

10th October 29021

Silence

“From politics, it was an easy step to silence.”

Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen

I don't know what cynicism Jane Austen had about 19th century politics that made her give one of her characters the words quoted above. But I do know that from *any* clamour in our modern world it is equally “an easy step to silence” – if only we were prepared to take such a step.

Thomas Merton spent most of his life as a Trappist monk at the Abbey of Gethsamani in the USA. He was a prolific writer about the contemplative life as well as on contemporary issues. I have a slim volume in my bookcase entitled *The Shining Wilderness*, a gentle introduction to the thinking of one of the twentieth century's spiritual giants.

Throughout his life, Merton sought “the shining of God” in what he called “the wilderness of solitude and silence”. This did not mean, however, that he shut himself off from the needs of the world. Far from it, for he writes powerfully about how time in contemplative silence raised his awareness of the world's needs and allowed him to focus more clearly on his concerns. He was never satisfied with an easy answer or a glib phrase, and his writing speaks directly to the situations in which we find ourselves in the present day. We would all benefit from reflecting on his work.

So, I make these pleas today: that we give ourselves to silence more than we allow ourselves to do; that we chose solitude sometimes, not to hide from the needs of the world, but to give ourselves more time to focus on what really matters, shutting out the noise and clamour of what surrounds us all the time; that we see wordless contemplation not as failure or inadequacy, but as a true communion between God and self.

Let Thomas Merton's words from *Thoughts on Solitude*, be for us ...

A prayer for today

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And ... I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always ... I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen