The threshold of silence

wccm.org/weekly-readings/the-threshold-of-silence/

19 December 2025

WCCM

19 December, 2025

From John Main OSB, "All You Have to Do Is Begin," WORD MADE FLESH (Norwich: Canterbury, 2009), p.53.

As you begin to meditate you become aware that you are on the threshold of silence. This is a critical moment for most people, as they leave the familiar world of sounds, ideas, thoughts, words and images. You do not know what is in store for you as you cross into the silence. This is why it is important to learn to meditate in a tradition. For us, Jesus is the heart of a tradition that sees meditation as being in the presence of love, the love that casts out fear.

The threshold of silence is a critical moment because if you go back to your thoughts and images, even perhaps to your familiar prayers, you have turned away from the door to silence, which opens into the pure prayer of love. Learning to return humbly to your mantra is the first step into the experience of silence as the presence of love. I could use many words to describe the eternal silence of God that dwells within our innermost being, the silence of pure creation. I could say how important that silence is because in it you hear your own name spoken clearly and unmistakably for the first time. You come to know who you are. Yet all these words would fail to convey the experience itself: unself-conscious liberty in the creating presence of God.

After meditation: Margaret Gibson, an excerpt from "Affirmations" in EARTH ELEGY (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), p. 154.

AFFIRMATIONS

see without looking, hear without
listening, breathe without asking
W.H. Auden

III

The word *death*
lives deep in the oddly branched vines of the lungs.
It is a wind instrument with no stops, a low
whine you ignore because conversation, or the owl's eye
yellow of the sky at dusk, or the solid crack of wood
split for the fire distract and claim you.

I am learning to breathe
without asking for breath to carry me anywhere
but here, to the split-second rush before wind
strikes word, to the moment I am what I am
without knowing it.
