

Silence (Continued)

Humility can be related to so many aspects of the Rule such as the conversion of morals, obedience, hospitality, and community. It is a virtue that can lead one to a deep peace. While silence is not literally a virtue, it is a gift and value of Benedictine spirituality for our personal growth and for the calming counteraction it provides in our daily frenetic environment.

Benedict's chapter on restraint of speech (RB 6) is a reminder that not only should evil speech be curbed but also *good words*, at times. If we are to be truly good listeners; if we are to hear that Word among us; that ever present God inside us, we must have silence. As we live our lives in this culture we are constantly bombarded with noise. Television and radios blare nonstop, cars whiz by, halls and elevators abound with music; iPods, earphones, smart phones, ... give us music and news and talk shows; telephones put us on hold and spew intermittent messages to assure us how important our call is; pagers, ATVs, motorboats, Jet Skis, machines of all types announce their presence. Our ears and minds are assaulted all through the days and sometimes through the nights until noise becomes the norm even for children; until we become numb with the vibrations. While real silence is not easy to come by, could it be that many do not seek it because in silence we come face-to-face with who we really are, with "what life is about," with the fact of discomfort in our own skin and in our circumstances, relationships, spiritual life?

Benedict knew that we had to make time for silence in our lives so that we could hear and respond to God's voice within us and even to listen to God speaking through others and in the Word. Remember Elijah (1Kngs 19:9-13): God was not in the whirlwind but in a sound like a whisper. God is also in our ordinary situations, in visitors, strangers. Silence helps us remember and maybe carry out in our daily lives the truth that God is present everywhere and in everything. "By practicing silence, we allow ourselves to be taught by God's presence."

How can oblates begin to apply Benedict's recommendations for silence in their busy lives? *Norene Vest in No Moment Too Small*, suggests taking an occasional coffee break alone; moving to the foyer or garden and sitting quietly for several minutes; driving home on a less crowded, less noisy route; walking alone in a park; spending a few days at a retreat center. Each person can identify areas in his or her life that would offer an opportunity to develop silence, which in turn could improve the ability to really listen. When we have successfully found a place, space for exterior silence, we can more easily start to focus on the interior self. To achieve interior silence we will face ourselves, and through all the distractions offered by heart and mind, we will continue to be attentive to the God who is with us and in us. With *lectio*, prayer and an interior silence that allows increasing awareness of the presence of God in other people and in our daily activities, we can help minister to an increasingly noisy and frantic society.

Cyprian Smith, OSB in *The Path of Life*, suggests that the aching emptiness in peoples' hearts in this age of great achievements and technological advancements is manifested in the fear of

silence. The need of God, for God, is real but rarely recognized as such by our preoccupied world. If we want to grow spiritually, all of us need to cultivate exterior and interior silence.

Reflection:

1. Stop a moment to reflect if silence has played any role in your day. Did you seek asylum from the noise or was that silence an accidental gift? How long did the silence last and were you comfortable in it and grateful for it? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. How can you achieve a measure of silence in your busy day? Is there a room to which you can go to shut out all the noise? Could you stop by a church and sit quietly in God's presence for a time? How about visiting a library and finding a quiet nook? Try now to identify where you can find some exterior silence in your life. Bask in the quiet, breathe deeply, and *just be*.
3. Can you list any ways in which silence would allow you to develop your spiritual life?

(Reaching for God: The Benedictine Oblate Way of Life, by Roberta Werner, OSB)