

Sacred Solitude

By Joanne Vallero, CSJ

“In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.”

(Mark 1:35)



This verse was the touchstone that infused an early work of Henri Nouwen: *Out of Solitude*¹. I still re-visit my well-worn copy frequently. Many years ago Nouwen’s reflections in that little book first articulated for me what my soul knew but my head hadn’t caught on to till then. It awakened me to consider the place of solitude in my life and my need to give as much significance to claiming those places and spaces of sacred solitude as to discerning my places of work, ministry and activity.

I am still unpacking the treasures of sacred solitude and silence, still unfolding the beauties and richness of those times that have been so transformative in my life. I continue to marvel at the awesome invitation held out again and again by the God of my life to come apart for awhile and savor the intimacy of our relationship that draws me deeper and deeper into the mystery of our oneness and the sacred community of all creation.

More importantly, I have learned that I can’t long engage in the busy-ness of life, relationships, ministry or community without getting up, leaving those activities and the press of responsibilities and going off for some sacred alone space. Indeed, in that “alone space” my self, my spirit, is renewed, finds courage, direction, is deepened, opens to larger possibility and wisdom. In that solitude, amazingly, I have never felt alone. The God of my life, the Spirit and the blessed communion of all creation have most surely been present. I have yet to return to “the



mix” of living from a time of solitude without being enriched, reintegrated, and more alive to myself and the world about me. It is a wholesome gift to give myself: to experience for a time the solitude that feeds my soul and the hungers of my heart. I have also learned that this seemingly extravagant gift is really as essential to my life as air, water, nourishment: breath of life, living water, and bread for the journey! Yet the gift received is not for me; the blessing extends to all I encounter as I return from this time of solitude.

“In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” Jesus lived this habit of seeking solitude in the midst of the press of living...not a bad habit to imitate!

†Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude, Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN. 1974

