

83. *The kingdom of silence*

It's up to you rather than me, to know whether you should give up the form of active mental prayer that you have followed until now, and turn to a more passive form of prayer. In any event, here are a few elements on which to make a judgement.

Let us suppose that during mental prayer you are inclined to remain silent and immobile, close to the God whom you do not see, but whom you are sure is there. Words seem superfluous, far less explicit and true than the silence of your being, offered to the Lord's gaze. After concluding your mental prayer, you are at peace, and as though renewed. Then search no further. The Holy Spirit has introduced you to the kingdom of silence.

But don't expect this kingdom to be an earthly paradise. There will be times when you'll need great courage to resist the temptation to flee from this austere and desert land. At such times, may your strength lie in the Lord's promise recorded in the small book of the prophet Hosea: "*I will lead [him] into the desert and speak to [his] heart*" (Ho 2:16).

Be on your guard against the contrary temptation to cling to this new form of prayer, fearing that you will retrogress if you turn back. There will indeed be days when silence would be empty, when you would be wasting your time if you were not active. At such times, return in all humility to the mental prayer you know well. This consists in thinking about God, in letting him speak, and in asking him to bless those whom you encounter and the tasks you have to carry out.

There may be times when you are unsure as to what you ought to do. It will seem as if your innermost soul is alert and attentive to God, in a zone impervious to noise. Meanwhile in your soul's periphery, emotions, passions, thoughts and sensations will be running wild. Don't be disturbed, but follow your innermost soul. As for everything else, all that is churning about and demanding your attention, respond with indifference and rejection. To reject something is to render it harmless.