

to be calling you to the experience of silent presence, and you surely aren't wasting your time when you accept the invitation. In fact, just the opposite! God has given you a very great gift, and you are letting that gift bear its fruit within you.

The good news is that, in varying degrees, we all have that gift. Personalities differ of course, and based on that, God calls us to communion with him in different ways. However, as in all relationships, some amount of silence is crucial. If you feel inclined to add an experience of silence in your communication with God, you could try a method called "centering prayer", a way of prayer that has become well-known in recent years. Books have been written about this way of silent communication with God, and information about centering prayer can be found on the internet.

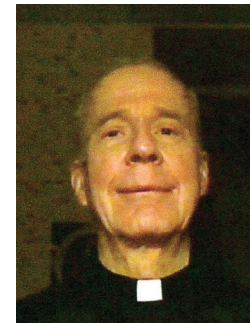
You might also investigate a form of prayer called "lectio divina" a reading of Scripture interspersed with frequent short periods of silence. Information about this kind of prayer can also be found in books and on the internet. You can take any form of prayer, the rosary for example, and

interject short periods of silence into it in ways that best fit your needs.

Our way of praying might take different directions as we grow in our relationship with God. The relationship becomes an adventure that brings a greater joy into our lives as it progresses. Sometimes we are nudged by the Holy Spirit to experiment with the process. And then we can be open to the possibility that we are being invited to an experience of silence with God that will go beyond anything that words can express.


(This reflection by Fr. Ken Grabner, C.S.C., was first published in February of 2009.)

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An Experience
of Silence

by Rev. Ken Grabner, C.S.C.



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Many years ago while teaching theology at Notre Dame, I offered a seventy-five minute presentation on the importance of silence for spiritual development. I presented this with some trepidation, because the audience consisted of a group of men and women who were barely out of their teenage years. But at the end of the lecture, one of the students came up to my desk and said enthusiastically, “Father, I had the best time with my girl last night.” As I was wondering what this had to do with the class presentation, he said, “We sat in a park for half an hour, and neither of us said a word.”

The joyful experience of sharing silent presence with someone he loved was still with him as he related his story. At that moment in the park, his love could not be adequately expressed with words. It could only be shared in a contemplative kind of silence that might have added a new dimension to his life. Forty years later, I can still see the ecstatic expression on his face. I was so impressed with his story that I have shared it many times in homilies and retreat conferences, because it evokes the possibility of an experience that can enrich the lives of all of

us, especially in our relationship with God.

We have many different ways of expressing our relationship with God. Perhaps most often we express it verbally. We thank God for his unconditional love and many gifts,

“ ... in silence’s embrace, we experience a presence that words alone cannot achieve. ”

and we ask him for the help that enables us to become the person he calls us to be. We may have our favorite prayers that we say, and all of these verbal ways of praying are good. But, as my student discovered with his friend in the park, there is also a silent way of communicating that can add a deeper dimension to the way we relate.

Perhaps this is a dimension that we miss in our relationship with God, and we may need to discover that words are not enough. Silence enables us to become listeners rather than speakers, and in silence’s embrace, we experience a presence that words alone cannot achieve. These experiences can happen in different ways, and in the most unlikely places, as the following story shows.

A former prisoner in a Communist concentration camp once told a friend how he managed to survive for ten years in that brutal environment. He said that even in the camp the snow glistened in the winter sunlight, the wildflowers bloomed in the summer, and on a clear night, the stars shone in magnificent beauty. All of these reminded him of God’s beauty and presence. He could not tell anyone about his feelings, but in silence, he treasured his experiences and they were like a kind of prayer that brought him peace, and a deep awareness of God’s goodness. If one can have these experiences in a concentration camp, how much more so can we have them in the midst of our lives? Only one thing is necessary. We need to pay quiet attention to the

ways God reveals his presence in the works of nature that surround us, and to give thanks for them.



Not only does God reveal himself in nature, but also in the depths of our minds and hearts. A Holy Cross brother once asked me if I thought he was wasting his time during the periods he set aside for quiet prayer. I asked why this was bothering him, and he replied, “ Well, I just sit with God, and I don’t say or do anything.” I thought of my student in the park, and I said, “You seem to have a communion with God that goes very deep. In those moments when it is so engrossing, it might be best to say nothing at all. God seems