If you ask the average Catholic what changed in the Mass after Vatican II, they would probably name some of the more visible changes, such as the Mass no longer being said in Latin, and the priest facing the people rather than standing with his back to them. Many do not realize that these changes were prompted by the call in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to full and active participation by all the faithful. In fact, this principle was so important in the restoration of the liturgy that it was to be considered before anything else (14).

The call to active participation not only resulted in outward changes to the structure and actions of the Mass, but also required a change in behavior on the part of the assembly. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy tells us that we “should not be there as strangers or silent spectators, on the contrary . . . [we] should take part in the sacred service conscious of what [we] are doing” (48). Prior to the changes of the Second Vatican Council, the congregation would often spend their time at Mass engaged in private prayer or devotion. But today, we are called to participate in the actions, gestures, words, and songs as a community, with our minds “attuned to their voices” (11).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- In which parts of the Mass do you already participate well? Where could you make a renewed effort?
- Reflect on the fact that you are called to full, conscious, and active participation. How does this change the way you think about Mass?

**ACTIVITY**

What does active participation look like? The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy declares, “the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bearing. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence” (30). Pick one of these areas of participation and try hard to work on your full and conscious participation in it each Sunday. Once you have mastered that area, choose another one to focus on.