



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

The Gift of Silence

God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.

Saint Teresa of Kolkata

Silence is a gift; it is important and necessary means of listening to and responding to God. With this purpose in mind, there is a practice, discovered quite by accident, by Dr. Maria Montessori called the Lesson in Silence. This is the greatest help to the child in becoming aware of and mastering his or her own actions. It is something we can do at home.



We need to understand that this is not the kind of silence imposed on the children by an adult trying to restore order to a noisy room. We could say that such silence is "an empty silence" for it is of little value to anyone but the adult. The silence we want to create in the family for prayer is the one Maria Montessori describes as rising from stillness, which has substance and brings to the child and the family an interior order.

The Gift of Silence is a special activity proposed to the children as a means of helping them to become conscious of the individual effort that it takes to achieve such a group result. It invites conscious control of every movement, which is not accomplished by an outer command. Rather, it is an exercise which takes time, a willingness to cooperate, trustworthiness and a great desire to belong to the family. This "ultimate" lesson in the control of movement requires much of the child. The preparations for the Gift of Silence are spread over an extended period of time and is achieved through the continued communal and familial practice.

It can be done in the following way:

- ⊗ Invite the child(ren) to find a comfortable position and call to attention your own stillness. Invite the child(ren) to try and imitate you.
- ⊗ As the child(ren) become more able to achieve their own silence, whisper a few brief suggestions to help them become aware of their own bodies. “Is even our breathing quiet?”
- ⊗ When all are relatively silent, invite an awareness of sounds around you. (birds, traffic, water dripping, etc.) The suggestion might be given to close our eyes and listen for a particular sound that is deliberately made (ringing a bell, snapping fingers)
- ⊗ As the silence is more complete, a psalm verse might be repeated, or a song might be very quietly sung.
- ⊗ The exercise may be completed by going just outside the sight of the children and whispering each child’s name to come to you. The child who is called gets up and moves as silently as possible to where you are, while the others wait with amazing patience and great anticipation for their names to be called.

The self-control that the children manage to exhibit is a wonder to behold and gives them great joy. Montessori wrote in *The Discovery of the Child*:

“It was then that I learned that within the mind of the child dwells its own reward and its own spiritual pleasures. After such exercises it seems to me that their love was greater: they certainly became more obedient, sweeter and gentler...It is in silence and when movements are so ordered that the inner sensitivity that is called ‘religious sense’ or ‘spiritual sense’ can be developed.”

Such experiences with silence help the child come in touch with him or herself, first of all through awareness of one’s body and the simple attention to one’s own breathing. Doing the silence exercises also helps the child feel connected to the others in the family through the common effort of achieving the silence. Furthermore, it sensitizes the child to the surrounding environment and fosters a state of inner peace and thus, a greater capacity for listening to God.

Silence needs to become a habit of being, for prayer, understood as dialogue, requires

silence. Without it, there is no prayer.

The Gift of Silence can help the family, with intentional self-discipline. Remaining quiet for a period of time can help develop a sense of peace and spiritual awareness of God.

Possible Scripture verses that could be used:

- ⊗ The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him. (Hab 2:20)
- ⊗ Be still before the Lord. (Ps 37:7)
- ⊗ Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46:10)
- ⊗ Be still before the Lord, all mankind. (Zec 2:13)
- ⊗ The voice of the Lord was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire; but in a gentle whisper. (1 Ki 19:11 - 12)
- ⊗ The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (Jn. 14:3)

Some things to remember to enjoy the Gift of Silence at Home

- Unplug. Our world is full of noise. Try to turn off the TV, the computer and unplug from all your devices. As unnatural as it may seem at first, remember that silence is essential for the soul!
- Notice your speaking voice and allow for time to speak to your children in a quiet manner. Even if your child responds in a loud voice, simply make your own voice quieter. Your child will eventually realize the volume of your voice. We must model for them how to be silent.
- Invite the children to be still. Young children may not be able to exercise control of movement right away. Make sure he or she has had an opportunity for movement prior to offering this time of quiet and stillness.
- After you have had an opportunity for silence, discuss with the children: What sounds did you hear in the room? What sounds did you hear in nature? In your own body?
- The 6-12 year old children may want to find a place where they can sit in silence, and later write, draw or journal about what they noticed. What gifts of God did they find in the silence? Maybe he or she has a small notebook or can take loose sheets of 8.5 x 11 paper and fold in half to create their own booklet, so that he or she may write or draw about their experience of silence often.