



FORMATION COMMISSION

SACRED SILENCE/LOVE IN ACTION

by Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

It is summer. The days are longer and warmer, and Brother Sun beckons. Along with everyday busyness, my calendar shows weekends filled with extra outings: a charity run, a parish social, a visit from family who live out of state, a retreat, a fraternity picnic or two, a national workshop. It is exhilarating to anticipate and exhausting to imagine.

Did I say retreat? In the middle of the gatherings, there is time dedicated to stepping back from the craziness to a place of peace and prayer, rest and refreshment, sacred silence, solitude. Solitude allows us to understand just who we are. It is an aid to conversion, transformation, and finding our true self. Solitude for Franciscans is not fleeing the world or being alone, it is being with God. Everyone needs to develop a rhythm between solitude and engagement. *It is all but essential for us to set aside a time and place to be in solitude so we can be receptive to God's presence through Scripture, prayer, and silence. This requires perseverance, especially for those who are not naturally inclined to solitude.*



Francis was a person of solitude. *When he was exhausted from his preaching, he would look for the secrets of solitude and a place of quiet.* (Campion Murray OFM, *An Introduction to Franciscan Spirituality*). *Francis "sought out a place of rest and secret solitude. He desired to free himself for God and shake off any dust that clung to him from the time spent with the crowds. It was his custom to divide the time given him to merit grace and, as seemed best, to spend some of it to benefit his neighbors and use the rest in the blessed solitude of contemplation.* The Life of Saint Francis (FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 261).

When we go away to pray, we develop a personal relationship with God. We are accepting an intimate invitation. Scripture tells us that after a long day of carrying out their mission, Jesus called the apostles to retreat. "And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves" (Mk 6:31-32). The crowds followed them. Jesus had "compassion on them" and "taught them many things" (Mk 35-44). The culmination of this passage? Come to the table of plenty!

When we return to our daily routine after a time of prayer and solitude, we cannot help being changed by the experience. We become prayer by bringing the presence of God with us. God increases in our lives, while the "I" decreases. Time shared in sacred silence readies us to serve all our brothers and sisters with love and compassion. This is ultimate hospitality, love in action. With this understanding, I can look at my packed calendar with excitement, gratitude, and joy!

Some questions for reflection:



How would I describe solitude? Am I comfortable with silence and solitude? Do I feel a need to make space in my life for silence and solitude? Where do I encounter God? Retreat, refresh and return to your friends, family, and fraternity. Share your experience.

Peace and Every Good
The National Formation Commission

*When you pray gather up your whole self and with your beloved enter into the chamber of your heart.
Remain alone with him there. . . .St. Bonaventure*