

Bishop Cotta's Reflection of the Month:

March- Silence of Mind and Heart

As we continue our Lenten journey, it is good to spend some quiet time- silence - with the Lord. Even though it is difficult, we owe it to ourselves to find a “deserted space” to be one with the Jesus. Getting away from the noise of the world in order to encounter that “interior silence” is important if we are to grow in our relationship with Christ. It is in the silence that we are able to face the obstacles that hinder our spiritual growth and pursuit of holiness. To have an opportunity to experience the gift of “sacred silence” is truly a blessing.

Recently, the Bishops of the San Francisco Province met at the Jesuit Retreat House in Los Altos for our annual retreat – a “silent” retreat; which included silence at the majority of our daily meals! This was my second experience of this retreat. Last year, I attended the retreat as part of my preparation for my episcopal ordination. It was perfect timing! It gave me the opportunity to bring before the Lord my questions, concerns and anxieties of the anticipation of the “unknown” that comes with “the call” of being the next Auxiliary Bishop of Sacramento. With the absence of the regular daily distractions, I was able to focus my prayer in silence and quiet my mind, and more importantly, my heart, to attentively hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit within me. It was in that silence that I became aware of the peace of God which occurs when one comes to that point of surrendering all to the call to follow Jesus.

It comes back to the realization that one cannot follow Jesus until one “drops their nets” as one is “summoned on the spot” by the Lord. It is at the moment of entrusting all to him, that the weight is lifted and that calm of his presence is experienced; a shift occurs. The retreat gave me the opportunity to entrust all to his Divine Mercy. As the end of the retreat was approaching, I then began to experience the excitement and anticipation of my upcoming ordination.

This year's silent retreat was a different experience for me. I entered this retreat a little more “relaxed and calm” than the year before! As my spiritual director mentioned: “This is your time to ‘rest’ in the Lord; your –‘vacation’ with the Lord”. It was truly that: a time of quiet reflection on how the Lord has walked with me throughout my first year as a bishop. It provided the time to reflect on the blessings and challenges that have accompanied me in my first year. As the Lord has shown me, the blessings have truly outweighed any of the challenges or “surprises” that have occurred since the last retreat. For it is truly: “He that leads us!” – IF only we allow him.

As the week progressed, the scripture readings at daily Mass presented the unfolding of the story of Creation in all its richness and vivid imagery. One thing stood out for me: God “walking with Adam” in the Garden of Eden during “the breezy time of the day.” I think all of us had, to some extent, the “Adam experience” of walking with the Lord during that “breezy time of the day.” The retreat gave us the opportunity to silently walk with Christ and to realize that we are part of the “New Creation” in He, who is the Resurrected Lord, the New Adam.

Brothers and sisters, as we journey toward the celebration of the Easter Mysteries, let us discover anew this “Lord of Creation” in the silence of our minds and, more importantly, in the silence of our hearts. Wishing all a blessed and joyful Easter Season!