

Lent Group 3

Silence comes less naturally to some people, so it has to be cultivated as a discipline.

If we are not used to wordless prayer, silence can feel uncomfortable. It is sometimes in the silence where we are confronted with our own weaknesses. And yet it is through the stillness, being present with God, that we are able to draw strength from him, and increasingly silent prayer can become something we embrace rather than something we fear.

We feel guilty about apparent non-productive activity. Most of us are driven by rabid busyness and self-importance. Our inner demons are of desire to perform, to be thought well of, to be seen as competent, productive etc

In silence *"We allow the noise of our own thoughts, compulsions, strivings to settle down so we can hear a truer and more reliable voice."* – Ruth Haley Barton.

We're not having to interact with others, or manage relationships and attend to other's needs.

The invitation is to let go and allow God to be in control.

We show up and let God do the rest. We make ourselves available to God for the intimacy of relationship and work of transformation that only he can do. So, this is about opening up a space for God to do something surprising

Contemplative prayer involves learning to receive.

Prayer as receiving may seem foreign and strange. Being on the receiving end of love is sometimes hard.

We need to learn to receive God's words of love and affirmation as addressed to us. "Receive his love and love him back"

Being made in the image of God is the starting point for our own self-acceptance. We are made to reflect his likeness (his personality, his ability to think, to create, to love, to choose, to be creative).

The next step is to receive, and rejoice in, the fact that God has *"set his love on us through Christ."*

God comes to give love and affirm our worth.

Robert Warren talks about what might be considered evidence of growth in prayer,

"...the enjoyment of God, and the personal sense of being and well-being which we receive in the process of encounter with him."

So much of prayer can be asking for what is already ours. Warren suggests learning the art of affirmation as a way of praying. **About turning prayers into positive affirmations of truth.**

About giving thanks and acting on the truth of scripture.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Contemplation has been called the prayer of loving regard / the prayer of loving attention.

Silent prayer focuses on being present before God, rather than offering thoughts and requests to God.

"I meet God in silence, and God speaks to me in silence... God always speaks to me in silence, I just need to be paying attention." — Fr. James Martin, SJ

Paying loving attention to God and his world. We are not looking for any particular outcome when we pray in this way.

This is not about thinking. Using our rational mind. About a quality of attention to God.

To pay attention we need stillness and silence.

"Contemplation is about putting ourselves into the hands of God, so that he can do something with us: so that he can change and transform the way we are, the way we think, feel, behave."

(Martin Tunncliffe – Exploring Contemplative Prayer)

Christian contemplation provides an open space in which God can do his work.

About being silent and letting God do the talking he wants to do.

Wait and listen without striving

SILENCE

"If we really want to pray we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks." **(Mother Theresa – In the silence of the heart)**

It's a bit like getting a few feet under the surface of a turbulent sea. Whereas on top the wave is crashing, underneath the wave there is a gentle stillness.

The deeper into stillness we go, the less agitated our lives become. But getting accustomed to stillness takes time and discipline.

The mind is expert at wandering and trying to solve problems.

Go easy on yourself.

When you start, you'll notice distractions and resistance within you. Allow the sediment to settle.

Just as the sky cannot be reflected in troubled waters, so the presence of God cannot be felt by a restless soul.

First step - **recognise that your attention is going to be stolen.** What's important is to bring your attention back when you realise it has been stolen.

Second point - **We need to cultivate the habit of gently returning to the present moment.**

This isn't about using the reasoning part of our brain.

STILLNESS

Psalms 131:2,

"I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms."

- "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46)
- "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37)
- "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord"

Our body posture affects our ability to be still and pray. We need to first still our body. If we are in an uncomfortable, unsustainable position, our attention will be drawn away from God to ourselves.

Having a straight spine is important, because this facilitates deep breathing. It's important not to restrict the blood flow, so no crossed arms or legs.

Sitting with hands held gently on the lap with palms facing upwards is a good, relaxed open posture.

It can be helpful to relax all the muscles of the body. Try tensing and then letting go of each part of your body in turn. Start with your feet and work upwards.

Become conscious of external sounds. Listen and then let go of them. Helps us become detached from these distractions.

Becoming aware of our breathing is a way of centring ourselves and beginning to enter the heart.

CENTRING PRAYER

Centering Prayer is one method of listening to God,

Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer. Rather, it adds depth of meaning to all prayer and facilitates the movement from more active modes of prayer — verbal, mental or affective prayer

Sit in a space where there are few distractions. Lighting a candle can be a symbol of God's focussed presence.

The idea is just to be aware of God's presence and rest in that with no agenda. In opening ourselves to God we are giving God permission to act in us.

Think of a tree full of monkeys. They leap about trying to attract attention. The solution is to find a way to tie them to a pole. Then they're confined without leaping about all over the place

Give the mind something to do. Let it quietly repeat a short phrase that communicates God's love and mercy.

Use the prayer word of re-focussing attention. Could "*Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me*". "*Maranatha*" (*come Lord*), *Abba, Come Holy Spirit, Peace be still*

The word or phrase is repeated in rhythm with our breathing when we find our attention wandering. We use it to quieten our mind. Attention is focussed on one fixed place.

If a distracting thought persists, it may be something that needs your attention, God may be speaking to us through it. Make a note of it by writing it down. "Lord, what are you teaching me?"

If you find yourself getting caught up in an inner commentary about the thought, notice it, let it be and return to the prayer word.

Over time, we learn to meet thoughts with stillness rather than with commentary. As we refocus, distractions subside, and we're left resting fully in God's presence.

Thomas Keating's – Welcoming Prayer

THE WELCOMING PRAYER is the prayer practice of attending, letting go, and surrendering to God in the present moment of daily life.

Keating suggested that many of us act as though God is absent and we must do everything. We need to learn to surrender and let go.

As we relax into silence in God's presence, Keating says, "*Gently become aware of your body and your interior state*"... "*feel it! Don't think about it – feel it in your body.*"

Notice your deep desires and emotions when they grab hold of you. He says that our emotional reactions are often connected to the frustration or gratification of our needs for security, affection and control.

- We all have the desire for power and control
- The desire for safety and security,
- The desire for esteem and affection

When you become aware of them raising their head, don't try and suppress or short-circuit them.

Focus on them. Allow them to sink in. Simply allow yourself to experience the sensation. Use you word – 'Welcome.'

When you've experienced it, say something like 'I let go of my anger,, or 'I give my anger to God.'

Then....'**I let go of my desire for safety and power and control.'**

'I let go of my desire for security.'

'I let go of my desire for esteem and affection'

Keating – "***Letting go means passing through the experience, not around it, not running away from it, or stuffing it back into the unconscious.***"

It's a way of surrendering ourselves entirely into God's hands. **We let go of the desire to control or change the situation / circumstances which we face.**