

Along the track

Silence

The first time I experienced double-glazing, it wasn't only the warmth that was impressive, it was the silence. You could watch the noisy world outside and hear virtually nothing.

Silence is a simple, yet complex and powerful thing. We can be silent, remain silent, we can enjoy it, be afraid of it, avoid it, use it. Silence can change us, or make us intransigent, it can make us go deeper, it can help us to grow spiritually and despite its capacity to isolate, silence can bring us closer to others. There are times when we welcome it, times when we avoid it, times when we crave it, we embrace it with relief and we realise that life is incomplete without it. There are, however, times when we remain silent for good reason but times when we should not.

Our world doesn't value silence much – we like to keep busy, occupied, we like to be 'wired for sound' at most times, continually 'in touch' and alert to the latest social media message. We can actively avoid times of silence and not realise its true potential. Being silent is not simply an event but rather a process, a learned habit that can transform us. It is an essential ingredient in developing wisdom, in fostering a deeper awareness of ourselves and of others. Silence invites us to total honesty, to realise who we really are. It's real gift is that it challenges us to be authentic, to be true to ourselves, it invites us to a much richer awareness of what we're thinking, what we are feeling and why. In silence, we find it difficult to hide! In the words of Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister:

We learn there what we fear and what we are resisting. We hear there the voices we so commonly block out with noise that seduces us to give in to ourselves. It's in silence that we hear the sounds of our better angels calling us to rise above our lesser selves.

Silence can bring inner peace. Jesus used it often. He went off by himself to be in the presence of his Father and to be alone with himself, to take time from the constant pressures that were mounting around him. It helped him find inner strength and renewed purpose. It was a very generous gift Jesus gave to us, one He learned from His own experience:

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled; do not be afraid. John 14:27

Finding some time for quiet, for silence in our own lives can be enriching, particularly at such a busy time as we prepare for Christmas. Such times can bring us closer to God – they allow us to hear 'the word' God may be trying to speak to us in myriads of ways. A few minutes of silence regularly can alert us to the signs of God's presence and activity in our lives, and to the peace that Jesus invited us to share. Such peace can come when we have time in silence to discover the wisdom from outside ourselves that we so often miss, the daily encounters and events we so often take for granted. A few moments of regular silent reflection can help us explore what troubles our hearts, what makes us afraid or fearful. Inner peace slowly and quietly emerges when we stop, when we are silent, which allows us to listen to the noises within us that need quieting, the pressures that need calming.

Silence is not escapism. Double glazing may allow the chance to watch the noisy world outside and hear virtually nothing but life involves more than just watching, more than being only a spectator. It can be tempting to use silence to avoid the world, its problems, and our responsibility to them, to simply focus on ourselves and our own quest for holiness. In reality silence ought to make us more aware, more sensitive to the gifts of those around us, more sensitive to their real needs. Silence is not for its own sake.

Pope John Paul II told the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: *The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God's Spirit.* Such a quietness of soul can help us, through the power of this Spirit, to see the world around us as a graceful and peaceful place, an especially precious gift as we prepare for Christmas, the season of God-with-us.

Regards
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