



Thoughts for a Holy Hour at the Altar of repose MAUNDY THURSDAY NIGHT

(Taken from 'JESUS OF NAZARETH' – Pope Benedict XVI)

[To be read slowly and meditatively]

INTRODUCTION “When they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives “(Mt 26: 30) Jesus’ final meal was first and foremost an act of worship - a prayer as of praise and thanksgiving. Still praying Jesus goes out into the night with his disciples. Jesus goes out into the night during which he will have to take upon himself the destiny of the Lamb – reminding us how Israel was saved from Egypt through the blood of the lamb (Ex 12)

Let us begin our time accompanying Jesus and sing: *Hymn*

LEADER: On each of the previous nights (in Holy Week) Jesus has withdrawn to Bethany. On this night, which he celebrated as his Passover night, he follows the law to remain in within the city of Jerusalem. He is in full knowledge as he approaches the betrayer and the hour of the Passion. “**They went a place which is called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples ‘Sit here, while I pray’.**” (Mk 14:32) Nearby was a natural cave which could have offered Jesus and his disciples a safe, if not comfortable place to spend the night.

SILENT REFLECTION

LEADER: Gethsemane is one of the most venerable sites of Christianity. The trees do not date from the time of Jesus, yet it is still the same Mount of Olives. Anyone who spends time here is confronted with one of the most dramatic moments in the mystery of our Saviour: it was here that Jesus experienced that final loneliness, the whole anguish of the human condition. Here the abyss of sin and evil penetrated deep within his soul. Here he was to quake with foreboding of his imminent death. Here he was kissed by the betrayer. Here he was abandoned by all the disciples. Here he wrestled with his destiny for my sake.

HYMN

LEADER: St. John takes up all these experiences and gives a theological interpretation of the place when he says, “**across the Kidron valley where there was a garden**” (18:1). This same

highly evocative word comes back as the end of the Passion narrative: **“In the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid.”**(19:41) John’s use of the word “garden” is an unmistakable reference to the story of Paradise and the Fall. That story, he tells us, is being resumed here. It is in the “garden” that Jesus is betrayed, but the garden is also the place of the Resurrection. It was in the garden that Jesus fully accepted the Father’s will and made it his own and this changed the course of history.

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt. 26:36-39

[Silent Reflection...]

2. THE PRAYER OF JESUS

LEADER: Let us approach as close as we can the mystery of this hour of Jesus.

After the common recitation of the psalms Jesus prays alone – as on so many precious nights. Close by is the group of three disciples – Peter, James and John. These three even though they are repeatedly overcome by sleep, are the witnesses of Jesus’ night of anguish. Mark tells us that Jesus “began to be greatly distressed and troubled”. He said to his disciples **“My soul is sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch”** (14:33-34). The summons to vigilance has already been a major theme of Jesus’ Jerusalem teaching but now emerges directly with great urgency.

While it refers specifically to Gethsemane, it also points ahead to the later history of Christianity. Across the centuries, it is the drowsiness of the disciples that opens up possibilities, for the power of the Evil One. Such drowsiness deadens the soul, so that it remains undisturbed by the power of the Evil One at work in the world, and by all the injustice and suffering, ravaging the earth. In its state of numbness, the soul prefers not to see all this, so as to continue in the self-satisfaction of its own comfortable existence. Yet this deadening of souls, this lack of vigilance regarding both God’s closeness and the looming forces of darkness is what gives the Evil One power in the world.

We bring to mind Jesus in the hour of intense agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[Silent Prayer]

LEADER: After this admonition to vigilance Jesus goes a short distance away. This is where the prayer on the Mount of Olives actually begins. Matthew and Mark tell us that **Jesus falls on his face** –the prayer posture of extreme submission to the will of God, of radical self-offering to him. This posture is still adopted on Good Friday, and at ordinations. Luke has Jesus kneeling to pray.

There now follows the prayer itself, in which the whole drama of our redemption is made present. Jesus begins by asking that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him (14:35). Then followed the essential content of the prayer: **“Abba, Father, all things are possible to you: remove this chalice from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.”** (14:36)

[HYMN]

LEADER: In this prayer of Jesus there is the primordial experience of fear in the face of the power of death, terror before the abyss of nothingness that make him tremble to the point that, in Luke's account, **his sweat falls to the ground like drops of blood.** (22:44) Because he is Son of God, he sees with total clarity the whole foul flood of evil, all the power of lies and pride, all the wiles and cruelty of the evil that masks itself as life, yet constantly serves to destroy, debase and crush life. Because he is the Son, he experiences deeply all the horror, filth and baseness, that he must drink from the "chalice" prepared for him: the vast power of sin and death. All this he must take into himself, so that it can be disarmed and defeated in him.

Jesus' fear is far more radical than the fear that everyone experiences in the face of death. We may see ourselves drawn quite personally into the episode on the Mount of Olives: *my own sin was present in that terrifying chalice.* "Those drops of blood I shed for you", Blaise Pascal in his writings, hears the Lord say to him during the agony on the Mount of Olives.

LEADER: I invite you to dwell on accompanying Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus had gone to pray to the Kidron valley for that momentous encounter with the kiss of Judas and his band of soldiers. (**Pause in silence**)

PRAYER:

Gracious ever loving God, You gave our Saviour the command to become man to save and bring us back to You, He underwent the ignominious death on the cross as an example of humility for all peoples to follow. We have the lessons of his sufferings: from Gethsemane to Calvary, give us also a participation in the fruits. We make this prayer through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

As you leave the Altar of Repose, carry with you all through the rest of the night the image of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, until you wake up in the morning to find Jesus in the courtyard with the soldiers.

II

OPENING HYMN: Be not afraid, I go before you *[or any other suitable hymn]*

INTRODUCTION: THE MYSTERY OF THE BETRAYER

Immediately after the exhortation at the Last Supper to follow his example and wash each other's feet, Jesus begins to speak of Judas. John does not offer a psychological interpretation of Judas' conduct. The only clue he gives is a hint that Judas had helped himself to the contents of the disciples' money box of which he had charge (Jn.12:6) In Chapter 13 the evangelist adds "**Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him.**" (Jn.13:27)

SCRIPTURE READING: Jn 13:21, 24-30

LEADER: For John what happened to Judas is beyond psychological explanation. He has come under the dominion of another. Anyone who breaks off friendship with Jesus casting off his “easy yoke”, does not become free, but succumbs to other powers. He betrays this friendship because he is in the grip of another power to which he has opened himself.

Judas’ second tragedy – after the betrayal – is that he can no longer believe in forgiveness. Remorse turns into despair. Now he sees only himself and his darkness; he no longer sees the light of Jesus, which can illumine and overcome the darkness. He shows us, the wrong type of remorse: the type that is unable to hope, that sees only its own darkness, the type that is destructive and in no way authentic.

Genuine remorse is marked by the certainty of hope born of faith in the superior power of the light that was made flesh in Jesus. John concludes the passage about Judas with these dramatic words: **“After receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; it was night”.** (13:30) Judas goes out – in a deeper sense. He goes into the night; he moves out of light into darkness: the “power of darkness” has taken hold of him. **[Silence]**

HYMN: Come back to me [or any other suitable hymn]

LEADER: TWO CONVERSATIONS WITH PETER

In Peter we encounter another danger, that of a fall which is not definitive and which can therefore be healed through conversion. John 13 recounts two exchanges between Jesus and Peter, in which two aspects of this danger become visible.

Initially Peter does not want to have his feet washed by Jesus. This goes against his understanding of the relationship between master and disciple and against his image of the Messiah. This has the same meaning as the protest against Jesus’ prophecy of the Passion earlier. It is the response to Jesus that we find throughout history. You are the strong one – you must not lower yourself! Again and again Jesus has to help us recognize that God’s power is different. The Messiah must pass through suffering into glory and must lead others along the same path.

In the second exchange Peter asks his master quite openly: “Lord where are you going?” When he understands that Jesus is speaking of his imminent death he wants to emphasize his radical fidelity: **“Why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you”** (Jn 13:37). On Mount Olives he rushes in with his sword. But he must put aside the heroism of personal deeds and learn the humility of the disciple. His desire to rush in – his heroism – leads to his denial.

The two exchanges are essentially about the same thing: not telling God what to do but learning to accept him as he reveals himself to us; not seeking to exalt ourselves to God’s level, but in humble service letting ourselves be slowly refashioned into God’s true image.

SILENT REFLECTION

Peter remembers Jesus, and looks at Jesus and what his betrayal has done to him and repents. Judas on the other hand looks at himself and the darkness he is in. There is no thought of receiving forgiveness.

SCRIPTURE READING: Jer. 11:19-20

LEADER: *Why did Judas, why did Peter do what they did to Jesus? More importantly, let us remember, that in reflecting on the betrayal and the denial, we see ourselves present with Jesus during his time of loneliness and darkness. Let us together keep company with Jesus this night.*

[Silent pause]

Let us repeat together: Lord turn our darkness into light

When darkness falls in our lives, do not abandon us even when we desert you. **R/.**

Judas was filled with remorse after his betrayal because he saw only what his sin did to him, and not what it did to Jesus **R/.**

In his betrayal Peter repented because of the Lord's look and the Lord's word, and as he saw what his sin did to his Lord. **R/.**

Judas leads the crowd in the darkness with a torch. Jesus tells us: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." Bring that light into our dark lives. **R/.**

CLOSING PRAYER:

Almighty God we leave you just for a while and will return at the dawn of morning. We have witnessed the betrayal of Judas and the hurt in your eyes. You said to the jostling crowd "I am he." Were you speaking to the crowd? Were you telling Judas you were the Messiah who would give the world light? We pray that the light may always be with us. Amen.

As you leave the Altar of Repose, carry with you all through the rest of the night the image of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, until you wake up in the morning to find Jesus in the courtyard with the soldiers.

-Contributed by Fr Wilfred D'Souza SDB