

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

*My Saviour, can it be  
That I should gain by losing Thee?*

These are the opening words to a poem written by Blessed John Keble for the Fourth Sunday After Easter. In only a few words, Keble sets before us the sorrowful meditation of the disciples who have fallen silent in today’s Gospel lesson.

On the night of the Lord’s betrayal, the disciples felt the weight of losing Jesus. They were troubled and confused. They questioned how they could gain anything by the loss of their Lord. Jesus was going to the Father and the disciples could not go with Him, at least not yet... They had wrestled with the teachings of their Master and had come away discouraged and confused. They were discouraged, not as those who feel that God has not heard their prayers, but rather, as those who have received an answer that they did not desire to hear.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus said to His disciples, “Now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?...sorrow hath filled your heart.” By the time that these words were spoken, the disciples had already fallen silent. Why is it that they did not ask their Lord where He was going? Why did they have sorrow in their hearts? Why are the disciples silent in today’s Gospel lesson?

The answer to these questions may be found in the surrounding context of today’s Gospel. If we are to understand the silence of the disciples, then we must consider what takes place in the 14th and 15th chapters of the Gospel of John. We must understand that this is not the first time that Jesus has told His disciples that He would soon be leaving them. We must understand that the disciples did, in fact, ask Jesus where He was going. We must understand that it was the Lord’s response to their search for answers that filled their hearts with sorrow.

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According to Saint John, just before the happenings of today’s Gospel lesson, the disciples had already enquired where Jesus would be going. They had wrestled with the Lord for answers. And, as we shall soon see, they did not walk away from the experience feeling encouraged, but rather, they limped away feeling discouraged.

At that time, Jesus had said unto them, “Little children, yet a little while I am with you... Whither I go, ye cannot come...” On this occasion, the disciples did ask Jesus where He was going. At this point in John’s narrative, the disciples were not yet silent and filled with sorrow.

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Only three of Jesus’ disciples sought to unravel the mystery of the Lord’s impending departure. Only three were courageous enough to wrestle with Wisdom Himself in search of answers. Today, we learn from the silent disciples. We learn that sometimes when we wrestle with God, we limp away in sorrow on account of the answers we have received.

The first of these three disciples to wrestle with the Master was Saint Peter. Peter replied to Jesus with the exact words that our Lord expected to hear in today's Gospel. He asked our Lord, "whither goest thou?" To this, Jesus simply replied, saying, "whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." These cryptic words of Christ confused Simon Peter and led him to boldly address the Lord. Peter put his heart on the line and said to Jesus, "... why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake."

Jesus' response to this statement led Peter into sorrow. Peter's heart was filled with sorrow when it was Jesus' turn to reply boldly. Jesus questioned the validity of Peter's devotion, saying, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice."

After Jesus told Peter that he would soon deny Him three times, the Lord sought to provide the Peter and the other disciples with some comfort. It was then that Jesus first spoke the following words that so many of us hold dear: "Let not your heart be troubled...in my Father's house are many rooms...I go to prepare a place for you." These words of Christ are well known by the faithful, but less known are the words that He speaks immediately after them.

Just after speaking these words, Jesus brings the discussion back to subject of His departure. This time, however, the Lord says, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." In other words, Jesus says, "You know where I am going and you know the way to get there." Just when the disciples thought they were beginning to understand Jesus, He turns them on their heads.

If the disciples had not yet been confused and frustrated with the Lord, they must have been after this. Here they are, listening to Jesus mysteriously talk about how He is leaving them and when they ask the Lord where it is exactly that He is going, He replies by saying that they already know where He is going. Not only does He do this, but He also claims that they know how to get there already! Jesus tells them that they already know the Way to the Father.

At this point, Peter is defeated and it is time for Saint Thomas to wrestle with the Lord.

Saint Thomas is the second disciple to try his hand at discerning the Lord's teaching. He says to Jesus, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" It is in response to this that Jesus first speaks another famous teaching. Jesus says to Thomas: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me."

After this saying, Jesus says some things to Thomas that He would rather not hear. Thomas is discouraged when Jesus says to him, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." In other words, Jesus tells Thomas, "You do not know me." These were difficult words to hear from the lips of the Master he had followed for three years. Thomas had forsaken all to be the Lord's disciple, and now, just before his Master's departure, He is being told that He never knew Him. At this, Thomas hangs his head, and Saint Philip begins his wrestling match with the Lord.

Saint Philip, having witnessed the defeat of Peter and Thomas, and now possessing the benefit of overhearing the information they received, decides to take a different approach to solving the

meaning of the Lord's teaching. Because of what Jesus said to both Peter and Thomas, Philip knows two things: (1) He knows that Jesus is going to His Father and (2) He knows that Jesus is Himself the Way to the Father.

Thinking that he has solved the meaning of the mysterious teaching, Philip attempts to be the one to give the response that the Master longs to hear. He asks no questions of the Lord. He only supplies what he believes to be the answer to the Master's test. Addressing Jesus as the Way, Philip simply demands: "Lord, show us the Father..."

The words Philip receives from the Lord are not what he expects to hear, however. He, like Peter and Thomas before him, experiences the consequences of being a finite mortal in a wrestling with Almighty God. Philip is wounded as the Lord says to him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"

At this point, there are no other contesters. Only Peter, Thomas, and Philip, were courageous enough to wrestle with God for answers. Now, like their forefather Jacob before them, these three disciples limp off into contemplative silence. They have been wounded by the encounter, but ironically, in their wounds, they will later find healing.

As Jesus explains to them later in John's Gospel, "...these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." Just like Jacob before them, Peter, Thomas, and Philip, do not come to understand that they have seen God face-to-face until after the wrestling match has come to an end. It is only after their suffering is turned to joy at a later time that they come to understand the words of Jesus... "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended...these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."

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This is why the disciples are silent in today's Gospel. They are silent because they have wrestled with God and have walked away feeling discouraged and defeated. If we think about it, is this not the very same reason so many of us have fallen silent before the Lord at different times in our lives? Have you like the disciples ever went to God in prayer and received an answer you did not want to hear? Have any of you ever wrestled with God, only to come away limping and wounded? Perhaps, even today, you are silent before God, struggling with unanswered questions or answers you just can't seem to accept.

What we learn from the silence of the disciples in today's Gospel, is that sometimes, when we truly seek to understand the hard teachings of our Lord, we walk away feeling wounded by God. The hard truth of today's Gospel is that often times when we receive words from the Lord, we do not understand them. They confuse and perplex us and leave us limping and feeling discouraged and defeated. We fall silent before Almighty God.

It is true that our confusion can cause us pain, and that we can perceive this pain as coming from the Lord. But the reality of the matter, however, is that it is not the Lord Himself who is causing us pain but our own weakness in light of His strength.

Like men who have been trapped in a dark room their entire life, when we come into contact with the Light, our eyes are forced shut and we cry out in pain. But shall we blame the Light for providing us with more warmth than we can not yet bear? Shall we blame the Light for illuminating the dark secrets of our hearts that are too painful for us to yet see? Shall we blame the Light for healing us and making us whole, casting out the darkness that is within us, providing us with the treatment we need, even though we will experience undesired side effects?

We are not wounded as if the Lord Himself has struck us on the thigh. We are wounded because we have but the finite and mortal thigh of Jacob. We are wounded because we are mere mortals in a wrestling match with Almighty God.

The very fact that God has allowed us to wrestle with Him and walk away with such minor wounds is in fact a very act of His mercy. Fools we would be, if we truly believed we could wrestle with God on our own accord, free from risk of total annihilation.

If we cannot but gaze up into the sky and look upon the very star that God has given us to light up our world, what makes us think that we can stare into the very face of God and not be destroyed? Why is it so hard for us to see how great a mystery it is that the faithful will one day see God face-to-face and not have their lives destroyed but preserved. Why do we wrestle with God and then walk away blaming Him for an injured thigh, instead of joining in silent song with Peter, Thomas, Philip, and our forefather Jacob, being counted worthy to wrestle with God and walk away unconsumed?

Today, Almighty God says to each of us, in our silence, in our pain, in our experience of wrestling with Him, "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended... these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."

May each of us count our sufferings not as an offense of God but as a sign of our great need to be transformed by Him. May we long for the day that we will look back on our suffering and know, that even though we felt wounded by God, we were in fact being strengthened by Him.

On that great day when the saints of Light stand before the throne, may we be counted among those who have suffered worthily for the sake of our salvation. On that day, may the eyes of our souls be not forced shut and unable to gaze upon the Light of the World, but rather, opened by grace and thus, transfixed by the attainment of the beatific vision.

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