

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Coping with God's Silence

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Hello. My name is Sister Faustina with the Sisters of Life. We're going to talk about God's silence, coping with God's silence, and let's begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. Come through Mary. Lord, as we enter into this time, help our hearts be stirred to know what is that You're speaking to us. Help us to have our hearts be free to receive You as You desire, that we might not be attached to how You speak or what You speak, but to knowing You more deeply, receiving You more deeply. We praise and we thank You. We ask all this through Our Lady's intercession and in the most holy name of Jesus. Amen. Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So you've heard the story about a steel town in Pennsylvania some years ago, and the mills were very loud, so loud that they almost became unnoticeable. The people of the town got very used to it, and they could sleep right through that constant noise. And then one day the power went out in the middle of the night, and everybody in the town woke up. And I sometimes think that that's what we all need sometimes: For silence to wake us up. We live in a culture that is bombarding us with constant noise, you know, with this constant and instant communication really that's hitting us from all angles. So that silence really indeed does get our attention.

But when we perceive God's silence, it is not a bad thing. You know, we can joke about it, I've done it myself, that, you know, when I'm not hearing anything in prayer I'll be like "Oh, God's too busy. He's kind of just got a lot of other people to think about and talk to." But as much as we joke about it, it's not true, you know. He has none of the communication hang-ups that are so prevalent in our time, right. He has no problem communicating Himself to us, and His will, His love for us. He is assertive, He loves to show us how He pursues us, knows us. He wants to make Himself known to us, you know, and He says "It is not you who chose Me, but I who chose you." You know, "Bide in my love." ***I'm with you always, even to the end of the age***, right. So beautiful.

I do find it curious, however, that He did nap in the middle of a storm on the sea of Galilee, right, or that He showed up days after Lazarus died, or that He didn't answer Pilate in words, that infamous question "What is truth?" Right. And so it seems from that that His silence is significant. That He wants us to see "Oh my

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goodness, there's something here to notice," and that He's actually offering us something in this relationship with silence. And so we can see that, you know, at times it is difficult, it can be very difficult to experience that silence in prayer. But what God is offering to us is actually a deepening in that relationship with Him.

So how do we kind of recognize it and live it well, so you can receive the gift that it is? That's what we're going to talk about. And really in 2 points. As we begin, first we're going to cover how to distinguish between like, you know, not hearing God's voice - maybe God is speaking but I can't hear Him or I'm just not hearing Him - versus actually I'm trying to listen and actually God is silent, just to distinguish between those 2. And then a second point I want to talk about is how to live that silence well, if indeed God is being silent in a way that we can't hear.

So this first thing, distinguishing. The first question we must ask ourselves when we're experiencing silence in our prayer is to say, you know, "Have I walked out on God?" You know, meaning that He is actually speaking, He is revealing Himself, but I'm not hearing it. "Or have I stayed the course? Am I, you know, with You, Jesus, and yet I don't hear? There's a silence that You intend." So, "Have I walked out on God?" This can be likened to the story in the gospels of Mary and Joseph leaving Jerusalem and leaving the child Jesus behind, thinking that He was with their companions along the way, and then realizing a day later that He's missing. That they've left Him behind. And so they go back to Jerusalem and for 3 days search for Him. And, lo and behold, they find Him in the temple, where He is... He's not silent at all, He's actually preaching the word to all those there.

And so, "Have I walked out on God?" Now, this could be through my own human weakness, right. You know, maybe I'm saying "Oh gosh, God's being so silent," and yet I'm so tired that I've been sleeping through all of my prayer, right. You know, I've been up late with kids, I've been traveling so much, right, so tired. Or maybe I am so busy and distracted that I haven't really given God my real attention when it comes time for prayer. It could be that. Maybe I'm holding on so tightly to something that I want, that I'm actually not open to hearing what God has to say about it. Or I'm waiting for a thunderbolt, you know, God to speak to me in this loud, strong way. Meanwhile, often God, He speaks to us in kind of a gentle, softer way. And so not only am I attached to, you know, what He's going to say, but I'm attached to how He's going to say it, which can obstruct me from really hearing His voice.

So to rule out all of these things, you must first return to the temple. That's right, to see that we haven't walked out on Him. And we can do this by examining if there is something of our own weaknesses or human weaknesses that have gotten in the

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way, and taking care of that, you know. If I'm tired, if I'm feeling sick, knowing that can be part of it. Or also my own sinfulness, you know. Making that good, honest confession to break, you know, habits or sinful ways of thinking, and to reach out for help, you know, build friendships and accountability. All of these things can help. Living a sacramental life, preparing for prayer, and really sticking to it.

But if all of that is not the case, and I've actually stayed the course and I've been faithful to, yeah, living the sacramental life and my prayer life, even though it's been harder in this time of silence and, you know, the human side seems to be okay and [chk 6:30]. And yet there seems to be this silence. Maybe it's out of the blue, and no seeming word from the Lord for a stretch of time. No kind of firm draw of the heart, and just kind of, yeah, crickets, hollowness, you name it. This has been likened to another scene in the gospels, where Mary and Jesus return to Jerusalem but in far different circumstances. This time, Mary stays with Jesus through His suffering and His death on the cross. Jesus dies on the cross, and for 3 days is silent in the tomb. And Mary waits, you know, because it would be 3 days later that He would return victorious.

So in the first instance, as we saw, there was something of a seeking out, going back to the temple to find the Lord who we have seemingly left behind and we've lost. Whereas in the second instance, you know, we're called to receive the silence. That something of that silence is intended for us, and we are there to stick to our prayer, maybe even increase it if we feel like walking away, increase our prayer, and here wait for what does the Lord want for us, you know. We don't have to return to Him, but simply wait on what He's going to give us. And Saint Ignatius would speak in reference of all of this in terms of consolation and desolation, and he would say similar things, you know. Sometimes we experience desolation, like it seems like God's not here, but it's just a different period, a different transition of hearing. And he would say that can... the cause can be a natural cause, like we're sick or tired, but it also can be our sinfulness, right. But if it isn't those things, then God might be permitting the desolation for some reason, and that's what we're going to talk about in our second point.

So how to cope with this silence? How to live it well? Because it really is a gift. And this is... this silence is about a work that is beyond us, and yet it requires our consent. Something of a response. So really 2 points within this is that: What is the invitation in the silence? And then secondly: What is the gift that is given to us as we respond to that invitation? It's pretty great.

Okay, so the invitation in the silence. So Mary at the foot of the cross, she can do nothing as the Lord dies to bring back... to bring Him back and enter back into that

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relationship as she once knew it. And yet she's not supposed to just kind of, you know, sit there or kind of piously stand by, right, nor is she being asked to go out to try to find somebody else to fill this deafening void maybe that she feels in His absence. But she is being asked to do something. She is being invited to say yes, to give her fiat, to say "Be it done onto me according to Thy word." To say yes to all that God is doing, permitting in these present circumstances, beyond what I can understand or regardless of if I like it, out of love for the Lord who is in control. That is what is being asked.

And silence is a type of speaking, right. And so the Lord is speaking to us in the silence, and He's asking for a response. This response is saying "Lord, I consent to what You're doing, even if I don't understand it." And I know that in my own life I've experienced this - a few years into my religious life I was, you know, experiencing a suffering that I didn't understand. And as I prayed about it and sought help in it, I was receiving, yeah, different advice and it only made me feel more alone in many ways. And yeah, as I went to pray about it I kept on hearing the Lord saying "Trust Me, trust Me." And I said "Why? Why do I have to trust You? Like, I don't even know how to trust You." And the experience feels like, you know, because life keeps moving, it was like I had to keep moving without knowing where I was going, with no clarity for months and months of doubt.

And so at one point when I was praying, it wasn't so much in words as it was in just an experience in my prayer, I felt like, you know, like the Lord was lifting up my chin, you know, and saying "You know, you want to love Me when you know all the circumstances and it's kind of in this safe place of your understanding. You want to give your love and your consent, your fiat, to circumstances. But your love is so good, so precious, I want to receive that love. I want you to say it to My face, you know. To give that yes to Me not based on anything else. To say yes beyond your understanding, out of love for Me."

And as I began to hear that, I realized I wanted to love Jesus in that way. I wanted that deeper love. I hadn't realized the depth of love that I was capable of, and that I actually wanted to live for Jesus. And as I said yes to the Lord that night, saying "Okay Jesus, like I consent to this suffering, not knowing why or what purpose it would serve, so that I can love You more." I felt my heart flooded with His presence. I felt my heart flood with this deep desire that not only I would live this way for the rest of my life, but that others would. Because I felt, yes, this trust really broke open a new relationship, a new depth of love which I've experienced and it continues to deepen.

It was through that that I felt or heard in the place of my heart this inspiration to write a prayer, Litany of Trust. And I know it's deeply, yeah, benefited my own

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heart, but the hearts of many others, and how worthy it is to say yes to the Lord. He wants us to walk, you know, walking through the aloneness that we feel, He wants us to share our desires there, and precisely there to make an act of trust and an act of faith, an act of faith to say “Lord, I know that You’re here. I know that You’re seeing me, and that You want my good, and that You will provide for that good. I know that You can see what I cannot see. I think I can see it, but really You’re the only one who does. You know, give me the grace to say yes to You, to give the gift of my love to a person and not to circumstances that kind of hold back my love from being given.”

So where is He asking you to say your yes, your fiat, your “Be it done onto me according to Your word,” in the small things or in the bigger things? You know, this is a sign of God’s love, which actually gives us an opportunity to love Him in a deeper way, to surrender to Him. Which leads us to our final point: The gift that is given to us when we respond to the Lord. So the tremendous gift of your love and trust given to the Lord brings great intimacy. This is an eternal gift, you know. Silence or suffering, it passes, but this does not pass.

And I love to think about how this relationship that we’re discussing is actually a relationship with the Almighty God. It’s amazing. This is the Almighty God. He gives freely the gift of His life to us, He gives us life, and He gives us new life, His mercy. These are gifts we cannot repay. This is not a mutual relationship that is like “Oh, I’ve got you back,” you know. He gives it to us freely. And as He gives us these gifts we can’t repay, what is He saying to us? He’s saying “You’re worth it. I love you. Not for anything that you can do, but for your own sake. You’re worth it.” And this invitation and the gift that we receive in saying yes to it is that we live in trust. Saying yes to Him is kind of the closest way that we can make this a mutual relationship. This is, you know, in this place of silence, in this place of not knowing and just having to walk by trust, I’m saying “You’re worth it, God. You’re worth it. You’re worth it not for anything that You can do for me or the way You make me feel, but for Your sake.” This is beautiful. It brings a new depth into our relationship.

One of our sisters was on the street walking to mass in Manhattan and she saw a homeless man. And she didn’t have any money or any food, and so she felt very sad about that, and so she was going to cross the street because she didn’t want to face that without having anything to give him. She heard this voice in her heart saying “You can give him love.” And so she walked over to him and she started talking to him, and very soon realize that he couldn’t hear. He was deaf. He takes out a pad, and so he starts to write down little things in the conversation, just “Where are you from?” and a little bit to get to know each other. And she looks at

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the time and she's like "Oh my goodness, I have to go to mass. I'm going to be late."

So she writes and she says "You know, I'm so sorry I have to go, but I'm on my way to church, I'm going to mass. But you're welcome to join me if you'd like." And, to her surprise, he says yes. And so he kind of jumps up, and they were walking on their way to mass, and on their way a woman on the street hands this, you know, a very apparently homeless man a \$20 bill. She's like "Wow, that was nice." And so they walk into mass and the sisters, you know, are telling him, you know, in the back of the church writing down, like, "We believe that God is here. That He hears you, you know, that you can speak to Him, anything that comes to your heart." He was really moved by that.

And, sure enough, as the collection baskets come around, this homeless man takes out that \$20 bill and drops it in. Amazing. Amazing love, right. This man had been begging on the side of the street for money and he was giving it, ultimately realizing that what he really wanted was to be loved. This is the gift and the power of love, right. That the silence can kind of dramatically show us in our own hearts that we might want a lot of things in our lives that we're pursuing, but when those things are given to us and we're unsatisfied - there's a restlessness, a hunger, a silence - we can see the power of God's presence, the power of presence comes out strikingly in silence. This power of presence that is a loving presence, that helps us not only to receive but then, once we receive it, to give it in return. So beautiful.

So prayer has its ebbs and flows, and that silence is never meant to be a long silence. It comes and goes. And, you know, as it goes, God shows us how He was present all the while, and that He was deeply consoled that we stayed with Him, that we said yes to Him there. And it makes our heart not attached to the consolations, but to be steady in our love and our fidelity to Him.

You know, Mary would never go back to her life. She would never choose to go back to her life before the cross. Why? Because she came to know the depth of God's love for her, and the depth of her own heart to be able to love in return. And that transformed everything. It blossomed her heart in its very demands into this beautiful heart of love, this heart that wanted to give itself. So this is true for us, that it deepens our faith, makes a strong bedrock of faith in our lives that can launch us into being generous lovers for God and for others. So we ask God to continue to bless us in this time, to keep us faithful to Him, and to recognize the true gift of His loving presence, of this deep faith, of calling us forth into living the love that we were made for. Let's end with a prayer.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Father, we ask You to give us a deep faith, a deep faith that gives us the vision to see Your goodness in all things, in all places,

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that You are good, that You remain faithful to us. We ask You, Lord, to reveal to our hearts the beauty of Your silence, and the beauty of the truth that You are always waiting for us. That when we walk into an empty church and we see that red flickering light, we know that You wait for us in the silence. That You wait for us in the silence of our own hearts, and that Your loving presence will bring us every grace and all the love that our hearts desire. We praise and we thank You. Amen. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.