

## The Important Thing about Silent Prayer: Don't Give Up!

October 2014

I wonder if you share this frustration: I really have a hard time getting quiet – and staying quiet for centering prayer. I have no problem sitting still. No problem finding time and space in my home to be alone. No lack of information or resources about listening for God or silent prayer. It's just that my brain never wants to give up its endless planning, evaluating, and analyzing. Some people call it monkey chatter, or monkey brain. Whatever you call it, it makes it really challenging to be receptive to the Spirit of God within.

If this is a struggle you share, and if you also share a deep desire to cultivate a closer connection to God, you should plan to attend a series planned for later this month. It's called **CENTERING PRAYER/LISTENING FOR GOD**. LeAnn Linder-Scholer has taught people to “manage the monkey brain” in lots of different settings and for many years. She will offer specific steps to help you quiet the mind, and lots of opportunity to practice. I'm really looking forward to it.

In the meantime, and in case you can't make this event, here are other things that I have tried, over the years. See if any of them work for you.

- Light a candle to begin, and offer God your intention. Your desire to be with God pleases God, even if it doesn't go as you plan.
- Focus on your breathing. Become aware of your body. Remind yourself that God is present right where you are, so be where you are!
- Don't declare war on your thoughts, chasing them down to shut them up. That increases the attention you're paying them. Try to just let them pass by.
- Poetry sometimes help me slow down my thinking. Some of my favorite poets are Mary Oliver and Denise Levertov. It's a good prelude to prayer.
- When closing my eyes seems to just encourage the monkey- brain, I have some mandala coloring sheets that can sometimes distract my brain just enough, but not too much.
- Music can help settle me too, but be very careful what you choose. For me, it has to be instrumental and very mellow. Otherwise my brain grabs hold of the song and starts following it!
- Resist any and all temptation to evaluate your effort – to grade yourself, so to speak. Again, that just puts you in your analytical brain. You showed up. You did the best you could. You will try again tomorrow.

Above all, don't give up! Like everything else, this practice of silence and solitude – of listening for God – comes more easily if you do it more often; it requires practice and perseverance. And it's a practice that most definitely bears fruit. There is no question that my days go better; they are, as the saying goes, “less likely to unravel”, if they're hemmed with this kind of prayer. When I have spent time in silence with God, I know a greater peace, I am less reactive, I am more able to love myself and others, and I am much more aware of God's presence throughout the day. So I'll keep at it. Always.

Pastor Susan