



EDITORIAL by Robert Moynihan

Lent: Way of Silence, Way of Sorrow

The season of Lent is upon us. In silence, in sorrow, we pray for our “daily bread” and that we not be led “into temptation.” We pray for ourselves, we pray for those dear to us, and we pray for our Church...

“The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence.” —Pope Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini (“The Word of the Lord”), September 30, 2010

“The Gospels often present Jesus, especially at times of crucial decisions, withdrawing to lonely places, away from the crowds and even from the disciples in order to pray in silence and to live his filial relationship with God. Silence can carve out an inner space in our very depths to enable God to dwell there, so that his word will remain within us and love for him take root in our minds and hearts and inspire our life. Hence the first direction: relearning silence, openness to listening, which opens us to the other, to the word of God.” —Pope Benedict XVI, March 7, 2012, in a reflection on Jesus’ silence

“Wordless is the Word of the Father, who made every creature which speaks, lifeless are the eyes of the one at whose word and whose nod all living things move!” — St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 in Constantinople to 662), cited by Benedict in the same talk

“In Jesus’ prayer, in his cry to the Father on the cross, are summed up ‘all the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history... Here the Father accepts them and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. Thus is fulfilled and brought to completion the drama of prayer in the economy of creation and salvation.’” —Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2606, cited by Benedict in the same talk

“It is man — in his soul — who finds himself without the means to take on himself the sufferings and miseries of our time... Man is no longer sure of himself or of his transcendent calling and destiny. He has desacralized the universe and now he is desacralizing humanity; he has at times cut the vital link that joined him to God... God seems to him abstract and useless. Without his being able to express it, God’s silence weighs heavily on him.” —St. Pope Paul VI, Gaudete in Domino (“Rejoice in the Lord”), Apostolic Exhortation On Christian Joy, May 9, 1975, the 12th year of his pontificate

The silence, the fasting and the sacrifice of Lent is upon us. We seek to follow Christ into the desert, and like Christ, to reject the temptations of the devil and remain faithful to our vocation, to our calling, to be in Christ and with Christ no matter what the cost, no matter what the sacrifice. Human words fall short in attempting to convey the situation we find ourselves in, in this time, amid these precise temptations and trials. All the more reason for us today to cling more closely to the words of Scripture, for, as Pope Benedict tells us, “St. Augustine’s observation is still valid: *Verbo crescente, verba deficiunt* ‘when the Word of God increases, the words of men fall short.’” (Pope Benedict, March 7, 2012 General Audience) St. Paul’s words on Christian life in general also apply to our prayers: “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

Lent may truly be a time of blessing if, in silence and sacrifice and in resisting temptation we immerse ourselves more deeply in the mysteries of our Faith. If we embrace silence. If we offer up our sorrow. If we embrace sacrifice for the sake of our own souls, and for our world, and for our Church as she follows her Spouse with sometimes uncertain steps.

Among the worries for the Church simmering among many Catholics: Brazilian Cardinal **Claudio Hummes**, the General Relator of last fall’s Amazon Synod, has sent a letter to all Catholic bishops saying Pope Francis’ post-synodal apostolic exhortation is imminent: it is due in early February. So the Pope’s judgment on this Synod, with its calls for married priests and the ordination of female deacons and a type of “inculturation” many see as incompatible with Catholicism, will be revealed in this document. Catholics expect clear, orthodox teaching from the Pope and the Vatican on these issues.

Then there are the “gender issues.” No Christian would support the unjust oppression of women (or of men) due to shallow society-imposed gender stereotypes. But in the drive for “gender equality,” the “complementarity” of human genders is increasingly rejected. And so a bedrock teaching of our Faith, from Adam and Eve, through Abraham and Sarah, to Joseph and Mary, is abandoned. We hear of children whose innocence is being robbed by educators who teach them to question their gender, and “drag queens” who read them stories in public libraries, of young people whose bodies are mutilated and lives drowned in confusion leading to despair, drug use and suicide, and of the persecution of any who try to resist. Where is the voice of reason, the Church’s voice, in all this? Do Church leaders not sense the rising confusion and the misery it causes?

What our culture does not seem to understand, even a little, is that the way of the Truth is the way of joy, and human happiness. St. Thomas Aquinas says, “Man cannot live without joy; therefore when he is deprived of true spiritual joys it is necessary that he become addicted to carnal pleasures.” The Catholic faith is the only way of real human joy, yet the Church seems to be faltering and acceding to the way offered by the world, as priests, bishops, nuns, seem to accept homosexuality, cohabitation and divorce as ways of life. Where may our peace, our true joy, be found, if not in the Church?

Misery flows from our loss of faith in God’s wisdom and our embrace of self-will as the guiding force of our lives. The only antidote is our Faith, our faith in Christ and in the Church He bequeathed to us. “To whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life,” St. Peter cried to his Master. It is our cry also.

As we face another kind of crisis, the crisis of a mysterious virus originating in China which is terrifying the entire world, let us all cry out to our Lord to have mercy on His Church and His world, and let us immerse ourselves this Lent in silence, for, as Cardinal Robert Sarah recently wrote: “Only silence leads man beyond words, to the mystery, to worship in spirit and in truth.”○