



The power of solitude

An ancient practice remedies busy lives

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Movie theaters and concert venues have reopened, and my social life has become colorful again. After experiencing pandemic social distancing, I can mingle in a crowd and exchange appreciative comments and nods. As social animals, we are driven to connect and congregate. Yet the Christian faith also makes a strong case for the spiritual practice of solitude: If you want to find your life, you need to lose it by stepping back from the crowd, by doing less and by doing with less.

no longer had to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit to join the church. In short, most people were Christians in name only. So, a small group resolved to do something about the lax attitude they witnessed. They sold their possessions and gave to the poor. They lived in the wilderness in the style of John the Baptist: eating what the land offered and spending much time in prayer. Above all, they practiced silence, solitude and simplicity.

Soon these communities of loners made headlines in the ancient world. Bishops made the journey to see these solitary wise ones for themselves. What they discovered was people who had little in terms of physical comforts, yet they had what traditional Christians back home lacked: Their faces were radiant. Upon their return to their parishes, bishops scheduled a season prior to Easter where Christians were to live like those desert folk.

My social life has become colorful again, but I cannot forget the important need for practicing solitude. We need this holy time — and we need not wait for Lent to have it. Start by making intentional time for solitude. Turn off all electronic devices for half a day. Set aside time when you make phone calls and answer emails, rather than sprinkling them throughout the day. Now that you have made the time, try sitting and not doing any other activity except becoming more aware of Christ alive in you. Practicing solitude is not about being alone, but about being more present to God. The church had good reason for implementing the practice of solitude. By it, we once again recover a sense of joy and peace.

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The church has scheduled an annual observance of solitude for us called the season of Lent. While we are still reveling in the light of Epiphany, Lent will be upon us before we know it, beginning March 2 this year with the observance of Ash Wednesday. So how can we start preparing to fully enter this season? What can the beginning of Lent tell us about the benefits of solitude that we might have forgotten after having an unwelcomed season of Covid solitude?

The Lenten season began in the late fourth century when Christians were no longer persecuted for their faith. They no longer had to meet in secret. And they

