

WORK OF THE PEOPLE: THE CATHOLIC MASS

SNAPSHOT 4: SILENCE

VIDEO SUMMARY

Full, conscious, and active participation in the Mass is about interior as well as exterior involvement. The instructions for Mass call for silence at several places. But silence is not merely empty space. It requires being fully present and making room for God. In the words of Pope Francis, “Silence is not reduced to the absence of words, but is the availability to listen to other voices: that of our heart and, above all, the voice of the Holy Spirit.” In the silence, we participate by reflecting or by calling something to mind. For example, in the silence designated in the Penitential Act, we think of our failings, both individual and communal. After each reading from sacred scripture, a period of silence allows us to reflect on what we’ve heard and think about how we might respond in our lives. After Communion, we silently offer praise and thanks to God.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Sacred silence is an integral part of the celebration of the Mass and should not be rushed.
- We actively participate in liturgical silence by meditation, reflection, or calling something to mind so that we can prepare to respond in faith.
- Silence helps us in a special way to listen to the voice of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How often do you experience silence in your life? Is it rare or plentiful?
- How does silence in the Mass challenge us to be full, conscious, and active participants?
- Are there times in your life where you have felt that distractions kept you from hearing the voice of God?

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

- After each scripture reading at Mass, use the silence to ask yourself: what is God telling me in this reading?
- Be aware of all the distractions that demand your attention, and make a conscious effort to leave those behind when Mass begins.
- Incorporate one extended period of silence into your daily routine (for example: first thing in the morning, before bed, in the car before turning it on, at your desk, after a meal). It can be as little as two minutes. Setting a timer can be helpful.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY?

- “Silence should be observed at the designated times as part of the celebration. Its function depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus at the penitential rite and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what has been heard; after communion, all praise God in silent prayer.” (*The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 23)
- “Contemplative prayer is hearing the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving commitment of a child. It participates in the ‘Yes’ of the Son become servant and the Fiat of God’s lowly handmaid.” (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2716)
- “In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 11)