

Sacred Solitude

“In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” (Mark 1: 35) This verse was the touchstone that infused an early work of Henri Nouwen: *Out of Solitude*¹. I still re-visit my well-worn copy frequently. Many years ago Nouwen’s reflections in that little book first articulated for me what my **soul** knew but my head hadn’t caught on to till then. It awakened me to consider the place of solitude in my life and my need to give as much significance to claiming those places and spaces of sacred solitude as to discerning my places of work, ministry and activity.

I am still unpacking the treasures of sacred solitude and silence, still unfolding the beauties and richness of those times that have been so transformative in my life. I continue to marvel at the awesome invitation held out again and again by the God of my life to come apart for a while and savor the intimacy of our relationship that draws me deeper and deeper into the mystery of our oneness and the sacred community of all creation.

More emphatically, I have learned that I can’t long engage in the busy-ness of life, relationships, ministry or community without *getting up, leaving* those activities and press of responsibilities and tasks and *going off* for some sacred *alone* space. Indeed, in those “alone spaces” my self, my spirit, is renewed, finds courage, direction, is deepened, opens to larger possibility and wisdom. In that solitude, amazingly, I have never been left to feel *alone*. The God of my life, the Spirit and the blessed communion of all creation have been most surely present. I have yet to return to “the mix” of living from a time of solitude without being enriched, more whole, reintegrated, more alive to myself and all about me. It is a wholesome gift to give myself: to be able to *marinate* for a time in all that feeds my soul and the hungers of my heart. I have also learned that this seemingly extravagant gift is really as essential to my life as air, water, nourishment: breath of life, living water, bread for the journey! Yet the gift received is not for me; the blessing ought to spill out to all I encounter as I return from that time of solitude.

“In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” Jesus lived this habit of seeking solitude in the midst of the press of living...not a bad habit to imitate!

¹Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude, Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN, 1974.