



## The Kingdom of God

### REFLECTION – Peter Ng

I've chosen as the theme for our reflection tonight, the motivation for our meditation practice. What is it that we are seeking in our practice of meditation? When I first learned to meditate, I was very inspired by two particular quotations from St Augustine.

The first quotation was about the process of meditation where St Augustine said:

*Man must be first restored to himself, that, making in himself as it were a stepping-stone, he may rise thence and be borne up to God.*

Prayer, meditation is a process of restoring ourselves, in other words, coming to an inner stillness of body and mind, coming to an inner stillness or peace so that we can then ascend to the peace of God, to the peace that is beyond all understanding.

The second quotation from St Augustine was about the motivation behind our prayer, behind our spiritual life, behind our meditation. And St Augustine said:

*Our hearts were made for thee, O Lord, and they will forever restless be until they rest in thee.*

'Our hearts were made for thee, O Lord, and they will forever restless be until they rest in thee.' In other words, what Saint Augustine is sharing with us is that the deepest yearning of the human being, your deepest yearning and my deepest yearning, is the yearning for God.

Our deepest yearning is to share in the very being of God. So when we sit down to meditate, it is not a matter of just getting relief from stress, although we will get relief from stress if we come into a deeper relationship with God. But that's not the primary motive behind our meditation. Neither is our meditation about seeking the fulfilment of our materialistic desires. Meditation is actually going beyond desire. And that is why, when we sit down to meditate, we leave behind all our thoughts, our ideas, our desires, our fantasies. We leave

them all aside and we faithfully repeat our mantra. That one little word, the mantra, contains our deepest yearning for God. Maranatha. Come Lord; come Lord, Jesus.

So, in our meditation we seek *only* the Lord. Leaving everything else behind leaving every other desire aside. We respond to the call of Jesus: 'Seek ye first, the kingdom of God (Mt 6:33).'

*Set your mind on God's kingdom before everything else and all the rest will come to you as well.* (Mt 6:33).

Let's listen to how Fr John Main as he spoke about this theme of setting our mind on the kingdom, and then we'll let John Main lead us into meditation.

### **SET YOUR MINDS ON THE KINGDOM** -John Main

This was the liberating message Jesus came to bring:

*I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes.* (Mt 6:25)

Jesus is not advocating an irresponsible or fanatical indifference to the external aspects of our life. He is urging us to develop a spirit of trust, of absolute trust in the fatherhood of the God who not only created us, but sustains us in being from moment to moment.

*Do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself.* (Mt 6:34)

Realise yourself, that is, in the present moment, because your happiness and fulfilment are here and now.

*All these things (said Jesus of the material concerns of life) are for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all of them.* (Mt 6:32)

The trust which he calls on his followers to have in the fatherhood of his Father is not the immature childish presumption of getting what you want simply because you want it. To trust in God means to have turned ourselves fully towards God, and if we've done that, we have transcended both ourselves and our wanting. In this experience of transcendence itself we receive more than we could ever have asked for or ever have dared even to want.

*Set your mind on God's kingdom before everything else and all the rest will come to you as well.* (Mt 6:33)

The proper ordering of our external activities can only be achieved once we have re-established conscious contact with the centre of all these activities and concerns. This centre is the aim of our meditation. It is the centre of our own being. In St Teresa's words: 'God is the centre of the soul.' When our access to this centre is opened up, the kingdom of God is established in our hearts. That kingdom is nothing less than the present power and all-pervasive life of God himself permeating all creation.

And so, in the words of John Cassian:

*He who is the author of eternity would have men ask of him nothing that is uncertain, petty, or temporal. Not because he does not want us to enjoy the good things of life but because we can only fully enjoy them when we have received his gift of himself, of himself from whom all good things come, who is goodness itself.*

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Transcript of extracts from: *Word into Silence, John Main, Collected Talks Vol I, 'Set Your Mind on the Kingdom'*

## Meditation

### **THE FIRST DISCIPLINE WE HAVE TO LEARN -JOHN MAIN**

To meditate, each of us must learn to be still, and that is a discipline. When we meditate in a few moments together, all of us should spend a few moments just getting into a comfortable sitting posture. And then all of us at some time probably, during our meditation will feel like moving, and not moving, staying still, will perhaps be for us the first lesson in transcending desire, transcending that fixation that we so often have with ourselves. So I want you to understand that meditation does involve this discipline, and the first discipline you have to learn, probably, is to sit still, to be still.

When you sit down and sit still, close your eyes gently and then begin to repeat your word. The word I suggest to use is 'maranatha'; that's four syllables, ma-ra-na-tha.

The purpose of repeating the word is to gently lead you away from your own thoughts, your own ideas, your own desire, and to lead you into the presence of God by turning you around, by turning you away from yourself towards God.

Say the word gently but deliberately. Say the word in a relaxed way, but articulate it silently in your mind, 'ma-ra-na-tha'. Gradually, as you continue to meditate, the word will sink down into your heart, and this experience is the uniting of mind and heart in God. Ma-ra-na-tha.

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Transcript of excerpt from: *Moment of Christ, John Main, Collected Talks Vol III, 'Discipline and Liberty'*

### OPENING PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son. Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call. Maranatha, maranatha, come Lord Jesus.*



<https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/in-the-beginning>

## Scripture Reading & Reflection

### **The Kingdom Parables – Mark 4: 26-32 (Jerusalem Bible)**

<sup>26</sup>He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. <sup>27</sup>Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know.

<sup>28</sup>Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. <sup>29</sup>And when the crop is ready, he loses no time; he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'

<sup>30</sup>He also said, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup>yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.'

### **THE KINGDOM PARABLES –Fr Eugene Vaz**

A very good evening, my dear friends. We are doing our meditation this evening as we celebrate All Saints and commemorate the faithful departed within the context or within the theme of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, is the central message of Jesus. Many bible commentators say it's the *whole* message of Jesus, and it's very interesting. When you look at the Gospel, according to St Mark, Jesus begins his public ministry (in chapter 1:14-15) with the proclamation of the kingdom. St Mark says:

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the good news.*

The good news, the gospel is that the kingdom of God is at hand, is here. The whole purpose of Jesus' coming into the world was to establish in this world the kingdom of God. The notion 'kingdom' straightaway makes us think of some geographical delineation, a territory, a space, an area. But no, the kingdom is not about geography in that sense. It's not about

boundaries and demarcations. The Greek word used is *basileia*. *Basileia* in Greek means 'the rule'. So, the rule, the reign of God. And therefore, when we say 'the kingdom of God', what we are really saying is the time has come when the whole world must come to understand, little by little, more and more every day, that God is ruling our life, that God is king. And his reign, his reigning over us, is so that all of us may be able to make our way in him on earth and move towards him (that's the whole purpose of life), and in the future, which is eternal, to enjoy him forever. So we can see why this was so important for Jesus. That was his proclamation.

The time is fulfilled. Why is the time fulfilled? Because the whole Old Testament was waiting for this moment. The whole Old Testament was preparing for this moment, this moment of Jesus. Why? Because man and woman had broken away from God, because of their sin. Sin is the disruption in harmony, is the break in relationship. It is God and human beings apart, which was not meant to be. God and man and woman were to be together. That's paradise, that's joy, that's life. That's what we were made for. Because of sin, we fell away from God, we kind of rebelled against God. But this is the wonder of God – God never abandoned us, God never abandoned humanity. And the whole Old Testament is the story of the process. It took a long time, about 1850 years, that process of getting people ready for this moment of Jesus.

So Jesus begins his public ministry by saying the time is fulfilled. This is the moment of salvation. This is the announcement of glory. This is the experience you have to get into. God is your king; the kingdom of God has come. The time for God to rule your life has come because you and I live as if other things or other people are ruling our lives. And so Jesus says, think about it, who is ruling your life, honestly, truthfully? Nobody can answer for you, nobody can answer for me. Each one of us has to answer this honestly and truthfully for himself: who is ruling my life? And hopefully dear friends, the answer comes to us: God is ruling my life. But God, you know, can be a very vague and far-away concept.

We human beings cannot know God. And therefore, God became man. Therefore, God sent his son, Jesus, a human like us going through every aspect of human life as we go through. And in that process, he showed us what God is like. He showed us who God is. He showed us how God thinks and feels and acts. And his own life becomes our point of reference in answering the question, 'Is God ruling my life?' And therefore, we as Christians are so blessed because we have Jesus. And in Jesus, we know what God wants us to do, how God wants us to live, and the whole mind and purpose of God to bring us back into harmony, into union, into oneness with him.

In this context, I think Christian meditation is a key factor. In the reading from Mark 4:26-32 we have two parables (there many other parables) but two parables of the kingdom. And many bible commentaries, bible scholars, commentators will say these two parables are actually the seed parables because they are dealing about the seed. Here is a mystery that we can kind of liken, identify with, if you want, as meditators. It's very interesting.

In the first parable that we heard just now (verse 26 and the following), we are told a sower,

a farmer, sows seed and then he goes to sleep, it's night time. He gets up, it's morning. And the cycle of life continues. He goes to sleep again, he gets up, he goes to sleep again, he gets up. There is a mystery. He cannot fathom how that seed he has sown gradually develops. And the gospel text puts it very nicely, 'Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake.' So he should sleep and wake up, meaning he has nothing to do with the seed. The only thing he had to do with the seed was to sow it and then sleep. Night and day. The seed, according to the parable, should 'sprout and grow'. And then Mark says something very profound: 'how, he does not know'. My dear sisters and brothers, this is what happens to us in meditation.

Every day, we meditate morning and evening, and we go to sleep and we get up, and we go to sleep and we get up. Why? There is a seed inside us, that is sprouting. How, we do not know. There is a mystery in our life. There is an inner dynamism of the rule and reign of God growing in us, which is facilitated and energised by our meditation. And that inner dynamism and that sprouting of the kingdom of God within us is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us, in a state of meditation, to be so connected with God that we begin to realise who we are. And that's why, as Peter said in his presentation earlier quoting St Augustine, it's very important to know ourselves. It's very important to come into harmony with ourselves. It's very important to get into that state of oneness with ourselves. Because it is only in that state that we can move into the fullness of God ruling and reigning in our life.

It's only when we come to realise who we are in terms of connectedness with God that we begin to enjoy our childhood and the parenthood of God. We begin to really be thrilled with our brotherhood in Christ. And therefore, Christian meditation is a letting go of ourselves, so to speak, that we may find ourselves in God who wants to rule and reign in our life. He wants to be our King and he wants us to *allow* him to be our King and to follow him.

The second parable that we heard just now, dear friends, is what happens when we allow God to be our King. You are presented with the image of the mustard seed. That experience always grows from a very small one in our life to a huge one, not just in terms of expanse or size in that sense, but in terms of quality, in terms of efficacy, in terms of meaningfulness; in terms of Christian meditation, how much we are developing in that way of God. That's what the kingdom of God is all about. That's what the rule of God is all about, that every day you and I have a point of reference to monitor our humanity, to monitor our human life.

Every day, and this is the mystery, we go to sleep, we get up, we go to sleep, we get up, and this movement of God's spirit inside us is making us to become more and more like him. And therefore John Main, in the reading we had earlier, helps us to see also – 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.' Seek first God who is your king, the God who wants to rule and reign in your life, seek him whom he has sent to show you his love. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God'. Everything else will be given to. But 'everything else' is not material amassment. Everything else is the elements of the kingdom that flow. You will begin to think more and more like Jesus; you will begin to feel more and more like Jesus; you will be able to respond to the various areas of life's callings in the way of Jesus; you see your whole person becomes more and more like Jesus. And therefore, Jesus says, it's a pity – you're such good people,

but you don't think very often the way of God, you only think the way of the secular world. Now you've got to learn. This is what he calls us to, 'repent (convert) and believe the good news'. And therefore, repentance by itself is not enough.

One of the demands of the kingdom is *conversion*. Conversion is not moving from one religion to another. At the heart of conversion is a turning back to God, that's it. And that's where that mystery is taking place inside us. How, we do not know. It's the power, the working of the Holy Spirit. All we know is that now, because of our meditation, we are beginning to think more like Jesus; we are beginning to speak more like Jesus; we are beginning to relate more like Jesus; we are beginning to be and become more and more like Jesus.

So it affects the way we love, the way we relate, the way we forgive, the way we serve; our virtues, our values, our principles, the options we choose in life. All this is the mystery of the seed sprouting in the ground, the farmer not knowing how, actually developing into a big tree that brings joy to people and to nature. Dear friends, my wish is that all of us grow in this process of the kingdom of God, the rule, the reign, the way of God becoming more and more in us through our daily meditation. Don't give it up. We need that time with God and the more and more you and I give ourselves that time to be with God, the more and more that inner dynamism is taking shape in our life. And the fruit of our meditation is that we are becoming more and more like Jesus. We are actually becoming 'kingdom people'.

Thank you. God bless.

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#### **USEFUL LINKS**

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WCCM	<a href="http://www.wccm.org">www.wccm.org</a>
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TIMERS	
In the Beginning (John Main)	<a href="https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/in-the-beginning">https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/in-the-beginning</a>
Moment of Christ (John Main)	<a href="https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/moment-of-christ">https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/moment-of-christ</a>
The Ego (Laurence Freeman)	<a href="https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/the-ego">https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/the-ego</a>
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