

4th Sunday of Advent
Cycle B
December 18, 2011
Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air 4pm, 10:30am, 12 noon

Stillness

This afternoon, I want to ask you to do something with me.

I am asking that for two minutes, we just sit here and let's all be silent – completely silent. I recommend that either we keep our eyes closed, or we keep our eyes focused on the image of the resurrected Christ or on the tabernacle.

In these two minutes, don't recite any prayers and do try to let go of any worries or any thoughts about what you are going to do the rest of the day. Let's just try to be – to be with God.

And every 10 to 15 seconds, just silently repeat the words: *“Emmanuel – God is with us.” “Emmanuel – God is with us.”*

So, let's begin and try this for two minutes. [Pause – 2 minutes]

Prayer of Stillness

Okay. I want to say a few things about what we just did.

We can call this the Prayer of Stillness. It may not be easy for us.

It is almost counter to how we live in our culture. Most of us, most of the time, including me, are always doing something.

It is difficult for us just to be instead of to do. One author says that we have become human doings instead of human beings.

I think this has affected our spiritual lives. We may think that a life of faith, a spiritual life, or prayer is just doing things like the set prayers here at Mass.

It does include that. But it also includes just being – being with God.

And, in fact, maybe this is a very basic part of spirituality. Maybe the lack of this is why some people today find religion or church or spirituality empty – just not meeting their needs.

Mary's Stillness

I am led to this today because of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

The gospel at one point tells us that Mary treasures and reflects on what is happening in her life. This tells us that there is a stillness in Mary's life – a Prayer of Stillness.

I believe that this stillness, her being, just being with God, this is what enables Mary to deal with the message of the angel in today's gospel. She questions how she can conceive this child.

But in the end, Mary says, "Okay!" Her inner stillness, her Prayer of Stillness enables her to do this.

What Stillness Does

I recommend that our making time just to be with God, like we did a few minutes ago, can have positive effects on our lives.

We see this right in the Scriptures today. This Prayer of Stillness can help us to be receptive, as Mary is.

It disposes us to listen – to take in what God or what another person is saying. It opens us to messages that are in words and messages that are not in words but in the very stillness.

The Prayer of Stillness also calms us. It gives us an inner peace.

Again, we see this in Mary today. She is troubled and she questions, but in the end she is at peace with what is happening.

Maybe the first reading about King David gives us the underlying value in the Prayer of Stillness. David wants to build a house for God, a great temple.

But God says, "*You're going to build a house for me? No way!*"

"*I'm going to build a house for you.*" God means not a building, but a "house" of successors to lead God's people.

In effect, God is saying to David, "*Don't worry about what you're going to do for me. Instead, allow me to do something for you that will be much more important.*"

Well, in the Prayer of Stillness, instead of our speaking words and offering prayers to God, we are allowing God to do something for us. We are allowing God to come to us and speak to us and form us as persons.

Our being with God allows God to affect our very being. And that can have dramatic effects on who we are and what we do and how we relate.

Conclusion

So, I recommend: try this Prayer of Stillness on your own.

Don't bite off too much at least to begin with. Maybe just 2 to 5 minutes.

It can have dramatic effects. After all, it enabled Mary to bring the Son of God into our world.