

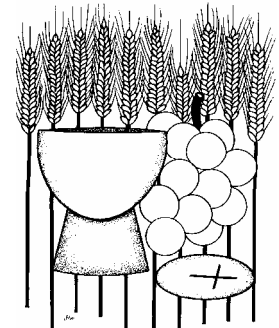
# Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

Part 19 in a series on  
**The Year of the Eucharist**  
from  
The Office of Rites and Sacraments  
Department of Worship & Spiritual Life  
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## The Structure of the Mass The Liturgy of the Word *Silence*

Romano Guardini was a German priest who lived from 1885 to 1968. He was a professor whose moving sermons, popular classes and readable books won him worldwide acclaim. One of his books, *Preparing Yourself for Mass*, is a series of 32 delightful reflections to help the reader “pray better, pay closer attention, and grow more reverent during Mass, no matter where, when, or how it is celebrated” (*from the book cover*). Because much has changed in the liturgy since 1939 when the book was written, there are references to outdated prayers or rubrics which have now been revised. Even still, the book contains a wealth of life-giving meditations on how to be with God and with each other at liturgy. It is a classic and well worth reading.



Guardini's first three chapters are on the value of *Stillness* and *Silence*. Some might be of the opinion that stillness and silence are elements of the pre-Vatican Council II liturgy. While that is true, they are also integral elements of the reformed liturgy which is celebrated today. The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* calls for “Sacred Silence” throughout the liturgy. In the Introductory Rites within the Act of Penitence and again in the invitation to pray issued by the presider in the words, “Let us pray,” we all silently gather the prayers of our hearts. Silence is observed at the conclusion of readings and after the homily when we are called upon to meditate briefly on what we have heard. Again, after receiving Communion we are to “give praise and pray to God in our hearts” (*G.I.R.M. #45*). Even before Mass begins a period of silence is 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” (*G.I.R.M. #45*).

The challenge for us is that we've grown less and less still and silent in our everyday lives. In fact, many people admit to growing increasingly awkward and uncomfortable when silence prevails even for a few moments. We live in a world filled with NOISE! In our homes and places of work, in our cars and shopping centers, almost everywhere we go there is the noise of radios, recordings, television, video games and more. Although much of the noise we live with is within the realm of our free choice, noise continues to be the backdrop of much of our lives. Can you recall the last time you sat in utter silence... on purpose? It will only change when we choose to change it, and even then it will not happen without daily practice.

Once we've achieved periods of exterior silence, we can begin to practice interior silence. Many people don't pray because they are not accustomed to sitting in stillness and silence. In a world where productivity has become a god, silence and stillness, even for prayer, seem counterproductive.

We can begin by asking the Holy Spirit to help us lay aside the hundreds of thoughts, anxieties and worries that plague our minds and hearts. For a time, we quiet even positive creativity because it too generates noise inside. There must come a time when we turn it all off and listen for the whisper of God. Only then will we begin to value stillness and silence and be able to utilize the periods of *Silence* given to us in the Liturgy. We are called to inner *Silence*, not to privatize the Liturgy; rather as one people, one community of faith, we quiet ourselves to know that God is with us.

### FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LECTIONARY FOR MASS...

#28. The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. 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.

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