

Principles of Silence

This resource draws on Church documents which mention silence and from them identifies some broad principles for silence in the liturgy. It is intended as a companion and resource for the document, the Place of Silence.

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, *should not be there as strangers or silent spectators*; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.¹

1. Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) 48

To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times *all should observe a reverent silence*.²

2. SC 40

Equally important for a correct *ars celebrandi* is an attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs: words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colours of the vestments. By its very nature the liturgy operates on different levels of communication which enable it to engage the whole human person. [SacCar 40]

1. Silence is an element in active participation in the liturgy.
2. Alongside the other languages or elements of liturgy silence is integral.

One aspect that we must foster in our communities with greater commitment is the experience of silence. We need silence "if we are to accept in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely to the Word of God and the public voice of the Church"... The Liturgy, with its different moments and symbols, cannot ignore silence.³

3. John Paul II, *Spiritus et Sponsa*[SS] 13

Pastoral attention to the Liturgy through the introduction to the various celebrations must instil a taste for prayer. To do so, it will of course take into account the ability of individual believers and their different conditions of age and culture; but in doing so it will not be content with the "minimum".⁴

4. SS 14

3. The Liturgy is a school of prayer for silence.

5. Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, *Celebrating the Mass* (CTM) 91

6. CTM 92

7. CTM 54, cf. *Musicam Sacram* (MS) 15

8. *Lectionary for Mass Introduction* (LMI) 28

During liturgical silence all respond in their own way, recollecting themselves, pondering what has been heard, petitioning and praising God in their inmost spirit.⁵

Liturgical silence is a corporate activity shared in by all present, by which all support and sustain each other in profound prayerful solidarity. It demands a stillness and prayerful concentration, which the priest celebrant and all ministers can help to bring about.⁶

The active participation of the faithful is first of all internal in that their thoughts reflect what they hear, do, and say during the liturgy. It is also external in that through their outward bearing and gestures they express their inner participation in the liturgy. The ritual interplay of the internal and external elements of the liturgy conveys the transcendence and the immanence of the living God whom the assembly worships.⁷

The dialogue between God and his 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.⁸

4. Silence enables active participation through recollection, reflection and response.
5. Silence in the Liturgy is both individual & corporate. It is held by the whole assembly and enable by liturgical ministers.
6. Silence in the Liturgy is dynamic — it helps to lead from one moment to the next.

This resource was prepared to accompany *The Place of Silence*. www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources