

A Moment of Liturgical Silence

In this Pastor's Page, I would like to think about one simple way to enter into the call at Mass: "Let us pray!" When I was an altar server, these words were usually my cue to get the book and hustle over to the priest's chair so that he could read the opening prayer or another prayer. I thought that the pause and silence that happened after the priest said, "Let us pray!" was just the polite time of waiting for the book to get there. If there was more silence it was because I had forgotten to get the book! If the book were right in front of the priest, I thought, there would be no reason for a pause at all, and we could just dive right into that first prayer.

In my training as a Jesuit seminarian, I have been able to take classes on the Mass and other rites of the Church. In these classes one thing that I have grown to appreciate more are the moments of silence that follow words like "Let us pray!" My teachers have explained that even if the book is right there in front of the priest, he should pause for a brief moment in silence before reading the opening prayer. Why? Because that brief silence is a precious moment for the whole church, each and every person present, silently to offer their prayers to God. The words of the opening prayer which follows give some concrete words to these prayers of the heart which everyone offers in a focused manner when we hear the call: "Let us pray!" That's the idea, but in practice, we may not find ourselves very focused.

As an altar server, running that book up to the priest, I was a little distracted from participating with my own prayer at Mass. When you are looking after your family in the pew, or your phone buzzes in your pocket after the words "Let us pray!" you may find yourself a little distracted as well. What is a way to focus our prayer at that moment? Prepare for it before. As we are driving to Mass on Sunday, or perhaps even in a little quiet time on Saturday evening, we can think about who could use our prayers, who has asked us to pray for them, who do we know who is sick, struggling, lonely, etc. Then, when we hear the words "Let us pray!" and we get that brief moment of precious silence, we can try to picture that one person to pray for at that Mass. This can help let the prayers, the responsorial psalm, our conversation with Jesus in the Eucharist, and the receiving of the blessing after Communion, all to become moments to bring this person to the Lord in prayer. We can ask the Lord to give them all that they need, and to teach us how to love this person concretely once Mass is over. "Let us pray!"

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