

% Dorothy Day

1948, pp. 166-175.

*Summary: Reflects on the role of silence during the liturgical season of Advent as necessary for hearing the Word in our souls. Says it is a time to examine one's conscience and a time "to see only what is loveable." (DDLW #866).*

ADVENT IS a time of waiting, of expectation, of silence. Waiting for our Lord to be born. A pregnant woman is so happy, so content. She lives in such a garment of silence, and it is as though she were listening to hear the stir of life within her. One always hears that stirring compared to the rustling of a bird in the hand. But the intentness with which one awaits such stirring is like nothing so much as a blanket of silence.

Be still. Did I hear something?

Be still and see that I am God.

Zundel, in *Our Lady of Wisdom*, has some beautiful passages on silence:

Do we understand at last that action must be born in silence, and abide in silence, and issue in silence, and that its power must be an emanation and the radiation of silence, since its sole aim is to make men capable of hearing the Word that silently reverberates in their souls?

All speech and reasoning, all eloquence and science, all methods and all psychologies, all slogans and suggestions are not worth a minute of silence in which the soul, completely open, yields itself to the embrace of the Spirit.

In solitude Christ speaks to the heart, as a modest lover who embraces not His beloved before all the world.

In silence we hear so much that is beautiful. The other day I saw a young mother who said, "The happiest hour of the day is that early morning hour when I lie and listen to the baby practicing sounds and words. She has such a gentle little voice."

St. James says, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." And how much more women need this gift of silence. It is something to be prayed for. Our Lady certainly had it. How little of her there is in the Gospel, and yet all generations have called her blessed. [James says,]

Behold, how small a fire, how great a forest it kindles. And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, defiling the whole body, and setting on fire the course of our life, being itself set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird and serpent and the rest is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But the tongue no man can tame – it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless God the Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made after the likeness of God. [James 3:5-9]

To love with understanding and without understanding. To love blindly, and to folly. To see only what is lovable. To think only on these things. To see the best in everyone around, their virtues rather than their faults. To see Christ in them.

Many people think an examination of conscience is a morbid affair. Péguy has some verses which Donald Gallagher read to me once in the St. Louis House of Hospitality. (He and Cy Echele opened the house there.) They were about examination of conscience. There is a place for it, he said, at the beginning of the Mass. "I have sinned in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." But after you get done with it, don't go on brooding about it; don't keep thinking of it. You wipe your feet at the door of the church as you go in, and you do not keep contemplating your dirty feet.

Here is my examination at the beginning of Advent, at the beginning of a new year. Lack of charity, criticism of superiors, of neighbors, of friends and enemies. Idle talk, impatience, lack of self-control and mortification towards self, and of love towards others. Pride and presumption. (It is good to have visitors – one's faults stand out in the company of others.) Self-will, desire not to be corrected, to have one's own way. The desire in turn to correct others, impatience in thought and speech.

The remedy is recollection and silence. Meanness about giving time to others and wasting it myself. Constant desire for comfort. First impulse is always to make myself comfortable. If cold, to put on warmth; if hot, to become cool; if hungry, to eat; and what one likes – always the first thought is of one's own comfort. It is hard for a woman to be indifferent about little material things. She is a homemaker, a cook; she likes to do material things. So let her do them *for others*, always. Woman's job is to love. Enlarge Thou my heart, Lord, that Thou mayest enter in.