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## Soundless Listening

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## Soundless Listening

On a University campus, it is not uncommon to see students walking across campus, from one building to another, talking on a cell phone – even in the company of peers. When I go out for exercises, there are men and women of all ages wearing headsets, listening to music or news. Most stores and all malls are filled with sounds of music and advertising. In my head, even when I drive without the radio, walk across campus with no cell phone, walk or jog without an iPod, I do not necessarily experience quiet inside. I can have a lot of mental noise, even when there are no sounds around me, or at least none that I have intentionally sought. The Noise” is the rush of thoughts. Anything but quiet. I find it hard to listen for God. Maybe not hard as in work that requires a lot of energy. Rather, hard in the sense that I have to discipline myself and make a choice: either this thought (recreation) or attending to the conversation with God. Even when I use the psalms of the liturgy of Hours, or a Reading from Scripture, or a favorite prayers, or poem, or even words to a song, I can read and hardly see, quietly say the words aloud, and not hear. The noise of thinking is hard to stop. I have to make a choice. And I know that it is not all me – I am weak, and what can I expect. God is good, and at times grants me special impulses to listen, to attend to what I am reading or speaking. Or even to listen for no sounds: listen with my heart for some gentle indication of God.

I wonder how others who surround themselves with sound all the time can ever get to the state of listening to nothing, but listening with the heart. But who am I? I do not know anyone else’s heart or mind. I do think it important to listen to the quiet, to turn away from all other thoughts, and to allow some softer sounds of God to be heard. Though words may come, and they are my language, my words in my heads; my thoughts, or at least thoughts that are in me, still, I sense inspiration, not all me or mine. A bit of ours or God’s. the feelings and sensibilities are greatly different from what I can induce by choosing songs I like or reading prayers I like. Well, those can help, but there is still the grace of God that I cannot force. It does make sense to go to sources if that’s the word – to occasions of grace. The near occasion of grace. And so it makes sense to make time and place for quiet, even if I cannot guarantee that I will be there fully, even if I show up. But without the appointments, I might never get to the point of listening to the quiet, making myself available to inspirations of ... Well, if I read about something significant, and then in the same day, or shortly after the reading or the experience, give myself time to be quiet, something might happen. Give God a chance to speak or suggest, or wink or smile. I can’t do all the talking, all the controlling. It’s a burden. Be

quiet. Let God make a move. I have never been hurt or called to something bad. I have heard my name with love. I have felt courage to make decisions that entail sacrifice. To apologize. To tell someone "no" when I had previously said "yes" too glibly. Especially, I have learned to say what's on my mind and then to laugh at the inconsistencies between what I say and what I deeply value. Humans move from one moment to another: sometimes on the surface, sometimes deeply into the truth. In the quiet, I can be guided to distinguish one level from another. God is in everything, everywhere. But I need some quiet to distinguish what is of God and what is really not helpful to me or to anyone else.