



30. March 2025

MEDITATIONS FOR LENT

Desert and holy silence

In the last two meditations we have considered the advice of the Desert Fathers to practise fasting and night vigils in order to reach union with God more quickly with an agile spirit. This guideline, applied with due moderation, is excellent advice for growing in the spiritual life and for effectively resisting the powers of evil.

Let us recall that the purpose of the meeting of some desert fathers around St Anthony Abbot was to discuss which virtue or practice could protect a monk from all the wiles of the devil and lead him with sure step to the summit of perfection. In this context, another suggestion was made: the eremitical life, because, as one of the Fathers said, those who live in the silence and solitude of the desert can pray to God in an almost familial intimacy and adhere more closely to Him.

Of course, the virtue of discretion must be applied here, too, because those who made these suggestions were monks who were free from family responsibilities and other worldly obligations, and could therefore choose their own rhythm of life. However, people living in different circumstances can also understand the meaning of this "desert" and adapt it to their personal situation. Then we will understand the value of this advice, remembering that our Lord Himself withdrew into the desert for forty days before beginning His public ministry (Mt 4:1-11). Moreover, in the Gospels we hear again and again that Jesus withdrew to solitary places to pray (Lk 5:16).

Undoubtedly, the physical desert, with its silence and the absence of so many sensual stimuli, is an ideal place for an encounter with God. But since only some people can live like this, the Lord will provide other circumstances so that the rest will not miss out on the fruits of such a lifestyle.

The Fathers mentioned that in the solitude of the desert, one can pray to God in the familial intimacy and, as a result, become more attached to Him. That is the goal! But it is also possible to achieve this goal without being physically in the desert, if we take the time to withdraw into silence to pray. This can be done in different places, although

it is always better to go to places that have already been sanctified by prayer. But this is not a prerequisite.

What helps us to concentrate fully on God is silence and stillness. This is not a liturgical prayer that we join in, but an immersion in an atmosphere of silence that allows God to speak directly to us. The "prayer of the heart" that we spoke of a few days ago is suitable for entering into silence and remaining in it. In a way, remaining in silence before the Lord prepares the ground for contemplation.

We usually live surrounded by constant noise, so consciously seeking silence in God will bring peace to our soul and awaken in it gratitude towards Him. It is hard to imagine the extent to which the regular practice of silence, which often requires practice, awakens a completely different side of the soul: the one that longs for a heart-to-heart dialogue with God.

Therefore, if we want to deepen our spiritual life, it is highly advisable to respond to the invitation of silence. Just as we must jealously guard our hours of prayer, we must also seek moments of silence, moments to pray alone.

When the soul goes in search of silence, it will more easily discover the deeper meaning of its existence and will be better able to distinguish between what is important and what is superfluous. It will also gain a certain distance from its surroundings and from the various impressions that beset it.

Instead, it opens itself to a renewed encounter with God. Once the soul has become accustomed to silence, it will seek it as a necessity. For this to happen, however, we must constantly discipline ourselves, for not everyone has a natural inclination to silence.

We must not forget that silence and stillness form our soul and bring it closer to God. Silence will also make us more sensitive and prudent in our dealings with others. It is therefore important not only for our own spiritual growth, but also for the service of others.

It is clear that there is an inner connection between silence and keeping one's tongue. When we are silent, we learn to listen more attentively, to handle our own thoughts better, to focus on the Lord and on what is essential.

It is not always so easy. Anyone who has lived in silence for any length of time knows how much restlessness there is within, how many thoughts cross one's mind, how many fantasies come to light and how many unresolved inner problems may come to the surface to be presented to God. Moreover, when we leave behind the hustle and bustle of daily life, we feel the inner emptiness even more.

But all this is a challenge, so that through silence and the search for silence, the Lord can penetrate us more deeply and thus unite us more closely with Him. The advice of the Desert Fathers will thus help us to become more deeply rooted in the Lord, and this will be fruitful both for our own spiritual life and for the fulfilment of our duties.