

# **The Sermon preached by Peter Das**

*on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of August in the year of our Lord 2020.*

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However, it is a fact that although services have adopted Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' agenda, the community feeling, and sense of togetherness has not been forsaken but transformed. One must not forget that what lies in the heart of worship: to get connected with one another and as a community get connected with the living God whose love is manifested in the coming of the word in flesh.

In today's gospel reading we learn about Jesus dismissing the crowd and entering a phase of silent prayer and reflection. Jesus finding bliss in solitude is like an echo of hope to all of us who are in self-isolation . This is not the only account of Jesus' disciplined prayer life but one of those which speaks to us about the necessity of silence and quiet reflection.

The practice of silence has been an integral part of Christian devotion for ages and we see this tradition alive in the monastic rules of St. Benedict and desert fathers. Even today, when we are amidst a devastating pandemic the importance of silence has found greater relevance in our daily activities. So, what is Silence? Is it the state of absolute quietness or speechlessness?

The Oxford Dictionary explains silence as the complete absence of sound, the state of abstaining from speech or the avoidance of mentioning something. Although, it gives us a very good definition of the literal meaning of the word, but it strikes in our mind a sense of absence. In my opinion, being silent before God is not lack of something but an opportunity for active conversation with God. For it is the state of being receptive to God's words which are spoken in our ears and initiates a conversation with him.

The scripture teaches us about the birth of Christ in the silent night which Mr. Phillips Brooks in his very famous hymn beautifully quotes as- 'How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.' It is also evident from the Scriptural understanding that the body of Jesus remained in the silence of the last day of the week until his disciples heard news of the resurrection from the Magdalene. In both acts the existence of silence was not the lack of something but it was the herald of the

good news of the coming of the word made flesh in the former and in the latter, fulfilment of the scriptural prophecies of his re- birth.

Prayer and silence are both one act of endless conversation with God where both are intertwined. For it is through our silence we hear the voice of God and feel his presence within. A very important act in being silent is to listen patiently which is portrayed in the words of J.M Neale- ‘and, listening to his accents, may hear so calm and plain’. Yes, it is important for us to be attentive to the Lord’s voice as every time we pray silently, he speaks to us of his redeeming love.

Saint Paul in today's reading speaks about our faith in Jesus. He says that belief in Jesus Christ and profession of faith makes us acceptable in sight of God and grants us justification. Yes, it is our faith in Christ which sustains us and adds meaning to our lives. It is through this faith that even though we are sinners, we find absolution of all our sins and become one with Christ who bore our sins and died once for all. It is also in this faith that we find a new identity which dissolves any distinction (neither Jews nor Gentiles) and grants us an eternal title of being one body with Christ.

This union with Christ is very fascinating to me as every time I think about it, I wonder about how we are united in spite of various divisions and differences. It is in the gospel of Saint John and his imagery of vine and branches that I find an answer to my question. Christ uses the image of vine and branches to describe the intensity of our union which Paul speaks in today’s first reading. This union is no simple but intense as in sharing the branches and vine we not only share proximity with Christ but also his sap and ours are united.

Thus, like every grape may not be the same yet, they are the part of one plant and share branches, in society we have people with varied abilities and yet, in Christ we are all one. This reminds me the great hymn of brotherhood by John Oxenham who beautifully illustrates the essence of today epistle reading-

‘In Christ now meet both east and west, in him meet south and north;  
All Christian souls are one in him, throughout the whole wide earth’.

It is very important for us to remind ourselves that even when our constraints prevent us to worship the Lord in regular fashion and make us more dependent on broadcasted services, we are united in Christ and his presence at every Eucharist, we are made one in him and through him we see the trinitarian God

indivisible. As we are reminded of this union with God, let us make ourselves worthy to realise that like our blessed Lord spent time in silent prayer to submit himself to the Father's will, we must imitate our lord as good sheep of his pasture and that our intense union with our shepherd remains unhindered by the present pandemic .

It is our responsibility to clean our minds and hearts of all distractions as our blessed Lord did and dwell in happiness with each other ignoring all differences with the blessed assurance that 'But thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever'

*'Gaudete in Domino Semper'*.