

September 2026

Last month I had the opportunity to go on a silent retreat; a whole week at a place nestled in the woods —no other people talking, no phone, no computer, no wifi at all. Just myself and the chance to communicate with God apart from all the usual distractions of life. Often when I tell people about this, they say something like “What? You didn’t talk for a whole week???” And then they add “I could never do that.” But I’m guessing they could. There is something about silence, alone time with God, that is a little intimidating, and yet, once entered into, it feels like something as necessary as air.

As Christians we understand that God is present in every moment of life, whether noisy or quiet. As the Psalmist says, “Where can I go from your spirit?...You hem me in behind and before.... (*Psalms* 139). And yet, in the busy-ness of everyday life, it can be difficult to recognize God’s presence. For myself, I find that tamping down the exterior noise, that is, intentionally moving away from the usual activities of daily life, allows my body to slow down which in turn facilitates the quieting of my racing mind. Exterior silence enables the cultivation of interior silence. It frees the mind for reflection and allows the spirit and voice of God to move from the head to the heart. And this movement might be felt through any of the senses; a new insight, a deeper knowledge of self, an unbidden creative idea, or even simply the peace of nothingness at all.

Of course, extended retreat time is not always possible; and even if it were, one cannot stay on the mountaintop, so to speak, forever. Fortunately, it is possible to cultivate stillness and to thereby open up our ability to connect with God even in our everyday lives. The key, I think, is to recognize and to even intentionally create pauses throughout each busy day. For instance, many people use their commuting time to listen to music or to podcasts. These are good things, but perhaps during one of those times each day, devices could be turned off in favor of quiet time with God. Or perhaps you simply find yourself with an unexpected five or ten minutes between meetings — this is a gift — what might God give you during that time? And sometimes the pauses might be even shorter than five minutes but can still be God moments: can you stop and savor that new flower that came up overnight in your garden or stop and laugh at the toad that just hopped across your feet?

So much can happen in the silence. God, it seems, sometimes wants to clear out the detritus of our minds and hearts in order to make room for Love to enter and roam freely.

Thoughts on Silence
Uncrowd my heart, O God
Until silence speaks
In your still, small voice;
Turn me from the hearing of words,
And the making of words,
And the confusion of much speaking,
To listening,
waiting,
stillness,
silence.
Amen
(Esther de Waal)

Elizabeth Goodine, Spiritual Director