presiding over it. In the case of the silences after the invitation "Let us pray," after the homily and after communion, the priest presides. But the silence after the first reading is presided over by either the musician, the cantor or the lector (whoever leads the responsorial psalm).

How do you know how much silence is enough? There are no concrete rules. Ministers need to develop a feel for the silence: praying or reflecting themselves, but with one ear tuned to the assembly. To a certain degree, you have to be immune to the distractions: Don't let a crying baby or a fidgety person rush the community's silence. You'll experience a good amount of pressure to hurry up, so remember that what seems like a long time to you probably isn't. But don't get so caught up in your own rapture that the community is left waiting until you come out of your trance.

The stopwatch is not one of the liturgy's implements, but perhaps during ministry training or renewal sessions, someone *can* use a stopwatch so that ministers begin to develop a sense for how long is long enough. Similarly, the parish staff, parish council and liturgy committee meetings can all begin with a timed moment of silent recollection, for its own benefit as well as for ongoing training in the discipline of keeping silence in the liturgy.

Here are some ideas about presiding over the various moments of silence at Sunday Mass.

● ● ● The Word of God

The introduction to the lectionary suggests silence in the liturgy of the word "before this liturgy begins." After the "Amen" of the collect prayer, perhaps the lector can stand in place for a moment, until all have sat down, before moving unhurriedly to the ambo. At the ambo, the lector should quietly adjust the microphone if necessary, look at the assembly

and wait for quiet to descend before announcing the first reading.

In some parishes, after the first reading and the assembly's acclamation ("Thanks be to God!"), the lector remains in place at the ambo to preside over the period of silence. Only when she or he moves away from the ambo and takes a seat does the psalm begin.

This procedure resembles that advocated by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy's pastoral introduction to the Order of Mass (to be included in the new sacramentary), although the rubric is a bit vague:

When a prayerful silence is observed before or after a reading, the whole assembly takes part in it. The reader does not move to or from the ambo during the period of silence. (86)

Does this mean the lector stays in place after the people respond "Thanks be to God!" and only returns to his or her seat after the period of silence?

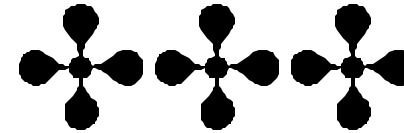
I think this is awkward. Standing at the ambo while the rest of the assembly is seated, the lector may be tempted to rush the period of silence. Distracted members of the assembly who are looking around might spy the lector and wonder what he or she forgot to do and why he or she is still standing there.

It is better for the lector to return to her or his place after the people's acclamation and for the period of silent reflection to begin then. This means, though, that the musician or cantor presides over this silence. And the silence here must certainly be longer than the few seconds it takes for the lector to leave the ambo and take a seat. The musician or cantor must let the silence settle in before commencing with the psalm. If a lector leads the recitation of the psalm, it is best to have a lector other than the first reader do it. The silence can be observed before the second lector approaches the ambo. Even if the first lector backs away from the ambo for the silence before beginning the psalm, again, the tendency will be to omit or rush the silence.

Should silence be observed between the psalm and the second reading? The rubric does not mention it. Depending on the as-

sembly, silence could be observed. But if the second reader, who is sitting for the psalm, waits for the cantor to move away from the ambo (or cantor stand) and then approaches the ambo unhurriedly and begins as described above for the first reading, that amount of time may prove to be a sufficient pause.

After the homily, the presider sits (if having just preached) or remains seated (if someone else has preached) for the period of silence before standing and inviting the Creed or the intercessions. In some assemblies and on some occasions, it may be helpful for the preacher to poetically state that now we will have a few mo-



ments to reflect further on God's word before approaching Christ's table.

● ● ● In Silent Awe

After communion, the period of silence follows the sharing of communion and the singing of the communion hymn. It may commence for the assembly while the ministers are finishing up their tasks, but it should last longer than that. Otherwise, it appears simply to be "down time" while we wait for the ministers to catch up. (The ministers should finish their tasks unobtrusively and efficiently so that they too can keep some silence.) Again, the presider presides over the length of the silence: The post-communion prayer, not the announcements, should follow the silence.