

Notes for a sermon preached for the Episcopal Church of the Nativity, Boyne City, Michigan, on the Third Sunday in Lent, 8 March 2026, by the Rev. Dr. J. Barrington Bates, Priest-in-Charge.¹

Did you know the vast majority of people in North America live in urban areas?—over 80 per cent.

That's a big change from a century ago, when it was only about half.

That means we are constantly exposed to urban noise: cars, trains, sirens, even industry.

Excessive noise increases psychological stress, raises blood pressure, inhibits cognitive ability, and decreases overall quality of life.

At the same time, we are increasingly exposed to virtual noise: a continual stream of images, messages, and sound from our televisions, computers, tablets, and cellular telephones.

This kind of exposure leads—in addition to those things I've already mentioned—this kind of exposure leads to anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

And that while risking digital addiction and disrupting sleep patterns.

So, this Lent, I'm going to commend to you the practice of silence.

Most of us hear the words "Lenten Discipline" and think of one of two things: either giving up dessert, or taking on a service project or prayer discipline.

And those things are just fine.

Yet, they do not provide a corrective to all that noise.

In fact, they may well amplify it.

Interludes of silence can become an oasis of rest in God's presence, a holy space in which word spoken or communion received have time to take root in one's being.

¹ Thanks to the Rev. Samuel Torvend, President, Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, for inspiration

The intentional keeping of silence in one's daily life serves as needed alternative to—perhaps even a protest of—the incredible noise in our lives:

The stream of information (and disinformation) that now courses through our culture and our lives.

And, while the history of medieval and reformation Lent tends to focus on the self and one's need for repentance and forgiveness, a healthy understanding of the Holy Trinity invites us to enter into silence,

To let our silence and contemplation be suffused with a love that overflows the banks of “me” into prayer for others: the terrified immigrant, the detained citizen, the neglected elderly, the family struggling to provide food, creatures suffering from abuse or loss of habitat, the sick who cannot afford care, the homeless, the many who are lonely and pressed, nations afflicted with conflict, and our dearly departed loved ones.

After all, the Holy Trinity is a community marked by love for the differences between us, a love that is poured out into the world in Jesus Christ, a love for others inspired and sustained by the Spirit.

The late Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann once said that celebrating the Holy Eucharist—the Mass, the Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper—celebrating the Holy Eucharist is what the church does for the life of the world.

So, this Lent, I invite you to spend some time in deliberate silence

And to use that time to focus, not on yourself, but on prayer for the advent of God's kingdom, that just and peaceful reign in human life, communities, and creation itself.

This may be a new concept, since, for many of us, the idea of a spiritual discipline for the holy season of Lent hasn't progressed much since our Sunday School days.

Back then, we were encouraged to give up dessert, or watching television; and to take on a project, such as saving our loose change in a mite box.

A colleague of mine refers to these sorts of practices as “middle class.”

He calls them that because the poor—even the working poor—have little if anything to give up.

And he can't call them “upper class” because studies show that what the really wealthy have been steadily giving up is charitable giving and church-going.

The point of simplifying life is *not* to make you obsess with whatever it is you have given up.

The point is to bring you closer to God.

So, if giving up dessert makes you go crazy with desire—eat the dessert!

Eat the dessert, and remember that there are many without not only dessert but maybe even a sufficient amount of nourishing food—so share of your bounty with those less fortunate than us.

Eat the dessert, and think of the hands that made it possible: farmers, truck drivers, grocery clerks, bakers, and a whole slew of others.

And do your part to see that these people are treated with dignity and respect, receive an adequate wage, and have access to affordable health care.

Eat the dessert, and give thanks to God while you are doing so.

And to help remind you this Lenten season, I have a little token for your pocket or purse

(pass out crosses)

Keep this little cross with you, and touch it, or think about it when you need to discern whether what you are doing is for good—or otherwise.

Use it as part of your prayerful devotions.

Because in that prayer, in those brief moments, maybe seconds—we are connected to God.

And *that* is the point of Lent: to renew our affiliation with grace, mercy, and love.

To put ourselves in the place where we know what is of this world, the flesh, and the devil—and what is from God.

This is the place in which we find the strength to resist the powers and forces of evil.

This is the place where God works within each of us to turn us from sin to what is good.

This is the place in which we, like Jesus, encounter angels.