

TO REALLY PRAY, GET BY YOURSELF

(Considering the Transfiguration Trio: Moses, Elijah, Jesus)

Mt 6:6-8; Ex 3:1, 19:3; I Kings 17:23; 19:8-12

I. Enter into a Sacred **Silence** (N.B. Moses, Elijah & Jesus seeking solitude)

- A. Eliminating, ignoring threats to well-being:
 - 1. Distractions—"we are distraction from distraction by distractions" (T.S. Eliot)—noise (ubiquitous and high decibels) harms hearing (both physical and spiritual)
 - 2. Diversions—media, sports, hobbies,
 - 3. Dissensions—familial, societal, political, congregational worries
 - 4. Hurry—Karl Jung: "Hurry is not of the devil. It is the devil."
- B. Hearing "still small voice"—Elijah (I Kings 19:11-12)
- C. Knowing that wise men urge withdrawing from society, learning to quiet one's heart—c.f. Toynbee's "withdrawal and "response of "creative minorities" in *A Study of History*
 - 1. Secular perspectives
 - a. "The stillest tongue can be the truest friend" (Euripides).
 - b. "Speech is of time, silence is of eternity" (Thomas Carlyle)
 - c. "Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together, that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of life, which they are henceforth to rule" (Maurice Maeterlinck).
 - d. The right word may be effective, but no word was ever effective as a rightly timed pause" (Mark Twain)
 - 2. Biblical precepts, examples
 - a. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).
 - b. Jesus "departed to a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mk 1:35)

II. Secure a Sacred **Space** (N.B. Moses, Elijah, & Jesus finding special places)

- A. Holy Land, Holy City—OT concern for land, sites
- B. Deserts:
 - 1. John the Baptist's wilderness, Jesus' temptations
 - 2. St Anthony's desert solitude—Athanasius' *Life of St Anthony*
- C. Mountains
 - 1. Moses at Mt Sinai
 - 2. Elijah at Mt Horeb—the mountain of the Lord
 - 3. "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills" (Ps 121:1)
 - 4. Katherine Lee Bates's "America the Beautiful"
- E. Oceans—Rick Kennedy's *Winds of Santa Ana*
- F. Jesus prescribes personal places, secluded from external factors—Mt 6:6-8; Blaise Pascal: challenge to be alone in a room by yourself (*Pensees*).

III. Find a Sacred **Time**

- A. Sabbath import: "*Judaism is a religion of time, aiming at the sanctification of time*" (Abraham Heschel).
- B. Greek distinction clarifies how time can be sacred:
 - 1. *Chronos* describes ordinary, clocklike, monotonous, work times
 - 2. *Kairos* describes good times, ecstasy, worship time
- C. "Where, except in the present, can the Eternal be met" (C.S. Lewis)
- D. Assigned times helpful: morning & evening; seven scheduled times; liturgical routines (e.g. Easter, Pentecost); sources such as Book of Common Prayer with daily readings from Psalms
- E. Continual attitude: minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour pray without ceasing, slipping through the "wrinkle in time" (Madeline. L'Engle)

IV. Cultivate a Sacred **Stance**: humility—cf. Lk 18:9-14

- A. Pharisee's phony pretense condemned
- B. Tax-gatherer's contrition exemplary
- C. King Canute's example