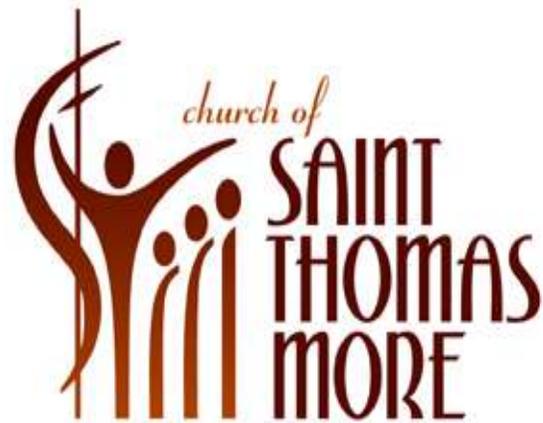


## Silence

Silence in a song is as necessary as the notes we sing. Silence helps to define music from noise, it gives shape to the phrases we sing, it allows us to breathe. Silence also helps to shape our liturgy. It enables us to pray, to reflect and to give thanks.

We use silence deliberately at mass. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says the purpose of the silence depends on where it occurs in the celebration:



*“Thus within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts. Even before the celebration itself, it is commendable that silence to be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner.”*  
(GIRM #45)

The Introduction to the Lectionary calls for meditation during the Liturgy of the Word, and warns against rushing:

*“The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembled congregation, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer.”*  
(Lectionary Introduction #28)

I don't know about you, but taking time for silence before mass is where I struggle most. In the midst of getting musicians warmed up, making sure all ministers are ready and the distraction of people streaming in for mass, it's tough for me to silence *myself* and prepare for the sacred action about to take place. I'm working on it, though.

In our culture, we are surrounded by sound. We've embraced "Walkmans" and mp3 players and other gadgets that keep our minds and ears occupied. In such a lifestyle, dealing with silence is hard and uncomfortable, especially when it's in a communal setting. We often don't know what to do with it.

So our liturgy, which cries out for periodic silence, is counter cultural. We need to take time to stop and listen to the silence. Perhaps in the silent moments of the liturgy, we can deepen our personal encounter with God.

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