

(1.20) Love Solitude and Silence

Find adequate time to be by yourself and use it to meditate upon the benefits that come from your Heavenly Father.

Stay away from novelties that simply entertain without substance; read books that turn your heart toward the better things. If you refrain from idle talk and do not become involved in gossip you will find time for virtuous meditations. The Saints avoided the unnecessary gatherings of others and lived in solitude. A learned man wrote about mingling with crowds and long conversations: *I never return home with the same character that I started out with.*¹ It is easier to stay silent rather than to speak at length; simpler to remain at peace in the home.

If your goal is directed toward spiritual things then be like Jesus who often *withdrew to a deserted place by himself.*² After revitalizing himself he could appear safely and teach the crowds *who were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to human beings.*³

Jesus was superior since he lived in harmony with the Father's will, obeyed it and could safely command *even the unclean spirits and they obeyed him.*⁴

The Saints understood this and stood in awe and reverence of God and even in their exemplary graces and virtues they were humble and diligent. Contrary to these are the wicked whose pride and presumption yield temporary security in deception.

Never consider yourself completely secure in this life even though you believe yourself to be deeply religious; excessive self-confidence has brought down many who were esteemed for their appearances. Struggles with temptations bring us down to reality and humility.

If you do not seek the transitory things of this life your conscience will be good. Think only of things above, place your hope solely in God, and you will have peace and serenity; otherwise one is not worthy of heavenly consolation.

When you shut out the noise of the world you will often find in your prayer space what you lost in the world. Such a place brings greater solace the more it is used; it is

¹ Seneca, Moral Letter to Luilius/Letter7, "On Crowds"

² Matthew 14:13

³ Matthew 9:8

⁴ Mark 1:27

where you become enlightened with the hidden things of Scripture that are revealed in silence and quiet. Withdraw from the world when you can, cleanse your soul with prayer and contrition and remind yourself of the Creator of all and in this way become closer to Him, and to his angels. In such ways the Lord enlightens us to do his will through prayer and study, through thought and deed, in solitude even when we are in the midst of our brothers and sisters.

It is better to be unnoticed and take diligent care of yourself than perform signs and wonders if such will cause you to neglect yourself. The spiritual man does his duty in the world but it is best to do your work and not to desire remaining in the limelight. The desires of the world attract the senses but *the world and its enticement are passing away.*⁵

Even what first appears as a happy outing often leads to a disappointing return; such an evening can bring a sad morning. Worldly joys attract with pleasantness but lead to regret and ruin. What can you experience in the world that will truly last? You think of satisfaction but it will never last; lift your eyes to the Mighty One and seek pardon from your sinfulness. Leave ephemeral things to those who are vain but seek the Almighty's will for yourself; call out to Jesus and he will stay with you, as you will not find true peace from any worldly source.



When you do leave your home be careful to stay away from gossip and other idle talk as it will disrupt your inner peace. And yet we all need to stay somewhat in touch with the world around us and what we hear can often be discomfoting.

This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 20 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal (layperson's) reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

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⁵ 1 John 2:17