

The Active Silence:

Finding Stillness for Leadership and Service

I. The Core Concept: The Active Silence

The theme "The Active Silence" is a call to be **more present** and **more spiritually fulfilled with less**.

- **The Ministry Challenge:** The crushing reality of ministry is "nervous activism"—the constant pressure to do, fix, and solve. This drains us, causes burnout, and prevents the deep, sustainable work of the Gospel.
- **The Key to Active Silence:** It is the moment we stop performing, stop worrying, and simply **gaze at Christ** and allow Him to gaze back at us.
- **The Source of Hope:** This profound, silent recognition of His love is the **source of our hope**, the **purifier of our action**, and the **only sustainable engine** for our ministry.

The Gaze of Contemplation: "I Look at Him and He Looks at Me"

Pope Francis cites this simple phrase (attributed to St. John Vianney and found in CCC 2715) as the essence of Christian life.

Component	Description for "The Active Silence"	Pope Francis's Emphasis
"I Look at Him"	A conscious act of the will to turn away from distraction and fix your gaze on Jesus.	"A gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus...". "A gaze is enough".
"He Looks at Me"	The realization that you are seen, loved, and known by Christ.	"Everything comes from this: from a heart that feels that it is looked on with love...". His gaze purifies the heart.

II. Contemplation and the Jubilee Year of Hope

The contemplative life is the foundation for the 2025 Jubilee, "Pilgrims of Hope".

- **2024: The Year of Prayer:** The year preceding the Jubilee was established as a time to devote to a great "symphony" of prayer to "renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord".
- **Contemplation as a Way of Being:** Pope Francis defines contemplation not as a specialized activity, but as a fundamental "**way of being**" for every Christian. Prayer is the "royal road to holiness" that enables us to be contemplative **even in the midst of activity**.
- **Inseparable Action and Prayer:** The Christian life rejects the dualism between action and prayer. Contemplation must lead to action, but **action must be purified by contemplation**. The two feed each other.
- **The Necessary Silence:** In an age of distraction, "interior communication, in silence, is so necessary". Silence is the space where "another Word can emerge," which is Jesus himself.
- **The Sabbath Connection:** Contemplation is a daily cease-fire from the tyranny of our own "nervous activism," much like the Sabbath is a "palace in time" built for the soul.

III. Models of the Active Silence

Three holy witnesses demonstrate how to root active ministry in contemplative prayer.

Model	Ministry Challenge	Lesson for Ministry Directors
St. Teresa of Ávila: Integrated Action	Overwhelm & Organization (Martha/Mary Dilemma)	Contemplation Sanctifies the Mundane. "The Lord walks among the pots and pans". The contemplative gaze reveals Christ's presence in every task.
Thomas Merton: True Self and Integrity	"Nervous Activism" (Busyness as an Escape)	Contemplation Unmasks the Ego. The "Active Silence" frees you from the compulsion to constantly <i>do</i> to prove your worth. Action flows from compassion, not guilt.

Henri Nouwen: Vulnerable Presence	Professionalism vs. Heart (Desire to be "Useful")	The Wounded Healer. True ministry is rooted in vulnerability and presence . Your power comes from acknowledging your own wounds, allowing you to enter into communion with the brokenness of those you serve.
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Summary of Action:

1. **St. Teresa:** Action integrated with Divine Will.
2. **Merton:** Action purified from the False Self.
3. **Nouwen:** Action motivated by compassionate presence.

IV. Silence as Antidote to Ministry Challenges

"The Active Silence" is the necessary antidote to common struggles in ministry.

Challenge	Antidote (The Active Silence)
Burnout, Exhaustion, and Overwork	Contemplation provides rest —replenishment by the source of life: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).
Rushing Decisions and Ego-Driven Work	Contemplation grounds decisions in Christ's face. What is "born of prayer and not from the presumption of our ego... is the greatest miracle".
Compassion Fatigue & Detachment	Contemplation fosters compassion in such a way that all distance vanishes. It equips you to accompany others' pain without being crushed by it.

V. A Practical Tool: The Examen of the Task

Use this simple, contemplative prayer tool, inspired by the Ignatian Examen, to approach an upcoming work task.

1. **Gratitude:** Silently thank God for the opportunity to serve that this task represents, even if it feels difficult.
2. **Request for Light:** Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the task and show you **one grace or one virtue** you need to bring to it (e.g., patience, clarity, courage).

3. **Active Silence:** Sit quietly with the task and the needed virtue. Let the action of the task reside in the silence of your heart. Trust that the Spirit is moving within this situation.
 4. **A Simple Resolution:** Form **one simple, active resolution** to take back to your office (e.g., 'I will be patient,' 'I will listen first').
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Key Quotes

I. Pope Francis on Contemplation

Theme	Quote
Nature of Contemplation	"To contemplate is not primarily a way of doing, but a way of being. To be contemplative."
Action & Prayer	Prayer is the " royal road to holiness " that enables us to be contemplative even in the midst of activity.
Contemplation's Fruit	What is "born of prayer and not from the presumption of our ego... is the greatest miracle that a Christian can perform."
Necessity of Silence	"...interior communication, in silence, is so necessary. "
The Contemplative Dimension	He calls the contemplative dimension "a bit like the ' salt ' of life: it gives flavour, it seasons our day."

II. Models of Integrated Action

Witness	Quote
St. Teresa of Ávila	God is found " even among the pots and pans. "
Thomas Merton	"Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that source [of life]."
Henri Nouwen	"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen

	rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. "
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III. Antidote to Challenges

Challenge	Quote
Burnout/Exhaustion	Contemplation provides rest: " Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 11:28)."
Detachment	Contemplation fosters the ability to " feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes. "