

In Silence



Meditations on the Practice of Silence

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Introduction

In the relentless noise of a city that never sleeps, is it possible to find an oasis of silence? Can the heart find a place of peace amidst the honking ruckus of the streets? Where is the voice of God to be found in our modern day?

“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.” (Kings 1.11-13a)

“‘In this oasis of quiet,’ said the Pope, ‘amidst the marvelous spectacle of nature, one easily senses the value of silence, today an increasingly rare good. The many opportunities for relationships and for information that modern society offers risk sometimes eliminating room for recollection, to the point of making people incapable of reflecting and praying. In reality, only in silence can man succeed in listening, in the intimacy of his conscience, to the voice of God which truly makes him free...The perfect model of listening to God is Mary...May Mary, whom we will celebrate in a few days as Queen of Mount Carmel, help us to see in the beauty of creation a reflection of divine glory, and encourage us to aim with all of our strength to the spiritual peak of holiness.’” (Pope John Paul II, Vatican Information Service, ANG/SILENCE : PRAYER/LES COMBES VIS 040712 (290))

Let us explore some of the many nuances of silence whose whispers are scarcely heard.

Conquering the Noise Within

Within the shelter of silence, the heart and mind are renewed with a profound simplicity that breathes harmony into the complexity of modern life.

“My people will live in peaceful country, in secure dwellings and quiet resting places.” (Isaiah 32.18)

Noises

The noises of a complex life
Bombard the senses constantly;
The heart and mind absorb the strife
As life marches relentlessly.

The noises of a complex mind:
Thoughts scattered like a grinder's spray,
Fade quickly as they fall behind;
Forgotten in the disarray.

The noises of a complex heart:
Attachments screech cacophony,
Weary the will to play its part --
A slave of whim and misery.

The silence of a simple heart,
Detached with true humility,
Is centered on God's will -- apart
From noise -- it beats tranquillity.

The silence of a simple mind,
Is ordered as reason has reign;
Its focus, filtered and refined --
Wisdom's intuitions sustain.

The silence of a simple life
Draws harmony from deep inside:
With loving peace, moments are rife
With meaning -- here peace can abide!

May silence in all its fullness renew our lives with simplicity
and harmony.

To Be Stilled In Silence

In silence, the profound peace of Christ settles in its fullness on
the human heart.

*“But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep
silence before Him.”* (Habakkuk 2.20)

Permeating Peace

The noise outside, a clanging whirr,
Is drowned out by the noise within.
When heart and mind no longer stir,
True silence and peace can begin.

Silence can quell needless worry,
Unmask the perceptions that blind,
Still the mind's relentless hurry,
And free the heart of ties that bind.

In silence, all fear dissipates,
The shame of sin washes away;
A profound peace then permeates --
The soul is stilled to watch and pray.

In silence, His Spirit is known;
His presence, palpable and near,
Rests on her soul -- His earthen throne;
Her heart is lifted, free and clear.

Pure love is silence's first goal:
To still the heart and fill the soul.

May the profound peace of the Spirit permeate our hearts and
souls and lift us to Himself in the silence that surrounds His
pure love.

Courage Before Silence

In the safe haven of silence, one finds the grace of courage to
face and accept oneself in the light of Truth.

“When Raphael entered the house, Tobit greeted him first. Raphael said, 'Hearty greetings to you!' Tobit replied: 'What joy is left for me any more? Here I am, a blind man who cannot see God's sunlight, but must remain in darkness, like the dead who no longer see the light! Though alive, I am among the dead. I can hear a man's voice, but I cannot see him.' Raphael said, 'Take courage! God has healing in store for you; so take courage!’” (Tobit 5.10a)

Murky Heart

The murky heart, whose depths unknown,
Stream currents of chaotic churn,
Harbours dark secrets never shown --
Truth's disfigured with twist and turn.

The fear of pain, from shame exposed
In light of Truth, drives some away:
Their wounds remain festered and closed;
Their hearts heavy with disarray.

With courage, granted by His grace,
She surrenders hostility.
His gentle touch helps her to face
Brokenness with humility.

In silence, the churn dissipates;
The debris, surfaced in the flow,
Dissolve, as His love radiates --
Her heart's true depths begin to show.

As wounds well up from deep within,
In silence, healing can begin.

May the healing light of the Lord penetrate the depths of our hearts and may He provide us with the courage needed to face what is exposed there.

Silencing The Tongue

A heart set in silence listens with its full presence and shares a kind word drawn from its abundance of gentleness.

“For we all fall short in many respects. If anyone does not fall short in speech, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body also...For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. This need not be so, my brothers. Does a spring gush forth from the same opening both pure and brackish water?” (James 3. 2,7-11)

Littered Words

The heart that sputters words profuse,
With opinions that must be heard,
Is thoughtlessly tossing refuse
On holy ground before the Word.

The open mouth closes the ear,
And judgements freeze the heart to ice;
How can the Word Himself draw near,
And penetrate this wall of vice?

Silence invites the heart of stone:
To listen tenderly with love,
To attend to the Word alone,
To raise the eyes and look above.

Silence renews all from within:
The spoken word, drawn from this source,
Brings healing, peace, and joy -- not sin;
Spirit guides the tongue on its course.

She strives always to listen first,
And speak if needed -- not to burst.

May the Spirit grant us the grace to listen with tender love in
silence and to speak only when needed.

The Shelter of Silence

In silence, the heart is shielded from the relentless onslaught of
its enemies.

*“For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from
Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall
not be shaken.”* (Psalm 62.5-6)

Shielded In Silence

Silence provides robust shelter
From devil, flesh, and world threats.
Should enemies encircle her,
Her heart's held free from fear and fret.

She disregards world affairs,
Which lie beyond her steward role;
The Lord will carry all her cares --
She accepts what she can't control.

Desires of the heart congeal,
And sink beneath silence's flow;
His Spirit consoles her to heal
Her heart, whose pain He'll surely know.

A pure simplicity shields her
In silence, from deceiver's lies;
Humility holds her secure,
Unswayed by half-truths and their guise.

She trusts in silence as her shield;
From all her enemies could wield.

May the Lord, our Master and the Conqueror of our enemies,
provide us with the strong protection of silence as a strong
defense against our enemies.

Life-Giving Silence

In silence, the soul is nourished and strengthened with the life
of the Spirit.

“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust -- there may yet be hope; ... For the Lord will not cast off for ever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men.” (Lamentations 3.25-29,31-33)

Sustained By Silence

The Spirit provides sustenance,
And life within silence's tent;
The virtues form in His presence,
And thrive in this environment.

In silence, safe from enemies:
Her heart finds peace and purity,
Her mind intuits subtleties,
Her soul rests in security.

From silence, flows His living stream
Through channels of service and prayer:
Its ripples reflect glory's gleam;
It refreshes -- compelled to share.

Whether through rocky crag or dust,
The strength of His stream forges on:
Carving and cleansing what it must;
Cascading where'er it is drawn.

In silence, life flows from its Source;
Through Spirit, on its charted course.

May the life of the Spirit flow through all His works in us from
its source in silence.

Love Flows In Silence

Love flows most fully from the aqueduct of the heart opened in silence.

“But whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’” (John 4.14-15)

Love's Gateway

The human heart is a deep well,
Littered with unloving debris.
Gazing within, it's hard to tell
Where Love's present in depths murky.

All the oceans cannot contain
Waters of Love, so pure and vast.
How can her heart hope to attain
Love? She's a thimble by contrast!

In silence, the pure heart is stilled;
Debris settle -- the depths are clean.
From well-turned-wellspring, she is filled;
As Love outpours in prayer serene.

Silence opens the wellspring's gate:
That life-giving Love may outflow;
That her heart's longings He may sate;
That His serenity she'll know.

Silence, for Love, is a gateway;
A source of life for all who pray.

May the Spirit aid us in silencing our hearts so that His love may fill our hearts to overflowing.

The Fruits Of Silence

Silence is fertile ground for the renewal of the heart and the growth of the virtues.

“Tremble and do not sin; upon your beds ponder in silence.”
(Psalm 4.5)

Understanding

Silence can still the restless heart,
Like flesh is slowed with breath held deep.
In silence, fear and angst depart;
Hearts need silence like flesh craves sleep.

The stillness of silence is born,
Of peace and love which lift and flow:
Absorbing all that's dead and torn;
Releasing all Life can bestow.

In silence, she's keenly aware,
Of self and its futility:
Weak and sin-prone beyond compare --
Self-distrust builds humility.

Pure silence yields understanding,
And compassion, with charity,
That's untouched by judgement's branding,
And affection's disparity.

From silence flows pure charity,
Self-distrust, and humility.

May the fruit of pure charity be born in our lives out of the clear understanding which silence brings.

Prepared With Silence

In silence, the heart finds the means to be still and to wait for the coming of the Lord.

“Be still before the Lord; wait for God.” (Psalm 37.7)

Recollected

Silence prepares the heart to pray:
Naked and empty of all things;
Withdrawn within from disarray,
And the disturbances it brings.

Recollected, silent, and still,
Her soul awaits the Master's touch:
Her emptiness His love will fill;
Her naked heart clothed with His clutch.

Her heart listens, watching, in wait;
The time He's coming is unknown.
Should He arrive sudden and late,
Her soul stands ready near His throne.

The Master wants a waiting heart:
Which listens for His quiet knock;
Withdrawn and still, not pulled apart;
Attentive, without bar or lock.

In silence, her heart is readied
To pray -- attentive and steadied.

May the Lord silence our hearts and grant us the strength and patience to wait with loving attentiveness for Him.

The Prayer of Silence

To pray in silence is to cherish the presence of the One who is Love Himself.

“Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the Lord! for He stirs forth from his holy dwelling.” (Zechariah 2.17)

Gazing

Her soul maintains a loving gaze,
Upon her King enthroned inside.
Her silence is a gift of praise,
To Him with whom pure hearts abide.

Attending to Love's silent flow,
Opened and still, her soul awaits
To receive Him -- He will bestow
Himself -- her deep yearning He sates.

His presence enthrals her whole heart --
Its lesser loves are set aside.
Singular love He will impart;
In silence, Heart with heart abide.

Love is the heart of silence held;
In silence, prayer and presence meld.

May Love Himself flow through us to fill us with His presence
as we gaze on Him in loving silence.

References

Scripture quotations are adapted from several Catholic editions

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