Although there have been a number of specific locations in the liturgy where “silence” was recommended, this new emphasis is noteworthy. The descriptions of the periods of sacred silence indicate their significance for the people’s participation in the Mass.

For example, there are two locations in the Introductory Rite of the Mass that call for periods of silence within them: the Act of Penitence and the Opening Prayer.

Let’s take a closer look at the Opening Prayer, called the “Collect.” This prayer begins with the priest celebrant giving the invitation, “Let us pray.” The General Instruction indicates there is to be a period of silence following this invitation.

The purpose of this period of silence is “so that all may be conscious of the fact that they are in God’s presence and may formulate their petitions mentally.” This silent period takes on a heightened importance for the engagement of the people in this communal prayer. Between the invitation to pray and the priest praying the Collect prayer, the rest of the people have something to do. This is the time that each person brings his or her hopes, joys and concerns to mind to be included in this prayer.

Then the priest, addressing God the Father, “collects” the people’s prayers by summing up the character of the celebration. The people, uniting themselves to this entreaty, make the prayer their own with an “Amen.”

This Sunday when the priest gives the invitation, “Let us pray,” let us do just that. Let us all bring to mind our intentions that we wish to present to God in prayer this day. This joining of our hopes, joys, sorrows and concerns engages us more fully, actively, and consciously in this celebration of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

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