

Integration Two

SOLITUDE PRACTICE

“God’s first language is silence.”

- St. John of the Cross

In today’s world, technology is everywhere. While it has its advantages, it can leave us feeling like we are always “online” and often never get a break. Our constant engagement with technology and social media leave us little time to rest. Such tiredness can also contribute to feelings of exhaustion, anxiety and isolation. This Integration exercise is about stepping back and unplugging. On physical, emotional, and spiritual levels, each person needs periods of solitude and silence to reset, recharge, and reconnect with what is important in one’s life. As Fr. James Martin puts it, “sometimes you need to disconnect to connect.”¹

Your Integration this week is to engage in some form of solitude practice. Schedule 10-30 minutes each day to practice silence and solitude. Try it first without your phone or other electronic devices. Here are some suggested methods:

Examples

- **“Sanctuary Prayer”:** Pray at the Grotto or one of the 57 chapels on Notre Dame’s campus
- **Nature Walk:** Walk around the lakes or other nature areas (without your phone) in a modified form of an [awe walk](#)
- **Labyrinth Walk:** Try an adapted labyrinth walking prayer (see pg. 15 of the [McGrath Prayer Enrichment Guidebook](#))
- **Spiritual App:** Experiment with a basic meditation from an app (try [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), or [Ritual](#))
- **Centering Prayer:** Reorient yourself with centering prayer (see pg. 10 of the [McGrath Prayer Enrichment Guidebook](#)) from the Catholic tradition
- **Instrumental Music:** Listen to relaxing music without lyrics (i.e., classical, jazz, lofi, soundtracks, nature sounds, etc.)
- **Journaling:** Journal and write about what you are thinking and feeling
- **Other Spiritual Exercises:** Identify and implement some practices of your own

¹ *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, pg. 141

“Deep calls to deep.”

[Psalms 42:8](#)

Solitude Practice Tips

- **Regularity:** The body and spirit thrive on regularity. Too much structure is confining. But too little is chaotic. Try to engage your practice at a similar time each day.
- **Variety:** It is important to find practices suited to our station in life and to be flexible enough to use different methods for different times. Experiment with new ways of praying. If you get antsy during seated meditation or prayer, try a walking meditation or an adapted labyrinth prayer.
- **Rhythm:** While periods of solitude are important, too much solitude can result in isolation. The main goal is connection: connection with God, connection with self, and then connection with others.
 - The good life, and spirituality, are full of [symmetries and cycles](#) of solitude and community, feasting and fasting, contemplation and action.
 - A healthy spiritual life balances a healthy rhythm with all of these elements. See [Ecclesiastes 3](#).
- **Intentionality:**
 - Choosing to make time for solitude is important. Make an appointment with yourself and stick to it.
 - Try extending this practice with a [phone-free lunch](#) or a [digital sabbath](#).
 - If you are struggling to find the time amidst the busyness of college life, practice [time blocking](#) by scheduling time in your calendar.

Scientific Foundations

- **Fatigue:** When we are constantly bombarded by noise (low-level information, alerts, inputs), we have more difficulty discerning signals (important information, relationships, creativity).
- **Balance:** Taking time to practice solitude can reduce stress and anxiety, improve creativity, confidence, and relationships, and help you regulate your emotions.
- **Creative Spaces:** [Shower thoughts](#) are a demonstration of how our brain can actually think and wander during the one of the only times we are fully unplugged and not receiving a flood of inputs.
- **Going Deeper:** Read this [NYT article](#) (and [Cal Newport](#)) for more research on the importance of solitude.

Theological Foundations

- **Religions and Solitude:** All of the great religious traditions share a mandate for silence and solitude practices, enough so that it can be considered a prerequisite for a healthy spiritual life.
- **Religious Leaders and Solitude:** Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Lao Tzu, and the Hindu sages all spent periods of isolation (often in the wilderness) seeking revelations and testing themselves.
- **Listening Attentively:** God often appears in ways that we would not expect, in the “[still, small voice](#)” of [1 Kings 19:11-13](#), and not in the obvious or dramatic moments that we often want.
- **The Cloud of Unknowing:** Read more about the via negativa (apophatic theology) of the mystics, The Cloud of Unknowing, St. John of the Cross, and Desert Fathers. As [summarized by Meister Eckhart](#): “God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction.”

