



One aspect that we must foster in our communities with greater commitment is *the experience of silence*. We need silence “if we are to accept in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely to the Word of God and the public voice of the Church” (*Institutio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum*). In a society that lives at an increasingly frenetic pace, often deafened by noise and confused by the ephemeral, it is vital to rediscover the value of silence.

Pope John Paul II

Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty. Here we see how the liturgy, though it must always be properly inculturated, must also be counter-cultural.

Pope John Paul II

Behold the Lord passeth, and a great and strong wind before the Lord over throwing the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord is not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake: the Lord is not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire: the Lord is not in the fire, and after the fire a whistling of a gentle air. And when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle, and coming forth stood in the entering in of the cave, and behold a voice unto him, saying: What dost thou here, Elias?

1 Kings 19:11-13



The great prophet Elijah, on Mount Horeb—that is, Sinai—witnessed a great and strong wind, then an earthquake, and finally flashes of fire, but in none of these did he recognize the voice of God; instead, he recognized it in a still small breeze (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-13). ...God speaks in the silence, but we need to know how to listen for Him. That is why monasteries are oases where God speaks to man; and in them there is the cloister, which is a symbolic place, for it is a space that is enclosed yet opened to heaven.

Pope Benedict XVI

While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thine almighty Word, O Lord, leapt down from heaven from Thy royal throne.

Introit, Sunday within the Octave of Christmas
(*Missale Romanum* 1962)

Before God’s majesty, we lose our words. Who would dare to speak up before the Almighty? Saint John Paul II saw in silence the essence of any attitude of prayer, because this silence, laden with the adored presence, manifests “the humble acceptance of the creature’s limits vis-à-vis the infinite transcendence of a God who unceasingly reveals Himself as a God of love.” To refuse this silence filled with confident awe and adoration is to refuse God the freedom to capture us by His love and His presence. Often we leave our noisy, superficial liturgies without having encountered in them God and the interior peace that He wants to offer us.

I am not afraid to state that to be a child of God is to be a child of silence. Conquering silence is a battle and a form of asceticism. Yes, it takes courage to free oneself from everything that weighs down our life, because we love nothing so much as appearances, ease and the husk of things. Carried away toward the exterior by his need to say everything, the garrulous man cannot help being far from God, incapable of any profound spiritual activity. In contrast, the silent man is a free man. The world’s chains have no hold on him. ...

God is silence, and the devil is noisy. From the beginning, Satan has sought to mask his lies beneath a deceptive, resonant agitation. The Christian owes it to himself not to be of the world. It is up to him to turn away from the noises of the world, from its rumors that run headlong in order to turn better toward what is essential: God.

Our busy, ultra-technological age has made us even sicker. Noise has become like a drug on which our contemporaries are dependent. With its festive appearance, noise is a whirlwind that avoids looking oneself in the face and confronting the interior emptiness. It is a diabolical lie. The awakening can only be brutal.

I am not afraid to call on all people of good will to enlist in a form of resistance. What will become of our world if it cannot find oases of silence?

✠ *Robert Cardinal Sarah*

For God is silence, and in silence is He sung by means of that psalmody which is worthy of Him. I am not speaking of the silence of the tongue, for if someone merely keeps his tongue silent, without knowing how to sing in mind and spirit, then he is simply unoccupied and becomes filled with evil thoughts ... There is a silence of the tongue, there is a silence of the whole body, there is a silence of the soul, there is the silence of the mind, and there is the silence of the spirit.

St. John the Solitary

What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God with our appetite and with our tongue, for the language he best hears is silent love.

St. John of the Cross

Blessed the soul that attends faithfully to her God by this secret and admirable way of silence. Never depart from it lest you become unfaithful. If, in this silence, one should say to you, "What are you doing?" You yourself do not know what you are doing: your support is naked faith. Be content that God knows it and that He knows it through and through.

Mother Mectilde de Bar (1678)



God does not give Himself to a chattering soul which, like a drone in a beehive, buzzes around but gathers no honey. A talkative soul is empty inside. It lacks both the essential virtues and intimacy with God. A deeper interior life, one of gentle peace and of that silence

where the Lord dwells, is quite out of the question. A soul that has never tasted the sweetness of inner silence is a restless spirit which disturbs the silence of others. I have seen many souls in the depths of hell for not having kept their silence; they told me so themselves when I asked them what was the cause of their undoing.

St. Faustina Kowalska



In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of

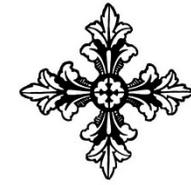
prayer are souls of great silence.

There is a very holy priest, who is also one of the best theologians in India right now. I know him very well, and I said to him, "Father, you talk all day about God. How close you must be to God!" And do you know what he said to me? He said, "I may be talking much *about* God, but I may be talking very little *to* God." And then he explained, "I may be rattling off so many words and may be saying many good things, but deep down I do not have the time to listen. Because in the silence of the heart, God speaks."

St. Teresa of Calcutta

We respond, by singing and praying, to the God who addresses us, but the greater mystery, surpassing all words, summons us to silence.

Joseph Ratzinger



POPES, CARDINALS, AND SAINTS SPEAK

about

Silence



Frequently only silence
can express my prayer

—*St. Therese of Lisieux*