

The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Practicing Lent

A Series of Weekly and Daily Reflections for Lent 2015

Friday ♦ March 27, 2015

Michael K. Marsh

*Fasting and Simplicity with the Desert Fathers and Mothers:
Fasting From Words*

A Word From the Desert.

"Abba Macarius the Great said to the brothers at Scetis, when he dismissed the assembly, 'Flee, my brothers.' One of the old men asked him, 'Where could we flee to beyond the desert?' He put his finger on his lips and said, 'Flee that,' and he went into his cell, shut the door and sat down."¹

Reflection.

Abba Macarius shushed the brothers. "He put his finger on his lips and said, 'Flee that.'" Sometimes we need to be shushed. The world is noisy, our lives are noisy, we are noisy. We need to be reminded of and sent to the silence "beyond the desert."

The old man who asked the question is looking at the world around him. Abba Macarius knows that real silence is more about what is happening within the old man than what is happening around the old man. It is not simply the cessation of talking or the absence of sound.

True silence is about engagement not escape, fullness not emptiness, presence not absence. "For God alone my soul in silence waits," the psalmist tells us (Psalm 62:1, 6).

Silence invites us to repent from the need to justify, explain, and defend; from the need to be recognized, heard, and approved of; from the need to be accomplished, efficient, and productive.

The practice of silence is an act of self-offering, showing up, and making oneself available to God.

Silence creates space and place for God to show up. It allows us to listen with our heart rather than our ears. It is the threshold upon which we meet God. Deep interior silence lets us rest in God.

¹ Macarius 16 in *The Sayings*, 131.

Nothing needs to be said. Nothing needs to be done. All is well.

For Consideration and Practice.

- Recall a time of intimacy with another in which there was nothing that could or needed to be said and to have said anything would have destroyed the moment and broken the intimacy. Now recall a time when you were not talking, there was no noise or distraction, and the world around you was quiet, but within you were chattering voices, a stream of thoughts, and various images arising. These experiences will give you some idea of what Abba Macarius meant when "he put his finger on his lips and said, 'Flee that.'"
- Do you sometimes play music or turn on the television just to have some company? If you are home is the television on? Is the radio always playing in your car? Are you always on the computer or phone? Let *off* rather than *on* become the default position. Become more selective about when, how much, and what kind of outside sound you bring into your life. Drive in silence. Limit your music and television. Speak only when your words are profitable.
- Establish an intentional and regular practice of silence. Sit in the same chair, at the same time, for a specified period of time. No talking, reading, or thinking. Thoughts and images will arise. That's normal and to be expected. Let them go, return to the silence.

Prayer.

O God, the creator and sustainer of life, from your silence you spoke your creative word, "Let there be," and brought forth life. Let me flee to that silent place where I may be still and know that you are God. *Amen.*