



Million Minutes is choosing silence as a way of standing up for young people. Fr Christopher Jamison OSB, Million Minutes Champion and presenter of BBC's *The Big Silence*, explains why and offers some advice about how to find it:

Staying silent may seem a strange way of giving voice to an opinion but we are drawing attention to the fact that there are many young people who are effectively voiceless. Some have been abandoned, others overlooked, and they find themselves without any sense of purpose in life. Million Minutes wants to help them in two ways. First of all we will draw attention to them by being a powerful expression of their voicelessness. By remaining silent together we find that we are giving voice to young people's silence. Secondly we will raise money for initiatives and projects that help young people to find a voice.

### **Where will we find the silence?**

Silence is about discipline and self control but it is also about a journey of self-discovery. Silence is the gateway to the soul. And that soul journey can be really rewarding and fulfilling. I hope you will take time to respond to that invitation to use silence not just as discipline but as a gateway to the soul. There are some ways of finding that silence and the best place to start is inside yourself.

At some point during your 24 hours (or however long you are staying silent) you might want to set aside some time to enter more deeply into your silence and into a time of reflection. This should be any time between 5 minutes and 30 minutes:

1. Sit upright on a chair, uncross your arms and legs, with your hands on your lap.
2. Keep your back straight (if it's crooked you'll tend to fall asleep).
3. Imagine someone has got a very important message to give to you. Sit relaxed and comfortable, but attentive.
4. Face forward, close your eyes and relax. Breathe deeply a few times, at the natural speed, just deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Deep breaths will help your whole body to relax.
5. Then breathe normally, but concentrate on your breathing. This will help relax your mind. Let all the other thoughts go by listening to your breathing.
6. You'll still get distracted by sounds and thoughts, so just take a simple phrase to say to yourself.
7. For example, 'Be still, and know that I am God'. Say to yourself, 'Be still' as you breathe in through your nose, and 'know that I am God' as you breathe out through your mouth.
8. And as you are doing this you are aware of your breathing and you have the simple phrase to keep your mind focused, you'll actually be concentrating on your own life. That breath is also the breath of God, the life-giving spirit within you. 'Be still' – to know that you

are alive. 'Know that I am God' to know that God's spirit is the breath within you.

9. You can enter into this wherever you are, even with noise around you, because you can find that still point within your own body and soul, and at that point you may have something to say to God.

10. Keep this up for as long as you like, (5 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes) and don't feel afraid when the time is right to speak your own words to God and let God speak his own words to you.

Another method of staying silent, from the monastic tradition is the slow reading of sacred texts, called **Lectio Divina**.

**Lectio Divina** is a practical way for you, or those you are encouraging to stay silent, to find a deeper silence during their sponsored period. In his book, *Finding Sanctuary*, Fr Christopher explains how:

This involves taking a sacred text, usually but not exclusively the Bible, and reading it with the conviction that God is addressing you through this text. There are various reading schemes on offer to help you read a Bible extract each day. Alternatively, you can just start with a gospel and read it section by section. I advise starting with Mark's gospel. Now, with text in hand, you are ready to look at the three key features that taken together make up Lectio Divina.

First of all, the text is seen as a gift to be received, not a problem to be dissected. Avoid imposing your questions and let the text question you. Humility is the key to this wisdom. Let the text come to you.

Secondly, the Lectio tradition teaches us that in order to receive what a text has to offer we must read slowly. As an antidote to speed-reading we need to foster slow reading. As Australian monk Michael Casey says "Repetition is the soul of genuine Lectio. We read and advance, then go back and read again. With each repetition something new may strike us".

Finally, Lectio is a way of prayer. Before reading pray that God will speak to you through the text. During reading, allow the reading to evolve into meditation and then into prayer and finally contemplation. When the reading is concluded keep some phrase in mind and repeat it throughout the day so that prayerful reading becomes prayerful living.

(Adapted from *Finding Sanctuary*)

Fr Christopher's book, *Finding Sanctuary*, is available from [findingsanctuary.org](http://findingsanctuary.org)

