

Why Can't We Handle Silence?

For Lent in 2018, I gave up noise. No music in the car, headphones at work, or background music while I did projects at home. It was exceptionally difficult, and hammered home to me how dependent we are on anything that will distract us from our existence.

Honestly, everything we do needs a soundtrack.

I learned that lesson after a very regrettable purchase. Back in the early days of eBay I got in a heated bidding war over, of all things, an old Volvo station wagon.

It wasn't even one of the cool ones. It was a 960 located in Miami. I lived in Minnesota. But because I had to win, I ended up with it.

So, I flew down to Miami and picked up my Volvo. I knew right away that the dealer had rolled me – the car was a piece of junk.

Lamenting my decision, I had 36 hours of driving home ahead of me in which to ponder my decision. I quickly realized that in addition to all of the car's many problems, the radio didn't work.

I thought I could tough out the silence. But, with only my thoughts to keep me company, the combination of caffeine pills and endless highway driving nearly drove me to insanity.

Every time I hear the song *Car Radio* by Twenty One Pilots, I'm immediately tossed back into that lonely, quiet drive home from Miami.

If you're not familiar with Twenty One Pilots, here are the lyrics to *Car Radio*:

*Sometimes quiet is violent
I find it hard to hide it
My pride is no longer inside
It's on my sleeve
My skin will scream reminding me of
Who I killed inside my dream
I hate this car that I'm driving
There's no hiding for me
I'm forced to deal with what I feel
There is no distraction to mask what is real
I could pull the steering wheel*

Aye, me too, Brother.

I couldn't handle a silent, 36-hour road trip from Miami to Minnesota without nearly losing my mind. And this year, I certainly couldn't go forty days in silence. I don't think I'm alone in this.

Think about our ancestors, they spent the vast amount of their time in silence. Can you imagine sitting in a covered wagon, silently rolling along at the speed of horse across the Great

Plains?

As a Catholic, I'm acutely aware that the God of the Christians is a quiet God. He whispers, you find him in silence. But I am also terrified of that silence.

I think we have trained ourselves, through a constant barrage of noise, to ignore the nagging, quiet inner voice. In silence we find ourselves stripped of everything but the fact of our being.

Flannery O'Connor, one of the great writers of the 20th century, once wrote:

Perhaps the feeling I keep asking for, is something again selfish – something to help me feel that everything with me is all right.

We aren't meant for this noisy existence. In silence we are forced to confront that which is not right with ourselves, while in noise we escape. The noise does not make things right, we simply move from one noise to another while never learning how to be, to have a sense that "with me all is right."

We can continue down this path, filling our being with noise and distraction, hoping for peace. But it seems to me that unless we are willing to enter the furnace of silence, it will be quite difficult for us to find the true peace we so desperately seek in our chaotic, atomized times.

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