

## February 20 Readings



**John Main, OSB**, "God's Two Silences," *THE WAY OF UNKNOWNING*

(New York: Crossroad, 1990), pp. 6-8.

We live in a very unsilent world. We live in a world that is so full of bombarding foreground and background noise that we hear everything at once and listen to nothing. And yet each one of us is called into the state of prayer, of pure attention, of expansion of spirit in the eternal silence of God.

[But a] second sort of silence, when God seems to have withdrawn his presence, is also a reality. It is one where we are left with no sense of his being but only with the sense of his wholesale withdrawal from our world, from our consciousness. . . . It is true that it is wonderful when we do have the sense of God's infinity filling us with an infinite calm, a profound sense of wonder.

This is a wonderful gift but it is not one that we must either seek or seek to possess, or to confect. One of the things we learn through meditation as we mature, as we go further along the path, is to be equally content with either of these forms of silence, with the infinite sense of his presence as with the finite sense of his absence. It is harder for us at the beginning because when we start to meditate we haven't learned much detachment. We haven't reached the stage where we can be equally content with absence as with presence, and anyway we are always looking for our meditation to satisfy us. We are always looking to prove to ourselves that it works, that now we know God, now we have learned to live in his presence. But the purpose of the second form of silence, his absence, is to purify us so that we learn to love God selflessly as he loves us (and himself). He teaches us to be strong in love, strong in fidelity and to ensure that we love God for himself and in himself and not only for any manifestation of his presence that satisfies us. [. . .]

To mature at any level we have to grow through all the difficulties produced by change or loss, all the feelings, emotions and thoughts so generated and learn to love God simply and strongly. Part of the discipline of saying the mantra is that it teaches us to stay in that love, come what may. Nothing will shake us from our conviction that God is, that God is Love, and that his love dwells in our hearts. If we are committed to the journey then the sense of absence will indeed deepen and strengthen our conviction of God's existence, making him more familiar, teaching us to know him more fully. At this depth of faith we are indifferent to whether we have a sense of his close presence or a sense of his absence. Whether he is near or far away in our perception or feeling does not affect the discipline that we bring to the practice of meditation because our conviction is founded not on feeling but on fact: the fact that he is the all-merciful, the all-loving, and all-compassionate God. The two silences are both of them equally powerful in teaching us: the silence of revelations fills us with wonder and the silence of absence teaches us fidelity. The Word is present in both.

**Meditate for Thirty Minutes....** Remember: Sit down. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly, begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase "Maranatha." Recite it as four syllables of equal length. Listen to it as you say it, gently, but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything—spiritual or otherwise. Thoughts and images will likely come, but let them pass. Just keep returning your attention—with humility and simplicity—to saying your word in faith, from the beginning to the end of your meditation.

**After Meditation**, from The Bhagavad Gita, 4:16-17, tr Mascaro (London:Penguin, 1962).

I will teach thee the truth of pure work, and this truth will make you free.

And know also of a work that is silence: mysterious is that path of work.

The person who in his work finds silence, and who sees that silence is work

Sees the light and in all his work find peace.

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