



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

6. Sacred Silence.

First Kings 19, recounts the story of the prophet Elijah as he flees from Israel and takes refuge at Mount Horeb. Having arrived at this “mountain of God” after forty days and forty nights of walking, he is told to stand on the mountain as the Lord is to pass by. While the story is properly understood in connection to God’s presence to Moses on this same holy mountain in times past, there is also a unique teaching to be found on how God is able to reveal himself through what is ordinary, or even unimpressive. For, as Elijah stands on the mountain, there is a strong, rock crushing wind, an earthquake, and a fire; none of these perhaps overwhelming or fear-inspiring happenings serve to reveal God’s presence. Finally, in a fourth moment, God makes his presence known in “a tiny whispering sound.” Elijah is moved at the whispering sound to hide his face in holy reverence for God in his midst, who addresses him with the commands that include going to anoint Elisha as prophet.

In thinking about the “happenings” of the liturgy, it is likely very easy for us to remember particular words that are spoken at every Mass, and the ritual movements that take

place, each in their proper time. Yet, there are also deliberate moments of silence that are meant to take place. Are we aware of when each of these moments of silence are to be found?

In the words of the Church from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, (GIRM) or the “how to” document regarding the celebration of the Mass, we are told of the ritual moments of silence. During the readings, moments of silence are fitting after the first reading, the second reading and the homily, as the way to aid and promote meditation on the spoken word. Later, the GIRM indicates that for the Prayer of the Faithful, there are options beyond the typical peoples’ response of “Lord, hear our prayer,” including the option of the people simply praying silently for a moment at the end of each prayer intention. Finally, silence is invited for a time after the priest returns to his chair after Holy Communion. These moments of silence, as defined as part of the ritual, offer individual worshipers times to pray and reflect during the Mass itself on the works of God that are being accomplished, or for any fitting meditation that they may have based on the prayers or readings of the Mass.

Like the more noticeable parts of the Mass, silence is meant to aid us in becoming open to encountering God more fully. An earlier article has already considered how the reality of listening well can aid us at Mass. Likewise, the moments of silence which are built into the Mass are able to serve us in coming to know God's presence more fully, that we may be more perfectly drawn into his divine life.

Silence also affects words – for it is clear that without proper silence, words can not be understood. As we begin praying the Mass in the new translation, we are encouraged to make the greatest use of all of the silent

moments that are offered. In particular, those silent moments that are given within which we are specifically invited to meditate on the very words of prayer as they are being spoken (such as during the Eucharistic Prayer itself, when the people are to “listen...with reverence and silence”), can serve us to not only hear and respond well, but to be caught up in an encounter with God. For God himself has revealed in Scripture that he is able to show his greatness even in tiny whispering sounds. By our own attentiveness to silence, we open ourselves to encountering him in ways that are only noticed when we are silent and still.

Questions of the Week:

➤ *What is the GIRM?*

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (often abbreviated as “GIRM”) is the introduction to *The Roman Missal*. This text offers a general introduction to the Mass itself within the life of the Church, and serves to describe details of the celebration of the Mass. The GIRM is an “instruction,” as it contains the necessary information for “how” the Mass is to be celebrated. It does not contain every detail for celebrating Mass, as some of the ritual directions are contained within the pages of the missal itself (we call these directions “rubrics,” a name that describes the “red” color in which their words are printed in the book).

As we implement the new translation, what we are truly implementing is the “third typical edition” of *The Roman Missal*. The beginning of this new book will contain the GIRM. However, since 2002, dioceses in the United States have already been celebrating *ritually* from this third typical edition. Over these years, the GIRM itself has been published as its own book, even though the prayers of this edition remained unavailable in English. This is why (as you may remember) there were some changes in “what we do” during Mass back in 2002-2003. With the new translation, there will not be any changes in the GIRM – for these already were given in 2002.

➤ *Sometimes I see the priest moving his lips, but without hearing him. What is he saying?*

Throughout the Mass, but especially when the priest is at the altar, there are some prayers that are said by the priest “in a low voice.” Such prayers are meant to be spoken by the priest in a quiet voice since these prayers are prayed by him for his own sake – that his offering of self as the priest will be acceptable. Some examples of the prayers said in a low voice include those he says during the “preparation of the gifts,” (as he himself prepares to pray the Eucharistic Prayer), and those before Holy Communion. While the people do not hear him, they should be aware that their own prayers on behalf of the priest contribute to these moments. In addition, there are moments, especially during and after Holy Communion, during which the people are encouraged to pray silently for their own needs – just as the priest is able to pray for himself.