17. Interior Silence

Third Week of Advent

Editor's Note: While today's meditation from *Divine Intimacy* addresses "consecrated souls" (i.e. those in religious life) in particular, the general principles outlined certainly apply to all the faithful – and all the more so in our age of incessant noise and chatter, especially via social media. May this reflection help us all to imitate Our Lady, who spent countless hours silently contemplating and adoring the Incarnate Word, Whose blessed Nativity we are preparing to celebrate with her. "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

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By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

1) Holy Scripture says, "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin. […] He that hath no guard on his speech shall meet with evils" (Prov. 10:19, 13:3). The rule of life of a consecrated soul, even if she lives in the world, should always provide for the practice of silence; and if, because of the demands of her duties, it is absolutely impossible for her to observe fixed times for silence, it is indispensable that she hold fast to this principle: to speak as little as possible with creatures in order to be able to speak as much as possible with God. She must, therefore, accustom herself to keeping control over her words, thus avoiding loquaciousness, idle chatter, prolonged conversations, and excessive exchange of confidences. The same norm which governs the use of the senses governs also the use of speech—it is to be used only in the measure required by duty or charity. Of course, it is certainly licit to talk for the purpose of taking some just alleviation or recreation, but always with moderation and within reasonable limits.

However, it is not enough to observe exterior silence; we must also strive for interior silence, that is, silence of the interior senses—the memory, imagination, sensitive feelings, thoughts, recollections of the past and useless conjectures about the future.

"If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue … this man's religion is vain" (Jam. 1:26), which is to be understood, says St. John of the Cross, "no less of inward speech than of outward."

2) God Himself says to the soul desirous of divine intimacy, "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house" (Ps. 44:11). Sister

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Elizabeth of the Trinity makes the following comment on this verse: “In order to listen we must forget our ‘father’s house’; that means, whatever pertains to the natural life. … To forget our ‘people’ seems to me more difficult; for by ‘people’ is meant that world which forms, as it were, part of ourselves. It includes our feelings, memories, impressions, and so forth. In a word, it is *self*. We must forget it, give it up, and when the soul has broken with it, and is wholly delivered from all it means, [then] ‘the King greatly desires its beauty.’”

The beauty of a recollected soul is the unity of her spirit, which is not divided and dissipated among creatures but is entirely concentrated on God. Then God takes pleasure in her and often manifests Himself to her, transforming her recollection, that is, her “silence” and making it divine, for “the knowledge of Him is in divine silence” (St. John of the Cross).

This total silence, both exterior and interior, disposes the soul to know and listen to God Who dwells within her: “One Word spoke the Father, which Word was His Son, and this Word He speaks ever in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul” (St. John of the Cross); and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity exclaims: “O eternal Word, utterance of my God, I desire to spend my life in listening to You!” This is the fundamental occupation of a soul who wishes to be a “perfect praise of glory” of the Blessed Trinity: to live interiorly in continual silence, listening to and adoring God present within her, and exteriorly, being and doing only what the divine Word indicates from moment to moment.

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