**Lesson 3: Composure**

[[1]](#endnote-1)For the spiritual life, silence is seldom discussed alone. Sooner or later its companion, composure demands attention. Composure is the victory over distractions and unrest. Our minds are restless, desiring to reach out for one thing after another so we are torn and self-contradictory. But composure rescues our attention, holds it captive restoring unity to our spirits. It calls the soul back to itself re-establishing its depth.

All things have the capacity to disquiet us. We are constantly stormed by violent and chaotic impressions. They are immoderate and disconnected. One contradicts, disturbs, and obstructs the other. Consequently it is easy to live without depth, without a center, in superficiality and chance. We touch everything, but do not really absorb anything. Living within a rush of activity and quick results is easy for us, but when quietness surrounds us, we become lost.

Composure is not just freedom from scattered impressions, but a life in its full depth and power. Our natural inclination to turn outward toward the multiplicity of things and events must be counterbalanced. Consider breathing. We breathe in two directions: outward and inward. Composure is our spiritual inhalation by which we collect our scattered selves and return to our center.

Only the composed person can be seriously addressed as capable of replying, genuinely affected by what life brings, awake and aware. This true awareness is inner knowledge of what is essential. When composure is established, then Liturgy is possible. It is not much use to discuss Holy Scripture if earnestness is lacking. Without it, even the Liturgy deteriorates to something “interesting”, a passing vogue. But composure must be willed and practiced.

Above all, we must get to church early in order to “tidy up” inwardly. We must have no illusions about our condition when we enter and face our restlessness, confusion and disorder because we do not yet really exist as persons whom God can address. As we quiet and collect ourselves we must be able to say honestly: “Now I am here. I have only one thing to do -- participate with my whole self in the one thing that counts, the sacred celebration. I am entirely ready.”

Is this possible at all? While animals are bound by nature our spirits reach beyond nature. We can turn our attention solely to the things of this world or fight our way through to composure, the essential, the eternal, rest, and unity. This seed of eternity lies deep within us. Therefore, we can say “I can dismiss everything that does not belong in God’s house; I can grow still and whole so that I can honestly reply to His summons: Here I am Lord.”

1. *The above reflection is a very abridged version of Msgr. Romano Guardini, Meditations before Mass, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1993), chapter 4, “Composure”, pp. 21-25.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)