

Carmelite Church, Kensington

6TH – 8TH APRIL 2023

EASTER TRIDUUM REFLECTIONS

Prayer, Love, Silence

with Fr Matt Blake OCD

CONTENTS

HOLY THURSDAY

PRAYER

1

GOOD FRIDAY

LOVE

5

HOLY SATURDAY

SILENCE

9

Prayer

So welcome everybody, we pray that these three days of Easter Triduum may be a time of grace and blessing for all. This is the first of three reflections, I will just take a theme out of each of the days and today I want to take the theme of prayer. We could perhaps see today as a celebration of prayer or the feast of Prayer; tomorrow we will do something similar with Love – see it as the feast of Love; and Saturday, Silence – see it as our feast of Silence.

So today we take prayer and today is truly a day of prayer. If we just think of Jesus praying today, praying in Gethsemane, praying at the Last Supper, the priestly prayer of Jesus in John's gospel. Today is the day that he gives us the greatest of all Christian prayers, the Eucharist, and there is so much more we could say. There is just so much prayer today and of course this evening after the Mass we will have a few hours of silent prayer, when throughout the world, in every church we will have the watching in prayer until midnight.

There is such a rich tradition of prayer around today and I want to look at it from the perspective, we might say, or the experience of three people, and the first one I want to take is Judas, who figures very strongly today. We don't perhaps think of Judas as a person of prayer, but of course he is and has spent years in the presence of Jesus, has spent so much time alone with Jesus when Jesus would be praying at night, praying in lonely places. He has spent so much time in the presence of Jesus, praying with Jesus and he is present at the Last Supper; Jesus washes Judas's feet. We will just think today of Judas as a person of prayer.

St Teresa reminds us very strongly about Judas in the fifth dwelling places of her *Interior Castle*. She said: *think of the gifts that were given to Judas*, and of course he's given an enormous gift, to be one of the twelve and to have experienced all of this, and it's very appropriate that Teresa brings this in in the fifth dwelling places of the *Interior Castle* because that is the place where God is bringing about change and transformation in the person, that's the place in the spiritual journey where God is doing his greatest work in the person, where God is bestowing his greatest gifts on the person. And she brings Judas in here as a reminder to us, or a warning to us in two particular ways. One is that one cannot be complacent – no matter what one has received from God, no matter how mature one's prayer life may be, no matter how experienced one may be – there is no place for complacency, no place for taking God's gifts for granted. But the second way she's using Judas here and more specifically in the context in which she is speaking, is that God's gifts are not deserved, they are not rewards, they are total free gifts. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, knowing he would betray him. He dipped the bread into the bowl and handed it to Judas – that very intimate gesture – knowing that Judas is about to betray him. We do not deserve the gifts that God gives to us, and Judas is the great reminder of this. God's gifts are freely given, it is our choice to accept or not, it is our choice, our total freedom, that we've got all the time, to say yes or no; we can choose to receive love or not. And of course the more mature one's prayer life is, the more free that the person is, because spiritual growth is always a setting free. So the prayer of Judas is one that we could think about, reflect upon today. What might his experience be a reminder of to us? How might it help us as we reflect on our own prayer today?

The second person's prayer I want to briefly reflect upon is that of Jesus. Jesus prays so much today; we're given precious insight today into the prayer of Jesus. I want to read a

few lines from Matthew's gospel that we had last Sunday, Palm Sunday, a few lines from that very profound prayer experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. I'm just taking a few lines from the lips of Jesus: *Stay here while I go over there to pray. My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by, nevertheless, let it be as you – not I – would have it. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done.* Those few phrases, they're like opening a door for us into the inner world of Jesus, we get the slightest little glimpse – and that's all it ever is – to what is happening within him. Firstly he says to his disciples: *stay here, you stay here – I'm going over there to pray.* Jesus felt a great need, a great desire to pray. He wants to pray; he decides to give time to prayer. Whenever we do that, that's a sign that one is already praying, that need has been put there by God. Jesus feels the pull, the draw, the hunger, the thirsting, the longing for communion with his Father. That in itself is prayer, that is profound prayer. At this critical moment in his life he is pulled towards prayer. And as St Teresa, St John of the Cross and so many others point out to us, that is always a sign that God is doing some great work in the person, though the person has no awareness or experience of that, they have no consciousness of it, but what they are conscious of, or become aware of, is the need to pray, the need to be alone, the need to be in silence: *I want to go over there to pray*, that's telling us so much about what is happening in Jesus at this time. Then comes a very strong statement: *my soul is sorrowful, to the point of death.* How is he feeling? What weight or burden is on him, to be *sorrowful to the point of death*? He's weighed down, he's anxious; there's a burden upon him here. There's feelings, pain, sorrow. He's crying out to the Lord here, but it is not out of weakness or depression, it's not that. He may feel very weak, he may feel very sorrowful and pained but in reality he's not, in reality he's very strong here, as of course is the characteristic of a person of prayer. They may be physically and psychologically and emotionally very weak and fragile, but spiritually very strong, and Jesus is spiritually very strong here, even though his feeling, his weakness, his humanity is really struggling to follow his spirit here, because the next words: *my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by, nevertheless let it be as you, not I, would have it.* He is putting himself completely into the hands of the Father, that's what the person of prayer does, he is trusting the Father even at this time when it is most difficult to do that, when he is struggling to do it, when his humanity is struggling to do it, but his spirit is willing. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*, he will say a little bit later, and that's exactly what we have here, the spirit is strong, the spirit knows what it's about; the flesh is struggling. *My Father if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done. Your will be done* – putting it totally into God's hands, doing the will of God, that is a sign of profound prayer, giving himself totally to his Father, to his Father's will. That's his prayer that he shared earlier on with his disciples in the gospel: *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* – heaven is where God's will is done. This is heaven, doing the will of God.

To remind us again of another phrase from St Teresa: *this life is heaven on earth, provided we want nothing for ourselves.* In other words, the person who can totally give themselves to God, put themselves into his hands, give everything over to his will, is in heaven, is living heaven. To see the Garden of Gethsemane, this experience of Jesus as heaven – that's different to our understanding of heaven – but it truly is, because Jesus is able to completely, totally do the will of the Father, put himself into the hands of the Father, give himself totally to the Father. So that is the prayer of Jesus here on this day.

The third aspect, the third person – people – I want to pick out are the disciples of Jesus. They are at prayer, they are at prayer all the time here, they have been at the Last Supper,

they have listened to Jesus praying, they have partaken in the prayer of Jesus, they have partaken in the first Eucharist celebrated, and now they are brought to Gethsemane to pray. And I just want to pick a few things from what Jesus says to his disciples here. First of all something I have already read, Jesus says: *stay here* – just hold that phrase – *stay here*. A little bit later he says to them: *So you have not had the strength to keep awake with me one hour. You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.* Then at the end of this he says to them: *you can sleep on now and take your rest. Now the hour has come when the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us go, my betrayer is already close at hand.* So this we might say is the instruction, the lesson that Jesus is giving to his disciples here. Jesus is always teaching them to pray, they have asked him earlier on in the gospel: *Lord, teach us to pray.* Being in the presence of Jesus of course is always a lesson in prayer, here they are being taught a profound lesson in prayer and the first one is: *stay here*. How important those words are for prayer: *just stay here*, just stay with this, stick with it, commit to it, do not stop, just stay here. In fact, St Teresa picks this out as the most important of everything she would want to say about prayer: *Never give up prayer, let nothing ever entice you or persuade you to give up prayer. Just never give up. Whatever else may happen, even if you die, she said, don't give up praying, let nothing cause you to give up praying.* Stay here, stay with it, not just for those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane, but all the time, that's what he is saying to his disciples all the time, to us now as disciples, *stay here, you're in my presence, I'm always with you. Stay here.* Very important words: *stay here*.

Then something else: *stay awake, keep awake, you should be awake.* That's a very rich word, to be *awake*. We find it in the Bible, we find it in so many people; John of the Cross begins his *Spiritual Canticle* with it, that the person who is awake, the person who has grown aware has become conscious of something. To be awake, to be aware, to have something come into one's consciousness. That of course is God, that of course is the presence of God, that awareness, to be awake – *stay awake with me*. So often prayer is about staying awake. It doesn't mean physically staying awake, as we can see because they go to sleep, but Jesus somehow doesn't have a problem with them sleeping, we can be physically asleep and yet the awareness be there. As St Thérèse says, we sleep in the arms of Jesus, like a baby sleeping in his mother's arms. It's not about physically staying awake, though the disciples are obviously struggling to physically stay awake, it's a different kind of staying awake, a much deeper staying awake, an awareness, a consciousness that God is here. It is simply about being in the presence of God, that awareness that God gives, that the presence of God gives to the person.

The disciples are here at prayer. As I have said already about Jesus, as he's experiencing his physical weakness, his psychological weakness, so also the disciples are. They do not have the strength to stay physically awake, they do not have the strength to even stay there. They are feeling their physical weakness, yet they are in profound prayer, they are in a very intimate relationship with Jesus. They are in a place of great privilege; they are receiving a great gift of God – what a gift of God to be present here. Again we find this right throughout the Bible, whenever somebody is in the presence of God, they feel themselves physically and emotionally and psychologically very weak, or very confused and bewildered, not knowing what's happening, not knowing what to do. Somehow in the presence of God our humanity really struggles, our humanity is seen in all its weakness and fragility and that's how the disciples are seeing themselves here and how they are depicted with all their fragility and weakness and confusion. God is doing something wonderful for them, the greatest gift God will ever give and yet they are unable to grasp it.

So they are sensing and feeling their weakness, their vulnerability as we all do in prayer, and prayer is a meeting with, an encounter, a coming face to face with our own vulnerability, our own weakness. The disciples here are every disciple, in every situation, in every circumstance. *Pray not to be put to the test*, he tells them. Of course, they are being tested, they are being tested most profoundly, they are being tested in every possible way. Pray that one can live through the test, pray that one can stay here, pray that one can remain faithful because just as with Jesus, so also with the disciple the spirit is strong, the spirit is willing, the spirit is alive, the spirit is filled with light, filled with awareness – but the flesh, the body, the mind, is struggling, is feeling its great distance from God, is feeling its weakness and vulnerability.

And then, the final statement, *you can sleep on now and take your rest*. How do we hear that? Sometimes we can hear it as a certain cynicism or sarcasm. It's not that, that's not what Jesus intends here, he truly means what the words are saying: *you can rest now, you can sleep now* - not in the physical sense of the word, but you can be at rest, you have come through the test. *The hour has come*, he said, *the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners*. The hour has come, what you will see is betrayal, what you will see is him put into the hands of sinners, but of course the hour is something far greater than that, the hour is redemption, the hour is the completion of God's great work, God's great plan. God is bringing to completion this work – you can be at rest, you can be at peace – because then he says to them: *Get up! let us go*. There's energy, there's life; that's why I said earlier, in the case of Jesus, spiritually he's very strong, he's very close to the Father here and so also are the disciples. Despite their weakness they come out of this experience filled with strength, they come out of this experience as new people, and so often it is with all of us that the times when prayer is a greater struggle, the times when prayer is a real encounter with our weakness, they are times when one comes out of that filled with strength, when the spirit is renewed because God has done something great. So these disciples are really struggling to be there, to stay with it. Their flesh is weak, but God is doing something great in them, he is giving them strength. *Get up now! Let us go*, we can face everything together, Jesus and his disciples.

So we're given a little glimpse, and that's all we're given, the slightest little glimpse of the prayer experience of Jesus and the prayer experience of his disciples – apart of course from Judas, who has already gone at this stage – but the others; the greatest struggle, the greatest difficulty with prayer, times when prayer is really difficult, we really struggle to stay there. By just staying there, putting it into the hands of God, praying not to be put to the test, opening one's mind and heart to the will of God, God gives great strength. It is a time of growing and maturing spiritually. The body may be weak, the flesh may be weak, but the spirit is strong, the spirit is maturing, the spirit is being purified. So let us pray that today will be a day of profound prayer, of spiritual growth and strengthening for all of us. Amen.

Transcribed from the recorded talk: <https://www.youtube.com/live/DW8b6jk-dic?feature=share>
(starting at 32:36)

Good Friday – 7th April 2023

Talk by Fr Matt Blake OCD

Love

As we reflect upon this day of Good Friday, as we reflected yesterday a little bit on the theme of prayer, today we reflect upon love – obviously everything we are reflecting upon is related to prayer in one way or other. But today let's reflect upon God, who is love – God is love. And as St John of the Cross reminds us, *love is God's language, God speaks the language of love* and today he is speaking to us in the language of love, or perhaps more importantly from our perspective, we must listen with the language of love, allow love to speak to us today, allow love into our hearts, into our minds, because that's what God is doing, pouring out his love to us – *no greater love than to lay down one's life*. Today we come face to face with no greater love, no greater expression of love known to humanity than for God to lay down his life, God to give his only son, God to pour out everything to us in love.

Last night, at our Holy Thursday ceremony we had the story of the washing of the feet, from Chapter 13 of John's gospel and I will just remind us of one line from it: *he had always loved those who were his own in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was*. He wants to show us how perfect his love was, and it's not just in the washing of the feet, but ultimately it is in his death on the Cross that he shows us the extent of his love, shows us how limitless his love is. St Teresa, when she's reflecting upon the great gifts that God gives to certain people, she poses the question why – undoubtedly people were asking her why – *why does God seem to give certain gifts to certain people? Why does God make himself known in certain ways to people?* And her answer is, *because he wants us all to know the limitlessness of his love*. He wants us all to know that, and he tells us through people and through the experience of people.

So today, Good Friday, not only does God love us, not only does he give the greatest gift, the greatest deed he has ever done for humanity, but also – and very importantly to understand today well – he wants us to know it. God doesn't just love us and pour out gifts to us, he wants us to know he loves us, he wants us to know he is giving us these gifts, he wants us to know what we are receiving. He wants us to know that he loves us, that's why he washed the disciples' feet, not for the benefit of just those disciples, but every disciple everywhere, that every disciple will know he loves him, he loves her, he loves me, you – every one of us – that we know that and we know that there is no limit to the love and that the disciples and others testify to this, this is a love beyond limit.

But the question that comes up for us – how do we know this? I want to read a little paragraph from St John of the Cross and I want to read it in terms of today and what we're celebrating. And for those of you familiar with John of the Cross, and many of you are, this is from his *Living Flame* stanza 1, paragraph 9, and here of course John is speaking about the individual person, the soul, but I would like to apply it to all of us, apply it to the world, apply it to humanity, apply it to all of creation. So John speaks here about this feast of love and that's how we see today – today is the great feast of love, today is the great celebration of love, today is the day when we are told, when we know we're loved. So he tells us that: *This feast takes place in the substance of the soul, the very deepest centre of the person, where neither the senses nor the devil can reach... And the greater*

the purity, the more abundantly, frequently and generously God communicates himself. Thus the delight and joy of the soul is so much more intense because God is the doer of all without the soul doing anything. Since the soul cannot do any work of its own save through the means and aid of the corporeal senses, from which in this event it is very free and far removed, its sole occupation now is to receive from God... Thus all the movements of this soul are divine. Although they belong to it, they belong to it because God works them in it and with it, for it wills and consents to them.

There's an enormous amount being said there and I just want to tease out a little bit of this, because it may help us and all of humanity. This is happening to the whole world today; he tells us we are talking about something that the corporeal senses cannot know, that is, we can't touch it, we can't see it, we can't hear it. We're speaking about something that our minds cannot think about, our minds cannot understand, we are speaking about something that our imaginations cannot reach. Or perhaps we could put it another way, this language of love, this language that God is speaking to us today is not the language of our minds or our imaginations or anything that we can experience or feel or know in any way that we know everything else, it's a language that's totally beyond all of that and therefore John tells us, free of all of that, and he said it is free of the devil or any kind of deceit or evil, so he said it is pure. It is pure, we can rely and we can trust upon it, because God is speaking to us today very directly, totally directly, not coming through anything else. So we can't hear him or see him, the language is totally different to that of this world. We would never invent the Cross, we would never even dream it up as a way of expressing love, we would never dream of crucifixion as the greatest expression of love.

Humanity has all sorts of ways of expressing love. As long as there have been human beings in this world, all sorts of means of expressing love have been found and used and invented; human imagination and creativity have expressed love in all sorts of ways, but never anything like this. This is totally beyond our normal language of expressing love and John tells us that's what makes it so secure; we can't be deceived here. There can always be something of deceit or compromise or something imperfect in human love, however generous we may be, there's always going to be an element there that we can't fully trust. Here there is no element, we can totally trust the love that is being given to us today, that is being communicated to us, because, he said, God is the doer of everything today – we do nothing, either as individuals, or as a human race, or as a world or as creation – we do nothing today. Today, to use the words of John of the Cross, *all our occupation is to receive*. Today we receive, all our prayer is the prayer of receiving, John tells us, all our doing is the doing of receiving; we cannot do anything, we only receive, today we are totally receiving, we are receiving love. As I said earlier, we are receiving it in love's language, by love's way of communicating, we are receiving it in God's language.

So everything about today is about receiving. But receiving, as John goes on to tell us here, is not something passive. We're not sitting back and God giving us something and we just say... thank you very much... no – we're not passive. And the way John puts it: *it wills and consents*. We will and we consent to the gifts of today. What does that mean: to will something, to really want something, to really desire something, to have one's heart set upon it? In the teaching of John of the Cross the will is the place where love is situated and when the will is totally free or when the heart is totally free, then it loves, it can only love, it can only act out of love, it can only respond to love. The will, or the heart, when it

is totally free to love or when it has been transformed in love, just loves. So the person has set their entire heart upon this, the person's entire being wills, wants, is moved towards this. So it wills it, and the other word he uses – it *consents* to it – it says *yes*. We've got to say *yes* to today, and the *yes* to today is the *yes* of one's whole person. To use another phrase of John of the Cross: *it is the pure and complete yes of love*. It's pure, it's not spoiled or compromised in any way. It's complete; it's the *yes* of the whole person – one's mind, heart, soul. It's the complete *yes* of love, that can only be made by somebody who knows that they're loved, somebody who has received this love, whose life has been changed and transformed by it. So picking out those few little things from St John of the Cross perhaps it gives us a way of somehow – understanding is probably too much – but somehow having a sense of how we can know, how we can experience the love that is being held up to us today, that is being poured out to us, that we are receiving, that our whole day today is about receiving, our whole action, all our doing today is in receiving. Today is the day to open our hearts and our minds to receiving.

We could well then pose another question. Where does the rest of our love fit into this? If we are speaking about a love that is on a whole other plane here, that operates by a whole other system, that speaks a whole different language, where does the love between each other fit into this, the love that is so important to us in our everyday lives? Perhaps we could see it like this: it's somehow a little drop in this great big ocean that is God's love, or it is a little glimpse or a little hint of this love. Human love, which is something beautiful, something good, something that we live by, something that we need, is but a slightest little glimpse of this greater love that God is revealing to us, showing us that he wants us to know today and it is God's love that gives meaning and value to our efforts at love. It is God's love that gives us the courage and the strength to make our effort, to love in whatever way we can, whatever way we're called to, whatever way our daily life demands of us. God, in revealing his great love to us isn't somehow putting down or diminishing our efforts to love, he is doing the opposite, he is enhancing them, he is affirming them. When we love, whenever we make the effort to love, the sacrifice to love, take the decision to love, in some little way even if it is a very imperfect way, we are ultimately saying yes, not just to the love to the other person or the situation around us, we are saying yes to this greater love that we are all taken up into, this greater love that is poured out to us today. So God in revealing his love to us – no greater love – is affirming and reassuring and strengthening and supporting all our efforts to love. He is showing us the real value of love, even our own imperfect and fragile love. He is showing that it has value, that it can do real good – it is something precious.

There's one other question then and perhaps this is the most difficult of all the questions today because we simply can't get to here, and that is the love between the Father and Jesus. Last night at the Last Supper, in chapter 17 of John's gospel, Jesus prays in that wonderful prayer where he puts his whole life into prayer, he prays that the love that there is between the Father and him will be in us, as individuals, as humanity, as Church, as creation – the love that there is between the Father and the Son will be in us. That's what he prays for and that of course we believe in faith is what happens. In dying on the Cross Jesus has given us that very same love that makes possible that relationship that there is between him and the Father, because in John's gospel, on the Cross we're told he gives the spirit, in dying he gives us that, he gives us that relationship. But the question of course always on our minds is, if the Father really loves the Son why does he have to die on a cross? Why is this the fulfilment of the Father's will? What kind of a love is this? How can we speak about this as love? We can and we do because it is. But it is a love

beyond our understanding, it is a love on a total other plane, in a totally other place. The Father loves the Son, he loves us, he loves us in and through the Son, he gives his Son out of love for us, he loves his Son with a love that cannot be surpassed. There we are pulled into a mystery that we cannot in any way understand, but we know it to be true, we know it to be real. The love that there is between the Father and the Son is given its highest expression upon the Cross. Yet upon the Cross Jesus prays: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* How can he feel forsaken by the one who loves him so much, so greatly?

Again St John of the Cross attempts to give us an explanation for that and an explanation out of our own experience, out of the human experience. This is the human experience of Jesus, Jesus giving everything, humanly speaking; as a human being he is living a spiritual life like all of us. Upon the Cross, just like us, he also has no understanding of what is taking place. He believes sincerely, in the depths of his heart, that God has abandoned him, forsaken him. Yet St John of the Cross reminds us that this is the very moment when God is doing his greatest work in Jesus, this is the moment when God is reconciling all of us – the whole world – with him, when he is saving the whole world through Jesus. In other words, he is pouring out his greatest love through Jesus, yet the human Jesus has no way of seeing or understanding this. And perhaps that is something we could reflect upon today, God is pouring out his love to us in a way that is so beyond our understanding, a way that goes totally contrary to our human understanding, but that is the great love that is being revealed to us, being shown to us today. God did not abandon Jesus on the cross, rather he did his greatest work through him, he poured out his greatest love through him, he gave us everything through Jesus Christ. He saved us, redeemed us and filled us with the love that there is between him and his Son. That's what he did upon the cross.

As we today reflect upon this love, this great outpouring of love – *no greater love* – we know and we're very aware that we're being pulled into a mystery that is totally beyond our understanding, a mystery that we can only hear through a language that is beyond all earthly language but we also know that when we receive and hear this language, we know how real it is, we are touching the reality of pure, uncompromised, limitless love. That's what Good Friday is, a little glimpse, or the slightest touch of limitless, pure, uncompromised, eternal love. It is God showing us, telling us who he is, in his language and not ours.

© Fr Matt Blake, OCD – 7th April 2023

Transcribed from the recorded talk: <https://www.youtube.com/live/tzAemStuZs8?feature=share>
(starting at 37:31)

Holy Saturday – 8th April 2023

Talk by Fr Matt Blake OCD

Silence

We come to the third of our reflections and this morning we'll reflect a little on the theme of silence. Silence is very much the theme of today; we've heard it already in our reading – silence. Today is a day of silence, of solitude, but it is not an empty silence, today is not an interval between what happened yesterday – the crucifixion, the death of Jesus – and tonight and tomorrow, celebrating the resurrection. This is not some kind of an interlude or an interval in between. Today something very important, something very profound is taking place, something very mysterious and the silence of today draws us into this deeper mystery, the silence of today draws us closer to the meaning of all that is taking place, of all that we are celebrating.

Let's begin with a little bit from Matthew's gospel that we heard last Sunday. So we're now after the death of Jesus *and many women were there, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons....Joseph of Arimathea then rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb and went away. Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.*

So let us today join these women. What were they experiencing? Grief? Bewilderment? Loss? They have come all the way with Jesus, they have been with him on the whole journey, we're told, they have followed him from Galilee, they have looked after him, they have been there for everything, silently there, on the entire journey of the life of Jesus, through all his public ministry. They have been silently there at the foot of the Cross. They are now at the tomb, they now see him being buried, they see the stone put in front of the tomb, a large stone. We're told elsewhere that when they come the following day with the spices: *How are we going to roll the stone back? Who is going to help us? We are not able to.* Jesus, the one that they believed in, the one that they have become disciples of, is dead, is buried. There is a great stone between them and him, a great division; they are cut off from him. Yet at a deeper level they are there, they are at prayer, they are meditating on what's taking place, they are in silence. Deep within them, without their even being aware of it, they are being led ever more deeply into the mystery and that's what's happening to us today also. Yesterday we had all the events of the Passion, the death of Jesus, tomorrow we have the resurrection, but today's silence, the time we spend alone today, the time that we join the women at the tomb, leads us ever more deeply into the mystery. Something profound takes place within us because something profound is taking place in our world.

I am reminded of the very famous words of St John of the Cross: *God the Father spoke one Word, that Word was His Son Jesus Christ and He speaks that Word in eternal silence.* What a statement that, there are three parts to it: *God the Father spoke one Word.* Only one Word, that's God's Word. We heard it in the *Letter to the Hebrews* that Tijo read to us. That Word can penetrate deep within, there is nowhere that Word does not have access to, it can go between the bone and the marrow, it can penetrate the deepest places, there is nothing hidden from that Word, that Word is all powerful, that Word is His

Son, Jesus Christ. That's the second part of the statement, that one Word is His Son. And of course that's the beginning of John's gospel – everything is created through the Word, everything that has being has its being through Him, all existence depends on Him. The Word has become flesh, the Word lives among us, the one Word that the Father has spoken is His Son – Jesus is the Word. So Jesus is the one that we look to for everything, everything that the Father is saying to us is in Jesus. Now that Jesus – everything that the Father says to us – is in the tomb. A stone has been put in front of the tomb. He is in the earth, in darkness. He is dead. But then John of the Cross in the third part of that statement says: *that Word is heard in eternal silence*. So we are today where that Word is heard, we are in an eternal silence, touching an eternal silence. Today isn't just a few hours of silence, it is rather like a little glimpse into a greater silence, it is the silence of God, the silence in which God speaks, it's the silence in which God's Word is heard. Today we hear the Word as the Father wants us to hear the Word. There are no words of course, he's dead in a tomb, and yet today, to follow the logic of John of the Cross, we are hearing Him as the Father would want us to hear Him, we are hearing the Father's one Word in that silence.

Those women, what did they hear? They had no consciousness of hearing anything, they had no awareness of hearing anything, but they are hearing something. A Word is being spoken to them, they are being brought ever more deeply into the mystery, they are feeling grief and exhaustion and emptiness and loss and loneliness and all of these things that they're feeling, as they sit there looking at the tomb. But at a deeper level, in the depths of their souls God is preparing them for a new life, God is transforming them. Today we're in this transformative silence, the silence that can change and transform everything, the silence that brings about new life, that brings us all into new life. That silence, that's what were in today, that's where the women are, that's what they're hearing.

So, to get some sense of the nature of this silence I want to turn to John of the Cross again and I want to take a few words from his *Spiritual Canticle*. We're at Stanza 15 of his *Spiritual Canticle* and he's commenting on two wonderful phrases: *the silent music*, the solitude that speaks, that has a voice, that communicates – whatever word we want to use – *la musica callada, la solidad sonora*. And John's commentary on this is at a stage of the spiritual journey when God is entering the person's life at a much deeper level. The person has been journeying, searching for God for so long and now God is bringing about this change, this transformation in the person. God is doing something great within the person. The person's awareness is less and less, the person is being drawn ever deeper into the mystery. John gives us a lovely expression here; what the person, the soul, the bride – to use the language of John's canticle – is experiencing or possesses is *an abyss of the knowledge of God*. It's a wonderful phrase and we can see today as being *plunged into the abyss of the knowledge of God*, we are simply being thrown into the abyss of the knowledge of God, we are simply being thrown into this abyss of God and it is so contrary and so totally other than or different to any knowledge we have. How can a God be locked in a tomb? How could a God be dead? How could a God remain totally silent? How can a God be unreachable? The human experience here is so far away from the real experience that's taking place. In reality we are in this abyss of the knowledge of God and what is it that we're experiencing, beyond our awareness, beyond our knowledge? What are the women experiencing as they sit at the tomb?

Let's take John of the Cross's words and apply them because they will help us. He talks about this *nocturnal tranquillity and silence*. He of course is speaking about the interior life of the person, but we can see it as these women in the darkness of the tomb, this *nocturnal tranquillity and silence* that we're in this morning, that we're in throughout this day. There might be bright sunshine but within there is darkness, there is tranquillity, there is silence. But then he goes on to say *there is knowledge of divine light*, because of course divine light, and to use the rationale of John of the Cross, divine light is experienced humanly as darkness and the brighter the divine light, the deeper the darkness that the human being is plunged into, because the light of God is just so bright, it blinds every other light, it completely takes over all other light that we see by. So this divine light, and through this divine light the person becomes aware – and it's a beautiful phrase of John's – *of Wisdom's wonderful harmony and sequence in the variety of her creatures and works*. So the person is becoming aware of something much more wonderful and deeper, the person is becoming aware of who God is, what God has created, the wonderful harmony and wisdom there is in everything that God has created in all God's works. Just a little bit more here: *Each of them is endowed with a certain likeness of God and in its own way gives voice to what God is within it*. So being led in this darkness, this tranquillity, into something deeper, that wisdom, which is the Holy Spirit, which is God, is showing us the world in a whole new way, is showing us the whole of creation as God sees it, as an expression of God.

In other words, when we sit in silence today, when we sit and reflect on God pushed into the earth, into the ground, a stone in front of him – there's something powerful in the idea of God being plunged into the earth, being buried in there – the earth that he has created, the earth that he draws life from all the time, the earth that he has put his wisdom into everything that grows, everything that exists. We are today seeing the hand of God everywhere; we are drawn into the deeper understanding of everything that God has created. Perhaps in an age where we're so concerned about the earth and creation and nature being destroyed by pollution, global warming, warfare, development, all sorts of things that are threatening and damaging our world, today is the day that God restores his world and shows us the beauty and wisdom of the earth, the earth that he lies in.

Now John goes on to speak about his wonderful music, this wonderful silent music that is all around us that we are hearing today in our silence. It's *a harmonious symphony of sublime music surpassing all the concerts and melodies of the world*, and it is silent, there is no noise, it is silent music, it is tranquil and quiet knowledge without the sound of voices, there's no sound, but this beautiful symphony, harmony of everything that there is in the world, this symphony of spiritual music that we're hearing. And then John takes us a step further, takes us ever more deeply into what we as human beings are experiencing here in this solitude, this sounding solitude, the solitude that is speaking to us, but is speaking to us silently: *This praise is like music*, he said, *for as each one possesses God's gifts differently, each one sings God's praises differently, and all of them together form a symphony of love, as of music*. [*Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 15, Para 26*]

So John here is giving us two symphonies that we're hearing in the silence, in the solitude. The symphony of all that God has created, the symphony of all that is in our world, in our cosmos, everything that exists, all the wisdom that he has put in to everything, that we are hearing, that's what the silence of today enables us to hear. This world is God's; this world is in his hands. He is dead and buried in our world, but he has given our world life, he is now bringing about a whole new life from the depths of the earth. And secondly he

is showing us who we really are, each one of us created to praise God, each one of us given the capacity to love, we are a symphony of love, a symphony of praise, we are rediscovering who we really are. The death and the resurrection of Jesus is a discovery, a rediscovery of what the world is as the expression of God's wisdom and beauty, we as human beings, the expression of God's love and praise, all in a beautiful symphony of silent music. We are rediscovering who we are.

We can see what is taking place here. What's taking place today is the new creation, which will become visible in the resurrection. When we hear about the resurrection tonight and tomorrow morning we will hear it expressed for us in terms of the first moment of dawn of the new day, the new week, the new creation, the transformation of everything. Today God has gone into the depths of the earth, he has gone into the depths of our lives and he is bringing about this new life. The silence of today is a silence that is filled with new life; the silence of today is a silence from which new life emerges. Today's silence is a silence that renews, that cleanses, that purifies; today's silence is a silence that enables us to hear God in a way that he has never been heard before. Today is a silence that brings us face to face with God's word, the eternal word, the word that all of creation is, the word that human beings made in the image and likeness of God are, the word that his son Jesus Christ is, who has become part of creation and who has lived the fullness of human life in all its dimensions, from conception to birth, to all the everyday life that we live, to suffering, pain, rejection, death, burial, to new life. He has gone on that journey. The women who were at the tomb we're told, very importantly, have come on this whole journey with Jesus. It is the silence now that enables them to complete the journey; it is the silence that enables them to enter into the meaning of the journey they have been on all this time, it is the silence that will prepare them to be the first witnesses of the new life. As we enter ever more deeply into the silence of today, know that it is the silence that is preparing us, that is purifying us, that is enlightening us in a way totally beyond our understanding or awareness, that we may be also his witnesses, witnesses to the resurrection, witnesses to the new life of Jesus Christ. So let us today appreciate and celebrate the gift that the silence of today is, because it is the gift that enables us to be truly Christian, witnesses to the new life, witnesses to the resurrection.

Thank you all, and may God bless you and give you a grace-filled and deep, profound experience of Easter. Amen.

© Fr Matt Blake, OCD – 8th April 2023

Transcribed from the recorded talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPJg8PLiP3c> starting at 30:21

REFERENCES – Source material

The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD. ICS Publications, Washington DC, 2012

Volume 1: *The Book of her Life, Spiritual Testimonies, Soliloquies*

Volume 2: *The Way of Perfection, Meditation on the Song of Songs, The Interior Castle*

Volume 3: *The Book of her Foundations, Minor Works*

The Collected Works of St John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh OCD and Otilio Rodriguez OCD. ICS Publications Washington DC. 1991.