
Contemplative in Action

By Father Christopher Viscardi, S.J.

As a Jesuit, living as a “contemplative in action” is a very familiar phrase, but it is also a constant challenge. Priestly ministry among the Hispanic immigrant community, along with the pastoral and teaching ministry at Spring Hill College, keep me as engaged and on-call as many of our graduates who are now struggling to combine healthy family lives with the demands of their professions or of corporate America. And so the words of our superior general, Fr. Nicolas, after last year’s international gathering of Jesuit leaders at Nairobi, caught my attention: “...one of the primary challenges facing the Society today is that of *recovering the spirit of silence.*”

So it was a special blessing for me to be able to make my annual retreat this year at Marymount Hermitage. In the early Church, outside the great city of Alexandria were the hermitages of the desert of Egypt. Outside the great city of Rome, Benedict took refuge in the mountains of Subiaco. At Marymount I found the same kind of solitude that is so necessary to nourish the spirit of silence. For those who have not yet been, it offers 100 acres in the high desert ranch country. Even in the heat of July, the mornings were cool and inviting. Hiking up and down the slopes was always blessed with the sudden appearance of deer sprinting away in the other direction or of fawns running after each other in long circles. Nights without the glow of urban lights offered a wonderful show of the stars and planets of God’s creation. My own hermitage, with its kitchenette, half bath, bed and living room, was both comfortable and prayerful. When I arrived I found a Bible on the table, opened to John 15. The words that drew me that first day would stay with me for the entire week: *Dwell in my love.*

The prayerful rhythm of Marymount also nourished for me the spirit of silence: daily Mass, morning and evening prayer and two nights of adoration and benediction. The minimal structure and the community of prayer helped enrich the quality of solitude that filled the rest of the day. As Fr. Nicolas said to his fellow Jesuits, when calling for a recovery of the spirit of silence, “I am thinking of the hearts of our men. We all need a place inside ourselves where there is no noise, where the voice of the Spirit of God can speak to us, softly and gently ...we need the ability to be-



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Photo taken after Mass at Marymount Hermitage July 6, 2013.

come ourselves silence, emptiness, an open space that the Word of God can fill and the Spirit of God can set on fire for the good of others and of the Church.”

What I found in my week at Marymount and what Fr. Nicolas recommends to Jesuits is certainly a profound need for all men and women of faith, especially those who are committed to ministering in the Church. As a true hermitage, Marymount brings a living witness to the whole Church of the need for nourishing and/or recovering the spirit of silence—not only the absence of external noises, but the silence of the heart that we can continue to carry with us in our busy and active lives of service. May God continue to bless Marymount’s ministry of witness with abundant fruits in the life of the Church and in the community of the Hermit Sisters of Mary.

*July 24, 2013
Feast of St. Sharbel Makhluf
Lebanese hermit priest*
