

Catechism on the Liturgy I,21

In a commentary on this address of the Holy Father, a commentator goes on to say,

If we are to foster the awe, reverence, and adoration through which we may know the Word of Christ, then we must love, and not fear silence and stillness in the Mass and in our life. From silence comes the Word. From silence God spoke and created the world. From silence he spoke to Mary and came to dwell in her womb. From silence he sent his Holy Spirit at Pentecost to lead the Church. Meditative quiet, as the pope laments, is neither favored nor fostered in our culture. Yet there is no getting around the simple fact that only in stillness do we learn to listen with the interior ear. Only in stillness can we build the habit of listening, a habit that, when impeded by the jangle of noise, can never develop. Only in stillness do we calm down enough to sense the Lord's presence. Only in stillness do we find out that the Lord loves us and that we are made to love him. Silence, then, is not a den of terror; it is rather the place where we fall in love. (The Spirit of the Liturgy, Romano Guardini)

This is a very high level of teaching and learning we are discussing at this point.

It is in this very aspect of the liturgy that its didactic aim is to be found, that of teaching the soul not to see purposes everywhere, not to be too conscious of the end it wishes to attain, not to be desirous of being over clever and grown-up, but to understand simplicity in life. The soul must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God and to be prepared for the sacred game with sayings and thought and gestures, without always immediately asking "why?" and "wherefore?". It

must learn not to be continually yearning to do something, to attack something, to accomplish something useful, but to play the divinely ordained game of the liturgy in liberty and beauty and holy joy before God. (Anne Husted Burleigh, "Common Wisdom.")

The silence of the Canon of the Mass in particular, harmonizes perfectly with the accomplishment and the essence of the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Indeed, the material elements are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, with the senses perceiving it, or the created mind being able to comprehend it; the real presence and the sacrificial life of the Savior under the sacramental species is concealed beyond all discernment. The holy silence of the Canon is quite suited to indicate and recall the concealment and the depth, the incomprehensibility and ineffableness of the wonderful mysteries that are enacted on the altar. "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him!" (Hab. 2.20)

There is another reason for this silence at the Canon... a mystical one.

The priest at the altar is the representative and image of the praying and sacrificing Savior. Now, as on the Mount of Olives and on the Cross, Jesus prayed not only in loud tones, but also in a low voice and in the silence of His heart to the Father, so also it is proper that the priest should herein resemble His Divine Model, when representing and renewing the Sacrifice of the Cross. The altar becomes not merely the Cross, but also the crib; for at the moment of Consecration the marvels of Bethlehem as well as those of Golgotha are renewed. Whilst deep silence pervaded all things and the night was in the midst of

its course, the Almighty Word of God descended from His royal throne in heaven to the crib of Bethlehem; in like manner, does the King of Glory at the consecration come down upon the altar, amid the most profound silence. (Gehr)

While children may not appreciate silence as an adult would, it is especially in silence that we receive the rod of correction and the staff of comfort. "For while all things were in quiet silence and night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty word leapt down from heaven..." (Wis. 18.14-15)

6. After having been polished, formed, informed, educated, instituted, instructed and disciplined in the mysteries, the believer is now ready to put into action what he has been taught. This is the highest mode of teaching in Senior's view, and it is called Exercise, (*exercere*), the putting into action, or exercise, of the things already learned.

Philosophers distinguish between potency (capable of being something else), act (the state of actually being it) and exercise (functioning). For example, a tree in the woods is potentially firewood; chopped and split, it is firewood in act and, in exercise, it burns. Since God is the only being purely in exercised act, when we achieve this state, we are His image (having minds) and His likeness (using them). The ultimate teacher is Christ, residing in the soul. Teachers act in loco Christi and students imitating

them are indirectly imitating Christ, as St. Paul said, "Be ye followers (imitatores) of me, as I also am of Christ." (Senior)

It is a precept of the Church (Denz. 437, 1205) that Holy Communion must be received by all adults in virtue of the Divine Command, "You can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood." (Jn.6.54)

As St. Thomas points out (*Summa Theo.* IIIa, Q. 80, a.12, ad 1) "On the part of the communicants, extreme reverence and caution are necessary to prevent anything happening which would not be fitting for so great a sacrament. This is most likely to occur in the drinking of the blood which might easily be spilt, if there were any carelessness in receiving it. And because the Christian community has increased...it is a prudent custom for the blood to be received by the priest alone, and not by the people."

It seems to me that the perfect example of how the liturgy teaches in this eighth and highest mode, may be seen in the act of Holy Communion. What strikes me most at this point, about the priest acting *in loco Christi* at the time of the distribution of Holy Communion, is the supplication he makes for every one of his parishioners to whom he gives the King of Kings. "*Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam ad vitam aeternam. Amen.*"