

Good Friday Ecumenical Worship: "Shhhhhh!"

Mark 15:1-5, 15

March 29, 2024

Mary, Star of the Sea Beach Chapel, Manasquan, NJ

Shhhhh! Listen. What **sounds** do you associate with Jesus? I hear a baby's cry and a dove's cooing, a donkey's braying and a cow's lowing, in a cold stable. I hear our Lord's breathing, groaning, sighing of the word "*Ephphatha!*" ("Be opened!") when He looses the mute man's tongue and opens his deaf ears (Mark 7:34). I think of Jesus' impatient command to the wailing mourners and noisy musicians outside of Jairus' house: "Stop that racket! The child is sleeping, not dead!" (Mark 5:39) And His **gentle, whispered** words to her: "*Talitha, koum....*" ("*Little girl, get up.*") (Mark 5:41) His **angry** words to money changers and dove merchants in the temple:

"My house was designated a house of prayer;
You have made it a hangout for thieves!" (Matthew 21:13, *The Message*)

His **rebuke** of wind and waves, shouted over the noise of the tempest:

"*Peace, be still!*" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. (Mark 4:39)

And the **velvety dark silence** we imagine enveloping our Lord when He retired for the night and retreated from His friends to spend prayer time in communion with His Father.

Our Jesus knew His Scripture and certainly was familiar with the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3:

¹*For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven...*

^{7b}*a time to keep silent and a time to speak....*

If only **we** understood the proper time for silence and speech as well as **He** did. Before Pilate our Lord spoke only briefly before choosing silence. An experienced classroom teacher knows that silence always commands attention better than shouting.

Silence before the crowd certainly would have served **Pilate** better than speech. He had full authority to exonerate Jesus or to set Him free rather than Barabbas. He didn't need the mob's "permission," but he was currying favor by having the people weigh in, and by allowing them to dictate his actions. As one Scripture scholar put it, the result was that Pilate, "instead of being a voice... became an echo."¹ He was like a mynah bird. The mob shouted, "Crucify him!" and in turn Pilate told the soldiers,

“Crucify him!” Neither his head nor his heart agreed, but he allowed himself to be blown in a wrong direction by a prevailing wind. “[I]nstead of being a voice, he became an echo.” He allowed the shrieking of the mob to drown out his conscience.

When have **we** abandoned the wisdom and dignity of silence, and instead parroted what others have said, belying what we truly believe in our head and in our heart? When have **we** allowed ourselves to be blown in the wrong direction by a prevailing wind? If that’s currently happening, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to grant us grace to be a **voice** of reason, a voice of compassion, a voice of faith, rather than becoming an **echo** of fear, of distrust, vengeance, alienation, division.

When have **I** refused to remain silent when I should have? We can all look back on times we should have swallowed harsh or angry words and instead we vented our spleen and made an already difficult situation worse. Let’s keep this simple prayer close to our hearts: “Dear Lord, make my words sweet, because I might have to eat them.”

On the other hand-- we can probably all remember times when we’ve found a coward’s refuge in silence, when we should have spoken out on behalf of others but became mute. Over the long haul, I’m pretty well convinced I’ve sinned more by what I **haven’t** said than what I **have**. I know there are times I could have used **my** “standing” to advocate for others without any. I could have used my voice to go to bat for the voiceless. “Jesus, make me braver. Jesus, make me wiser. Jesus, may my God-given voice not fade into a pale echo. Jesus, speak ‘*Ephphatha!*’ (“Open!”) to me when I should speak, and close my mouth when silence is the better and holier option. ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’”

Amen

¹*Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1951), p. 896.

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