

Silences and Music at Mass during Advent

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In keeping with the spirit of the season, we will be making an effort to observe more times of quiet and silence during Mass all through the season of Advent.

For example, we may have a longer-than-usual silence in some of the usual places where we normally experience a pause for silent prayer. We might have silence or quiet instrumental music in a place where we usually sing a hymn, such as the Preparation of the Gifts. We'll make a concerted effort to extend the silence after Communion just a bit, and we'll avoid programming hymns, choir pieces... or even extra talks and verbiage... after Communion. If a Prelude or Postlude is sung or played before and after Mass, they will most likely be a bit more subdued, either "quietly joyful" or even in a minor key, imparting a sense of "longing," musically. The two exceptions to these guidelines will be the two days during the Advent season which naturally call for heightened solemnity and a greater sense of outward joy and celebration: the holy day of December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and the Third Sunday of Advent ("Gaudete" or "Rejoice" Sunday) which is observed December 11-12 this year.

We don't observe silence in the liturgy merely for its own sake. There is nothing particularly "renewing" or uplifting to people's prayer by simply depriving the whole community of music and beauty for an entire season. Whether it is Advent, Lent...or any season, for that matter, we don't pretend that we are somehow "unsaved" or "unredeemed" for a while. No, we are people who celebrate the joy of the "Good News" of the Gospel each and every time we gather to worship!

Silence in the liturgy needs to be well-placed and is supposed to call us into a deeper experience of interior prayer and focus. We can incorporate plenty of silence in the Mass without making it a drudgery or devoid of beauty. This will be our goal.

As busy Americans, we don't usually do well with silence; not in the liturgy, and certainly not in how we live our lives. We tend to think of silence as wasted time, unproductive, or at its worst in the liturgy... "Oh, oh...what went wrong? Who missed a cue now!?" With a crowd of people such as an assembly at worship, it generally takes some time for silence to even become "established." For example, one can go a solid minute...which is a long time when you are just sitting... before people settle-in and quiet themselves. At this point, they likely haven't even had a chance to really "pray" yet! What we usually experience in liturgy is that, just as the silence is beginning to settle-in, to be experienced communally, we short-circuit it by nervously getting things moving again. Yet, this is the point at which our experience of shared silence has only begun! We were just finally "getting into it!" With a little practice, we can become more comfortable with silence in the liturgy and welcome it, especially during such a beautifully quiet season as Advent! We can begin to experience it as a time when we are ever more open to how God might be speaking to our hearts!

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End of Lectionary Cycle

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The First Sunday of Advent, we will begin an entirely new cycle, with the arrival once again of “Year A.” Matthew is the primary evangelist during Year A. His particular charisms and emphasis in proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel will shape our prayer and spirituality all through the coming year. There are many interesting features to Matthew's Gospel, too numerous to name here. One that is particularly worth mentioning is that Matthew's Gospel is infused throughout with the spirit of the Beatitudes! So, every time you hear a part of Matthew's gospel in the next year, ask yourself this simple question: “What does today's excerpt from Matthew tell me about my own efforts at living out the Beatitudes?”

Perhaps the end of one liturgical year and the start of a new one next week is a good time for us to do some personal reflection. How have we grown in these past three years of celebrating the church's liturgy? We've walked with our spiritual companions of Matthew...and Mark...then Luke...(and John too, whose Gospel is sprinkled throughout **every** year, especially on important feasts!) Has this journey made any difference in our lives? Imagine what we might be like, or where we might be in our lives, three years from now when we have walked this complete cycle again. Take time to reflect. Dream. Set spiritual goals for yourself. Decide to walk and live this next cycle with a passion and zeal for the Gospel unlike what you have ever done before! We are about to embark on experiencing once again the “greatest story ever told”...and from no less than **four** perspectives! Let's use this gift and seize the opportunities for growth that it offers us!

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