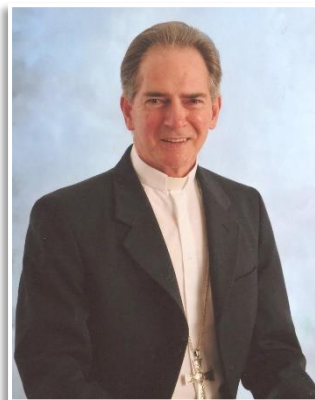


Catholic Education Week 2019



Time for Listening



One evening in a theatre in Carlton, I saw the movie “Into Great Silence”. The setting was the Grande Chartreuse monastery, high in the French Alps. The focus was on the everyday lives of the Carthusian monks. The director Philip Gröning had contacted the monks in 1984 to ask whether he might make a documentary about the monastic community. The monks replied that they would like some time to think about the request.

Sixteen years later, they sent their response. They advised the director that he could make the movie, though on certain conditions. There was to be no extra lighting and no added sound. In other words, the filming was to be done using the natural light that came into the monastery and the very limited artificial light of candles and the few electric globes already in the building. There would be no added musical soundtrack. The only music would be that of the monks chanting their office in the chapel. The only sounds would be the sounds of nature and the occasional sounds of the monks going about their daily life – such as the clink of a spoon on a plate as a monk was eating his lunch.

The film opened with a winter scene, with snow falling almost silently on the monastery. As the story unfolded, we saw the coming of spring and summer and autumn and the daily life of the monks through the changing seasons.

I thought of this film when I read of the theme for this year’s Catholic Education Week: “Listen with the Ear of Your Heart”. In many ways, “Into Great Silence” was a film about listening with the ear of the heart. It was a film that had very few words. It was more about listening than speaking.

Because there were so few sounds, the sounds that were there seemed all the more vivid – the sound of the spoon on the plate, the sound of footsteps on the stone floor. By the end of the film, it seemed to me that the people in the theatre had been led into the silence and into listening more deeply. Before the show started, there was general chatter in the theatre. When the show ended, people stayed for a while in quiet. As they moved out, their voices were hushed.

As we celebrate Catholic Education Week, I hope we might all have some opportunities for quiet in these days. Through such moments, may we come to hear the sounds around us more clearly. May we find some times when we can be still and reflect and through such times of reflection may we hear whatever messages may be within our hearts – messages from people around us, messages from God, messages that can only be heard when we are listening carefully with the ear of our heart.

+ *Paul Bird*

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