

Silence. Direction.¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Wednesday, November 3, 1858

To live an interior life, we must be silent. The Holy Spirit said: *The Lord does not dwell in the storm* (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-12). God speaks with a soft voice, in a gentle manner, and we must pay careful attention to hear him. In one of the psalms he also says through the mouth of the prophet: *Listen, my daughter, turn your ear to my voice* (cf. Ps 44:11). Our Lord does not speak in cities and in public places (cf. Is 42:2), but in deserts (cf. Hos 2:16), on mountain tops (cf. Mt 5:1); he did not dwell nor sleep in cities that were too noisy. When he withdraws to prepare himself for his public life, he goes to the desert (cf. Mt 4:1-17).

If you want to be in those conditions which allow God to reign in you, you must enter into the interior life and keep silence. Cloistered communities are always isolated, far from the noise of the world. Canon Law recommends that churches be built in quiet places – silence is needed to pray to God. Notice how the desert Fathers avoided contact with the world to attend more freely to the contemplation of heavenly things and be united to God. Work, then, on external and internal silence, and see what the *Imitation* has to say about silence (Book 1: Chapter 20). [Our Reverend Father read this chapter.]

We must practice silence in order to avoid sin. He who talks much commits sin. Long conversations normally lead to excess. *If anyone does not fall short in speech, he is a perfect man* (Jms 3:2). See how dangerous it is to speak outside; you must flee the world. [...] It is not enough to avoid the world, but **you must keep silence when the rule prescribes it.** Whenever we fail in silence we hurt our soul. To speak during times of silence is a weakness and failure that offends the Holy Spirit. Many religious communities are very strict with silence – some only use sign language, or speak only twice a week, while the remaining time they are in their hermitage. Why? In order to be closer to God.

In order to be faithful to your vocation, you must practice silence according to the rule. If you don't have the virtue of silence, you will always find reasons to break it. Do not act like that, my Sisters. Solitude and silence were so respected formerly that there were many hermits who spoke only at certain times. Therefore, keep the silence of the rule and of virtue. You each have your own room in which to be recollected, for greater union with God. Community life is truly difficult and meritorious: – but here we are concerned with recollection and union with God.

My Sisters, it's not enough to keep external silence; to live with God **you also need internal silence.** What value is there in external silence if you keep thinking about your relatives, your friends, the noise of the world? Then, you are chasing God out of his own house. When we have the king, we pay no attention to the servants. Drive away your past life, the memories of individual persons; battle the world through self-abnegation. This is very important if you want God alone to be with you. We must be alone: when the master arrives, the servant disappears. We must not only drive away our past life, but also our present life, even keeping busy with spiritual people. You must not live in each other, trying to please each other – you must account creatures as nothing, compared to the Creator.

How do we know that a soul is united to God? When she is free of all thoughts about created things. We must not even think of the world to come, not be preoccupied about it. Live hidden in God, and let this house be a house of silence. I exhort you to silence especially in the chapel, the stairway, the

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corridors, and your rooms. A community is a Cenacle, an oratory, a church. Your room, particularly, is considered an oratory – therefore, you must respect it: that’s where the king gives his audiences. God says in the Song of Songs: *Do not arouse my beloved who is sleeping, do not stir up love (before its own time)* (cf. Sg 2:7). This slumber is the union of the soul with God, and you must keep silence so as not to disturb it. Be careful to respect silence – when you are animated by its spirit, everything leads you to collection with God who is spiritual.

[Our Father then gave us a few words about direction.]

My Sisters, both body and soul need direction. It is very important to make known your physical condition, because your sufferings and illness influence your soul. According to your bodily strength, some things should be permitted and others eliminated. You must also make known the state of your soul: whether you are calm or troubled. We must look at the cause of the trouble, to see if it is a temptation, a trial, a sacrifice, or agitation. You must give an account of your entire life – spiritual and natural.

In directing a soul, two things must be kept in mind:

1° The negative direction of the soul deals with sin, temptations, spiritual sickness, and dominant fault. We recognize the sickness of the soul by its temptations, by the feelings of sorrow, repugnance, antipathy, or fear of certain sacrifices. When there is repugnance, we must battle against the enemy. To do this, however, one must follow the soul step by step, and this is difficult. There are very few directors who want to take the trouble; they are satisfied with taking away sin.

2° Then, there is the positive direction. It is not enough to know the difficulties of the soul, we must also know its state of grace, the virtues, the work of perfection, and we must learn your particular grace. Each one has her grace of perfection, her attraction of grace. Once the attraction is found, it is easy; we are on the right road. When the attraction is not clearly noticeable, it is more difficult. Then, we look for the grace to know the attraction, for the attraction is more than the dominant grace. Virtue ends up by becoming an attraction, a spirit. We easily recognize a prayerful soul. My Sisters, your adorations and your thanksgivings are your prayers. That’s why we immediately ask a person: How do you pray? How do you feel during prayer? We can never completely know the person’s state of grace. This is a hidden mystery that we must respect and that God alone knows. There is a space that God reserves for himself: he veils the graces and the mysteries of his love in order to hide them.

Open your heart: don’t worry about your inability to explain yourself; just say: I don’t know. The director will help you. There are some very mysterious things that are hard to describe. The director has the grace to discover them. It is not those who talk the most who are the best in revealing themselves. When one talks too much, the director says nothing. A person cannot know herself, no matter how holy she is or whatever have been her experiences. She needs a director, otherwise she will be misled. God blesses direction with grace. How many are abandoned! My Sisters, consider yourselves blessed to have so many spiritual helps, and to have regular direction – while there are many persons, even communities, who are deprived of this consolation.



Point for reflection:

Notice the reasons given here on the value of silence. Do you know any others?