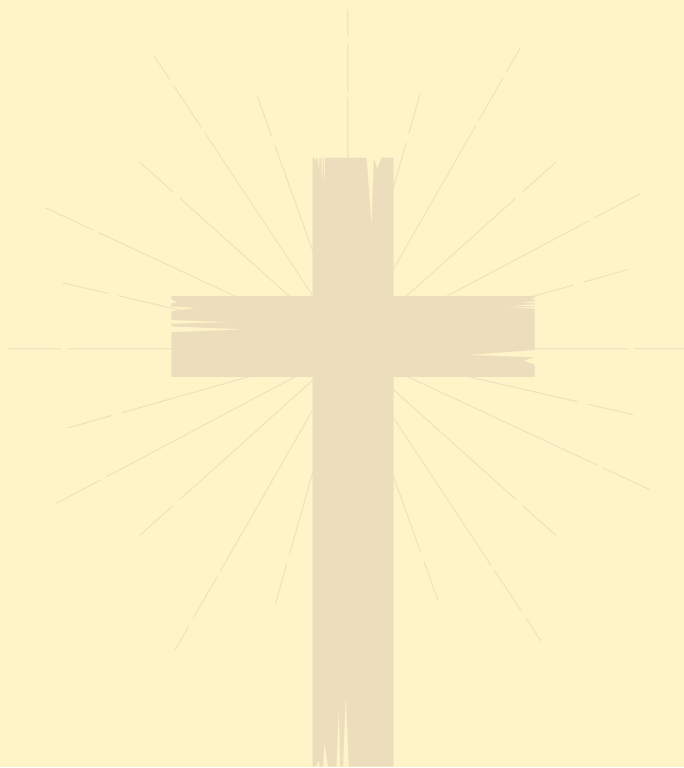


ASH WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2022

Silence versus Noise



Message of *Laudato Si'*

On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself. An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace, which is much more than the absence of war. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances?

Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment.

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence "must not be contrived but found, uncovered".

Laudato Si' #225

Take time to consider, what are the noises and distractions that may cause a certain imbalance in my way of life. Does this imbalance affect in me being in harmony with my loved ones, those around me, and my care of the environment?

GOSPEL – MATTHEW 6:1-6,16-18

Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

REFLECTION

Sometimes we forget that a great deal of strength and inspiration can come from a place of silence. We can become too accustomed to “noise.” Noise can mean the need for attention, recognition, acknowledgment, and praise. Noise can also be in the form of needing to be loud in our actions so that people know and can see the good we are doing. Noise can also come in a great need to be entertained. For instance, entertaining ourselves with gossip or being busybodies, or that our television is always on. Noise can refer to many activities, yet they do not nourish us as human persons and as children of God.

In our pursuit from one “noise” to another, the question we can ask ourselves is:

Is God not enough? Is God too poor that we need a great deal of “noise” like the ones Jesus was critical of in the gospel? Or perhaps, we are poor?

Jesus reminds us that there is an aspect of our life where God is present and sees all we do, even in secret. We do not need to parade around our actions and decisions “noisily” because, for us, it is directed towards God. Needing more can indicate that God is not enough. This is something we can reflect on.

Let us cultivate the ground of silence in our spirituality. Silence can create the condition for us to discern the movement of the Spirit better. It can be a great source of strength and inspiration. Cultivating silence also predisposes us towards a direction that is in harmony with God, one another, and creation.

LENTEN EXERCISE

The Lenten exercise of penance such as bodily fasting and self-denial can bring us to the realization that perhaps, we have focused too much on bodily comforts and pleasures. It may have dulled our senses and the voices of our conscience. The exercises of prayer, penance, and charity are meant to strengthen our desire and will in committing to living a life that is in union with God. For this week, let us be aware of the “noises” in our life. This is especially when they are the ones that make us insensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

MY STAND

- Acts of Penance: During Lent, let us choose to eat only for sustenance. We can renew our practice of penance instead of it becoming a routine. Perhaps, we can choose two acts of penance each week from list no.5 in addition to abstinence from meat.

Days of penance from the Code of Canon Law numbers, 1250-1253

1. The days and times of penance for all the Latin Church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.
2. Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Bishops’ Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, except when a solemnity falls on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
3. All are bound by the **law of abstinence** who have reached the age of fourteen.
4. The **law of fasting** applies to all who have attained their majority until after their fifty-ninth birthday. Pastors of souls and parents should ensure that even those who

are still too young to be bound by the laws of fasting and abstinence are trained to have a true appreciation of penance.

5. Those who are unable to observe fasting and abstinence may do penance in one of the following or similar ways instead. As examples: Going to the Holy Mass, praying the rosary, praying the Stations of the Cross, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, doing works of mercy, such as giving money to the poor, visiting the sick, praying for the dead, depriving themselves of some enjoyable food, abstaining from alcoholic drinks, giving up a show on TV or Video and many other ways of mortification. Eating meat on Friday would not be a sin if an alternative penance as suggested above is performed.

(Conference of Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei on February 25, 1984)

Source: <http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/meat-on-friday/26054/13>

- Cultivating a habit of inconveniences for a sustainable way of life. For instance, tote-bag, water-bottle, tiffin-carriers or food containers, and e-paper where possible, i.e., newspapers and books. Action for first-timers: Try it twice a week when you shop groceries or buy food.
- Set a goal for (our / my) contribution to the Lenten Campaign, (our / my) "almsgiving" to the poor. For instance, saving each week or set aside our salary for the poor.



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