

Hesychia Stillness

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There is an ancient tradition of stillness in the Christian faith. It is the way of Hesychia. The word simply means "stillness." But the tradition is powerful in or midst.

This way of stillness is based upon the example of Christ himself. Jesus first went to the desert to prepare for his ministry. He went to the place of the greatest stillness to prepare for the ultimate action. He went to the place of deafening silence to hear the most profound word. He went to the place where those of his day believed the demons dwelled in order to do battle with them, and bring salvation and lasting peace to all the world.

This way of stillness gave rise to the whole monastic and contemplative tradition in the Christian Church. Those who wanted to follow Jesus wanted to imitate his stillness before they could imitate his actions. They needed to understand his silence before they could speak his words. They needed to know his emptying of self through ultimate dying before they could proclaim the abundance of eternal life.

But this way is no mere escape into fantasy of illusion. In fact, it is the way to the greatest confrontation of all; the confrontation with the devil who lurks within the self centered hearts of us all. Even as Jesus had to confront this devil in the deserts of Palestine, so did the early monks, and all who followed after them, have to confront these demons within their own heart and soul.

Solitude and silence are a wonderful alternative to the noise and chaos of this modern world. But anyone who has spent more than just a few hours or days in its womb knows that the process of rebirth from this death to self is often only found through great travail. Only then do we know the joys of the newborn child of the Spirit of God.

To use the analogy of the pond: The waters are usually agitated in the winds of this world. This stirs up the waters so that they become muddy, and unclear. Where once they could reflect an image of God and his wonderful creation like a fine mirror, now they are unable to reflect any image purely. All that remains is a distortion of the original image.

It is only when the waters settle for a great time that they finally are calm and still. Then we can really see what is within the pond of our soul. Then we can reflect all life around us, and the very image of God. This is why it took Jesus forty days and nights of fasting and prayer in the Judean desert. It is why it takes most serious monks a lifetime. It takes years for us as well.

But this is not the end. This is really just the beginning. Once we can really see within the pond of our soul, we discover that there are all kinds of trash that has been tossed into our life over many years of false patterns of senses, emotions, and thinking. The deepest bottom of our soul has become a collection place of all kinds of garbage. All of this can now be cleaned out as well.

Cleaning out the garbage from our soul is a long process. It took years to collect. It can sometimes take years to clean out as well. It is usually just plain hard discipline and work. Furthermore, it usually stirs the waters of our soul again. Sometimes it seems that after we begin the process of spiritual rebirth, all hell breaks loose. In a sense it has. All the discarded and negative and destructive stuff of our life is now coming to the surface as we haul it out. Our pond may seem downright ugly for a while. But this is just temporary. Compared to living in a continual state of agitation and unclarity, this is definitely doable if we but keep our eyes on the divine goal of the eventual clear and clean waters of our human soul.

So what about us? Do we take the time to enter into the tradition of Hesychia stillness for ourselves, or do we just read about it, and fantasize about maybe doing it someday? The scriptures say that, "today is the day of salvation. If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." If you need the rest from the burdens of this noisy and chaotic world, if you are tired of living in constant agitation, unclarity, and distortion, come to the waters of life, and still the waters of your soul. This is the way of Jesus. It is the

way of the mystics and the saints. It can be your way as well. It may be the temporary respite you need, and may be the beginning of a whole new way of living that stills and purifies the waters of souls throughout creation for all eternity.

This article was part of a 20-week series originally published in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette newspaper between July 14 and November 24, 2001

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