

# Simplicity and Silence in Catholic Liturgy: Implications for the Church in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

A celebrated dictum holds that “Order is the first law in heaven”; hence, earthly liturgy should be a miniature of heavenly liturgy. This paper delineates that simplicity and silence, among other norms, help the liturgical assembly to know the boundaries of their actions and operate within acceptable standards. As such, the pivotal role of simplicity and silence need to be re-echoed anew for the Church in Nigeria, with the high risk as the most talkative age in the history of the world. Using descriptive and analytical methods, the paper argues that all who are gathered to be bearers and sharers of the sacrifice are equally called to be and become true dispensers of this mystery according to the mind of the Church. They must be observed carefully and dutifully as treasure trove that the Church bestowed on the faithful.

**Keywords:** Simplicity, Silence, Catholic, Liturgy, Worship

## **Introduction**

Catholic worship is meant to be well-ordered, flowing from the fact that liturgy is public worship performed by the Mystical Body of Christ, by the Head and His members. Laws and norms abound for celebrants and participants, and, in filial obedience, they are expected to respect these provisions as contained in the *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*. Other sources of liturgical norms include the Roman Missal, Breviary, Ritual, Pontifical; papal documents (especially apostolic constitutions and apostolic letters on papal initiative, *motu proprio*) and a variety of curial documents, from directories and instructions to simple notifications; general decrees of conference of bishops, ceremonial and of individual bishops (especially guidelines for celebration and doctrinal expositions concerning the liturgy) [See McManus, 1997, pp. 402-403. As the centuries rolled by, the Church has necessarily developed them according to which, her public worship is to be expressed. Simplicity and silence, among other norms, help the liturgical assembly to know the boundaries of their

actions and operate within acceptable standards. Admittedly, the place and importance of simplicity and silence need to be emphasized anew for the Church in Nigeria. Our time is agog with activities of human beings that probably could be designated as the most talkative age in the history of the world. Hyperactivity, complexity, love of noise, chattering, tendency towards exhibitionism and flamboyancy characterized our age.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) decried these anomalies as unduly lengthy Eucharistic celebrations, excessive monetary collections, and the near absence of silence and decorum during liturgical celebrations. We observe arbitrary alterations of the text, singing between the Gospel and Homily and indecent dressing on the part of the minister, and the lay faithful. Others are the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament as if it is a magical and theatrical display, and indiscriminate and indiscrete use of sacramentals. These practices obscure the very essence of Catholic worship and are gradually eroding the true Catholic identity (2023). The Church's liturgy in Nigeria have fallen victim to these abuses in worship. Indeed, our liturgy has become an abundance of words and confusion. But active participation promoted by the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council includes silence as well as speaking and singing and thus disqualifies any misconstrual of living participation. Against this backdrop, it becomes worthwhile to make some brief, but important reflections on these cardinal aspects of the Catholic worship. This is the primary focus of this reflection on simplicity and silence in Catholic liturgy.

### **Explanation of Key Concepts**

To follow this discourse fully, let us explain some key concepts of this paper, namely, Simplicity and Silence, for better appreciation in this liturgical excursus.

#### **Simplicity**

By simplicity we mean something being easy, plain, or straightforward. To state the obvious, simplicity should be the hallmark of Catholic liturgy. This is because liturgical actions should be done without encumbrances and complications. Flowing from the classical era of the Roman liturgy, worship is generally characterized to be very sombre, noble, practical and simple in its language with liturgical text. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council reinforces the clarion call. Henceforth, liturgy is easy to understand or celebrate because of its brevity, clarity, simplicity, and elimination of superfluous textual prayers as well as the use of vernacular language that promotes active participation with responses from the worshippers. This is against the backdrop that participation and Latin responses from the faithful offered during the celebration were minimal. In the pre-conciliar liturgy, some

worshippers opined that they listened to the priest to finish his "*supiri supiri*" (abracadabra). They waited for him to say "*in saecula saeculorum*." They will respond "Amen." Conversely, under the banner of simplicity, prayers are also not verbosely composed and recited. The sanctuary and nave are not overly burdened with cultural decorations, artistic designs, icons and images. Her trademarks entail simplicity, concise language, and clear principles. Generally, Catholic liturgy abhors duplication. No one thing is done more than one.

### Silence

One of the esteemed values in the world's religions including Christianity and particularly Catholicism is silence. The word "silence" means "forbearance from speech, noise-muteness, absence of sound or noise, stillness (Mist, 1998, p. 325). Relatedly, the Italian masculine noun *silenzio* means silence, stillness, taciturnity, to hold one's tongue or be quiet (Deborah, 1997, p. 67). The liturgical Latin rendition uses the word *Silentium* to mean silence, quietness, freedom from disturbances (Diamond, 1989, p. 67). The Igbo of Nigeria generally renders it *Noro nwayo* which goes beyond mere shutting one's mouth, but implies collectedness, meditation and recollection. So, it is the ascetical restriction from talking to achieve the quiet necessary for better thoughtfulness and prayerfulness. Evidently, silence helps to refine our hearts. This is because we tend to listen more when we are silent. We tend to hear more and understand life better. We also get the bigger picture and can look beyond our immediate problems. Granted that silence is absence of sound, stillness, omission of, or abstention from, sounding, speech, mention, or communication; in this context, it refers to those quiet moments that are relevant and important to the Catholic liturgy, and as it is also related to those prescribed areas in the GIRM 45. Unlike in some quarters where noise is generally regarded as the music of hell, sacred silence is whereby we look at God and allow God to look at us and to envelop us in the mystery of His majesty and love.

One could say that this silence is not synonymous with idleness or a lack of participation. Its primary purpose is to make all the faithful enter the act of love by which Jesus offers himself to the Father on the cross for the redemption of humanity. The Council Fathers are very clear on silence: "At the proper times all should observe a reverent silence" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 30). "For in the liturgy God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 30). Indeed, the basic attitude of the "*homo liturgicus*" – both individually and collectively – is one of receptivity, readiness to listen, self-giving and self-relativizing. It is the attitude of faith, of orientation towards God, wonder, adoration and praise. It is an attitude of contemplation that is alien to the "*homo faber*" in many of us (Echema, 2008, pp. 139-140).

### **Forms of Simplicity in Catholic Worship**

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, titled: "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*," reminds the faithful that liturgical celebrations are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church. The cherished Christian liturgy is mocked when it is defectively celebrated. Undoubtedly, the Eucharistic worship is the most sublime of all the liturgical celebrations of the Catholic Church. It is fittingly being called "*fons et culmen*" (source and summit) because in it is contained the source of the Church's strength and the good towards which she aspires, namely, Christ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 30). When Catholics gather to celebrate the Eucharist, they gather to remember and to celebrate the greatest event in the salvation history – the Paschal Mystery of Christ – the incarnation of Christ, his life and works, but most importantly His passion, death and resurrection. The Eucharistic liturgy is, therefore, a place of encounter with the divine. The structure of celebration clearly indicates this sublime encounter. A typical Catholic (eucharistic) liturgy has two major parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. These two parts form one single progressive celebration; or simply put, One Act in Two Scenes.

The celebrants and participants are first prepared by the Word of God. This leads them to the altar of sacrifice where they are fed with the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ. Unfortunately, this enriching yet simple Catholic liturgy has come under threat in many Christian communities as a result of the habitual inclusion of extraneous multiple activities, gestures, posture and rituals. Ideally, both celebrants and participants are to faithfully follow the rubrics in the *Roman Missal*. The Eucharistic liturgy is an official celebration of the Church with its rites and rituals that cannot be altered at individual whims and caprices. It is not subject to an individual's creative genius of dress code and environmental responsibility. What we see nowadays is that Catholic liturgy has been turned into a theatre of parade show by way of dressing (with different kinds of *Asoebi* groups in their uniforms), dancing, noise making, merry making, catching fun, etc. The inherent value of simplicity is being suppressed and undermined (Anagwo, 2022, p. 109).

The spirit of the liturgy is one that is celebrated in a dignified, devout and attentive manner (*digne, attente et devote*), in order for it to produce full effects. To achieve this feat, the faithful need to come to the celebration with proper disposition, in such a way that their mind is attuned to their voice in prayer as they cooperate with God's grace. Anything short of this kind of disposition may deny the faithful the full grace therein (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11). This implicitly means the care of the environment, the attire over the body, keeping silence, bodily movement, the use of vernacular and inclusive language, etc. The drive cannot be far from the theological underpinnings of sacred silence.

### **Theological Framework of Silence**

Theology is a systematic articulation of faith in God as a guide for all who are in search for God. Liturgy determines the purpose of theology. It is a way of life. From the view of St. Anselm, theology is 'faith seeking understanding.'<sup>1</sup> It seeks to comprehend the reality, meaning, significance, and approach of the Church's worship to simplicity and silence. Prophet Elijah demonstrated the ideal encounter with God in simplicity and silence. When there was the mighty wind, God was not there. When the earthquake occurred, God was not there. When the fire blew, God was not there either. When the sound of a gentle breeze came, behold the presence of God! (see 1 Kgs 19:9-13).

Since "Silence is God's first language", God harkens to the prayer that comes from a devoted and attentive heart (see 1 Kgs 18:20-40). Hannah, in her deepest moment, poured out her heart silently: "When she went on praying to Yahweh, Eli was watching her mouth, for Hannah was praying under her breath, her lips were moving but her voice could not be heard, and Eli thought she was drunk (1 Sam 1:12-13)". Hannah's prayer in silence is one of the classical prayers recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. Silence was the acceptable behaviour in the presence of God. Hence, the Psalmists and the prophets ceaselessly reminded the people... "Be still and acknowledge that I am God, Supreme over the nations, Supreme over the world" (Ps 46:10).

In the new dispensation, the role of silence consistently featured in the salvation history. The message of the Annunciation came to Mary in the solitude of silent prayer (Luke 1:26-38). In the silence of the night, the Angel of God appeared to Joseph to take Mary home as his wife (Matt 1:18-20). The use and value of silence were customary for a divine calling and intervention. It was customary for the prophets who withdrew to the mountain (Luke 19:12-14), or to the desert (Exod 3:1-6) to commune with God. If God forced Zechariah to be silent (Luke 1:20,64-65), how much more would we not profit when we decide to embark on silence voluntarily.

Similarly, it was a common practice for Christ to withdraw to lonely places to pray alone or with his disciples (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). Jesus withdrew into the desert after his baptism where he remained in silent prayer for forty days and forty nights (Matt 4:1-2). On such occasion, he taught his disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1-14). Thus, silence and withdrawal were always for prayer. Such silent withdrawal was for prayer and meditation where he was reinvigorated for the ministry. His aversion for noise and tumult in the temple where people were buying and selling (Matt 21:13) should send strong signal to those who abuse the place of worship. Traditionally, the African temple of worship (*Okwualusi* as Ndigbo would call it) is always a silent zone.

To say the least, today more than ever, the unfortunate aspect is that the gesture of silence in the liturgy is being questioned by some of the faithful. It is eroding Catholic culture and identity. With the daily breakthrough in science and technology, with its concomitant noisy environments, electronic gadgets, and infrastructures, some are pessimistic about this wholesome value. In recent times, it is no exaggeration that the coming of GSM handsets and android phones at the reach of everybody has constituted a nuisance to the serene and prayerful environments of the gathering of God's people. Prayers and quiet moments are interrupted with all forms of ringing tones. Sometimes, prayers, in the Christian communities, are said in such a way that is a reminiscence of the prophets of Baal (see 1 Kgs 18:20-40). Shouts of "Holy Ghost fire" at some Christian prayer meetings could warrant some neighbourhood to call for the fire fighters, presuming there is an inferno somewhere. Nowadays and in some places, the use of drums and flutes are easily blown out of proportion in the liturgical assemblies that the faithful are drawn away from the focus of the worship.

One might have heard the story of the lad who accompanied his father to a fellowship in one Pentecostal Church on a Sunday. The service consisted of dancing, gyrating, howling, rollicking and muscle-exerting galore, clapping, speaking in tongues, etc. Like the Biblical Isaac who asked the father on the way to the place of sacrifice about the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen 22:7), the lad ventured to ask the father as they were returning home: "Dad, when are we going to pray?" The father was taken aback and dumbfounded. Of course, the reason was obvious. The service was characterised by external activities that quiet time with the Lord, which is another essential element of worship, was conspicuously lacking (Anagwo, 2012, pp. 74-75). Catholic liturgy is not only exterior but also interior. There are sensible (perceptible/material) signs and spiritual (imperceptible) signs in the liturgy. It must be exterior because the nature of man requires it to be so; he is composed of body and soul. Though the life and worship of the Church is supernatural, they are communicated to its members in a truly human way, and that the members use the same to express their vital participation. But the exterior is not enough without the interior otherwise the Christian worship will become mere formalism without meaning and without content. In the liturgy, the exterior and the interior must be linked together. This is to ensure individual participation and authentic ritual action.

None should be sacrificed for the other. You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul. Both must be promoted. If not, the problem of emphasizing one to the detriment of the other will amount to loss of identity. It does not promote balanced spirituality if the exterior elements are promoted to the discomfort of the interior elements. Unfortunately, this is seriously eating deep into the worship pattern. Whenever it happens, it becomes offensive and discourages meditation

and overall spiritual growth. Robert Cardinal Sarah, in his book titled: *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*, rightly observed that:

Silence is a basic Christian teaching that our purpose in life is to know, love and serve God. Consequently, nothing will make us discover God, better than His silence inscribed in the centre of our being. Ironically, we normally equate silence with simply staying quiet, however, at the supernatural level; silence is not an absence but a manifestation of a presence, the most intense of all presences (2017, p.20).

### **Moments of Sacred Silence in the Liturgy**

If there is any gesture that should never be omitted during any Catholic worship, it is the interspaced moments of liturgical silence. Liturgically, this is the sacred time when the participant goes inward to have the desired rapport with God. Interiority and exteriority (inward and outward) are indispensable elements of an ascent to God. Catholic worship is essentially an encounter with God. And in a very particular way, a devout soul communes with the divine in the silence of one's heart. In his celebrated book titled: *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict XVI rightly states that:

Silence is part of the liturgy.... The greatest mystery, surpassing all words, summons us to silence. It must, of course, be a silence with content, not just the absence of speech and action. We should expect the liturgy to give us a positive stillness that will restore us. Such stillness will not be just a pause, in which a thousand thoughts and desires assault us, but a time of recollection, giving us an inward peace, allowing us to draw breath and rediscover the one thing necessary.... (2000, p. 209).

That accounts for also why the undiluted teaching of the Church on the ideal way to commune with the divine echelon places great recognition on the liturgical silence. Respect for the moments of silence in the liturgy is the watchword. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) clearly reinstates the pivotal role in liturgical worship. It says: "Sacred silence should be observed at the designated times as part of the celebration. Its function depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration" (GIRM 45). It goes further to itemise those instances the liturgical silence is interspaced for a befitting and glorious worship to God. They are basically five times (*Quinque viae*). First is during the penitential rite whether at Mass or the Liturgy of the Hours. When the celebrant has launched them (congregation) into soul-searching to acknowledge their sinfulness before God, a moment of silence must be allowed: "The priest invites those present to take part in the Acts of Penitence, which, after a brief pause for silence, the entire community carries out through a

formula of general confession" (GIRM 51). Each participant recollects, searches, accuses, and consequently confesses before God and the people gathered for worship.

Secondly, after the invitation to pray, it begins with "Let us pray." All must recollect themselves and articulate the individual and community needs; hence, it is also called Collect (*Collecta* in Latin). In simple term, it is the collection of the individual prayers and petitions of the praying community by the celebrant, joined to the community intention, petition, and offered to God the Father through the mediation of Christ in the Holy Spirit. A Collect summarizes the mood, focus and theme of each Mass. Accordingly, it is an essential part of the Mass that can never be omitted or altered at will since it is the gathering of the aspirations of the assembly and expression of the character of the celebration (Lang, 1986, p. 467). One cannot pray unless he/she has articulated the intercession aligning the self to the Holy Spirit who knows how to present our petitions before God (see Rom 8:26). The chief celebrant ought to allow some minutes for the faithful to present their petitions before he sums and collects them for onward presentation in the prayer. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) reiterates and affirms that for the Collect, "the priest calls upon the people to pray and everybody, together with the priest, observes a brief silence so that they may become aware of being in God's presence and may call to mind their intentions" (GIRM 54).

Thirdly, reverential silence is observed during the Liturgy of the Word. After the first and second (and third reading for Sundays, solemnities and feasts) readings and the homily; (GIRM 56), all meditate briefly on what has been heard and allow the Spirit to convict or confirm those who heard the Word. St. Ambrose rightly stated: "Great is the virtue of silence, especially in the Church. Not a word of the divine lessons will escape you if you tend your ear and suppress your voice." Admittedly, faith comes through hearing (Rom 10:17). Hearing the Word of God is possible through listening, and much can be heard in silence. The greater the silence, the richer the word received and the deeper the faith. It means in effect that after the proclamation at the end of the reading and the homily, the silent moment must be permitted before the commencement of the next liturgical activity.

Fourthly, sacred silence is recommended when the celebrant pronounces the Eucharistic prayer. He acts as interpreter of the voice of God and the voice of the people, who raise their hearts to God. Sacred silence must therefore accompany the moments the prayers were uttered in the stipulated requirements of the rubrics as well as when the Body and Blood of Christ is raised for adoration. This liturgical silence abhors any form of gesture in terms of singing, clapping, humming, etc whether introduced by the priest or the congregation. The

faithful must silently adore the Eucharistic Jesus as they look unto him who is shown to them.

Fifthly, after communion, all praise God in silent prayer expressing gratitude to God who has made Himself food to be eaten by mortal. This calls for thanksgiving in the heart of the individual which will lead to a resolution to reciprocate this unique gesture. It challenges the participants to be like what they eat and drink from the Mass. The GIRM admonishes that after Communion, the priest (s) and the lay faithful spend some time praying silently (GIRM 88). If desired, either a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may be sung by the entire congregation. In agreement with this understanding and further elucidation, Patrick C. Chibuko says the choir does not sing throughout the period of Communion. It suffices to stop as soon as the last person has received Communion so that the collective thanksgiving for the great mystery being celebrated and received in silent prayer will take place before the hymn (2007, p. 55). It means in effect that as soon as the last person has received Holy Communion that the moment of silence should be enforced. Conventionally and practically, this is heralded by thanksgiving hymn and prayers to attune the congregation on the need to be with the Lord whom they have received.

As for the central role of the liturgical silence, it is strongly recommended since the devout soul restrains the self from talking and attunes the mind and heart to thoughtfulness towards God. A noisy fellow cannot articulate the self to God in prayer. Being empty, it makes the greatest sound, a replica of an empty gong that makes the greatest sound. It should be considered as an important element in liturgical formation. Thus, the GIRM recommends that even before liturgical celebration, reverential silence should be observed in the Church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room and in adjacent environs to attune the devout soul for the sacred action (GIRM 45). It presupposes that in the sacristy before Mass, for example, the spirit of silence is ordered toward the devout disposition of all who will participate in the liturgy. In an exclusive interview on silence in the liturgy, Robert Cardinal Sarah observed: "How sad it is - it is almost a sacrilege - to hear sometimes priests and bishops chattering uninterruptedly in the sacristy and even during the entrance procession, instead of recollecting themselves and contemplating in silence the mystery of the death of Christ on the Cross that they are getting ready to celebrate, which ought to inspire them with nothing but fear and trembling!" (Sarah, 2017, p. 20).

### **Liturgical Decorum Fosters Simplicity and Silence in Catholic Worship**

In keeping with the intrinsic dynamic nature of the liturgy and liturgico-theological vision of the Second Vatican Council reforms, liturgical decorum fosters and enhances the simplicity, sacred silence, beauty, and prayerfulness of Catholic liturgy. Indeed, for liturgy to worth its value, decorum must be applied

in top notch. The word decorum is derived from the Latin *decorus*, which means “fitting” or “proper.” According to Cicero, “*Color albus praecipue decorus deo est*” (White is particularly fitting for worship) [2000, p. 240]. However, the term is also used to designate “ornate, beautiful, attractive, elegant, magnificent.” Manlio Sodi rightly states that along these lines of semantic development of the word in its various meanings, two senses of the meaning can be deciphered: Firstly, the word denotes an attitude of dignity that in its aspect, fashion and action is appropriate to the social condition of a person or a class (to live, behave, dress...decorously), as well as decorum in language, style, art. Secondly, the word denotes a sense of one's own dignity, an awareness of what is proper or due to one's own status, function or condition (Sodi, 2022, pp. 2-3).

In this sense, the 1917 Code of Canon Law, in canon 124 discussed the concept of “clerical decorum,” as presenting the ideal of a greater interior holiness and the character of an exemplary exterior behaviour which clerics should exhibit in their relationship with the laity. Additionally, and personally, as a member of the Altar Servers' Association, one of the terminologies learnt and meant to be recited always was that “Decorum is the moving principle.” Then we were made to understand and rightly too that whenever one is moving around the sanctuary and indeed, in the Church during celebrations, it should be done with gait, nobility, simplicity, solemnity and brisk. In fact, one must move with liturgical steps, characteristic of a worshipping environment. In my later years in liturgical formation, I came to realize that liturgical decorum means more than just about movement in the liturgy, but the understanding to enhance everything related to the liturgy. For Patrick C. Chibuko, the nature of liturgical decorum demands that its ministers must exhibit eminently in their public behaviour some level of gentle accessibility, good manners, dignified composure, modesty in dressing, tip top in general comportment and calmness of character (2011, p. 37).

Accordingly, liturgical decorum is looked up as anything that is fitting and can facilitate the essential values of liturgical celebration as “the Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation” (Pope John Paul II, 2003, no. 10). Therefore, liturgical decorum is the fitting behaviour, postures, gestures, space, time, language, etc conducive for an efficacious prayer, simplicity, silence, and worship at the designate liturgical settings. In the words of Msgr. Guido Marini, Master of Pontifical Ceremonies, quoted by Cardinal Sarah:

A well celebrated liturgy, in its different parts, plans a happy alternation of silence and speech, in which silence animates speech, allows the voice to resonate with an extraordinary depth, and keeps each verbal expression in the right atmosphere of recollection.... The required silence must not...be considered as a pause between one

moment in the celebration and the next. Rather, it should be considered at a true moment of the ritual, complementing the words, the vocal prayer, the song, and the gestures (2017, p. 20).

Cosmas Aina, in his book titled: *Liturgical Renewal and Active Participation in the Church*, suggests some ways by which liturgical decorum can be observed as:

- i) Clergy and servers should never walk backwards.
- ii) They should sit upright, with legs uncrossed.
- iii) Ministers avoid discussing or talking in the sanctuary.
- iv) The celebrant should arrange vessels, linens and book neatly on the altar.
- v) Avoid cluttering up the altar or the ambo with pieces of paper, booklets or personal effects (2013, p. 177).

From the foregoing discussion, as evident from the facts and reflection extemporized above, liturgical decorum fosters an enabling ground of simplicity and silence for communication with God. And it remains one of the practical ways to promote fuller and integral participation in the liturgy. It constitutes an essential part of the liturgical celebration and never an accidental part. Hence, the document on the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy is emphatic on the active, conscious, and plenary participation of the faithful, *inter alia*, as it encourages sacred silence. Here, silence is likened to a fire which burns and purifies our hearts. It is risky to speak because we might speak wrongly and be judged by God at the same time of wasting our spiritual energy. When we practice simplicity and silence, we build up our spiritual energy. Conversely, if we become talkative and sycophantic, we reduce ourselves to chaff.

### **Implications for the Church in Nigeria**

To initiate viable discussion on the implications for simplicity and silence in Catholic liturgy, it presupposes that there are guidelines that regulate and stipulate how the public worship is to be celebrated. The Mother Church earnestly desires that all her children be led to a full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebration which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1 Pet 2:9) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14). The Fathers of the Council also paid attention to liturgical gestures and postures, acknowledging that these help to foster and promote the desired participation in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 30). The importance of gestures and postures is such that they make the entire celebration resplendent with beauty, candour, sobriety and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration become evident (GIRM 42).

Thus, flamboyant display of oratory and profane expressions should be discarded. In simplicity, lifting the congregation's hearts and minds should be the watchword. Since Eucharistic celebration involves engagement of senses and reason in such a manner that gestures, postures and rituals are evident to expose the *ars celebrandi* (act of celebrating), it is obvious that for the worship to consciously and actively be involved in by any community, coded languages, signs, and symbols that are employed must be understood through liturgical catechesis. The pertinent values and theology of simplicity and silence must be properly understood by those who participate in the liturgical celebration. The necessary implication is to encourage the fullest use of them in such a way to reveal their significance as well as their beauty. There is therefore the need for intensive catechesis and formation of the liturgical assembly on them. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy says that the bishops and priests should respond and ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by its effects (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11). In this way, it will enable them to participate according to the spirit of the liturgy that is in keeping with the regulations already laid down in the liturgical texts.

To say the least, the Church in Nigeria should learn to be futuristic through ongoing liturgical catechesis and formation. Accordingly, there is need to continuously educate and re-orientate the faithful, at the individual and community levels on liturgical practices. The purpose of all formation is to develop in the Christians "a living, explicit and active faith, enlightened by doctrine" (CCC, 1995, 14), for the purpose of making all Christians personally committed to the message of salvation. It will also shed light on every Christian and facilitate the maturity of the faith and as such, the Christian would be able to communicate it accordingly. After all, a celebrated Latin adage holds that: "*nemo dat quod non habet*" (one cannot give what he/she has not).

### **Conclusion**

The paper affirms the illuminating prognosis and promising prescription on simplicity and silence in Catholic liturgy. It calls for greater commitment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Catholic liturgy to the ancient rituals of silence and simplicity. Christ's faithful need to accept in their hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit to accentuate their prayer to God since it remains a great and key necessity to their spiritual worship. The liturgical heritage of simplicity and silence mean so much to the Church. All who are gathered to be bearers and sharers of the sacrifice are equally called to be and become true dispensers of this mystery according to the mind of the Church. They must be observed carefully and dutifully as treasure trove that the Church bestowed on the faithful. Consequently, for worshippers to gain the richness of the liturgy in its entirety, they must allow themselves to be enveloped in the sacred space of

silence and simplicity at every liturgical celebration. There abound the riches of the liturgy as renewed in the light of the Second Vatican Council which may not be fully explored by celebrants and participants due to enthronement of the culture of complications, disorder, noise making or innovations, based on ignorance of, or disregard for, the norms of Catholic worship. All participants, priests, religious and the lay faithful, in Nigeria and beyond, are to think and act along the framework of fidelity to liturgical laws and practices to joyfully, meaningfully, symbolically, prayerfully and in simplicity carry out their liturgical actions, gestures, postures and rituals.

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