

# Nelson Mandela Quiet Day

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*A Pilgrimage at Washington National Cathedral*

*November 17, 2013*

“As I walked out the door toward my freedom, I knew that if I did not leave all the anger, hatred, and bitterness behind, I would still be in prison.” ~ Nelson Mandela

“We have to say that we probably have someone batting for us up there, because we were given the extraordinary gift of a Nelson Mandela.... Mandela evolved from an angry young man into someone who grew in magnanimity and in his understanding of the point of view of the other.”  
~ Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“In every gnarly, knotted, distorted situation in the world where people are kept from becoming the best they can be, there is an apartheid of the heart. And if we really honor this stunning sacrifice of 27 years, if we really rejoice in the infinite justice of this man happily married in the autumn of his life, if we really are seeking some driven wisdom from the power of his example, it will be to do whatever we can, however we can, wherever we can, to take the apartheid out of our own and others’ hearts.” ~ President Bill Clinton

Mandela embodied a more elemental and universal myth, like a revolutionary opera or *The Odyssey*, depicting the triumph of the human spirit, the return of the lost leader. And his long isolation had allowed the myth to take off from the man, leaving everything to the imagination: a dotted outline within which anyone could fill in his own detailed picture of a hero. ~ Mandela biographer Anthony Sampson

## Schedule

2:20 Meet at Human Rights Porch, just outside the nave, for brief prayers

2:40 Meet back in the Center for Prayer & Pilgrimage

3:55 Finish in time for evensong or a walk to the new Mandela statue

## Today’s Quiet Day Leader

Sue Mosher (sue@turtleflock.com) is a deacon and wedding celebrant at Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington, DC, and an ordained teacher in the Céile Dé tradition, an ancient Celtic spiritual path based in Scotland. She is a graduate of the Shalem Institute’s *Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats* program. Her web site at <http://www.placekeepers.net> focuses on the sacred link between people and place.

## Quotations & Reflection Ideas

These quotations from Nelson Mandela come from variety of sources including Mandela's autobiographies and authorized biography, speeches, and the film *Invictus*. At the end of each section are a few questions to stimulate your reflection.

### Courage

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons are in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

"Today when I look at Robben Island I see it as a celebration of the struggle and a symbol of the finest qualities of the human spirit, rather than as a monument to the brutal tyranny and oppression of apartheid. Robben Island is a place where courage endured in the face of endless hardship, a place where people kept on believing when it seemed their dreams were hopeless and a place where wisdom and determination overcame fear and human frailty. It is true that Robben Island was once a place of darkness, but out of that darkness has come a wonderful brightness, a light so powerful that it could not be hidden behind prison walls, held back by prison bars or hemmed in by the surrounding sea. In these sketches entitled: *My Robben Island*, I have attempted to colour the island sketches in ways that reflect the positive light in which I view it. This is what I would like to share with people around the world and, hopefully, also project the idea that even the most fantastic dreams can be achieved if we are prepared to endure life's challenges."

- Is there any cause for which am I willing to die?
- For what cause am I willing to live in such a way that others will see and support the rightness of that cause?
- Where do my actions – or inaction – create a prison for someone else, a prison of poverty, prejudice, etc.?

## Forgiveness & Reconciliation

“We slaughter one another in the stereotypes and mistrust that lingers in our heads, and the words of hate we spew from our lips.”

“I am what I am both as a result of people who respected me and helped me, and of those who did not respect me and treated me badly.”

“Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.”

“There is nothing better than opposites sitting down to resolve their problems in a peaceful way.”

- When has it been most difficult for me to forgive?
- When have I found it hardest to receive forgiveness?
- Is there anyone with whom I would like to have a conversation as the first step toward reconciliation?

## Leadership

“One issue that deeply worried me in prison was the false image I unwittingly projected to the outside world – of being regarded as a saint. I never was one, even on the basis of the earthly definition of a saint as a sinner who keeps trying.”

“The history of liberation heroes shows that when they come into office they interact with powerful groups: they can easily forget that they’ve been put in power by the poorest of the poor. They often lose their common touch, and turn against their own people.”

“I’m prepared to do anything to bring the people of this country closer together.”

“If one or two animals stray, you go out and draw them back to the flock. That’s an important lesson in politics.”

“Loyalty to an organization takes precedence over loyalty to an individual.”

“The most discouraging moments are precisely the time to launch an initiative.”

“I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands.”

- To whom or to what am I loyal?
- How have my loyalties changed over my life?
- What am I doing to honor the sacrifices that others have made so that I can live the life I have now?
- What qualities in a leader earn my trust?
- Have I ever felt betrayed by a leader?

## Solitude

“It was a tragedy to lose the best days of your life, but you learned a lot. You had time to think — to stand away from yourself, to look at yourself from a distance, to see the contradictions in yourself.”

“You may find that the cell is an ideal place to learn to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the processes of your own mind and feelings. In judging our progress as individuals, we tend to concentrate on external factors such as one’s social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education ... but internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one’s development as a human being: honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, purity, generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve your fellow men—qualities within the reach of every soul—are the foundation of one’s spiritual life.... At least, if for nothing else, the cell gives you the opportunity to look daily into your entire conduct to overcome the bad and develop whatever is good in you. Regular meditation, say of about 15 minutes a day before you turn in, can be very fruitful in this regard. You may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative factors in your life, but the tenth attempt may reap rich rewards. Never forget that a saint is a sinner that keeps on trying.”

- What obstacles keep me from knowing myself better?
- Do I seek out or resist opportunities for solitude?
- What contradiction is active in my life right now?

## Community

“People are human beings, produced by the society in which they live. You encourage people by seeing good in them.”

“Few things are more exciting to me here [in prison] than to listen to a man’s background, the factors that influenced his thoughts and actions, the unknown battles he has fought and won.”

“I could see the history and culture of my own people as part and parcel of the history and culture of the entire human race.”

“My current circumstances give me advantages my compatriots outside jail rarely have. Here the past literally rushes to memory and there is plenty of time for reflection. One is able to stand back and look at the entire movement from a distance, and the bitter lessons of prison life force one to go all out to win the cooperation of all fellow-prisoners, to learn how to see problems from the point of view of others as well, and to work smoothly with other schools of thought in the movement. Thrown together by the fates, we have no choice but to forget our differences in the face of crisis, talk to one another mainly about our background, hopes and aspirations, our organisations, and the kaleidoscope of experiences in the field of struggle.”

- If I were sitting with Nelson Mandela, what would I ask him about “the factors that influenced his thoughts and actions, the unknown battles he has fought and won”?
- Is there some unknown battle of my own that I have not shared with those close to me?
- Where do I long for more cooperation in my life?