

LENT 2017 – day sixteen – March 23rd

Fr. Claude, whom we have known for many years, when he did his doctorate in Belgium, he did his doctorate on charismatic movements in the Catholic Church like the CRL and the Pubuduwa.

He found out something very interesting: Many people are attracted and empowered by the praise and worship that we do.

Then he found something equally amazing: An equal number of people are put off by praise and worship.

This isn't an opinion but he has done a research on it and come up with scientific facts. The people who are most attracted to this movement are attracted because of the praise and worship. Those who hate it hate it for the same reason.

Knowing the background of praise and worship is so valuable. A lot of people think this is something Pentecostal we are doing. The background of praise and worship is not Pentecostal, but it is Jewish. It is coming from the Old Testament style of prayer. In the Old Testament era, there were no meditation prayers - where people sit and fall asleep and think about God. They didn't have meditation in the Old Testament. Their understanding was that God is the King.

If historians like a king, they glorified the king and whitewashed them so that you find no fault in that king. **For example:** King Dutugemunu from our history. He has been glorified and whitewashed, so much so that you can't find any fault in him. Historians who want to be objective tell us that he fought a very old man called Elara who didn't want to have much bloodshed. So he said, "Okay, you can fight me." This young prince took on this brave challenge of fighting an 80 year old man.

If you look at the Old Testament, there is no king that is whitewashed - not even David. In the four step retreat we look at David in the second step. All his sins are laid bare. For the Israelites their true king was God. That is unique and no other nation has that. So when they came to the temple, for the Israelites, it was coming to visit the King of Kings. So they cheered the king, they glorified him, they shouted his praise. ***That's the base of praise and worship.***

People still continue to do it to human beings - even those who are meditating and falling asleep. You go to a rigger match and you will see praise and worship. We are praising our side, worshipping our heroes and cursing as well. They are the very ones who come to the church and say, "I don't like this praise and worship."

We are not used to that, because we have come down from the Latin tradition and that is a 'cold climate' prayer style. It originates in Western Europe, most of the year is cold so therefore even the prayer methods are pretty cold and impersonal. "Don't talk to the one on your left or right, only talk to

God and push off." Even in churches we do that. We see people for years and we never talk to them because it is the cold climate approach.

Of course meditation, reflection, silence is so valuable. But you don't have to choose one over the other. It's like cutting your left hand because you're using your right one - you use both. In praise and worship you focus your attention on God. You look at Him and interact with Him. Then, in internal reflection you go deep into His presence. That's why we encourage people to do both.

We are producing the prayer tools. Each of these prayer tools is a method to enter into your own heart in silence. This way you have both. Then you become strong. You can't say, "It's not my cup of tea." It's herbal tea and it's good for you. It may not be your cup of tea but it will certainly help you.

The first reading today is from our friend, Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 7:23

...but I gave them this command: Obey me and I will be your God and you will be My people. Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you.

Life looks so simple. God tells you what to do and you do it.

Buddhism also says the same thing: Learn the principles and put it into action. Islam says the same thing.

But look at the next verse:

Jeremiah 7:24

But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.

Jeremiah is talking about this ancient problem we have. Even up to today, most people have not realized that it is not instruction that is the problem. Everyone is ready to give advice to one another. Instead, it is the monster living inside that is really the problem.

You will find that today the discovery and the psychology of the inner being is a modern science started only in the 20th century. Before that they didn't have that kind of science. So they suspected that anyone who was mentally unstable was either possessed by the devil or some other form of activity. The only solution they had was to thrash them. If you were half okay, the thrashing put you right because the hammering was deadlier than the sickness. But that's all they had. Others tried various other methods like The Mad Hatter's Tea Party. This was an experiment they tried and they said, "The real problem is we aren't treating mad people properly, and that's why they are misbehaving. Let's treat them as sane and they'll be fine." So they dressed them up for the tea party and put the tie and coat and dress and they looked fabulous. Then they served tea to them and they looked like proper gentlemen and ladies - until they got the tea and biscuits into their hand and started flinging it at each other. Just because you dress the person it doesn't change the interior.

So we have the unconscious, the sub-conscious and so many other internal drives within us. We are still learning those areas up to the 21st century. The long and the short of it is, everyone is trying to make us happy at the same time. God is telling us, "If you deny yourself self-gratification you will

become happy." Society is telling us, "If you behave properly and you're a gentleman or a lady, you will be happy." But the fellow inside is telling us, "Don't listen to both of them. You better do what you like - otherwise you'll never be happy."

Depending on whom we are listening to, our behaviour changes. So look at what Jeremiah says: "You were given the instructions and you're not listening to the third dimension deep inside you and that's why it's getting worse."

Jeremiah 7:25

From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent you my servants the prophets.

Jeremiah has no problem at all with talking about his problems to people.

Jeremiah 7:26

But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.

Why is that? Because they got used to listening to the deepest parts of their nature. As you listen to the deeper parts of your nature and give in to that - you don't listen to God, you don't listen to the sanity of the word - but you give in to your desires. The more primitive your desires, the quicker you can gratify yourself. You do what you like and you get a satisfaction. But then once you have done it, the damage you cause to other people and yourself is so great that it ruins everything. That's why we live unhappy lives. The decisions we make for happiness has made all of us unhappy. That's why we need to make a connection with God. Little by little, He can take us out of the primitive system into the higher one.

When you're traveling between those worlds - the primitive world within us and the higher world of God - there is an emptiness and a desolation and a dissatisfaction. You have to give up things that are making you satisfied, you have to give up addictions that meets your needs. But if you walk through that dryness and deprive your base nature - then you enter the paradise of God. There is internal peace, rest, transformation and a constant blessing of happiness. Many never go there because they don't chart the barren period of letting go of what they have been holding on to. Once you let go of your method to happiness, it's a death. That's why in spirituality it is called a death experience. A lot of people don't want the death experience but they want life. That won't last. That's why a lot of people don't have an answer to the spiritual journey because they come to a point where they have to enter the barren waste of a death experience and they won't go there.

That's where we journey by faith. There is a beautiful answer waiting for us. There is absolute peace, internal rest and a beautiful life waiting for us - if only you take the risk of crossing the barren waste. You cross it because you're sustained through it by the word and the promises of God, by your prayer time and the time you spend in worship before God. You are sustained to walk through the barren waste.

That's why prayer is not a badge of your sanctity but it is the essential part of broken, sinful people. If you don't pray you'll never cross the barren waste. Most of

the time our internal being will call us back and say, "Don't go that way, the desert will kill you. Come back to your addiction, come back to your broken nature, and come back to the behaviour you are used to because that's where all the answers are."

Even though we see the destruction of its answers, we keep coming back. That's why we use anger as a weapon. Knowing that it has destroyed the lives of people around us, we still use it. Our inner being tells us that if you don't use anger then you'll be overwhelmed. We can't cross the barren waste.

God says there is a better way, a more beautiful life, a beautiful freedom waiting for you - if only you journey by faith. So every morning you go to the petrol shed to pump enough fuel to walk through the desert. That is your prayer time. When you want light you go to the scriptures that the word of God will enlighten us so that we become free of the darkness that comes from within us.

The gospel talks about another problem:

Luke 11:14

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.

In that brokenness of our nature, the spiritual world breaks in. That is also a reality. When we are grown and developed in our spirituality, the spiritual world of God breaks in, and we enjoy that touch. But when we are broken and addicted, the spiritual world of oppression breaks in and oppresses us from inside. That's why we need a Saviour.

In some people's addictions are mixed oppressions so that no longer do they have a free will and are able to do anything against it. They have actually lost their freedom. They are tied down and held and that's when we need Jesus to save us. That's the important thing of the spiritual journey. The world needs that. If we live by our base nature, we are inviting the dark forces to come in and control our lives. If we live by the higher principles and allow God in, we are inviting the Holy Spirit to come and live inside us. We host His presence.

Today we have a reflection from a Dominican who lived in the 13th century. He is talking about the internal journey and he says: *Children, you should know what a disgraceful thing it is for a man endowed with reason to allow himself to be vanquished by the devil... He is convinced that it is we who open the door or close the door to the devil ..to be led into grievous sin and to forfeit the grace of God. A man gifted with reason who gives up to the evil one is like a well armed soldier who runs away from a fly.* It's beautiful, the analogy he uses.

Think of the powerful weapons with which we can withstand the devil - our holy faith - if you don't have faith in the word of God, you can be drifted into anything ...the blessed sacrament, God's Word... You have to construct this: Faith, the Eucharist and God's Word ...the example of the saints, the prayers of the church - all strong weapons against the demon. He has no great force against these arms, than a fly has against a big bear.

If you have the weapons of God, there is actually nothing that the powers of darkness can do. If you don't have these weapons, we become victims. *Let but a man resist and he can never be overcome.* Using these 5 tools is so important:

Faith - refuse to look at life without faith.

The Holy Eucharist - Jesus coming to live inside us. If you invite God, He will come to live inside you.

God's Word - the word of god gives you God's vision of life.

Example of the saints

Prayers of the church

constructing an inner life this way breaks the power of the dark areas of our life and lifts us to the presence of God.