



In Joy and Hope

by

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy

Christmas 1994

The countdown is over. TV and newspaper ads no longer remind us that only a few days remain until Christmas. After all the noise, parties, and the blare of Christmas music, we find ourselves in the quiet of a Bethlehem countryside. Powerful images of angels, shepherds and kings spark life even in the driest imagination. We see a mother holding a child. The silence of the night speaks loudly to us. It is Christmas.

There is so much to Christmas that brings out the best in the human spirit. Joy is contagious, greetings abound, and love seeks expression. Each year we seek new ways for this feast of God's love to speak to us. Maybe it's wisdom that comes with age, but I have discovered this year how Christmas can take on a new meaning. I need to give myself a gift to appreciate this season. It is the gift of silence.

The sounds of silence

Silence can be disturbing. Noise in one form or other dominates so much of our day. When silence confronts us, we often ask, "What's wrong?" Silence can be oppressive for the elderly when it expresses the loneliness of isolation. For the sick and dying, silence is the reminder of the slow passage of time. Yet, when we engage silence as a friend, it becomes a powerful voice that speaks loudly to us. There is no better time to listen to the sounds of silence than at Christmas.

Silence gets rid of distractions. Silence becomes the lens through which the ordinary reflects the extraordinary. Silence helps us to focus on what is really important. It is often in silence that we discover love, hope and faith.

Christmas silence

The Christmas scene creates an environment of silence. It is not a place for parades or marching bands. Rather, we appreciate what happened centuries ago when our imagination makes us time travelers and we stand in silence outside a crib. Silence allows us to appreciate God's presence. Silence embraces us with the powerful cords of God's love. It is in silence that we can begin to understand what Christmas is about - God is with us.

Christmas silence not only invites us to go back in time to find meaning in this feast, but it also asks us to look at the present moment. Silence allows us to look at the gifts that we possess - life, health, family, friends, faith - and to appreciate them more fully. Pictures of silence are among the most powerful expressions of what silence offers to the human spirit. We need only look around us. We see the parents of the newborn child gazing in wonder at their firstborn child in a crib. The elderly couple married for years sit often together in silence and unknowingly shout out a message of what commitment, love and faith mean. The solitary figure bent over a pew in church with flickering candle lights in the background becomes the symbol of the hunger and search for peace. People in love find the full meaning of intimacy often in silence.

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A Christmas gift

It is far too late for most of us to do any remaining Christmas shopping. Yet, there is still time to give ourselves a gift. We could give ourselves the gift of a few moments of silence during this Christmas season. If we dare to accept this gift, it is amazing how much more we will receive. The sounds of silence could well speak words that give new meaning to who we are and what is really important in our lives.

Have a blessed Christmas filled with God's presence and love. May the New Year bring you life and health, grace and peace. May the sounds of silence this Christmas speak loudly to you.