

# St Edmundsbury Cathedral



## **An Introduction to Silent Prayer**

*“For God alone my soul in silence waits.”*

*Ps 62.1*

Silent Prayer is a gateway to deepening our relationship with God. And although we can offer you some simple guidelines, getting the method right is not all that important, so don't be too caught up with method. Unlike learning skills in day to day life, your efforts are really not what is important. God knows that you are seeking God and God is not going to judge you harshly for your faltering attempts. God is looking at your love and your desire and, in time, you will be drawn into silent prayer by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The important thing is to sit there for the length of time that you have decided, and to stick at it, every day. If you can just sit there, then the Holy Spirit will make all your difficulties evaporate. The outcome of practicing Silent Prayer will be experienced more in daily life, than in the period of Silent Prayer itself.

*“Be still and know that I am God.”*

*Ps 46.10*

## **Some Simple Guidelines**

Sit comfortably with your back straight and with your eyes lowered or closed: however, not so comfortably that you encourage sleep, but so as to avoid thinking about any physical discomfort during the period of prayer.

Spend a few moments preparing for your period of prayer. Consciously relax, let the tensions drain away from your body. Be aware of the natural rhythm of your breathing but do not force it.

Consciously consent to God's presence and action within you. Give him your "Yes". You might find it helpful to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention. Examples of the sacred word would be: "Amen", "Lord", "Jesus", "Abba" or "Yahweh". A simple inward sacred gaze upon God may be more suitable for some people than the sacred word. Gently gaze inwardly, without hurrying or, if you prefer, introduce your sacred word gently. Let the word rock to the breath that you breathe; neither hold on to it nor focus upon it. If it fades away, let it go.

The word is there to serve you, to carry you to that inner place where you can rest in God. It is not your prayer.

Thoughts can be a huge problem for people who are beginning the practice of Silent Prayer. But take heart, you are not alone, everyone has this experience. In fact thoughts are a normal part of the prayer experience. They are there to help you to let go of them. Take a "friendly" attitude towards them during the time of prayer. When you realise that you are engaging in thoughts, this is the time to renew your intention by returning to the sacred word with patience and very gently. In so doing you are performing an act of love, a renewal of your commitment to be in relationship with the Beloved.

It is our sincere intention to be in God's presence at this time that is important and is at the heart of this practice of Silent Prayer.

In Silent Prayer, thoughts are never viewed as a failure, as something to struggle against, as something to control. They are part of the process and are normal.

And what is more, they contribute to the unloading of the wounds of life, allowing God to heal these wounds and to free us from the emotional debris of a lifetime.

And so, as a guideline for dealing with our thoughts, and to help you to remember not to struggle against thoughts, we suggest the FOUR “R”s

- Resist no thought
- Retain no thought
- React emotionally to no thought
- Return, ever so gently, to the sacred word.

The practice of Silent Prayer is one of continual growth and a deepening of our relationship with God. The single most effective way to do this is through fidelity to this practice.

Our period of Silent Prayer is a time in which we do nothing and say nothing; only breathe the breath of God within. Your prayer is not your prayer. Your life is lived within Christ and it is the prayer of Christ that is prayed within you. Within you God loves his Son and the Son returns that love to his father and in their love you are held.

At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. This will give you time to readjust to the world around and enable you to carry the atmosphere of peace and inner stillness into daily life.

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our striving cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.*

*J.G. Whittier*

## **Some Practical Points**

A recommended time for this prayer is 20 minutes. However it can help to begin with a shorter period, say 5 or 10 minutes to establish your habit and keep to that – building up the length of time later. To begin with one period would be good and later, introduce two periods each day, one first thing in the morning, and one in the evening.

Although Silent Prayer can be done anywhere it may be a help to create a Sacred Space in your home specifically for prayer time.

If it is possible join a Silent Prayer support group which encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practice of daily silent prayer.

The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer, providing it does not have a loud tick or sudden ring.

Silent Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer. Rather, it adds depth of meaning to all prayer and emphasises prayer as a personal relationship with God and as a journeying beyond conversation to be in union with Him.

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