

Silence Reading

At first silence might only frighten us. In silence we start hearing the voices of darkness: our jealousy and anger, our resentment and desire for revenge, our lust and greed, and our pain over losses, abuses, and rejections. These voices are often noisy and boisterous. They may even deafen us. Our most spontaneous reaction is to run away from them and return to our entertainment.

But if we have the discipline to stay put and not let these dark voices intimidate us, they will gradually lose their strength and recede into the background, creating space for the softer, gentler voices of the light.

These voices speak of peace, kindness, gentleness, goodness, joy, hope, forgiveness, and most of all, love. They might at first seem small and insignificant, and we may have a hard time trusting them. However, they are very persistent and they will grow stronger if we keep listening. They come from a very deep place and from very far. They have been speaking to us since before we were born, and they reveal to us that there is no darkness in the One who sent us into the world, only light.

Although the discipline of solitude asks us to set aside time and space, what finally matters is that our hearts become like quiet cells where God can dwell, whenever we go and whatever we do. The more we train ourselves to spend time with God and God alone, the more we will discover that God is with us at all times and in all places. Then we will be able to recognize God even in the midst of a busy and active life. Once the solitude of time and space has become a solitude of the heart, we will never have to leave that solitude. We will be able to live the spiritual life in any place and any time. Thus the discipline of solitude enables us to live active lives in the world, while remaining always in the presence of the living God.

Henri Nouwen
Can You Drink the Cup?
Making All Things New

We all know that we can often come to know another person most profoundly in silence. To be silent with another person is a deep expression of trust and confidence and it is only when we are unconfident that we feel compelled to talk. To be silent with another person is truly to *be* with that other person. Nothing is so powerful in building mutual confidence between people than a silence which is easeful and creative. Nothing reveals inauthenticity more dramatically than silence that is not creative but fearful.

I think what all of us have to learn is that we do not have to create silence. The silence is there within us. What we have to do is to enter into it, to become silent, to become the silence. The purpose of meditation and the challenge of meditation is to allow ourselves to become silent enough to allow this interior silence to emerge. Silence is the language of the Spirit.

These words of St. Paul writing to the Ephesians are charged with the power of silence:

“With this in mind, then, I kneel in prayer to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, that out of the treasures of his glory he may grant you strength and power through his Spirit in your inner being, that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love.” Ephesians 3:14-16

The words we use in trying to communicate the Christian message in the Christian experience have to be charged with strength and power, but they can only be charged with strength and power if they spring from the silence of the Spirit in our inner being... Leaving behind all other words, ideas, imaginations and fantasies is learning to enter into the presence of the Spirit who dwells in your inner heart, who dwells there in love. The Spirit of God dwells in our hearts in silence, and it is in humility and in faith that we must enter into that silent presence. St. Paul ends that passage in Ephesians with the words, “So may you attain to fullness of being, the fullness of God Himself.” That is our destiny.

John Main (1926-1982)
Moments of Christ: The Path of Meditation