

FINDING SILENCE

Million Minutes is about standing up for young people and raising money for young people. And we are choosing silence as a way to achieve this. Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB, Million Minutes Champion and presenter of BBC's The Big Silence, explains why.



“Staying silent may seem a strange way of giving voice to an opinion but we are drawing attention to the fact that there are many young people who are effectively voiceless. Million Minutes wants to help them in two ways. First of all we will draw attention to them by being a powerful expression of their voicelessness. By remaining silent together we find that we are giving voice to young people’s silence. Secondly, we will raise money for initiatives and projects that help young people to find a voice.

“Silence is a natural part of life. There are two kinds. There’s the embarrassed silence you get in a lift with strangers when we’re just longing for the lift journey to end and somebody to say something. And then there’s the beautiful silence that you get at the top of the mountain when the last thing you want is somebody to start chatting about things. You just want to sit there and absorb the beauty and the silence of the mountaintop. The challenge for all of us is how to find silence like this in day-to-day life. There are some ways of finding that silence and the best place to start is inside yourself.”

How to find the ‘deeper silence’

At some point during Lent, maybe even each day, we encourage you to go a bit deeper into your silence and into a time of reflection. This should be any time between 5 minutes and 30 minutes. It’s up to you to choose a time, relatively short, but quite intense. The monastic tradition offers us several ways to help us in the silent times. One of these is the slow reading of sacred texts, called *Lectio Divina*. Fr Christopher offers some guidance at millionminutes.org/silent where you can also check out Fr Christopher’s advice on reflection in meditation on video at millionminutes.org

Fr Christopher’s book, *Finding Sanctuary*, is available from findingsanctuary.org



DELIA SMITH

Britain’s best selling cookery writer and Million Minutes Champion

“What my seventy years on this planet can offer you is my utter conviction of the importance of allowing some time for stillness and silence in daily life. There are three main reasons for this. One is that it gradually enables us to understand ourselves more deeply. Two: this then expands our capacity to understand and relate to others and to the world. Three: as the deeper reflective part of our human nature develops it will draw us inexorably towards God.

“Why not begin with Million Minutes? Don’t settle for life on the surface of things. The world needs young people like you to take up the challenge. In the words of St Paul ‘God’s power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine’ (Ephesians 3. 20).”

See millionminutes.org/silent for Delia’s advice on staying silent.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR YOUR SILENCE

MATTHEW VAN DUUVENBODE



“I grew up in a lively Catholic family, with 3 older siblings and lots of activity going on around me. There was lots of laughter in my house, as well as the occasional argument. The TV was often on and our home resounded with competing musical tastes and piano practice. As my teenage years progressed, I found the prospect of being on my own a little bit intimidating, and deliberately surrounded myself with people and noise. I think I was a little scared of what I might end up discovering about myself if I spent time on my own, and preferred not to risk it! You may well be similarly anxious about the prospect of spending 24 hours in silence for Million Minutes.”

Find out some of Matthew’s top tips for integrating silence into daily life. They’re bound to help you in your sponsored silence. millionminutes.org/silent

SR GABRIEL DAVISON

“Enjoy your sponsored silence... I hope it will bring you peace and to a greater awareness of yourself. I hope it will encourage you to look for moments in your day when you can be silent, become more present to yourself and therefore more present to God. It will lead you along a mysterious path.... to a place of greater intimacy with yourself and others..... it will lead you to a place where you know you are loved and where you can love freely.”



Sr Gabriel Davison, from BBC 2’s *The Convent*, offers some words of practical advice on staying silent for a long time. millionminutes.org/silent

“Even amid the ‘busy-ness’ and the stress of our daily lives, we need to make space for silence, because it is in silence that we find God, and in silence that we discover our true self. And in discovering our true self, we discover the particular vocation which God has given us.”

Pope Benedict XVI to the young people of the UK during his visit to London

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Mediation

Being silent can be hard. Trying to stop and empty your thoughts is difficult. But the more you try and give yourself space, the easier it becomes. Here are the key points to follow if you feel confident to lead a group of students in a short time of silence. It could even be used in an extended staff meeting.

1. Sit upright on a chair, uncross your arms and legs, with your hands on your lap.
2. Keep your back straight (if it's crooked you'll tend to fall asleep).
3. Imagine someone has got a very important message to give to you. Sit relaxed and comfortable, but attentive.
4. Face forward, close your eyes and relax. Breathe deeply a few times, at the natural speed, just deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. The deep breaths will help your whole body to relax.
5. Then breathe normally, but concentrate on your breathing. This will help relax your mind. Let all the other thoughts go by listening to your breathing.
6. You'll still get distracted by sounds and thoughts, so just take a simple phrase to say to yourself.
7. For example, 'Be still, and know that I am God'. Say to yourself, 'Be still' as you breathe in through your nose, and 'know that I am God' as you breathe out through your mouth.
8. And as you are doing this you are aware of your breathing and you have the simple phrase to keep your mind focused, you'll actually be concentrating on your own life. That breath is also the breath of God, the life-giving Spirit within you. 'Be still' - to know that you are alive. 'Know that I am God' to know that God's Spirit is the breath within you.
9. You can enter into this wherever you are, even with noise around you, because you can find that still point within your own body and soul, and at that point you may have something to say to God.
10. Keep this up for as long as you like, (5 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes) and don't feel afraid when the time is right to speak your own words to God and let God speak his own words to you.

This meditation is created by Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB, Million Minutes Champion and presenter of BBC's The Big Silence. Abbot Christopher's book, Finding Sanctuary, is available from

Abbot Christopher explores meditation on video at millionminutes.org

How to find the 'deeper silence'

At some point during your silence you might want to set aside some time to enter more deeply into your silence and into a time of reflection. This should be any time between 5 minutes and 30 minutes. It's up to you to choose a time, relatively short, but quite intense.

The monastic tradition offers us several ways to help us in the silent times. One of these is the slow reading of sacred texts, called Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a practical way for you, or those you are encouraging to stay silent, to find a deeper silence during their sponsored period. In his book, Finding Sanctuary, Abbot Christopher explains how:

This involves taking a sacred text, usually but not exclusively the Bible, and reading it with the conviction that God is addressing you through this text. There are various reading schemes on offer to help you read a Bible extract each day. Alternatively, you can just start with a gospel and read it section by section. I advise starting with Mark's gospel. Now, with text in hand, you are ready to look at the three key features that taken together make up Lectio Divina.

First of all, the text is seen as a gift to be received, not a problem to be dissected. Avoid imposing your questions and let the text question you. Humility is the key to this wisdom. Let the text come to you.

Secondly, the Lectio tradition teaches us that in order to receive what a text has to offer we must read slowly. As an antidote to speed-reading we need to foster slow reading. As Australian monk Michael Casey says Repetition is the soul of genuine Lectio. We read and advance, then go back and read again. With each repetition something new may strike us".

Finally, lectio is a way of prayer. Before reading pray that God will speak to you through the text. During reading, allow the reading to evolve into meditation and then into prayer and finally contemplation. When the reading is concluded keep some phrase in mind and repeat it throughout the day so that prayerful reading becomes prayerful living.

(Adapted from Finding Sanctuary- findingsanctuary.org)

Scripture passages on silence

Mark 1.35 "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."

Luke 4.42 "At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place."

Habakkuk 2.20 "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!"

Psalms 46.10 "Be still, and know that I am God!"

Psalms 62.1-2 "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken."