



ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND SILENT PRAYER

Many people do not know of the riches that are to be found in periods of silent adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. The small, white consecrated Host placed in the monstrance contains the fullness of Him who fills all in all (*Eph.1:23*) and saints down the ages have adored Him who is present to us. "What wonderful majesty!" declared St Francis of Assisi, "What stupendous condescension! O sublime humility! That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God, should humble Himself like this under the form of a little bread, for our salvation ... In this world I cannot see the Most High Son of God with my own eyes, except for His Most Holy Body and Blood." (*Letter to a General Chapter*)

ADORATION OF JESUS

When we place ourselves in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament we place ourselves before the gaze of Christ who loves us and wants us to know that love. As St John says, *'This is what love really is: not that we have loved God but that he loved us. We love because he loved us first.'* (1 John 4:10f) When we celebrate the Eucharist we are taking the first step to being caught up in the divine life. As with the Prodigal Son, as soon as God sees us coming home and, a long way before we even get home, God comes rushing up to welcome and embrace us and we need to let our heart welcome His extravagant, self-risking love that flows from heaven.

In the silence of the Eucharist we taste and enter the silence of the Father from whom the Word eternally springs. In Andre Rublev's icon of the Trinity the three Persons are gathered around the Eucharist and we, who gaze upon it, are the fourth. We are enfolded into the silent, loving gaze of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit upon each other uniting each to the other and to the one who is before them.

St Jean Marie Vianney, the Cure of Ars in France, tells of asking an old farmer why he came into the church every day to sit before the tabernacle: "I look at Him" he replied "and He looks at me and we tell each other that we love each other." This is the prayer of loving regard which seeks to fulfill Jesus' command to love God with all our heart and mind and strength. And, in order to realise this command, we need to be still, silent and attentive on God.

SILENCE BEFORE GOD

Silence is a rare gift in today's world. Those who live alone can experience enforced silence and crave for communication with another human being. T. S. Eliot recognized the emptiness that we can know when silence suddenly descends:

*As, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too
long between stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness
deepen.*

But there is another type of silence, a silence we can long for, when all those competing voices cease, the silence that comes at the end of a war or when two lovers let go of each other's bodies and rest. Silence can provide the space in which we realise what is present, the silence that is sought by those who desire to prevent themselves being distracted from attending to the great silence in which *God* is present. As St Teresa of Calcutta wrote:

'We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness.

God is the friend of silence. See how nature -- trees, flowers, grass -- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. We need silence to be able to touch souls.' ('Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta)

This is a reminder of the way Elijah encountered God in silence after he had fled to the cave on Mt. Horeb to escape his persecutors:



'God said to Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.' (1 Kings 19:11-12)

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

St Benedict, who also sought out desert places, used two words for silence: *quies* and *silentium*. *Quies* is quiet, physical silence, an absence of noise – not banging doors, not coughing or unwrapping sweet papers. It is a physical self-restraint that respects the presence of other people. *Silentium*, however, is not an absence of noise but an attitude of consciousness turned towards others or to God. It is attention, and what greater attention can we pay to God than that which we give in the presence of the Eucharistic Presence. As Mary Oliver wrote:

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed. (*The Summer Day*)

To listen deeply, to give oneself in the act of attention is in fact not to judge, or fix or condemn but to love. There is indeed nothing so much like God as silence because God is love. Meister Eckhart, the 13thc. German mystic, knew how God is clothed in silence:

'It is the nature of a word to reveal what is hidden. The word that is hidden still sparkles in the darkness and whispers in the silence. It entices us to pursue and to yearn and sigh after it. For it wishes to reveal to us something about God.'

This silence is not the absence of noise but the abode of God.

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation my fortress; I shall never be shaken *Psalm 62 : 1 – 2*

Religious, especially contemplatives, have always recognised the importance giving themselves to long periods of silence, a silence that is lovingly welcomed and which interweaves the rhythm of their days, weeks and months. These act as reminders of the importance of giving loving attention to God and remind us of Jesus' words to Martha when she complained about the way her sister was simply sitting at his feet: *"you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."* (Luke 10:41f)

Eckhart doesn't say God *likes* silence or likes silent worshippers but that *God is like silence*. St Teresa of Avila said that 'silence is God speaking to us. It is like God as nothing else is. When we pay attention to God we come to know that God is paying attention to us. Indeed it is God's attention to us that allows us to pay attention to God.

Prayer is like watching for the
Kingfisher. All you can do is
Be there where he is like to appear, and
Wait.
Often nothing much happens;
There is space, silence and
Expectancy.
No visible signs, only the
Knowledge that he's been there
And may come again.

Seeing or not seeing cease to matter,
You have been prepared
But when you've almost stopped
Expecting it, a flash of brightness
Gives encouragement. (*Ann Lewin*)

'The tree of silence bears the fruit of peace.'

Arabian proverb

'The heavenly Father has spoken one Word: It was His Son. And He speaks it eternally in an eternal silence. And it is in silence that it can be heard by the soul.'

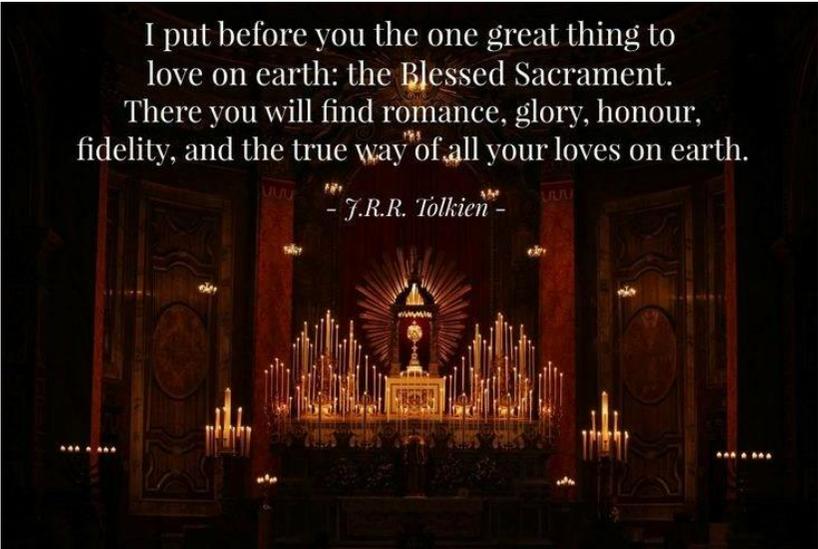
St John of the Cross, Watchword 217

'Preserve spiritual peace by lovingly gazing upon God. If you must speak, do so with the same calm and peace.'

St John of the Cross, Watchword 198

'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)



I put before you the one great thing to
love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament.
There you will find romance, glory, honour,
fidelity, and the true way of all your loves on earth.

- J.R.R. Tolkien -