

INTENTIONAL SILENCE

Silence is something that we don't get a lot of in our daily lives. As a matter of fact, when we are confronted with it some of us may become uncomfortable because it's so unfamiliar to us. I think silence can even be classified as counter cultural because we always seem to want to fill the void when quiet presents itself.

Unlike in our daily lives, there are several periods during the Mass when intentional silence is called for. And because we are asked to participate in the Mass in a "full, conscious, and active manner," partaking in, and making use of, the prescribed periods of silence are integral to our participation at Mass.

Two areas where intentional periods of silence are called for are during the Opening and Closing Prayers at Mass. This is when the priest says: "Let us pray." These three words should serve as an invitation for us to take stock of where we are and why we are there.

Notice that the priest says let *us* pray, not let *me* pray. That is because the priest is voicing the prayer on our behalf. And we make the prayers our own through our acclamation of *Amen* at the end of each prayer.

Other periods of intentional silence are called for after the three of the scripture readings, the responsorial psalm, and the homily. Again, these short periods of silence are inserted into the Mass to give us the opportunity to reflect on what it was we just heard. *What did these scripture passages say to me? How do they affect me and my daily life? How can I put what I heard into practice?*

The longest and the most intentional period of silence comes after Communion, when the priest and all of us take our seats. This is not the time when we should be preparing ourselves to leave the building. This is not the time when we should be planning out the rest of our day. The time is gifted to us by the Church so that we may reflect on what has just happened to us when we received Holy Communion.

We need to take the time to reflect on the fact that Jesus has actually become a part of us! How can we allow ourselves not to be changed by that fact? Jesus is truly within us - body, soul, and divinity! Because of this greatest of gifts, we are given the opportunity to meet any obstacle, overcome any challenge and conquers any fears, *if* we allow the grace we receive in Holy Communion to act.

I have stated before that we should not think of the Blessed Sacrament as some sort of magic potion - but we could have a similar effect - if we *allow* ourselves to be changed! If we allow ourselves to believe that Jesus has truly become a part of us, how can we not be changed as a result?

The period of intentional silence after Communion is very important. Our Lord given to us through His Precious Body and Blood is indeed a gift. We need to allow ourselves to become what we have received - we need to become more Christ-like. We need to make use of the graces that the gift offers us. And maybe most important of all, we need to take this time and let God speak to us!

The reason we should receive our Lord in Holy Communion at least once a week is because we are human and we are weak and we falter. Our Lord, through our reception of the Eucharist, puts us in real communion with Him. What a special gift! Jesus is with us - always at our side - always ready to assist us with any problem we may have.

So, the next time you are at Mass, don't leave before it is ended. Don't sit after Communion and daydream or stare aimlessly into space.

Instead, participate in Mass fully, and consciously, and actively, by making good use of the periods of intentional silence that the Mass offers us, especially the one after Communion. Rather than fear the silence, look forward to it and its accompanying peace and solitude.

Let's use this quiet time to let the Lord sink in! Let Him empower and embolden us! Let Him surround and embrace us! Let us truly live our lives believing that we have been changed, as indeed, we have been!

Jim Madura

