

August 9 2020
19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

After my 30 day silent retreat, we are asked to have a few days of transition to adjust from silence to noise. It also became a time where, as a group, we could share how we encountered the Lord in the time of the retreat. During these days, one of the retreat facilitators gave us a talk about the importance of incorporating silence in our life. He told us a story about a Dutch seminarian who wore a big, bright yellow button. Such a button, you could imagine, would draw a ton of attention. On the button would be written: 10 Minutes. Those, who were drawn to the button would ask this Dutch fellow about why he is wearing a big, bright yellow button that had written on it, 10 Minutes. The Dutch seminarian would then be engaged in a conversation with a stranger and would challenge them to spend 10 Minutes in silence each day. They could spend those 10 minutes in silence at home, in a park or if they could, in a Church. The Dutch seminarian also handed out a business card with an email address and phone number and asked these strangers to call him or email him about their experience of spending 10 minutes of silence each day after a month. The results that this seminarian reported were pretty outstanding. The strangers informed him that at the start, it was very difficult to calm the mind of all the busy-ness of their lives, but after a week...the silence was easier to enter into...and after a month, they were wondering if they could spend half an hour in silence rather than 10 minutes because it was not enough time. In these moments of silence, these strangers recalled that they were encountering something greater than themselves...God. Our retreat facilitator was attempting to re-enforce our experience of the silent retreat...Integrate silence into our everyday lives so that we may hear the voice of the living God speak to us.

Cardinal Robert Sarah, in his book, "The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise." encourages Christians to rediscover the silence of God and within that silence how God speaks to us, often in ways that excel the use of what we know as modern visual and auditory communication. Silence, as we are to rediscover, is the first and greatest language of God. Long before God said "Let there be light", God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dwelt in deep silence and even once the work of creation began, it was in silence that the universe came into being and it is in silence that God continues to speak most intimately to us, His creation.

When we enter into silence, we "expose" ourselves to the reality of our complete and utter dependence on God. We become vulnerable as creature to the Creator. The reality of being vulnerable and dependent on God, which is the effect of silence, is illustrated to us in the first reading with the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb. Prior to this encounter with the Lord on the mountain, Elijah was on the run from those who were trying to kill him. He was tired and distressed by many things...and so he retreated to the place where God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. Yet, God did not reveal himself to Elijah in such an obvious way. In the case of Elijah, God reached out in silence to calm the storms in his life.

Most of the time, in the storms of our life...when difficulties in our life arise, when we are anxious about something...we tend to focus on ourselves and what we can do to get out these moments...and try to control the situation, like St. Peter in today's Gospel. Rather, we should seek God, who is found in the silence, and put our focus on Him rather than on the difficulties...He is large and in charge. It is in these moments of difficulties that God is speaking to us and saying to us, "It is I, do not be afraid" and we need silence to hear that tender and loving voice in the storms of life.

Today, we are being challenged by God to listen to Him...becoming more aware of how He is working in our life. Our response to this challenge is to foster an interior attitude of silence where we will hear the tender voice of God calming the storms of life, speaking to our hearts.

Father Michael Simoes