

# +WEEKLY SERMON

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## The Sound of Silence

What is the word you would pick to describe silence?

Popular options include: a strange silence; an unbroken silence; a hostile silence; an eloquent silence; a resentful silence; and a golden silence.

Sixty years ago, Simon and Garfunkel famously sang about “the sound of silence”. “The words of the prophets / are written on the subway walls / And tenement halls / And whispered in the sounds of silence”

It was very good to gather our Headteachers from our 190 Church of England schools across Lancashire last week. I am so impressed by the quality of their leadership and the depth of their faith.

One Head spoke about introducing a time of silence into the start of her staff meetings. She explained how school life is so busy, full and noisy, so she was pleasantly surprised by how her staff team welcomed her suggestion. It brought a peace to their time together and deepened their listening and discussions.

I love spending time in silence. It can take a bit of practice, not to be immediately distracted by trivia on the shopping list or the dripping tap. But my experience is that times of silence in prayer each day, allow me space and time to submerge myself into the presence of God, to be still, and to experience his tender renewing of my soul.

The desert fathers and mothers were Egyptian monks and nuns who took seriously the call to silence in the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries, just at the time that the church was becoming part of the furniture of the Roman empire under Constantine. They sensed a call to escape to the Egyptian desert from the bright lights of the city to live the deeper and simpler life.

Dutch Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen writes about their ministry in these terms:

“Silence protects the inner fire. Silence guards the inner heart of religious emotions. The inner heat is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. This silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive. Diadochus of Photiki offers us a very concrete image: ‘When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it; likewise the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the door of speech, even though everything it says maybe good ... . Timely silence, then, is precious, for it is nothing less than the mother of the wisest thoughts’.

As the seasons change, and our instincts are to value the time spent indoors, why not try spending some time in silence each day? Sack off the job list, slow your breathing, still your heart, and invite His peace deep into your soul. “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46).

**Rt Rev Dr Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster**

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