

SILENCE IS A SACRAMENTAL

A personal reflection

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We are a society of people on the go. We pride ourselves on our productivity and our energetic undertakings, our dynamism. We cannot tolerate a moment of loss, lest we be guilty of idleness. Accomplishment upon accomplishment; “what are you doing for me today” physically or mentally; never mind yesterday. We strive to learn about the future, rarely concerning ourselves with the past; not to relive it, but to cherish its memories; to appreciate its influence, to learn from the experiences. We begin to resent that which does not seem to keep pace, that which does not progress as we do. We grow intolerant or at least impatient. We rush forth blindly many times toward progress only for the sake of progress. Surprisingly, there always seems to be time to repair that which we did badly but rarely enough time to plan completely, lest we fall behind.

Have you ever felt the tension in a relationship when there is a pause, a period of silence? If you agree with the speaker, you excuse his silence by saying he is reflective; if you disagree, then he is indecisive. How we manage to twist the circumstance, but either way we are uncomfortable with the silence and the delay. An uncomfortableness that does not accept the opportunity to reflect on what was said or to seek out the ramifications. We are so caught up in the recklessness of speed that we forsake the prudence of moderation and the serenity of slowing down.

So be the world, so be it. But what about God, do we bring this worldly impatience to the things that are most important for our spirituality? The need to pause, the need to reflect, the need for silence, to pull ourselves together, to listen with our hearts not our ears.. You can't hear God if there is too much noise and distraction. If we are impatient, then silence tends to scream at us; if we are reflective then silence is all too short, very sweet and satisfying.

Since Vatican II we have become a Church of activity, busy with changes. The Mass is a Mass of involvement, of happiness, singing, greeting, participating in vocal prayers; an outwardness which shares our love for God with our neighbor. However, caught up in the activity have we forgotten a very important part of the worship of God; ourselves? Have we become impatient to get on with it, to get it over? Have we become schedulized Catholics who can not appreciate the beauty of silence, only the dynamics of activity? Have we lost our ability to be reflective? At Mass, do we become

anxious when there is a pause between the proclamations of the word of God; only 10 or 15 seconds each, not really long enough to digest the contents of what we heard, if indeed we listened. Do we become impatient with a few minutes of silence during communion time or a minute of silence after Communion when our hearts should say thank you God for being you; thank you for your goodness to me in so many ways; thank you for forgiving my sins; thank you for helping me carry my cross; thank you for watching over my family. Seeking out the positives in our lives which we take for granted and then giving thanks for them. At no time in our lives are we as close to God, or on as intimate terms, than this wonderful moment. A communion of ourselves with God; a touching of the essence of life which can only be achieved in the silence of our hearts. The power of holding, capturing our creator within us to say "I love you" or to say I'm bored with you because I haven't the time to listen to you."

All too often many have lost this beautiful moment because of the inpatients of others. Please do not take these moments from us or from your neighbor by unnecessary distractions and unbridled desire to be the first one out to avoid the crowded parking lot. I point out not to admonish, only to ask for consideration and understanding, and as an invitation to take full advantage of these moments of silence with us. When we use silence and reflection they become a tool, a sacramental for us which outwardly shows our love and respect for God.

At the dismissal of the Mass we are all exhorted to go forth to love and serve the Lord. How can we love and serve when we didn't come to know Him in silent reflection? Silence is beautiful, meaningful, helpful, rewarding and most of all an intimate experience when seeking God. Impatiens and distractions serve only worldliness; silence and reflection serves God. Shhhhhh! God's talking to us. Are we listening?