
What's With All the Silences During the Prayers?

An article from the *Cathedral Times*.

At least one person thought the celebrant (me) had spaced out during our Eucharist last Sunday. And, truth be told, sometimes I do “space out” during the liturgy. It’s amazing how many places my mind, and my soul, can go during the course of a simple five second pause in our service. And not just during the pauses! I admit that even I, the priest presiding at the liturgy, can be imagining something else even when my tongue is reciting our common prayer!

However, that silence you experienced last Sunday during the Prayers of the People—and the silences you have been experiencing throughout the Fall during our prayers—have not been caused by the priests spacing out. Those silences are deliberate.

Do you know what the silences are for? They are there in the hope, and the expectation, that we will actually pray during the Prayers of the People! We know that our physical space is challenging to hear in. The beautiful and reverberant acoustic of our transcendent space is excellent for certain types of music, but it is a challenge to the spoken word. Unless the speaker enunciates clearly and deliberately and slowly, those who have even the slightest hearing problems lose the sense entirely.

We, the priests at the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip, know all this. Thus, we also realize that faithful people sometimes experience more frustration than prayer. And if we cannot actually pray in the Cathedral, what are we doing there?

Thus, here is our custom of praying the Prayers of the People on Sundays in the cathedral proper. After the intercessor invites particular prayers, by topics, the celebrant will always pause—sometimes for a considerable period—before closing that section with “Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayer.” The idea is that all of us will actually “space out” and pray during those periods. The idea is that we will actually pray in those silences. And, as always, your prayer can be silent or spoken.

So we have often heard that question, “What’s with all the silences during the Prayers of the People?” We have also heard, “Please put *xyz* on the prayer list,” and “I wish you had prayed for *abc* in the prayers.” We are happy to do this, but do remember this: YOU can pray for those concerns—out loud—too. From wherever you are in the room. The prayers are meant not just to be heard, but to be prayed!

Yes, our Sunday liturgy is prayed by all of us. We, the leaders of the liturgy do much of the talking on Sundays, but we do NOT do all the praying. Our liturgy goes well if all of us are praying, and praying well!

Thus, we also need lectors and intercessors (and clergy!) who can be heard clearly, and who can actually enable other people to hear and to understand. We need readers who read like they understand what is being said! Our goal is nothing less than trying to achieve an experience of the living God.

It may just be that God will indeed take us to a new place during our prayers. We may even space out! If so, that is wonderful. What I am imagining on Sunday mornings, in the prayers, in the music, in the sermon, might well be what God is putting in my soul. Am I contemplating some issue in my life? God wants me to lift it in prayer. Am I thinking of some problem person, or some special person? God wants that person lifted in prayer. I pray that everything we contemplate on Sundays at the Cathedral, even the unintentional contemplations, can be lifted up in a new experience of God. “The Lord be with you, and also with you; let us pray!”

Sam Candler

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