

A Moment of Reflection:

The Stillness and Silence of Mass (and Holy Hour Eucharistic Adoration)

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When Holy Mass is properly celebrated there are moments in which the voices of both priest and faithful become silent. The priest continues to officiate as the [Roman Missal] rubrics indicate, speaking very softly or refraining from vocal prayer; the congregation follows in watchful, prayerful participation. What do these intervals of quiet signify? What must we do with them? What does stillness really imply?

It implies above all that speech end and silence prevail, that no other sounds — of movements, of turning pages, of coughing and throat-clearing — be audible. Nevertheless, stillness is still, and it comes only if seriously desired. If we value it, it brings us joy; if not, discomfort. People are often heard to say: “But I can’t help coughing” or “I can’t kneel quietly”; yet once stirred by a concert or lecture they forget all about coughing and fidgeting. That stillness proper to the most beautiful things in existence dominates, a quiet area of attentiveness in which the beautiful and truly important reign.

Once we try to achieve such profound stillness, we realize that it cannot be accomplished all at once. The mere desire for it is not enough; we must practice it. The minutes before Holy Mass are best; but in order to have them for genuine preparation we must arrive early. They are not a time for gazing or for daydreaming or for unnecessary thumbing of [missalette] pages, but for inwardly collecting (or recalling – re-collecting) and calming ourselves.

How does this apply to a church? When we say that Holy Mass is celebrated “in church,” we are including something more: the congregation. Congregation, not merely people. Congregation is formed only when those individuals are present not only corporally but also spiritually, when they have contacted one another in prayer and step together into the spiritual “space” around them; strictly speaking, when they have first widened and heightened that space by prayer. All this takes place only in stillness; out of stillness grows the real sanctuary.

Silence and the Word

We have discussed stillness in the presence of God. Only in such stillness, it was contended, can the congregation fundamental to the sacred ritual come into being. Only in stillness can the [worship space] in which Holy Mass is celebrated be exalted into a church. Hence the beginning of divine service is the creation of stillness. Stillness is intimately related to speech and the word.

(SR: <http://catholicexchange.com/stillness-silence-mass>)