

6th July 2023

Silence

**“Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.”**

Max Ehrmann, *Desiderata*

**“Silence is not simply the absence of sound,
it is going to that place of inner stillness.”**

From an Iona Community Programme Worker

The guests and staff in Iona Abbey eat together three times a day round long, Refectory tables. The food is good, the conversation stimulating, the building of community always important. The meal begins with a spoken Grace in a creative form, from a Book of Graces or written by the person chairing the meal. At the close, there are announcements: information about what's happening next; plans for later; requests for help.

When that's done, there's a call for silence, so we can give thanks. Usually, here or elsewhere, when a "silent prayer" is announced, I've only just begun to gather my thoughts and concentrate on my prayers, when the silence is interrupted by the leader saying something or pronouncing the "Amen". The silence is *too short*. There may have been an absence of sound for a few seconds, but there hasn't been time to find a place of inner stillness. The *Desiderata* reminds me "what peace there may be in silence", but the shortness of it doesn't allow me to get close to that peace.

Today it was different. The chairperson called for a silence at the end of the meal as usual – and she let the silence run! I suspect it was no more than 30 seconds, though I didn't time it. But it seemed *much* longer than that. And it was long enough to allow me time to "get into" my silent prayers before my journey to stillness was interrupted.

On Sunday evening in the Abbey Church there's a service which is largely silence – just "topped and tailed" by a few words. And in this act of worship there is more than enough time to go on that journey to a still place and to experience the wonders that await you there.

If silence isn't just the absence of sound, we need time to get to that inner place where stillness embraces our prayers. Peace and stillness don't happen in an instant. It's a journey from the "noise and haste" of a shared meal or anything else, to the inner peace that awaits us.

A prayer for today

Today, Lord, I found you in the silence – because I had enough time to get to you. Amen

An original reflection © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>