

# the messenger

## The 12 Virtues Series

Information collected from around the globe.

Thanks to all contributors past and present!

### The 12 Virtues of a Good Teacher - Silence

"Silence is a virtue that leads the teacher to avoid speaking when he should not speak and to speak when he should not be silent."

"... experience shows that the teachers who talk a lot are hardly listened to and that little account is taken of what they say. But if they speak rarely and to the point, their students pay attention to what they are told, like it, remember it, and profit by it."

#### Some Faults Against Silence Which Should Be Avoided:

- "Speaking without necessity or remaining silent when he should speak."
- "Expressing himself poorly when he does speak, because he had not foreseen the topic, the need for speaking, the proper times and circumstances for it, and the good or the evil that might result from it; or again, expressing himself without force or precision, without exactness, hesitantly, groping for the right words as if not knowing what he is saying."
- "Remaining too long in conversation with certain students or their parents, with other outsiders, or with his fellow teachers, even though he has some reason to talk to these persons."
- "Talking too much, too quickly, or too slowly, confusedly, too loud, or so low that students cannot hear or cannot easily grasp what is being said to them."



**A Question:**

***How do you create an environment in which students (or adults) will listen?***





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**Some Faults Against Silence Which Should Be Avoided:**

"Talking too much, too quickly, or too slowly, confusedly, too loud, or so low that students cannot hear or cannot easily grasp what is being said to them."

"The first effect of Silence produces good order and calm in the classroom, insures the progress and advancement of the students, gives the teacher some rest, and preserves her health; three things that a teacher cannot afford to neglect without exposing herself to serious consequences."

## ***Silence***

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### **For Reflection**

***What statement speaks especially to you and your educational responsibilities?***

***What does this virtue look like in action?***

***How does one exercise silence towards oneself?***

***How do you know when your silence is effective?***

***How do you know when your silence is ineffective?***

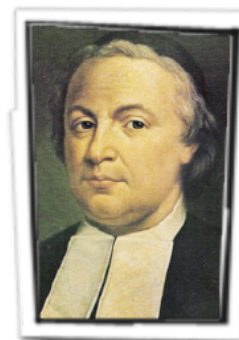




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## SILENCE

A virtue that leads the teacher to avoid speaking when  
(s)he should not speak and to speak when  
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### Strategy 20-5: Silent Response to Errors

**Purpose:** To avoid responding in unproductive ways to student mistakes.

**Description:** Noticing an error or problem and leaving until later a consideration of what, if anything, to do about it.

According to Pilon (1996) the best response to a mistake is often no response, other than a mental note to think about the issue later. Consider these examples.

- John is giving a report of his work to the class. Several times he says “ain’t” and “ain’t not.” Often the best response to such errors is to say nothing and to make a mental note that he and perhaps others need more practice saying “isn’t” and “is not.”
- A student turns in a report that confuses *too* with *to*. Should we mark the error? If we do, two consequences are predictable. First, odd as it may seem, the student will continue making the error; that is, correcting such errors often fails to change a student’s behavior. Second, the student will be less willing to write – sometimes less willing to write anything for anybody, even himself. Students rarely enjoy activities that lead to many corrections.

Instead of on-the-spot corrections, we might do nothing other than to remember the error and make a note to create an appropriate mini-lesson on another day for the whole class for a small group. And at that time, we probably do not want to say, “We need to review *too* and *to*; we have not mastered that yet,” or anything else that may communicate to the students, “You should have already learned this.” Such a message is unnecessary and may foster discouragement. We might instead simply teach the lesson as if it had never been taught before, perhaps as follows:

Here on the board is an example of *too* used correctly in a sentence. And here is an example of *to* used correctly. It is, of course easy to confuse them. I’d like each of you to please write a pair of sentences like these on scrap paper. In one, use *too* correctly. In the other, use *to* correctly.

When the students are finished writing, we might continue like this:

Now please share your sentences with a partner. Check to see that the *to* and the *to* are correctly used in all sentences. If your partner wrote something interesting, you might also enjoy reading it.

In short, it’s often wiser *not* to point out an error in order to get students to learn. Instead, simply teach a lesson about the topic again at another time. As long as the lesson has a quick pace, it will be an easy review for students who already understand, and for those who do not, a chance to learn it in a climate free of criticism or a sense of failure. Alternatively, we might teach the lesson only to the students who need it, allowing the others to work on something else.

Keep in mind the message of one of the *Truth Signs* (Strategy 4-1): “We each learn in our own ways, by our own time clocks.” Students sometimes encounter material they are simply not yet ready to master. We do well to accept such times as a natural part of the learning process and refrain from correcting all student misunderstandings on the spot.



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Yet it is not always advisable to keep silent about errors. In solid, accepting relationships, people usually do not mind having someone point out a few of their mistakes. However, when unsure, choose the Silent Response to Errors. It is safer. Be like a physician who chooses the medicine most likely to avoid harmful side effects.

## Strategy 33-12: Silent Response to Misbehavior

**Purpose:** To give students room to solve their own problem and to avoid a hasty, inappropriate response.

**Description:** Mentally noting misbehavior and leaving until later the consideration of what, if anything, to do about it.

A student fails to bring in the required notebook, chats with a neighbor while we are talking, neglects to do work assigned, or makes a smart-aleck remarks. Sometimes the best response is the Silent Response, a response to oneself that says, "There is a problem here. Let me note it now and see, later, if I want to do something about it and, if so, what." Sometimes such later attention is, in fact, needed. But sometimes it is not. The problem may disappear on its own. That outcome is especially likely if the class climate is lively, kind, and supportive and students have a growing respect for the teacher, who, by responding silently to misbehavior, demonstrates a self-confidence that itself inspires a positive response. In such cases it makes no sense to use our limited energies to respond immediately to every incident, especially when the problem is in no way dangerous and might well solve itself or soon be solved by student-initiated self-responsibility.

### Other Reasons to Use a Silent Response

In addition to the possibility that a problem will disappear on its own, why else should we respond only by making a mental note to ourselves. Some reasons to consider:

- The Silent Response models an adult with personal security, someone who is not worried that one incident will destroy the group climate. It can be reassuring and educational for students to witness such a leader.
- The Silent Response communicates a confidence and trust in students. It demonstrates our confidence that they can and will learn to self-manage their behavior, that they do not need to be babied, told what is right and what is wrong at every turn. The Silent Response strengthens the power of positive expectations.
- The Silent Response seems to strengthen our own personal security and sense of community, perhaps partly because as we practice going with the flow, not trying to control every event around us, we learn how to live more peacefully ourselves.
- The Silent Response gives us the space to choose a response that will produce the best long-term effect. It helps us avoid a more impulsive response, one more likely to aggravate our problems. It is the wisdom of counting to 10 before acting.

### TEACHER COMMENT

I like the Silent Response to Misbehavior, I use it all the time. If I had to react to each and every little disturbance, both the students and I would go crazy. My first reaction is to ignore a problem. If I reacted every time someone disturbed the class, I bet some students would only mess up more frequently and get pleasure out of that.

— Stuart Rabinowitz, Junior High Teacher

### Teacher Comment

Ginger was repeatedly late to my class, but only a few seconds late. Then I sensed Ginger was playing an independence game, that her style was not going along with authority figures. She was bright enough so her lateness was not serious and it was not prompting others to be late, so I decided to ignore the issue and let her live her life in her way. Interestingly, when her lateness stopped bothering me, Ginger stopped being late. Odd, eh?

— Benj Ho, High School Teacher





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• An immediate response to a student who has just misbehaved calls attention to the misbehavior. Often it's preferable to call attention to the behavior we *want* in the classroom, to accent the *positive*, rather than add attention to those acts we'd prefer to disappear. This is especially important in terms of our concern for student dignity and growth in self-management. When we call attention to an act of misbehavior by responding to it, a student with questionable self-worth often experiences a further weakening of self-worth, concluding that "I was bad," not "That act was bad."

## Further Considerations

- *Demonstrating security, not timidity.* Teachers who respond to misbehavior by only making a mental note, not doing anything overtly, are not timid. They are secure – or at least strong and wise enough to act as if they feel secure until that security does emerge.
- *When silence is inappropriate.* A Silent Response is not appropriate when danger is involved – for example, a book is tossed across the room; a fight breaks out between students; a student waves a knife. Physical danger calls for direct, forceful action.
- *Silence now, action later.* Withholding an immediate overt response does not equal no response at any time. We might note a behavior problem and then, the next day, teach or reteach a lesson to some or all of the class. For example, if we notice too much aimless walking about, we can role-play walking in class with efficient purpose and dignity, without criticizing any students for prior behaviors.
- *Reflection and learning.* In some cases we may conclude that there is nothing we can do to prevent the misbehavior. We thereby accept reality. And we might do well to reflect on what we can learn from it, asking questions, like, Could that misbehaving student be providing me with an opportunity to learn more about treating people who displease me with dignity? About remaining calm in the midst of chaos? About finding new ways to run my classroom? Great lessons, after all, often come from experiences initially judged unfortunate.
- *Avoiding excessive intervention.* In general, minimal interventions are preferable. It's important to give students enough space to practice and eventually master the art of self-discipline. A Silent Response, indeed, can actually make things a lot easier for us. No action is often the best action.



"It would be of little use for teachers to apply themselves to making the students keep silent if teachers did not do so themselves. Teachers will better teach students this practice by example than by words..."



# SILENCE

Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

## I believe in the sun

I be lieve in the sun, \_\_\_\_\_  
e - ven when it is n't shin - ing; I be lieve in love, \_\_\_\_\_  
e - ven when there's no one there. \_\_\_\_\_ And I be-  
lieve in God. I be lieve in God. e - ven  
when He is si - lent. \_\_\_\_\_  
1. I be - lieve. in the mir - a - cles. I be -  
2. I be - lieve in the Son of God. I be -  
1. lieve in light. I be - lieve there can al - ways be a  
2. lieve his way. I be - lieve He can lead us to the  
1. way. I be lieve that no - thing is im -  
2. light. I be lieve that He is \_\_\_\_\_  
1. pos - si - ble. I be - lieve that no - thing is im - pos - si - ble: that  
2. call - ing us, I be - lieve that He is \_\_\_\_\_ call - ing us; and  
1. all things are pos - si - ble with God. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. He \_\_\_\_\_ will lead us on our way. \_\_\_\_\_  
*CODA*  
lent. e - ven when He is si - lent.



### *Reading*

from Brother Agathon 1785,  
translated by Brother Gerard Rummery 1998

Silence is a virtue which leads the teacher to avoid talking when he must not speak, and to speak when he should not be silent.

The first effect of silence produces order and calm in the classroom, insures the progress and advancement of the students and gives the teacher some rest. Indeed, if he speaks too much the students will do the same. They will ask and answer questions out of turn; they will meddle in what is none of their business; they will excuse themselves and try to excuse others.

Moreover, experience shows that the teachers who talk a lot are hardly listened to, live in perpetual agitation and that little account is taken of what they say.

### *Our response*

from James 3

Side One:

All of us often make mistakes. But if a person never makes a mistake in what he says, he is perfect and is able to control his whole body.

Side Two:

Think of a ship: big as it is and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and it goes wherever the pilot wants it to go.

Side One:

So it is with the tongue: small as it is, it can boast about great things.

Side Two:

No one has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison.

Side One:

We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people, who are created in the likeness of God.

Side Two:

Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, this should not happen!

All:

Glory be to the Father .... Amen.

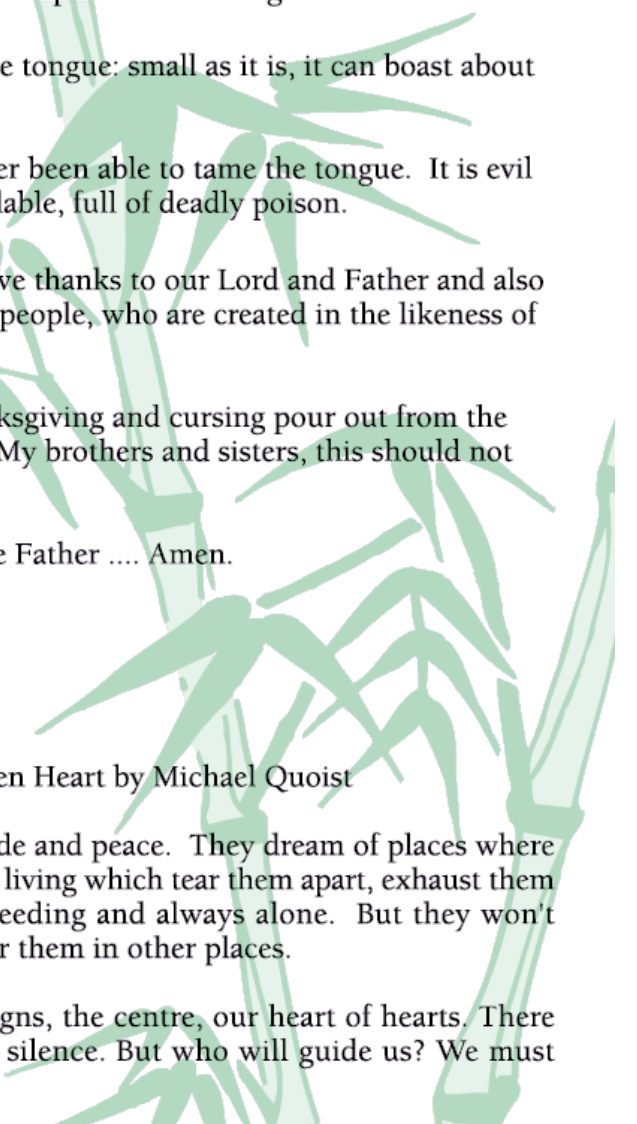
### *Pause for quiet reflection*

### *Reading*

from With Open Heart by Michael Quoist

Many people today look for silence, solitude and peace. They dream of places where they can rest away from the daily hassles of living which tear them apart, exhaust them and leave them dissatisfied, wounded, bleeding and always alone. But they won't necessarily find peace and quiet waiting for them in other places.

There is a place within us where quiet reigns, the centre, our heart of hearts. There we can find him who is the plentitude of silence. But who will guide us? We must learn the way.







## *Our response*

from Letters 49, 85 and 113 of John Baptist de La Salle

Side One:

You should be most careful not to speak so haughtily, as you tell me you sometimes do. The Spirit of God does not allow that sort of talk.

Side Two:

So let humility and gentleness be always evident in whatever you say. Nothing will make you more pleasing to God and men than these two virtues.

Side One:

So never rebuff anyone; that gives very bad example. On the contrary, speak politely, which is altogether in keeping with the Spirit of God..

Side Two:

You say that often you don't know how to keep from speaking. You must try to learn this. It is great wisdom to know how to keep silence when the occasion requires it.

Side One:

You will find silence a very useful even a very necessary virtue, if you are to adore God, serve him in spirit and in truth, resist temptations, and save yourself from falling into sin.

Side Two:

You must learn how to be silent and to speak only when necessary. Always remain silent when others annoy you, and let God alone be the witness of your innocence.

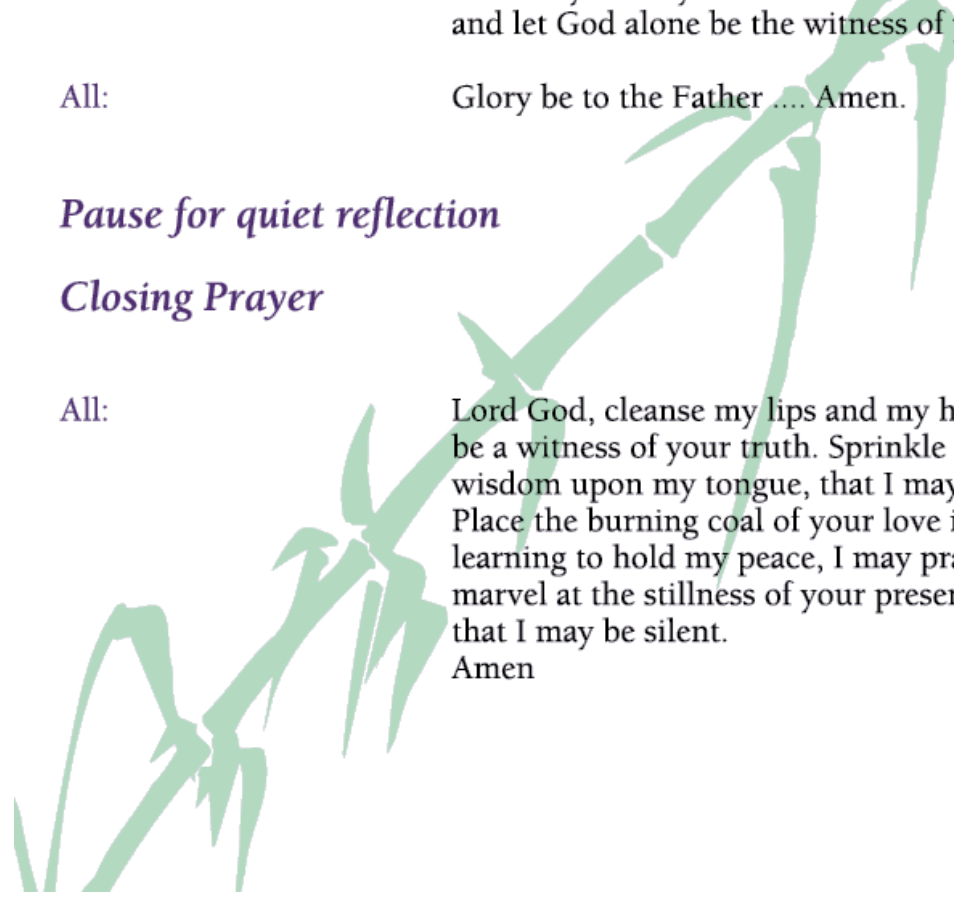
All:

Glory be to the Father .... Amen.

## *Pause for quiet reflection*

## *Closing Prayer*

All:



Lord God, cleanse my lips and my heart that I may truly be a witness of your truth. Sprinkle the salt of your wisdom upon my tongue, that I may weigh my words. Place the burning coal of your love in my heart, so that learning to hold my peace, I may praise you and may marvel at the stillness of your presence. Speak, Lord! that I may be silent.  
Amen





## God is dwelling in my heart



God is dwell - ing in my heart He and I are  
one. All His joy He gives to me through Christ His  
Son, And with Je - sus in my heart  
what have I to fear! For He is the Son of  
God in my heart He, is near.  
1. Chris tians, who are bap - tised have you ev - er re - a - lised:  
2. This joy, God gave to you, share it, then, with oth ers too.  
The great mys te - ry: God dwells in you and me:  
Tell them that God is Love; lifts their - hearts a - bove.

When you speak, do so in a simple and unaffected manner,  
without trying to improve what others say. (Collection)

St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us. Live Jesus in our hearts, forever!



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## Peace! Be Still

### REFERENCES FOR THIS ISSUE OF "THE MESSENGER"

#### THE FOLLOWING ARE KINDLY ACKNOWLEDGED...

- Pages 1-2:  
Mr. Greg Kopra
- Pages 3-5:  
Br. Jeffrey  
Calligan
- Pages 6-10:  
Lasalle Hong  
Kong

**MANY THANKS FOR  
YOUR TIME, EFFORT  
AND ENERGY IN THE  
CREATION OF THESE  
RESOURCES. YOUR  
GIFT IS IMMENSE.**

Silence is a way of quieting the noise coming both from your thoughts and your environment. It is usually reserved for prayer. However, one can learn to apply silence to all aspects of your life.

In the Lasallian tradition, the teachers usually do not talk too much. The classroom atmosphere should normally be harmonious and quiet, rather than strictly silent. This leads to more effective teaching and marks the ideal classroom-learning atmosphere.

Silence is linked to peace sometimes. This virtue guides students to acquire insights into life and helps them to live peacefully.



### Time to Think

Students' concentration span depends much on their own abilities. Usually they need some rest after listening for fifteen to twenty minutes. They also need time to re-think about what they have heard and what they have learned. Every bit of knowledge is like a foundation stone for another bit of knowledge.

The virtue of silence enables a teacher to speak when necessary and avoid talking when unnecessary. This is also reflected in good lesson preparation which really helps students to acquire knowledge step by step effectively.



**LIVE  
Jesus  
IN OUR  
HEARTS  
FOREVER**