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“Do You Hear What I Hear?”

Isaiah 9:2-7
Luke 1:39-45
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For many years it was believed that silence was sacred, a path to the Holy.
Go into any convent or monastery and the first thing you notice is the silence.
Christian nuns and monks often took vows of silence to grow closer to God.
It was widely understood that human beings encountered God in quiet, still places.
In silence you are forced to go deep within yourself, and discover your emptiness.

Without distractions, you understand your deep need for God.

In silence you come face to face with yourself and with God.

I have made several silent retreats in my adult life, most recently last year.

I always love it at first. To get away from the sounds of the world
and the sound of my own voice is so refreshing.

The Jesuit Retreat House where I go requires that you observe total silence,
even at meals, even when you are surrounded by people.

It is strange, but very enlightening to spend extended time in silence.

You realize how much your own noise prevents you from listening to the world,
and how oblivious you are to the small still voice of God.

For God most often comes to us in the quiet depths of our hearts and souls.

There is a sacredness which is found in silence.

Yet, it is one thing to choose to live in temporary silence, another to have no
choice.

There are those whose world is totally silent all the time.

Those who have never heard the sound of their mother's voice, the chirping of
birds, the laughter of a child, or the incredible beauty of music.

Helen Keller said that of all of her limitations, deafness was most challenging of
all. She said that blindness cuts you off from things,
but deafness cuts you off from people.

It can be isolating and lonely to live in a totally silent world.

Historically the deaf were considered incapable of reason.

By Roman law the hearing impaired were denied all legal rights,
and in the Middle ages the deaf were thought to be barred from Heaven,
because they could not understand the liturgy of the sacraments.

Deafness was once equated with mental illness.

Of course we know better today, but there is still so much we do not know.

What is it like to not be able to hear?

I wanted to understand more about hearing impairment, so I asked our own Virginia Carscallen to help educate all of us.

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Virginia said that the hearing impaired have to use total communication and listen with their entire being. What does it mean to listen with our entire being? At the age of 26 Thomas Merton entered a Trappist Monastery and took four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and silence.

Merton promised to turn everything over to God, including his voice.

He prayed, contemplated, and wrote extensively about the silent life.

He discovered that the knowledge of God is best found in silence and solitude.

Merton wrote: "Often our silence and our prayers do more to bring us to God than all of our words. Silence glorifies God.

If you enter into your solitude with a silent tongue, mute beings will share with you their rest. If you go into solitude with a silent heart, the silence of creation will speak louder than the tongues of angels.

Through silence we come to live in God alone.

It is the Lord who speaks to us, with a deep silence, hidden in the midst of our own souls. Those who love their own noise are impatient of everything else.

They constantly defile the silence of the forests and the mountains and the sea.

It is the silence of the world that is real.

Our noise, our business, our purposes, these are all illusion.

God is present, and God is alive and awake in the fullness and depth and breadth of all of the silences of this world."

Luke tells us that Elizabeth, a wise older woman, was visited by Mary one day. Elizabeth is expecting a child in her old age, and when she saw and heard Mary, the baby leapt in her womb.

Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed that Mary was blessed, for she was chosen to give birth to the son of God.

The presence of this miracle in the flesh evoked a profound physical reaction, like when your heart skips a beat, or your stomach drops to your feet.

Elizabeth heard, saw, and experienced God's promised coming, and even her unborn child responded to this astonishing miracle.

The anticipation of the birth of Christ is apprehended not with the ears alone, but with bodies, hearts, and souls.

That is how we are to listen for God—with our bodies, hearts and souls.

Advent begins today, marking the beginning of the Christian year.

Advent is a Latin word which means, "to come."

It is a season of quiet watching and waiting,
the season of listening for the coming of the Christ child.

Can you feel it? The anticipation, the excitement, the promise,
and God's assurance that joy is on the way.

Can you feel it? The promise that even the most broken and cynical human being
can become pure and innocent once again.

God is trying to communicate with us, and we must listen with our bodies, hearts
and souls.

Do you hear what I hear?

"A voice cries in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain made low,
the uneven ground level and the rough places plan.

The glory of God shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together"

Do you hear what I hear?

"The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.

"For unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given.

And his name will be called wonderful, counselor, mighty God, Everlasting Father,
the Prince of Peace."

Do you hear what I hear?

"And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their
flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them,

and the glory of the Lord shone around them,

and they were filled with fear.

The angel said to them: 'Be not afraid, I bring you good news of great joy.

For to you is born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

Let us pray....

Eternal God:

As we begin this sacred season, help us to listen to you.
Help us to feel and experience your power, your presence, your peace.

Be with us as we anticipate the birth that changed the world,
the birth that has the power to change us.
Come to us now through the Holy Sacrament we are about to receive,
so that the living Christ might be born in us and we in him,
from this day forward and forevermore.

Amen.