

Keeping Silence

Contemporary research tells us that silence helps to restore well-being and keep our mental health sound. What is more, silence is a key to our own inner world where we meet God face to face. It is not selfish, therefore, to regularly seek a quiet sanctuary in the midst of the noises of our daily living. Time before the Blessed Sacrament offers a precious opportunity to spend a few moments in a quiet environment and allow the noises fade into the background so that we can focus on what is in front of us: the silent sacrament of God's love.

Keeping silence is not just about the absence of irritating or disturbing external noises. Although it helps to seek a quiet spot, it often becomes all the more obvious in the external silence how much is happening on the inside. It is not unusual to become aware of our constant internal chatter, or images, hopes and memories that whiz past the stilled awareness like racing boats. Although seemingly disturbing, it is important to let them pass without clutching onto them, observing them without judgement and without any intent to change or influence them. It may help to keep our eyes fixed on the other shore, as it were, noticing the stillness and silent presence of God.

When the mental disturbances fade into the background, a deeper silence becomes prominent. It is this silence we can enter and savour, noticing its quality because through it God speaks. And it is this silence which remains with us when we leave our quiet spot and immerse ourselves back in the noisy world.

Jesus and Silence

According to tradition, Jesus was born in the silence of a night. It happened some four hundred years after the last word of God had been recorded in the Hebrew Scripture. These four hundred years of silence seemed to have been a fitting preparation for the Word of God to become a human being.

Jesus also went to his death silently, likened to a lamb brought to a slaughter. It was not only a sign of Jesus' fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, but also a space to acknowledge the silent activity of God in the midst of human violence and noise. As many saints have noted, God specialises in being most eloquent in silence, and transforming the world by it.

Meister Eckhart

Nothing is so like God as silence.

Thomas Keating

Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God.

St. John of the Cross

The Father spoke one word from all eternity and he spoke it in silence, and it is in silence that we hear it.

Thomas Merton

It is in deep solitude and silence that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brother and sister.

Acknowledgements

Time before the Blessed Sacrament is a series of leaflets produced by the Spirituality Committee in preparation for *Adoremus*. It is intended for individual reflection as part of a time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or Exposition. It could also be used with small groups.

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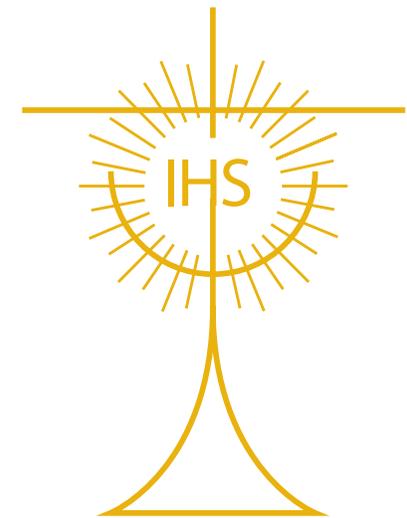
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Time before the Blessed Sacrament

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The Lord will fight for you, and you only have to be silent.



ADOREMUS
NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC
CONGRESS & PILGRIMAGE
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Looking at Scripture

O Lord, my heart is not proud
nor haughty my eyes.
I have not gone after things too great
nor marvels beyond me.

Truly I have set my soul
in silence and peace.
A weaned child on its mother's breast,
even so is my soul.

O Israel, hope in the Lord
both now and for ever.

Psalm 130 (131)



Reflection

Where do I find external silence?

How can I learn to be internally quiet? Do I want to?

What do I normally experience when I am in silence?

(Fear, comfort, refreshment, loss, demands, novelty, invitation...?)

What's the silence like now?

(Inviting, affirming, boring, refreshing, deep, shallow...?)

Where, in this silence, can I perceive God??

Prayer

Read through the psalm and stay with the image of a quieted child. Relax into it. Savour the silence which is pregnant with the meaning God gives it right here and right now. Breath it in. Stay with it as long as you can or wish to.

At the end, you may want to keep still and only make a sign of the cross or bow to God to acknowledge the end of your prayer. If you wish to formulate a prayer in words, do it from your heart, from what has emerged in the silence. It does not need to be long, but it needs to make sense to you. It can be a word or a line from the Psalm, perhaps a word of thanks, or whatever else emerged in the stillness and quietude. A single word can be enough because you have just shared the silence with God.