

SILENCE

Eugene Hemrick offers a question regarding the quality of our lives. He asks, "Is our age's emphasis on perpetual motion, commotion and the need for sound no matter its intensity or quality eroding our quality of life?" In many ways the answer to this is "Yes." Just think of what a few-hour power outage does to us. We have grown accustomed to the radio or television as a companion, we spend hours on the computer, much of our recreation is noisy with our snowmobiles, jet skis and motorcycles. Our desire for noise gives us an allowable excuse for not spending time in silence or contemplation. We keep ourselves busy so that we cannot find time for prayer or a day's retreat. Yet, the good news is that we are desperately looking for ways to regain some silence in our lives. Meditation and quiet rooms have become popular. Retreat centers are seeing an increase in attendance. Books on prayer, contemplation and spirituality are once again sought after.

"If we were deprived of all the stimuli we have become accustomed to for just one day, we would see a good number of people beginning to reflect neurotic behaviors." Erich Fromm

Sr. Joan Chittister writes, "Scripture is very clear: God is not in the noise around us. God is in the whisper of the breeze. It takes concentration to hear God, in other words. The things we mistake for God, noisy, consuming, and encompassing as they may seem at first, will in the end have nothing new to say to us about ourselves, about life, about meaning. Only in silence does God say those things." Indeed one of the strongest reasons for seeking silence is to come to a better understanding of who we are.

"Do not the most moving moments of our lives find us without words?" Marcel Marceau

"You can live a lifetime and at the end of it, know more about others than you know about yourself." Beryl Markham

For the next month we invite you to focus on silence, to pray for the virtue for yourself, to thank God for the gift where it already appears, and to think of those persons you know who are examples of this virtue. Once you have identified these people, we encourage you to call them or write a note to them, telling them that you see the virtue of silence or contemplation in their lives. A few examples might be:

- Persons who listen well to others without interrupting and who can be a silent steady presence to them.
- Those who take the time to reflect on their lives and make space for prayer and contemplation.
- Parents who let their children develop their imagination or quiet play instead of filling their schedules with endless activities.
- Someone who seems to understand themselves or hungers for self-knowledge.
- Those whose very manner speaks of a peaceful spirit.

Prayer for the virtue of silence:

Loving God, thank you for giving me the gift of your Son who has shown me the path to you. Your desire for my life is to continually draw closer to you, and so I ask for the virtue of silence. Strengthen in me the desire for silence and give me the courage to face the dangerous openness it requires of me. Create in me a willingness to learn more about myself with all of my gifts, scars and failings. May I seek You in the silence and come to a greater understanding of Your presence within me. May I allow the power of stillness and silence to renew me physically, mentally, and spiritually. Above all, may I come to see silence as a dear friend and a necessary refuge. Thus renewed, lead me to be Your peaceful presence in the world. Amen.