

Drive affords chance for reflection

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I was grateful for the dry roads and bright skies as I drove to the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, late last week. The pleasant conditions would have been welcome at any time. But I appreciated them especially during this Advent season because they allowed for a peaceful silence I needed and found most enjoyable.

The weeks following my July vacation had been very busy, and I was becoming more and more aware of losing the contemplative dimension of life. I don't mean anything fancy by that term. I simply mean that I noticed myself becoming so active — inside and outside — that I was not as available to life and to its meaning as I would like to be. I wasn't stopping enough to remember the important moments or to draw meaning from them. I wasn't taking time to savor the beautiful or rejoice in the good. I wasn't allowing myself to be silent or just to be.

I don't mean to suggest that those quiet hours on the road turned my life around. They did not, nor do I have anything particularly exciting to report about the journey.

But I did find joy in the quiet beauty of the Berkshires. They are a quiet gray-brown now, and offer the rich beauty of autumn's quieter face.



LONG THE WAY

It was a pleasure to revisit significant moments of weeks past, to appreciate the deeper meaning of each and to consider them in relation to one another.

And, I must confess, I appreciated the privacy that allowed me the freedom at one moment to sing duets with Barbra Streisand and, at another, to conduct Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony.

Most of all I relished the opportunity to be quiet and to remember in the silence how important it is to be in touch as best I can with my own center, to be attentive to God's often quiet whisper in my life. Without such moments I can lose track of who I really am. I don't know about you, but when that happens in my life I gradually lose my capacity to

be compassionate toward others. It becomes more difficult to laugh or to cry; much easier to be harsh and negative.

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, has written, "Silence is the lost art of this society. Every waking moment is filled with noises competing with themselves for attention. Shouting has replaced reason; force has replaced diplomacy. Screaming has replaced conversation as the family communication pattern of choice. And most of all, though no society in history has communicated as much as this one, whole businesses have been built around fixing bad communication when silence may be what is really lacking in the human mix."

I do believe that silence has been missing in the mix of my life recently. I'm grateful for the opportunity for the silent time afforded me by the trip to Holy Cross. It reminded me that such moments should be a part of every day — that they are not a luxury. Rather, they are crucial to our well-being because they allow us to be aware of our own inner depths and of the presence of our God so lovingly available to us there.

If you feel in any way harried or out of touch with what you judge to be beautiful and true and life-giving, you may find some renewal in the silence to which we're invited in a special way during this Advent season.

Peace to all.

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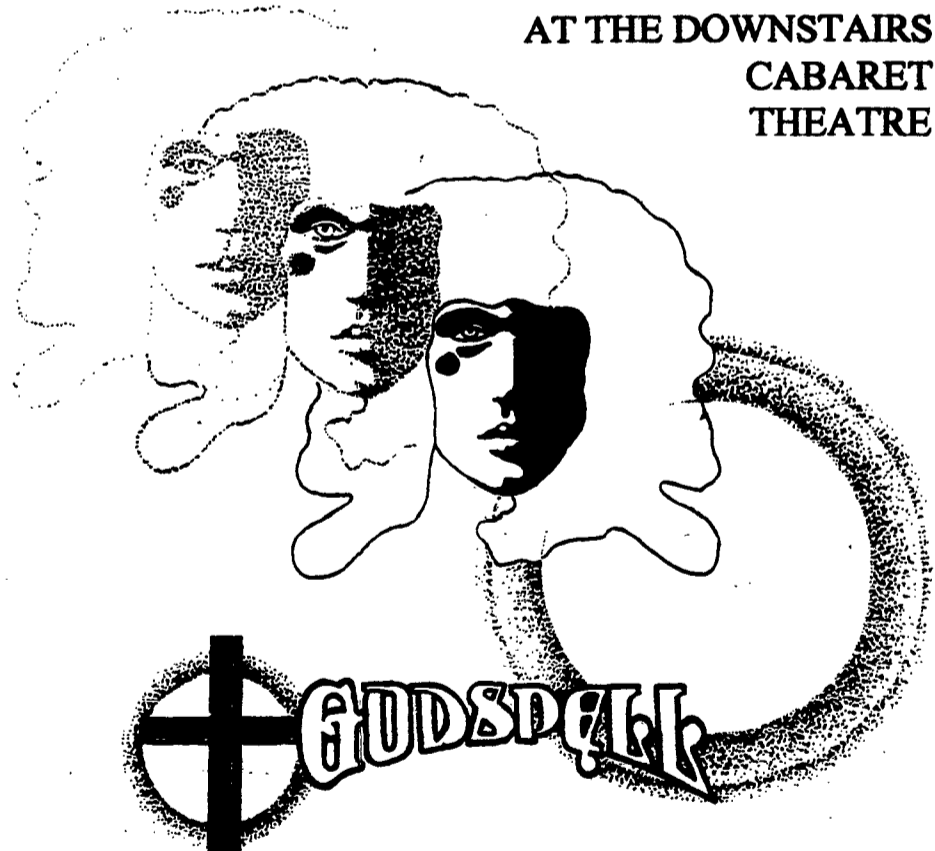
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