

**6.30pm – Evensong – 17 October 2010**  
**1<sup>st</sup> EP of St Luke – Year C**

Hosea 6: 1-3  
2 Timothy 3: 10-end

Next Friday, at 7.00pm on BBC 2, a series of three programmes begins called 'The Big Silence.' The programmes initially return to Worth Abbey, in Sussex, where five years ago a series called 'The Monastery', was filmed. After that series was broadcast, the number of people in the UK who went on retreat went up by ten percent. What will happen after 'The Big Silence' we will wait and see with interest.

The programmes begin with the realisation that people are very busy, and then works with the idea of helping five volunteers to find silence in their daily lives. There is scientific evidence that noisy environments depress people, so setting time aside for silence is a good place to start in doing something about this. In fact, dedicating time is part of the discipline required. This can be a little as ten minutes a day. Giving yourselves a set time is as important as the amount of time set. Then it is a matter of meditation. Just listening to your own breathing is a good way to start. It always comes as a really big shock to some people, when it's pointed out to them that the day their breathing stops, they will be dead. You are, in effect, listening to life itself. That alone can have a remarkable effect on people, just opening the possibility of listening, and not speaking.

There is a temptation for modern people is to see silence, or peace, as a state that can be induced. Our culture persuades us that we can induce any emotional state we chose, by chemical means, or by changing external conditions. But peace is not induced, it is entered and released. It is not commanded, but is received. Peace depends on a complete correspondence between all of our faculties. All of our potentialities need to be awakened, if we are to be at peace. Only peace makes for peace. The only power that can create peace is the power of peace, found, known, and experienced, in our own hearts. This peace power is the core and foundation of our being. And meditation, in silence, is the way of peace. It is also the way to purity of heart. Matthew wrote, in chapter 5 of his gospel: **Happy the pure of heart; they shall see God.** For us Christians, the meaning of life is to see God with absolute clarity, and meditation is the way to that clarity of vision. The skill we have to learn is to see clearly, purely, what is here. God, I am, is here. This vision of God is not the result of any moral striving. It is not the result of an ambitious pursuit of holiness. It is a pure gift of God.

Of course some people would say that they simply don't have the time for all this meditation, silence or contemplation. A single working mum, for example, who has to balance time with the children, and time to work, and even getting to and from work. Well work is not necessarily an impediment – we all have to work. St. Benedict knew all about that and there's a marvelous chapter in his Rule saying, in effect, when you have to get the harvest in, you have to get it in. So pray in the fields. Don't leave the wheat out in the rain, just because you had to be home at a certain time to pray, to meditate, or to contemplate. This, the wheat, is what must be attended to now, so do it. This is your contemplation. The desert mothers and fathers, some three hundred years before Benedict, said that contemplation was best accomplished through manual labour. Their ancient literature tells stories about the work that was done by contemplatives – basket weaving, for example, is frequently mentioned. The desert mothers and fathers were effectively saying that contemplation is not an excuse for idleness.

Silence, meditation or contemplation can become your centre, giving you direction, and is then no longer a burden. You can begin to see all of your 'good works' in relationship to your awareness of the presence of God. Certainly you must nourish this awareness of God's presence in your life and in the world. This awareness will always be the filter through which you think, and act, and pray. This presence will always stand between you, and over you, and around you, in everything you are doing.

So watch 'The Big Silence' next Friday evening, and watch how the five volunteers cope with bringing silence into their daily lives. But let me warn you, this is not something that you learn to do in just a few hours. But whether it takes you two weeks, two years or twenty years to learn, doesn't matter. All that matters is that you are on the way. You are on a pilgrimage to perfect freedom of spirit. Amen.