

On Contemplative Life

Bishop Philip Boyce

They may well be separated from the busy world, with all its interests and pleasures, but contemplative monasteries remain very near to us with their prayers. They pray for us but we are normally unaware of the graces we receive through their lives of quiet dedication to the Lord. Although they are hidden from society, people of faith have trust in the prayers of nuns and monks and friars. It is sufficient to visit any contemplative monastery to become aware of the constant stream of people who come with prayer intentions, trusting in the intercession of those who have completely dedicated their lives to God in continuous prayer and penance.



The busy world often passes by our contemplative monasteries, heedlessly unaware of their existence or of the spiritual influence they exert on society. Parishes, especially those who have such communities near at hand, could draw attention to their presence by placing a notice in their parish bulletins and on their online and digital platforms. Catechists could mention this way of life, to which some young girls or boys might be called, and even take a school class to visit them and spend an hour with some of the enclosed women or men whose life always fascinates young people. Although not a very common vocation in life, the Lord does call some, and will continue to do so, to this type of dedicated life on behalf of the Church.

The Church is well aware of the importance of the contemplative life. The Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) acknowledged the important role of contemplative communities in the Church. It said they were “a fount of heavenly blessings” and that they “lend lustre to God’s people with abundant fruits of holiness, sway them by their example and enlarge the Church by their hidden apostolic fruitfulness” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 7).

All popes in recent times have expressed their appreciation for this way of life. Perhaps the most striking witness to the whole world on the value of a hidden life of prayer was given by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who, on account of advanced age and diminished physical strength, retired from the Petrine ministry on 11 February 2013 and chose “to devote himself even more to prayer and meditation” in a secluded monastery in the Vatican gardens. This is an important reminder to us all of the apostolic value of a life completely dedicated to God.



Contemplative communities are power houses of prayer, drawing down many graces on our troubled world. In their own silent but effective way they contribute enormously to the work of re-evangelisation of our secularised world.



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