

Friends of Silence

Vol. XXXVIII, No. 6

June 2025

"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"

Dear Friends ~ I want to speak now about the grace of community. Nan Merrill's interpretation of Psalm 133 says that this unity "is like a shimmering rainbow, breaking through a summer rain..." As children of the Divine Mother/Father, communion is our birthright, the yearning for community is our DNA. Particularly when fragments and shards of what once seemed coherent lie scattered around us, we need the experience of authentic connection and relationship to give us courage and the possibility of joy. Community is necessary even for those who thrive in solitude: when the world is in turmoil we can tether ourselves to one another with the same thread we use to weave ourselves to Silence and Mystery.

Yet, no matter how essential, the shimmering rainbow of experiential community frequently arrives after a drenching baptism of storm and thunder. A wise friend once spoke truly to me of the "crucible of community", of the surety of disappointment and the inevitable encounter with my own brokenness. That is the uncomfortable secret of grace: It operates in the gaps, where the self-image cracks and the heart breaks open. Community is, in my friend's words, "a terrible blessing", but a beautiful and necessary one that opens us to healing and the astonished ability to see the holy light in one another.

So, my friends, take heart. Reach for the hand of a companion and stay the course. Grace abounds. *Ar Scáth a Chéile a Mhaireann na Daoine.* * It is in the shelter of each other that the people live. ~ Lindsay



Spiritual community is not about being nice to one another. It is about being real enough to allow grace to operate through our wounds.

~ Richard Rohr in *BREATHING UNDER WATER*

It is in community that we come to see God in the other. It is in community that we see our own emptiness filled up. It is community that calls me beyond the pinched horizons of my own life, my own country, my own race, and gives me the gifts I do not have within me.

~ Joan Chittister in *WISDOM DISTILLED FROM THE DAILY*

Community is the container in which the sacred is remembered, practiced, and made real.

~ Sobonfu Somé, read more in *WELCOMING SPIRIT HOME*

**What you need to know about me
is not that I survived the war
or that I write poetry
or that I am African,
but that I live in this world
just like you.**

**That I wake up every morning
to get the children ready for school,
that I comb my hair
and worry about its gray,
that I love my strong coffee
in the morning...**

**That I listen to music
and laugh out loud
when the mood is right,
that I cry when I read the news...**

**What you need to know about me
is not what country I am from
or how many languages I speak
or how I pronounce my name,
but that I believe
we are connected
by the simplest thread—
the need to be seen,
to be held,
to be heard.**

~ Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, from "What You Need to Know About Me";
read more in *PRAISE SONG FOR MY CHILDREN*



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Behold how good and pleasant

it is

when brothers and sisters

dwell in unity!

It is like vistas seen from

atop a mountain one has

climbed...

Or like the stillness of a sunset

after a long day's work.

It is like a shimmering rainbow

breaking through a summer rain.

When men and women dwell in

harmony,

the star of Truth appears.

~ Nan Merrill, "Psalm 133" in

PSALMS FOR PRAYING

*We men and women are all in the same
boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each
other a terrible and tragic loyalty.*

~ G.K. Chesterton in

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF G.K. CHESTERTON

VOLUME 28

*This is an old Celtic/Irish saying.

The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and likely to quit the road.

The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.

The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.

~ Parker Palmer in *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS*

The wisdom of a true community often seems miraculous. This wisdom can perhaps be explained in purely secular terms... There are times, however, when this wisdom seems to my religious eye to be more a matter of divine spirit and possible divine intervention. This is one of the reasons why the feeling of joy is such a frequent concomitant of the spirit of community. The members feel that they have been temporarily—at least partially—transported out of the mundane world of ordinary preoccupations. For the moment it is as if heaven and earth had somehow met.

~ M. Scott Peck in *THE DIFFERENT DRUM*

I want a new ritual for when we meet each other—
strangers or beloveds, friends or rivals, elders or children.

It begins by holding each other's eyes

the way we behold sunrises or the first cherry blooms,
which is to say we assume we'll find beauty there.

And perhaps some display of open hands—
a gesture with palms up—that suggests both
I offer myself to you and *I receive you*.

There should be a quiet moment in which
we hear each other breathe—

knowing it's the sound of the ocean inside us.

If there are words at all, let them be formed
mostly of vowels so they're heard more as song
than as spitting, more like river current and less
like throwing stones, words that mean something like

I do not know what you carry, but in this moment

I will help you carry it. Or something like,

Everything depends on us treating each other well.

And if we said it enough, perhaps we'd believe it,
and if we believed it enough, perhaps we'd live it,

treating every other human like someone

who holds our very existence in their hands,

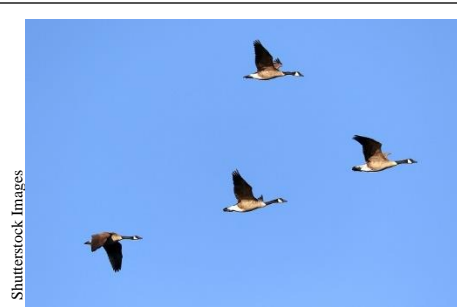
like someone whose life has been given us to serve,

even if it's only to walk together safely down the street,

hold a door, pass the salt, share a sunset,

offer a smile, and say with our actions *you belong*.

~ Rosemary Wahtola Trommer, "When we greet each other," on her blog *A HUNDRED FALLING VEILS*



The wild goose is a Celtic symbol Of the Holy Spirit. Geese in a flock have greater range and fly faster than single geese as they benefit from the lift of their wings. When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into formation and another flies at the point position. We fly in sacred community, interdependent with one another.

~ from the *Iona Community*

Community is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Spirit, not built upon mutual compatibility, shared affection, or common interests but upon having received the same divine breath, having been given a heart set aflame by the same divine fire, and having been embraced by the same divine love.

~ Henri Nouwen,

"*A Meditation on Community*"
in *THE GENESEE DIARY*

But no matter the medicinal virtues of being a true friend or sustaining a long close friendship with another, the ultimate touchstone of friendship is not improvement, neither of the other nor of the self, the ultimate touchstone is

witness, the privilege of having been *seen* by someone and the equal privilege of being granted the sight of the essence of another, to have walked with them and to have believed in them, and sometimes just to have accompanied them for however brief a span, on a journey impossible to accomplish alone.

~ David Whyte in *CONSOLATIONS*

Our communities may not conform to any blueprint, but we know we have them... I once knew two elderly shut-ins, longtime friends, both of whom lived alone. Every day they watched a religious program on television and as it ended each would offer a prayer for the other. They knew who formed their unique community...



Why is community a near-universal experience—especially for people of faith? One person put it this way: "Community is God's strategy for reaching the world." That's a neat way of saying that as community—rather than as individuals—we model what God has in mind for humanity.

~ Joe Nangle, "Community as Home," in *Sojourners Magazine*, May 1994