Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Religious Life



A bench in San Francisco Bay, October 30, 2021. (Nodelyn Abayan)



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How I long to speak in the language of silence — without uttering a single word.

These words have lingered in my heart as I sit with the invitation to reflect and write. Silence, as many have feared, is not emptiness; it is presence — a presence that abides. A presence that speaks without a single sound, yet makes one feel so loved and beheld.

"Silence," as Meister Eckhart reminds us, "is the language of God." And indeed, as a woman consecrated to God, the lure of silence has never left me. It is not an escape from life, but a deep entering into it — and, in fact, saying "yes" to all of life.

I begin most days with silent meditation and I end them the same way — in quiet communion with the One who is always near. In this rhythm of silence, I find myself carried by grace, held in the loving breath of God, and entrusted to be a bearer of light through the day's unfolding moments (I can assure you that there are days I badly needed it!).

This sacred silence is not mine alone. I have encountered what I can only call a communal silence — one that binds hearts in a shared reverence, a collective yearning for our merciful and loving God. One moment that lives in me was during the liturgy of Good Friday. No words were spoken at the beginning. No sign of the cross. Only the slow, solemn procession of the ministers, walking in stillness, then prostrating themselves in silent surrender.

And then, as the wooden cross was carried through the assembly — its weight a silent testimony to love's cost — each person came forward in quiet devotion, touching, kissing, honoring the mystery. And finally, as the Passion was proclaimed and we heard those aching words, "and he breathed his last," we all fell to our knees. A silence descended — not void, but full. Full of sorrow, yes, but also of hope. Full of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Such moments teach me again and again: it is in silence that we hear the heartbeat of the One who promised us that "I am with you always, until the end of time" Matthew 28:20.



A hummingbird in the Sisters of Social Service's backyard in San Francisco on March 1, 2023. (Nodelyn Abayan)

I have fallen deeply in love with God through silence and meditation. In these moments, I often encounter a sacred stillness shared with the earth — a kind of communal silence, yet one that reaches into even deeper realms of God's abiding presence. I feel this communion most vividly when I walk through the woods on my hikes or sit quietly in our backyard. In that silence, there is a palpable energy — a gentle vibration of God's glory — woven into everything: from the humble earthworms beneath the soil to the towering majesty of the pine trees; from the delicate, backward-flying hummingbirds to the loud commanding crows perched above. All of creation seems to participate in this holy hush, inviting me to listen with my whole being, and to simply be.

In recent days, the world has felt heavy with noise, grief, and uncertainty. One sorrow in particular has weighed deeply — the passing of our beloved Pope Francis. So much has been written, so much said. Yet no words ever seem to suffice. His life, marked by authenticity and integrity, speaks a truth so desperately needed in our time. A shepherd who dared to walk humbly in the footsteps of Christ, he bore witness to the Gospel not only in word, but in deed. He showed us what it means to be human, to be holy, to lead through mercy and simplicity.

And then, in contrast, we look around us — especially here in the United States — and see how those in power often move in the opposite spirit. Policies shift like shadows, not from conviction but from convenience (and seemingly money-making). Empathy and compassion — hallmarks of true leadership — are traded away for short-term gain. Words abound, but wisdom seems absent. And in all this, the human toll grows, sorrow deepens, trust betrays, and our souls become weary.

It is so daunting at times.

And yet, in the face of all this, perhaps the only faithful response — for me, at least — is silence. Not the silence of indifference or oblivion, but the abiding silence of prayer, of presence, of deep listening. A silence that asks: What is the true purpose of our lives? Why must we continue to love, to hope, even in the midst of brokenness? It is the kind of silence where God dwells — quiet, steady, and real. A silence that does not escape the world but holds it tenderly. A silence that nourishes hope when words fall short and all that remains is trust.

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But more than that — silence has become for me an act of resistance. In a world overwhelmed by noise, by propaganda, by performative statements and hollow promises, I choose to respond with silence that is rooted in truth. It is not a passive silence — it is a silence that refuses to join the chorus of empty speech. A silence that exposes injustice by refusing to normalize it. A silence that becomes a form of protest against systems that crush the human spirit with lies and domination. A silence that holds space for the wounded, the voiceless, and the forgotten — without rushing to explain them away or fix them.

As a woman religious, I have learned not to be defined by the verbosity of titles or the expectation to always have the "right" thing to say. In a world that too often devalues women's wisdom unless it is loud or marketable, I claim the power of quiet witness. I do not need to shout to be heard by the One who matters most. I do not need to perform to prove my worth. My silence is not absence; it is presence. My silence is not weakness; it is strength.

So yes, I long to speak to you in the language of silence — without saying a single word. For it is in that silence that I have encountered the God who sees, who hears, who loves. And in that same silence, God has found me too. There, I have also come to know myself: as a woman, a sister, a witness, a lover of justice and a pilgrim of hope.

"Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

Let us abide there.