

Can I Truly Say with St Paul:

All I Want is to Know Christ?

A Reflection on Philippians 3: 8, 10-11, 21, 4:11

FR EUGENE VAZ

> 3[8] *I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him…* [10-11]*All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead…* [21]*And he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body. He will do that by the same power with which he can subdue the whole universe...* 4[1]*So then, my brothers and dear friends, do not give way but remain faithful in the Lord.* (Phil 3:8. 10-11, 21, 4:1)

In this reading from St Paul's letter, there are two parts that connect especially with our meditation practice and our way of living as disciples of Christ – you could say with our dying and rising in Christ. Fr John Main puts it effectively when he says meditation is 'powerful'. That word struck me. Meditation *is* powerful and it is my prayer that you are gradually finding this power in meditation and that through your faithful daily practice you are coming to understand that our life on earth is not forever. What then is this life on earth all about?

As our focus in meditation shifts away from our desires and anxieties, we begin to see that what we are all about on earth is to die to ourselves and get into deeper union with God. That's where meditation helps us in our personal journey. Each time we sit down to meditate, we die to our self-centredness and our self-importance, we die to whatever is ours. That regular shift of focus deepens our relationship with God and we gradually come to realise that nothing can satisfy our ultimate desire but Christ, as St Paul expresses it from the depths of his heart:

> *All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead.* (Phil 3:10-11)

So we need to search our hearts. What do I really want? Is Christ *all* I want? St Paul's strong language

challenges me to question whether all my personal concerns are 'rubbish' after all, and therefore to remain faithful to my meditation practice so that Christ becomes the centre of my life.

That is my first point today. Our practice of meditation should help us move from self-centredness to Christ-centredness. Christian meditation is Christocentric.

But what does it mean to live a Christ-centred life? It cannot be that we mumble prayers all day! Fr John Main says, if you really want to know Christ, if you want to know the power of his resurrection in yourself, then leave yourself behind and get into communion with others, get into community. That is the mystery of the cross, the outstretched arms of Jesus – the horizontal beam of the cross representing love, intersecting the upright beam of the ego and self-centeredness. In the outstretched arms of Christ is resurrection – his self-surrender and his embrace for all. So, to be Christlike we must move into life with others, into life with the community, into a life of communion with family, friends, fellow men and women. The late pope Francis reminded us in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti* or *tutti fratelli.* We are all brothers and sisters, and meditation helps us to come to know that. As we enter the mystery of God dwelling in our heart, the God who loves us so much and who created us out of that love, we are enabled to live in that love. This brings me to the second point I want to share today.

In verse 11 St Paul says, 'to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death'. That's the connection between meditating and living. If meditating is not linked to living, meditating is of no value spiritually and a waste of time on our spiritual journey as Christians; it may bring psychological peace and calm and some health benefits, but that is not the purpose of Christian meditation though we may find those same benefits. The purpose of Christian meditation is to deepen our relationship with God whose love enables us to lead a full life as Jesus promised:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (Jn 10:10)

We meditate not only to know Christ and his resurrection – which is important as a springboard – but knowing Christ and his resurrection, to then share his way of living, to share his sufferings. Yes, that is the mystery. There is no resurrection without the cross, there is no glory without suffering, and there's no rising without death. That's what the great feast of Easter really says to us – to reproduce the pattern of his death so that we can rise to new life in him.

What was the pattern of Jesus's death? That is explicitly taught by example on Maundy Thursday. The pattern of Jesus' death was humble service – he washed the feet of his disciples. I don't think you and I have to walk about with a pail of water and towel round our shoulder and force everybody to wash their feet. What Jesus wants us to do is to be servants, to recognise where are the needs of people around us. What is their pain, their need? And to make a difference in their life, to touch them.

That is how Jesus lived, and he had to die for that because the religious leaders didn't like what they saw. He was making an impact on people's life by humbling himself and serving them, healing them, bringing life to them, bringing joy to them. People loved him for that and the leaders did not like that, so he had to die for it. His only 'crime' was to be who he was created to be, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews as inscribed on the cross. That's not a crime, that's a title, that's a way of being, that's a way of life – a king who is a servant, a leader who is humble enough to be at the service of those he is leading, a shepherd who leaves the flock to hunt for those who are lost.

He took risks. He was vulnerable. He was ready to be in very tight and difficult spots. That was his cross. Way before he landed on the timber, Jesus was already experiencing the cross. If you study St Mark's

gospel, his cross begins as early as chapter 3 verse 6 while the passion story is only in chapter 14. So you've got many chapters between chapter 3 and chapter 14 in which the cross of Jesus is already being described. What is that cross? The way of sharing, suffering if necessary. And I think Christian meditation gives us that clarity to know and the strength to say 'all I want is Christ'.

But to yearn for Christ is not just as an emotional experience in a moment of meditative high. To really know Christ is to love him and to serve as he did, to continue his work on earth. Why did God make you and me? Not just to know him but to live fully, to love him and serve him by serving all his children, my fellow men and women. To love him and to serve him leads me to enter into his suffering, leads me to the cross and into the glory of rising with him to new life in my family, in my community, and in my society.

The transformation we seek will not happen overnight. The way is God's, the timing is God's. All he asks from us is that we remain sincere in our desire and come to him faithfully in our twice daily meditation practice. The rest is his grace.

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