

Silence (Adapted from Anthony De Mello)

- Anyone who wants to find God must pass through silence.
- Can it be that God is staring us in the face but because we cling to our ideas we do not recognise him?
- We hear the song but not the voice; we see the dance but not the dancer.

Three ways of gaining silence are:

- By understanding the limitations of our words and ideas
- By truly looking, listening and hearing without preconceived images, ideas or reactions.
- By meditatively reading scripture

Understand - Come to the realisation that words and ideas are inadequate. Meditate in this. Recall each idea you have of God and say to yourself, “*God is more unlike this than like it. God is far beyond this and far better than this.*”

Look - Look at some nature scene or object. Don't look for anything sensational. Just look as if you are seeing it for the first time. (Heart looking)

Listen - Listen to all the sounds around you. If possible, avoid putting names to sounds. Realise that each sound is really composed of many sounds. Again don't look for anything sensational. Just listen to those sounds as if you are hearing them for the first time in your life. (Heart listening)

Scripture

Recall your favourite sentence of Jesus from the New Testament. Repeat this to yourself. Imagine Jesus in front of you. He addresses these words to you. Don't dwell too much in the meaning of the words. Resist the temptation to react. Don't say anything and don't respond in any way. Let the words reverberate and resound within you. When you cannot contain it any more, respond to Jesus. (Read, recite, react)

A variation of this exercise is to get into silence first. Then recall a sentence from scripture or get someone to read it to you. Those words will be etched in your heart and will deepen your silence. They may take on a meaning that is quite beyond the power of words to express. (Scripture as sign posts)

The Review of Prayer

After the period of prayer is over, review what happened during that time - not so much what ideas I had, but more the movements of consolation, desolation, fear, anxiety, boredom, and so on - perhaps something about my distractions, especially if they were deep or disturbing.

Questions like the following may help:

- What went on during the period of prayer?
- What struck me?
- How did I feel about what went on?
- What was my mood? Were there changes in mood?
- What did God show me?
- Is there some point I should return to in my next period of prayer?

This review is an instrument to help me reflect upon the experience of the prayer period. It helps me notice my interior experiences. Thus it enables me to be spontaneous during the actual prayer time and to go with the flow of experience. If I were to monitor myself during the period of prayer, I would be interfering with God's communication. I let happen what is happening during the prayer time; afterwards I take a look to see what God is saying to me in the prayer.

It is helpful during this review to jot down a few reflections that strike me so that I can prepare more easily for the next period of prayer. God may be inviting me to go back to a point where I was moved. This may be because there is more to be discovered in that particular moment, and God is inviting me to go deeper.

Jotting down my reflections during the review is also a help for me if I am intending to discuss my prayer experience with a spiritual director. It is also helpful at the end of a prayer period to signal the difference of the review from the prayer period by some change of place or posture, e.g. blowing out the candle, getting up out of my chair and moving to the table: the activity of the review is different from the activity of the prayer period.

The Daily Examen

In the Examen, we take time in the evening to review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in our lives. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well—when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we turned from God or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments. We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments. Having reflected on the past day, we then turn to the day to come and ask God to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward God's plan or away from it. We ask for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism. We ask God for that grace, and we trust that he wants us to succeed in our day even more than we do. That's the basic idea, it's essentially a five-step routine:

Give thanksgiving.

Begin by giving God thanks for all the things you're grateful for today. Allow your mind to wander as you reflect on the ways God has blessed you on this particular day. Allow big things and small things to arise—everything from the gift of your faith, to the gift of relationships, and your pattern of activity today.

Ask for the Spirit.

Next, look at the moments in your day when you didn't act so well. However, before doing so, ask God to fill you with his Spirit so that the Spirit can lead you through this difficult soul-searching. Otherwise, you're liable to hide in denial, wallow in self-pity, or seethe in self-loathing.

Review and recognize failures.

Look back at your day and ask the Lord to point out the moments when you've failed in big ways or small. Also take a sobering look at the mistakes you've made today.

Ask for forgiveness and healing.

If you've sinned, ask God to forgive you and set you straight again. If you've not sinned but simply made a mistake, ask for the healing of any harm that

might have been done. Ask for help to get over it and move on. Also ask for wisdom to discern how you might better handle such tricky moments in future.

Pray about the next day.

Ask God to show you how tomorrow might go. Imagine the things you'll be doing, the people you'll see, and the decisions you'll be mulling over. Ask for help with any moments you foresee that might be difficult. Especially ask for help in moments when you might be tempted to fail in the way you did today.

To help you remember the five steps, you could use a 5-Rs mnemonic:

- **Relish** the moments that went well and all of the gifts I have today.
- **Request** the Spirit to lead me through my review of the day.
- **Review** the day.
- **Repent** of any mistakes or failures.
- **Resolve**, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.