

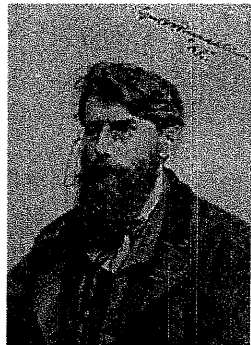
## THE SILENCE OF LOVE

I could praise you once with beautiful words ere you came  
And entered my life with love in a wind of flame.  
I could lure with a song from afar my bird to its nest,  
But with pinions drooping together silence is best.

In the land of beautiful silence the winds are laid,  
And life grows quietly one in the cloudy shade.  
I will not waken the passion that sleeps in the heart,  
For the winds that blew us together may blow us apart.

Fear not the stillness; for doubt and despair shall cease  
With the gentle voices guiding us into peace.  
Our dreams will change as they pass through the gates of  
gold,  
And Quiet, the tender shepherd, shall keep the fold.

**George William Russell**  
(1867-1935)



## SILENCE

*Hearing from God in the Silence*

### Monastic

The monastic desert Fathers and Mothers have left us sayings that indicate that they sought the silence of the desert precisely as an atmosphere where the soul could find quiet needed for deep communion with God. This comes through clearly in this statement of Cassian (*inst.10.3*): "*The monk can attain the goal of his calling, namely, the pure vision of God, overriding all things, only in silence, in patient endurance in his cell and in meditation of Scripture.*"

### Scriptural Silence

*Ecclesiastes 3:7 A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.*

*Habakkuk 2:20 But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.*

As Christians, we must remember that silence is integral to our faith. Put another way, to omit or neglect silence in our life of faith harms our spiritual integrity. Jesus shows us that it is important to take time each day for silent prayer. "Very early next morning," we read in the Gospel, "he got up and

went out" (Mark 1:35). Moreover, "He went away to a lonely spot and remained there in prayer" (Mark 1:36). If our Lord thought it good to awake very early and be alone in prayer, we ought to take notice.

### Prayer

Silence thus is the context for prayer, and from that silent prayer flows activity. From our silent prayer, early and alone, we do well to move on to the place where we can meet the Lord in word and sacrament. In short, our prayerful silence should lead us to liturgical worship.

Far from being anti-social or uncharitable, at its best silence whether in a monastery or within a family of lay people should lead us deeper into our loving search for God. Since silence is so closely bound to prayer and the liturgy, it is also inseparable from God's grace. Silence is above all a gift; like the seven virtues, it is a gift worth praying for. The challenge for Christians is to ask God for the grace to make time away from noise, which is the absence of silence, and to reclaim as part of the daily quest for holiness the glimpse of heaven that is prayerful silence.

*"We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grow in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. We need silence to be able to touch souls."*

**Saint Teresa of Calcutta**

## Deeper Silence, Deeper Self

"Silence is God's first language," wrote the 16th-century mystic John of the Cross. And silence is the normal context in which contemplative prayer takes place. But there is silence and then there is silence. There is an outer silence, an outer stopping of the words and busyness, but there is also a much more challenging interior silence, where the inner talking stops as well.

Most of us are familiar with this first kind of silence, although we don't get enough of it in our spiritual nurture. It's the kind of silence we normally practice in retreat times and quiet days; sometimes you'll hear it described as "free silence." With a break from the usual hurly-burly of your life, you have time to draw inward and allow your mind to meander. You may pore over a scriptural verse and let your imagination and feelings carry you more deeply into it. Or you may simply put the books away and go for a walk in the woods, allowing the tranquility of the setting and the relative quieting of external pressures bring you more deeply in touch with yourself. You listen carefully to how you're feeling, what you're wishing.

In this kind of work, the free association of your mind provides the key to the renewal, and silence furnishes the backdrop where this work can go on.