

Silence

Objectives

To learn about the virtue of silence and why it is so important in our lives

References

1. Holy Scripture
2. The Philokalia the Bible of Orthodox Spirituality by Fr. Anthony Coniaris
3. The Ladder of Divine Ascent by St. John Climacus

Lesson Outlines

Have you ever said something that you regretted? That made you feel so small and you wished you could take it back?

Well if so then you are not the only one. We all have said things that we regret tremendously. St. James says that the tongue is an unruly evil full of deadly poison (James 3:5) and that anybody who is able to control their tongue is blessed (verse 2).

St. John Climacus says “It is hard to keep water in without a dike. But it is harder still to hold in one’s tongue.”

Why does the tongue seem so bad? After all we spend so much of our time talking and having a good time, after all that how we make friends and stay in touch with them and get to know people...why is talking so bad???

1. Proverbs 10:19. Too much talking is never free from sin. Consider how a conversation begins, it may begin by asking someone about their day which then turns into complaints about their job, their spouse, their children and then into gossip about the boss and coworkers; judgment of their spouse and it may all seem innocent at first. I am just blowing off some steam. But in one conversation I have sinned three times – I complained, I judged, and I gossiped without even knowing it. Idle talk causes us to sin without us even knowing it.
2. 1 Kings 19: 11-13. God is only present and can only be felt in the silence of the mind and the heart. Too much talk results in the loss of the Holy Spirit and God’s presence. This is why the desert fathers valued silence and fled from the world in order to clearly hear God’s voice and feel His presence in silence.
3. If there is one sin that we find in too much talking it is pride. I may want to make sure everybody hears my opinion and learns from what I have to say, or I may just like the extra attention that talking is drawing to me or I maybe boasting directly or indirectly about my life, my possessions. In all cases I am basically feeding my ego. St. John Climacus says that talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to preen itself and show off.
4. Too much talking actually ruins communication. Silence helps us communicate better with others. When we stop talking we become better listeners, we are able to understand others better and cater to their needs. Too much talking is not a sign of love. Many times we feel that if we love someone then we need to always be talking with them. To truly love someone means to be able to sit quietly in their presence.

5. Ecclesiastes 3:7 Does that mean that we should always stay silent regardless of the situation? Absolutely not! The Bible says that there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak. We should speak up when our words will edify someone else, will encourage someone or will allow us to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to ask God for discernment regarding when to talk.
6. Even in situations where we are called to talk, we should keep our words few. One of the saints says that even godly spiritual talk if it is excessive turns into idle chatter. The mind cannot keep up with the tongue in order to fuel it with edifying thoughts, so what happens is that we start saying things that are really of no value and may hurt or offend someone else.
7. Job 5:21. Most importantly in keeping our silence is avoiding words that are more like poison. Many times words are more hurtful than a physical blow and are seldom forgotten. Many people see strength in the way they can put people down but that is probably one of the worst forms of cruelty. If you cannot hold your tongue in anything else make sure that your words are not hurtful.

Conclusion

Too much talking is a sin that we must learn to avoid because it results in quenching the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), losing of virtues, and causing us to sin. May God grant us wisdom and discernment to know when to speak and to say the things that will build others up and not tear them down.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. How can we practice silence?