

"Silence gives you perfect sound"

Where does one find the power to "begin a Marian Church", to "begin a Church with a Marian face", to "renew the Church in the image of Mary the perfect disciple of Jesus?" Here we face one of the paradoxes of the christian life, that all this activity and energy is rooted in interior solitude and silence. A recent advertisement for high-tech sound systems claimed: "Silence gives you perfect sound". Without realising it, the advertisement was doing more than making a claim for good audio technique. It was also highlighting a feature of the Gospel life which Jesus chose for Himself, and which He has pointed out to those who wish to follow Him. The desert, solitude, and silence were part of His very life-style. We know why He was led into the wilderness after His baptism. He was led there by the Spirit in order to be tested, as a preparation for His mission. These three events: the baptism of Jesus, His testing in solitude, and His energy for mission cannot be separated. He was set apart in baptism, purified and tested in solitude, and then sent out on mission. Followers of Jesus experience the same journey: we are drawn into some form of wilderness experience which tests our willingness to put all our trust in God alone. In our personal solitude and silence, we too are shaped into an image and likeness of God. The "perfect sound" of our compassion comes from the silence of our solitude in which we enter into the compassion of God. We leave behind our many activities, our concerns, our plans and projects, and we remain alone with God who little by little forms in us the Word which we are to make flesh for our world.

What actually happened during Colin's years at Cerdon is not completely clear to us. But we do know that those were the years when he was transformed interiorly. He himself described those years as years of "extraordinary serenity" when it seems he was touched by the experience of "tasting God". So important was this to him, that he looked on it as the key experience for anyone beginning Marist life. From his own experience he believed that once a person had "tasted God" everything else would fall into place. But "tasting God" in prayer was never to be an experience that happened just once in life, or that happened just to priests and religious. It was to be a constantly repeated inner experience even in the busiest moments of one's life. For Colin, the symbol of this experience was Nazareth, which for him represented a state of soul which rested in God, which waited in solitude and silence where the perfect sound of God's love could be heard.

On one occasion, in 1842, Father Colin said to us: "...I really do not know what ideas they have of the novitiate and its conduct. To me nothing appears so simple. I should like to spend a month or two there to set the house running as I understand it should.... I would try simply to unite (the novices) to God, to bring them to a spirit of prayer. Once they were united to God, everything else would take care of itself. When the good Lord dwells in the heart, it is he who sets everything in motion. Without that, everything that you do is completely useless; no matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking. But having once tasted God, a novice will turn to him again and again."

The Mayet Memoirs

The cave of the heart

India has an ancient tradition of contemplative prayer. The Indians have a saying that the deepest prayer takes place not in the head but in the "cave of the heart". A cave is a dark place. The cave of the heart is our deepest heart, our spirit - a place where we might not "see" clearly, but where we experience love, commitment and God. The cave of Bethlehem has taken on a richer symbolism since I heard this Indian expression. Mary had to leave the lighted, boisterous town and walk out into the darkness of the Bethlehem hills. Then in the deepest darkness of a cave, she saw the Face of the Light of the World.

A Zen disciple seeks as the ultimate religious experience *satori* (enlightenment). This comes after a long, arduous spiritual pilgrimage, in which hours of daily prayer and ascetic living in a context of brotherhood are of the essence. Satori is written by adding the ideograph "heart" to the ideograph "oneself". You find your true self in your heart - not your head.

Paul Glynn, sm

Inner sounds of silence

Marcel Marceau is one of the greatest mimes of our day. His work takes him into the realm of wordless communication. But like all mimes, he knows that what is communicated in silence and from silence can be more powerful than any words. It also requires extraordinary discipline. Marceau writes: "I want my pupils to study the art of mime with profound humility, in an effort to develop the capacity to study life, mankind, and the nature of the universe. It is through this never-ending search that an artist learns to lift his vision towards the heights where myths are born; by subjecting our students to our forms of discipline we attempt to inspire them with the love of the inner sounds of silence. By discovering this new world, they will also discover the very roots of their existence. .. The School of Mime is a tough apprenticeship which will certainly not succeed without obstacles. The path to self-knowledge is a long one, strewn with tentative steps and silent tears, not only of anguish, but also of love, compassion and exultation."



Silent touch of compassion

Father Brown is one of the central characters in Graham Greene's play "The Living Room". Confined to a wheelchair for 20 years, he has been living with his eccentric spinster sisters. Their niece falls in love with a divorced man, much to the horror of the overly-Catholic aunts who do all in their power to shame her out of the affair. In desperation she turns to Father Brown, asking for some way of finding peace. He is unable to find the right words, and his niece leaves him and commits suicide. Alone with his thoughts, Father Brown reflects:

I dream of helping someone in great trouble. Saying the right word at the right time. In the old days in the confessional – once in five years perhaps - one sometimes felt one had done just that. It made the years between worthwhile. For more than twenty years I've been a useless priest. I had a real vocation for the priesthood. And for 20 years it's been imprisoned in this wheelchair.... the desire to help. Last night God gave me my chance. He flung this child, here, at my knees, asking for help, asking for hope. I said to God, "Put words into my mouth." But he's given me twenty years in this chair, with nothing to do but prepare for such a moment. And all I said was, "You could pray." If I'd ever really known what prayer was, I would only have had to touch her to give her peace. "Prayer," she said. She almost spat the word.

Mary is a model of prayer for us. Virgin of the Annunciation, she welcomes the Word of God. Woman blessed among all women, she rejoices in God her Saviour. Faithful handmaid, she lives out her YES even to the Cross. Mother, she ponders in her heart what Jesus does, and relates His actions to the words of Scripture. She intercedes at Cana and prays with the Church in the upper room.

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