



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 10 January 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

Over the course of the series of catecheses on the Eucharistic celebration, we have seen that the Penitential Act helps us to strip ourselves of our presumptions and to present ourselves to God as we truly are, conscious of being sinners, in the hope of being forgiven.

It is in the very encounter between human misery and divine mercy that the gratitude expressed in the “Gloria” comes alive; “a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 53).

The beginning of this hymn — “Glory to God in the Highest” — recalls the song of the Angels at Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem: a joyful heralding of the embrace between heaven and earth. This song also engages us, gathered in prayer: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will”.

After the “Gloria” or in its absence, immediately following the Penitential Act, prayer takes on a particular form in the oration known as the “collect”, through which the very character of the celebration is expressed, with variations according to the days and time of the year (cf. *ibid.*, 54). With the invitation “let us pray”, the priest encourages the people to recollect themselves with him in a *brief silence*, so that they may be conscious that they are in God’s presence and so that all can formulate within their own heart the personal petitions with which they are participating in the Mass (cf. *ibid.*, 54). The priest says “let us pray” and then there is a brief silence, and each one thinks about the things they need, that they wish to ask for in the prayer.

The silence is not confined to the absence of words but rather to preparing oneself to listen to other voices: the one in our heart and, above all, the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the Liturgy, the nature of sacred silence depends on the moment in which it takes place: “within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts” (*ibid.*, 45). Thus, before the opening prayer, silence helps us to recollect ourselves and to contemplate why we are there. This, then, is the importance of listening to our heart, so as to then open it to the Lord. Perhaps we have experienced days of toil, of joy, of pain, and we want to tell the Lord about it, to invoke his help, to ask that he be at our side; we may have relatives and friends who are ill or who are undergoing difficult trials; we may wish to entrust to God the future of the Church and the world. And this is the purpose of the brief silence before the priest; *collecting everyone’s petitions*, he expresses aloud to God, on behalf of all, the common prayer, which concludes the Introductory Rites by offering the “collect” of the individual petitions. I strongly recommend that priests observe this moment of silence and not rush: “Let us pray”, and let there be silence. I recommend this to priests. Without this silence, we run the risk of neglecting the recollection of the soul.

The priest recites this plea, this collect prayer, with outstretched arms. It is the prayerful manner practiced by Christians ever since the first centuries — as attested in numerous frescoes in the catacombs in Rome — to imitate Christ with his arms outstretched on the wood of the Cross. And there, Christ is both the One praying and also the Prayer! In the Crucifix, we recognize the Priest who offers God the worship He cherishes, namely, filial obedience.

Prayers in the Roman Rite are concise but rich in meaning. One can have beautiful meditations on these prayers. Very beautiful! Returning to meditate on these texts, even outside the Mass, can help us understand how to address God, what to ask and which words to use. May the Liturgy become for all of us a true school of prayer.

Special greetings:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from Norway, New Zealand and the United States of America. In a special way, I greet the numerous seminarians and university students present. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

Lastly, I offer a special greeting to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, may you be bearers of Christ’s love among your peers; dear *sick people*, may you find support for your pain in the tenderness of God; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, be witnesses to the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage through your faithful love.

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