

## Things to Consider

- ▶ In order to create silence and solitude in our life, the way to begin is just to begin! Simple, and yet it can be so hard if we have tried to avoid it. Sometimes, in the beginning we can feel afraid as we sense a great chasm of emptiness that seems to open before us. We need to face it. It may be that we will need to talk with someone who can offer assistance and support. We also need to note that solitude and silence should not be equated with loneliness.
- ▶ Begin in small ways. Start the day with a cup of tea or coffee and just sit silently and alone with God, offering the day to Him, asking what He wants to say to you. Take time. Eventually, with practice, the answers will come, forming themselves wordlessly in your heart. Learn to listen to and discern that inner voice, that whispering within.
- ▶ Seek other moments of quiet and solitude through the day: as you wash dishes, go for a walk, or sit at your desk. Use those brief moments between chores, to silently offer the moment to God, before you commence the next task.
- ▶ We need to undergird these shorter moments of silence and solitude with longer ones: meditating and engaging in *Lectio Divina*. This brochure is not to develop the theme of meditation, save to say that there are numerous methods which can help us to engage more deeply with silence and solitude in an extended way. To oversimplify, we could say that in prayer we talk to God and in meditating we listen to God.
- ▶ *Lectio Divina* is a way of reading the Scriptures which can enable us to ponder what God might be saying to us. We need to take care that we don't turn this exercise into a Bible study, but there is not the space to develop this subject here. (The next brochure will explore this.)
- ▶ There is the famous story of the Cure D'Ars, John Baptiste Vianney, who once asked a peasant, who often sat in the church building, seemingly doing nothing, what it was that he did do during those times. He replied, 'I look at God and He looks at me and we're both happy.'
- ▶ As we persevere with silence and solitude, one day we will become aware that we have been very still and silent, calm and at peace; we will feel balanced and centred and sometimes this stillness and silence will seem to grow and envelop us.
- ▶ But remember: we never 'arrive', for there are always new depths to be plumbed. God always has much more to say to us. But we will have known the joy of experiencing God in new and deeper ways and we will be aware that He is ever so slowly drawing us to Himself, transforming us in His Love.

AtG/B4/MBH

# Attending to God

'Silence & Solitude ...

A place apart ...'



**My wife and I were on holidays** and one afternoon went for a drive on an unsealed road along the ridge of high hills which fell away steeply on either side. In past years we had done this several times, but for some reason, never from our current direction. We were amazed by what we saw! The green hills receding into the distance, the coast and the sea beyond. It was stunningly beautiful and a number of times we simply stopped and gazed in wonder.

**Sometimes we need to do something** different in order to notice what has been there all the time, but which for some reason we miss.

**If we want to notice God's presence** around us (and what God might want to say to us) then one of the things we will need to do is to cultivate space in our life and times of silence. If you like, solitude and silence provide an opportunity to look at life from a different angle and to listen in a new way.

**Today, it is not easy.** Ours is a busy, noisy world that prides itself on productivity, achievement and efficiency. It doesn't encourage stillness, it doesn't encourage time spent just 'being'. And yet these two, solitude and silence, are vital for our well-being and particularly as we seek to notice God and His presence around us. If we are seeking depth to our relationship with God there is no other way. Solitude and silence can be scary for some, but we are not alone for we are there with God in that silence, and through prayer we are part of a community; we are with each other.

**How can we avoid silence?** Think about it. We can get up in the morning and shower to the sounds of the radio, perhaps even with the TV news switched on in the background as we eat breakfast. The journey to work can be accompanied by music on the radio or from an MP3 player. Perhaps there is even 'wallpaper music' in the background as we work. As we journey home and during the evening, the process is simply reversed and the last sounds we hear before drifting into sleep is that of the bedside radio. In the end we can become like someone living next to a freeway or on an airport flight path – who simply ceases to hear the noise. They fail to notice. Constant noise can be bad for our health, causing stress, heart and hearing problems.

**Think too of the ways in which** we can avoid any real solitude. Many people fear being alone and feel a sense of anxiety when they find themselves in that situation. And yet it's as if a voice from deep within clamours to be heard like a spring of water forcefully bubbling to the surface. It whispers what we need to hear, but would prefer to avoid. We want to 'run away' and escape into noise and activity. And the world of entertainment, which seems to become more and more frenetic, obliges.

**I want to suggest** that we look at our life from a different angle and to do this we will need to create spaces of solitude and silence for ourselves. I am not suggesting this as an end in itself, or as a form of escapism, but as a means of enabling us to begin noticing God's presence and what He may wish to say to us. The psalmist wrote, 'Be still and know that I am God.' (46.10)

**With time, practice and patience,** doing this can begin to open a new world that we had not noticed before; a world where God is both noticed and listened to for what He might wish to say to us. It's as if we discover there is colour TV when we thought there was only black and white – it's as if we discover the world is three-dimensional when we thought it was only one.

**Let me use a different analogy.** If you want to go into the bush to see the birds and the wildlife and if you enter with a great deal of noise and commotion, then you are unlikely to notice anything. On the other hand, if you quietly slip in and stay still and silent, observing what is before your eyes, just watching and waiting, that world may open up to you in unexpected ways.

**It is the same with us and God.** A transformation will begin to occur. We will come to see solitude not so much as a physical place, but a solitude and silence of the heart. We will begin to feel comfortable in God's presence, glad to be there, and a deep peace and sense of balance will begin to emerge in our life. A further analogy takes in the radio – we will have tuned to a different frequency.

**St Isaac of Nineveh** (died 680) wrote these words on solitude, and I think they apply equally to the place of silence: 'Solitude is an ocean with wonderful pearls hidden in its depths.' It truly is.