

“SOLITUDE – REST FOR THE HURRIED SOUL”

MARCH 14, 2021

1. Solitude is not about being alone but being alone _____. (Mark 1:32-38)

“In solitude we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the center of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us. In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone. It is in this solitude that we discover that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our effort. In solitude we discover that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared.”

-Henri Nouwen

2. Solitude is not about emptying oneself but _____ oneself with God. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered this furnace, and there he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant (“turn stones into loaves”), to be spectacular (“throw yourself down”), and to be powerful (“I will give you all these kingdoms”). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity (“You must worship the LORD your God and serve him alone”). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter—the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.”

-Henri Nouwen (from Out of Solitude pg. 22)

3. Solitude will not make you less productive but more _____. (John 15:5-10)

“In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make...The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone.”

-Henri Nouwen

“In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” In the middle of sentences loaded with action – healing suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town and preaching from synagogue to synagogue – we find these quiet words: “In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” In the center of breathless activities we hear a restful breathing. Surrounded by hours of moving we find a moment of quiet stillness. In the heart of much involvement there are words of withdrawal. In the midst of action there is contemplation. And after much togetherness there is solitude. The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus’s ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn.

In the lonely place, Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s words and not his own; to do God’s work and not his own. He reminds us constantly: “I can do nothing by myself...my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 5:30). And again, “The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work” (Jn 14:10). It is in the lonely place, where Jesus enters into intimacy with the Father, that his ministry is born.

I want to reflect on this lonely place in our lives. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention.”

– Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, Introduction