

Finding Silent Night

In this article, Fr. Andrew urges us to get beyond the consumerist messages of the season, and truly find the silence inherent in the birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We live in a world that sends endless messages about what we should or should not be thinking of concerning ourselves. More than any time in human history messages are sent through the latest “app” and if, for example, we drive past a mall, an instant notification is sent directing us to a sale. There are countless instant alerts regarding such things as headline news stories, sports scores, stock portfolios, weather, Facebook, and emails; we are living in a very different world than just fifteen years ago. In addition, there is also the downturn in the economy with tightened budgets, children in college, unexpected home repairs, the diagnosis of an illness, the loss of independence caused by aging, a disability rendering one unable to work, the loss of a job, or a family crisis. These factors direct one’s concerns, create stress and demand one’s attention.

There is no other time of the year when the impact of such things becomes so intensified; so full of conflicting messages is the approaching season of Christmas. There is consequently no other time more in need of finding one’s silent night, and finding once again that perspective so alien to our age, the message imbedded in worship which invites us to adopt it as the standard against which all else is to be measured. There exists a receptive state described by our Lord as, “blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.” (Mt. 13:16) In order to hear God, one must be free from serving other gods such as those of wealth and riches. When wealth and riches are pursued for the only purpose of personal gain and not for the good of others, this renders one incapable of hearing that which is truly essential from God.

The consequence of pursuing a self-indulgent way of living was best described by the Prophet Isaiah, ‘In hearing you shall hear, and in no wise shall understand; and seeing you shall see, and in no wise shall perceive. For the heart of this people was made fat; and with their ears they heard heavily; and their eyes they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart and be converted; and I shall heal them.’ (Mt. 13:14,15) The condition of serving the god of money, wealth and riches is understood in terms of an illness which is in need of healing. Certain primitive cultures identified the accumulation of wealth with the sole purpose of personal gain as a mental illness. It is an illness because of the change it brings about in the character of the person and the isolation from others that results. A person is defined as one who faces another. This implies that in order to be a person, one must be in relationship with others and part of a communion with others.

Our Lord taught, “Not one household slave is able to serve two lords; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and possessions (riches, mammon).” (Lk. 16:13) The reason it is impossible to serve two masters is because of the existence of duality, the mixing of opposing messages cannot co-exist, they rupture a person. Saint Cyril described it this

way, "If a man be a slave of two masters, or of diverse and contrary wills, whose minds are irreconcilable with one another, how can he please both? For the unrighteous riches (mammon), by which wealth is signified, is a thing given up to indulgent pleasures,...engendering boasting, the love of pleasure, making men stiff-necked....What base vice does it not produce in them that possess it? But the good will of God renders men gentle, quiet, and humble in their thoughts, longsuffering, merciful, of exemplary patience, ... and especially fleeing from the love of money. They joyfully undertake toils for piety's sake, fleeing from the love of pleasure... endeavoring to live uprightly and practice all soberness. This is that which is their own and the true. This God will bestow on those who love poverty, and know how to distribute to those who are in need that which is another's, and comes from sacrifice, even their wealth, which also has the name of mammon."

To enter into that state of being which is our own and true to one's being begins with turning off the destructive messages of the season (there are of course many positive ones as well) that are the voice of the false god known as consumerism. To assist us in realizing and seeing that which is not given by God and essential; the Church invites us to hear its voice, the worldview established by Christ, which is the Truth about this world revealed in worship. This is why there are multiple opportunities to gather to worship throughout the entire year, but especially in preparation for the Nativity of Christ. St. Paul spent a great deal of his own life living in falsehood, deceived by the blindness shared by the powers that be of his own generation.

Upon encountering the risen Christ, the fullness of Truth was revealed to St. Paul. "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, which has been hidden and which God foreordained before the ages to our glory, which not one of the rulers of this age has known; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of the glory. But even as it has been written: 'Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and neither has it entered into the heart of man the things which God prepared for those who love Him.' But God revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." (1 Cor. 2:7-10). St. Paul is quoting the Prophet Isaiah who was granted the vision of heavenly worship because he loved the true God above all other gods of his day.

The greatest gift of the Nativity is worshiping the living God in Spirit and in Truth, to taste and see that the Lord is good, to participate in the food not of this world which satisfies the inner thirst of man for that which is essential and true. It is the gift of the Kingdom of God within the heart which casts out duality and transforms a person into an integrated member of Christ Who is Community, Servant of the other, the Fountain of Silence. This is the silent night which the world cannot hear nor see because the world has created its own darkness which blinds it from the Truth. Take a moment to make some decisions regarding this Christmas season like attending more services and not heeding the noisy messages of consumerism. Do that which is necessary to break down any inner duality of serving two gods. Take a moment to be open to hear the

voice of God speak within the silence of His presence in worship ~ Christ is Born, Glorify Him!

+Fr Andrew Barakos