

Notes for Adult Class on Silence, Part 1

4 Options for Sitting in Silence

all of these are a simple way to begin

1. Benedictine Rumination

This practice has been around since the 6th century and started in Benedictine monasteries. It began because monks were hearing a great deal of scripture each day but they would daydream and zone out.

To “ruminate” comes from what a cow does when it chews its food again.

It means to go over the same thing again and again to get all the nourishment you can.

By picking a passage of scripture and reconsidering it again and again, you can extract deeper meaning from it.

How to:

1. Choose a passage that is a complete unit but that doesn't take more than 2 minutes to read out loud
2. Read the passage and select a fragment that you can easily memorize.
3. Now repeat the phrase or sentence. Chew on it over and over for your 10 minutes of silence—mouth the phrase or whisper it if you want to be like the Benedictines ☺
4. If your mind wanders, just gently return it to your phrase—you can free associate and be imaginative but keep returning to your passage
5. You can even let it take over your whole day—sit in focused silence with it for 10 minutes but then return to it throughout the day
6. You will often extract new nourishment from the passage AND it can reshape your entire day

2. Psalm Repetition

In the 4th century a wandering Christian scholar named John Cassian went to the east and found Eastern Christians practicing this and he brought it to the Western Church. It is similar to Benedictine Rumination but with two main differences:

1. Benedictine Ruminations uses a new phrase each day; Psalm Repetition is extended; you might sit in silence with the same psalm for a week or a month
2. In Benedictine Ruminations you let your mind work over the verse; in Psalm Repetition you let the verse work over you.

How to:

Choose a line of a psalm. Breathe in the first part of the line as you say the line in your head; then breathe out the second part of the line as you say it in your head.

3. The Jesus Prayer

We don't really know how this practice began. It is the prayer that the tax collector prays in Luke chapter 18. We do know it has been practiced in the Eastern Orthodox Church for centuries. Over time, the name of Jesus was added.

How to:

The prayer is simply this:

"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Again, breath can be used. Breathe in as you say "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior" then breathe out as you say "be merciful to me, a sinner".

Do this for 10 minutes as you deepen and slow your breath.

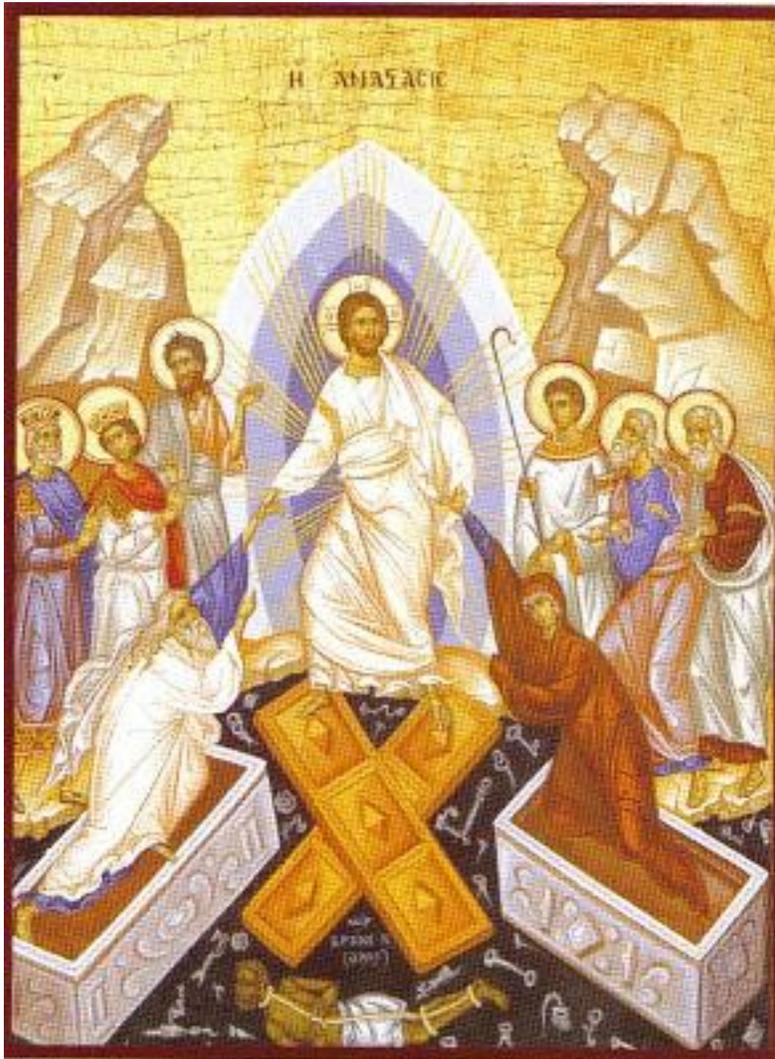
4. Icons or Symbols

This one may make you feel itchy as a Protestant but we can move beyond the fights of the 16th century, can't we? Jesus came in the flesh so visuals should not scare us. These are a tool for going deeper into our silent reflection.

How to:

Choose a single image to look at during your silent time for one week. Like the other options, when you get distracted simply return to the image.

Here is one icon that I love if you would like to use it. It is called the Harrowing of Hell and it is over 600 years old. It is considered an Easter icon. In the Eastern Orthodox Church they do not portray Easter as we do with the empty tomb in the garden. To celebrate Easter they show Jesus breaking into hell to save the people there. In this icon Jesus stands on top of the gates of hell as he pulls people from their graves. You can see him pulling Adam and Eve come out first.



Here is also one symbol I love if you prefer a symbol to an icon. It is one of our Chrismon ornaments of the fish with the word “fish” written in Greek within it—ichthus. This symbol speaks to the courage Christians have had over the eons because of their faith. The fish was a secret symbol for the faith, drawn on walls and in the sand to let others know you were a follower of Jesus. The fish became this symbol, in part, because of the spelling of ichthus. Each Greek letter

was the beginning of these words: Jesus Christ Son of God Savior. So, in one simple symbol, courage, resilience, trust and faith are all depicted.



All 4 of these sitting silent times could be enhanced by keeping a journal of your reflections after your 10 minutes each day.

As a Lenten discipline this week, try one of these. Do not try all of them. Try one and stick to it all week until we have class again next Wednesday. As you go, I would love to hear from you—what the silence is teaching you, how it is affecting your faith.