



Monthly Online Meditation

World Community for Christian Meditation (Singapore) SESSION 23 | 2022 Jun

Christian Community

REFLECTION -Peter Ng

Tonight, I would like to share with you how my practice of meditation over the years has helped me to deepen my faith, to transform and make me realise the meaning of my life. I think what I have experienced is the same experience that I think all of you will have if you can persevere on the journey of meditation. I was very inspired many years ago before I started meditation when I read Fr John Main and he said that the meaning of Christian meditation is that we come to 'experience the love of God for us in Jesus. Experience the love of God for us in Jesus. So, the key word is 'love' – the love of God for us in Jesus'. Then Fr John went on to say that meditation is about 'experiencing the fundamental truths of our Christian faith'.

And the fundamental truth has got three parts. Number one, that God is our creator, that we come from God, that we are created by God. And secondly, that we are redeemed by Jesus. I think if you read the beginning of the Gospel of John, it says all things were created by God through the Word. And the Word of course was made flesh in Jesus. So, even our creation by God, our individual creation, each one of us, we came from God through Jesus. And that was the act of love of God for us in creating us. But God did not just create us and leave us alone. He sent his Son. So the Word became flesh in Jesus in order to lead us back to God. So that's the second fundamental truth of our faith. And the third fundamental truth of our faith is the Holy Spirit, that God sent the Spirit of Jesus to dwell within us.

So, we are created by God out of love. We are redeemed by Jesus out of love, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us in love to lead us back to God, to re-join us with God, to call us into union with God through Jesus. So when we sit down to meditate, we might think well this is something very ordinary. It is ordinary. You're just sitting down, you're sitting still, and you try to say the mantra; day in and day out you do that. But something deep is happening within us, because the longer we meditate the more we begin to experience this love of God for us. We begin to experience the gift of our life, the gift of our existence.

You know, when you just sit down and you meditate, you say the mantra, there's something

happening because you are leaving behind all your thoughts, your desires, your worries, your problems, and what you're trying to do is to give your attention. Give your attention to who? To God, to the Spirit of Jesus dwelling within us. And when we try to do that as best as we can, then we begin to realise that we are loved into existence, that we are unconditionally loved. So we don't have to perform, we don't have to look good, and we don't have to feel so mournful about our sins. But what is more important for us is to realise that although we have sinned we are no less loved unconditionally. I think this is a very powerful experience for any human being to have, to know that you are created, you have meaning, you have value in the eyes of God, otherwise you wouldn't be created, and that you are loved.

And then, of course, what is the consequence of that? The consequence of that is that we begin to realise that we are not the only one who is loved unconditionally, who is loved into existence. Everyone in this world, every human being is of the same value. They too are called into existence by the love of God. They too are loved by Jesus. They too are redeemed by Jesus. So, what that means is that we rejoice in the gift of our being, we rejoice in our being loved by God. And we then begin to appreciate that all of our brothers and sisters, all of humanity share in the gift of love from God. And that leads us, then to the great teaching, which Jesus gave us, the teaching, which I think sums up the Christian faith, 'Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13:34).' So meditation is the way of love.

The longer you meditate the more you begin to understand that in the silence of your meditation you experience this love of God. And what we are doing in our meditation is to respond, to reciprocate the love of God. How do we reciprocate the love of God? Not by praising God, not by trying to impress him. We reciprocate the love of God by giving our attention to God, by leaving behind all our thoughts, our desires, our self-preoccupations, and for the period of our meditation to say, 'Lord, thank you for the gift of my life. I want to return this gift to you by my attention to you.' And we do that in our teaching of meditation by sitting still and by simply repeating the mantra as best as we can.

I want to share with you tonight this very, very important experience that all of us must have if our life is to have meaning, which is that we are unconditionally loved by God, that we are created out of love, and that our life journey, our life meaning, is to love in return. And that's why in the talk that Fr John Main is going to give us he says, 'The essential meaning of our life is that we exist for others, we don't exist for ourselves.' We exist for others. If we exist for others, we will go beyond ourselves to love someone. That also suggests how we should treat our brothers and sisters. And John Main is going to speak about how in meditation you learn to be. In other words, you're not trying to change God, you're not trying to bombard God with all your petitions asking God to do this, asking God to do that. You simply love God by being in his presence and by giving God your attention. So, similarly Fr John is saying that in our life, in our community, in our family, we should not try to change other people. We should learn to appreciate them, treasure them as equally loved by God. We should let them be and not impose our will on them, our wishes on them, as though they belong to

us. So, in Fr John's view, the secret to community is to let others be, rejoice in the gift of their being, rejoice in the fact that they are put into contact with us in our life. So everything comes down to this key point that meditation is the way of love. So let's listen to Fr John now as he gives us a very short teaching on Christian Community.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY -John Main

The very essence of our meaning is to exist for others. The church does not exist to perpetuate itself, to guard itself against injury, to increase its own security. It exists to lead others into an awareness of the redemptive love of God in Jesus. And in so far as it does really exist for the other, the church is invulnerable, triumphant.

'You are the light for all the world ... [Jesus told his disciples.] 'When a lamp is lit, it is not put under the meal tub but on the lampstand where it gives light to everyone in the house, and you like the lamp must shed light among your fellows so that when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.' (Mt 5:14-16)

There is only one way to do this, and it is the essential means of shedding the light with which the church is entrusted upon everyone in the house, and this is the way of prayer.

Our Christian communities do not exist for themselves but for others, ultimately for *the* Other. And in our prayer, we have to discover ourselves existing for the Other, because it is in prayer that we experience ourselves being created and sustained by him.

In our prayer then, we let God be. We rejoice in his being as he is. We do not try to manipulate him, to harangue him, or to flatter him. We do not dispel him with our clever words and formulas but we worship him. That is, we acknowledge his value and worth. And in doing this we discover that we, created in his image, share his value and worth as sons of God.

The crime of idolatry is precisely creating our own God in our own image and likeness. Rather than encounter God in his awesome difference from ourselves, we construct a toy model of him in our own psychic and emotional image.

God is not a reflection of *our* consciousness. But we are his reflection, his image by our incorporation with Jesus his Son our brother.

Our way to the experience of this truth is in the silence of our meditation.

Just as we can cut God down to our own size, impose our identity on him, so we can do this with other people. Indeed if we do it to God we inevitably do it to other people. And if we do it to them, we inevitably do it to God. This is the obverse of saying what St John said:

If a man says I love God while hating his brother he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen. (1 Jn 4:20)

And indeed this command comes to us from Christ himself, that he who loves God must also love his brother. Let us be quite clear what St John is saying, we cannot love God *or* our neighbour. We love *both* or neither.

And what love means is rejoicing in the otherness of the other, because the depth of this awareness is the depth of our communion with the other. In this communion, the discovery of our own true self and that of the other is the same discovery. So in the people we live with, we find not objects to be cast in our own superficial likeness but much more. We find in them our true selves. For our true selves only appear, only become realised, when we are wholly turned towards another.

In meditation we develop our capacity to turn our whole being towards the other. We learn to let our neighbour be, just as we learn to let God be. Not to manipulate our neighbour, but rather to reverence him, to reverence his importance, the wonder of his being, in other words to love him.

Because of this, prayer is the great school of community. In and through a common seriousness and perseverance in prayer we realise the true glory of Christian community as a fraternity of the anointed living together in profound and loving mutual respect.

Christian community is in essence the experience of being held in reverence by others and we in our turn reverencing them. In others, I recognise the same Spirit that lives in my heart, the Spirit that constitutes my real self.

And so Christ's mystical body has just this creative aim, the realisation of each other's essential being. True community happens in the process of drawing each other into the light of true being. In this process we share a deepening experience of the joy of life, the joy of being, as we discover more and more of its fullness in a loving faith shared with others. The essence of community then is a recognition of and deep reverence for the other.

Our meditation leads us to turn wholly towards the Other who is the Spirit in our heart.

Transcript of extracts from: *Word into Silence, John Main, Collected Talks Vol 1*,
'Twelve Steps for Meditators'

Meditation

THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION -Peter Ng

So my brothers and sisters, the way that we respond to the love of God for us in our meditation is to give our attention to the Spirit of Jesus present within us. And in order to give our attention, to be in the presence of God, in the presence of Jesus, we have to leave ourselves behind. We have to leave our self-preoccupations behind. All our thoughts, our ideas, our plans, our problems, our desires, everything, we leave these behind at the time of meditation so that we can give our total attention to God as much as we can. And this is

what we call 'selfless-attention'. We are paying attention, but the attention is not focused on ourselves, it is focused on God. So we think about, we refer to our meditation as the practice of selfless-attention.

So to do that, we bring our body to attention by sitting still, closing our eyes lightly. Then breathing very calmly we then bring our mind to stillness by the faithful repetition of our prayer word 'maranatha'. So it's important to learn to say the mantra as well as you can.

So, what I suggest to you is that when you begin to repeat the mantra, say the mantra clearly as four equally stressed syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. Say it quietly without moving your lips but you say it clearly. And then you say continuously, in other words, don't say the mantra for a few seconds and then stop and think of something, and then come back to the mantra. Try to say it as continuously as possible, but not rushing, you're not going to rush through your meditation. Learn to say it in a calm, hurried way, say it clearly and continuously. Then as you say the mantra, in order to be able to hold on to the mantra, listen to the mantra as you say the mantra; give your hearing attention to the mantra so that you are not distracted by other sounds that are going on around you. So it's important to learn how to say the mantra by saying it clearly, continuously, and listening to it. So let us now practise this for the next 20 minutes.

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

THE PRIESTLY PRAYER OF CHRIST - JOHN 17:21-26

May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the

world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.

REFLECTION –Fr Eugene Vaz

A very good evening my dear friends.

We've got this very beautiful scripture reading which we have just heard. We are so privileged, dear friends. I would like to situate this reflection that I am making between two very great days. Yesterday we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost and the coming Sunday we will be celebrating the Feast of the Holy Trinity, the feast of God himself, and we are so privileged to do this meditation and reflection on the day after Pentecost and the week that is leading us to celebrate God himself. If you look at the scripture passage that we have just heard, there is a deep desire in Jesus that we all be one as he is one with the Father, and he is one with us. So that's the great desire of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit (we celebrated his feast yesterday) has come into our life to help us move into that oneness with God, and we're going to celebrate that this coming Sunday, God who is our creator, God who is our saviour, and God who is our sanctifier. This is the work of God. This is the work of God – to create us, to save us, to keep on making us grow in holiness. And we know this action of God, this triple action of God as the Father who creates, the Son who saves, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies. And we are caught up in wonder in this awesomeness of God and, as we have heard from John Main just now, *that* is done in Christian meditation.

Therefore, Christian meditation is not just any ordinary meditation. It's a whole focus on God. And as Peter was insisting just now, it's the God who loves, who creates us out of love, who saves us out of love, and who keeps on making us holy because he loves us and that's what he wants us to be, holy as he himself is holy. Now, how do we get into all that, dear friends? Every day, by our meditation. What does meditation do for you and for me and to you and to me? Meditation puts us into the deep desire of Jesus. Meditation helps us to make that desire of Jesus happen. In meditation you and I get caught up in God – Father, Son and Spirit. And therefore, Peter was saying just now we leave everything aside, we don't let anything distract us or disturb us. Because we want to be totally in that Father, Son and Spirit, the Triune God, the one and only God, the true God, the God of love. And therefore when we celebrate the feast of God, next Sunday, we will see that God spends his time not looking at himself but looking at others. The whole activity of God therefore is Trinitarian, the whole activity of God therefore is communion. The life of God, Father, Son and Spirit,

they live totally and fully for the other. And in this total being for the other, they are united, they are one. They are not three gods; they are one God who lives a communion of life and love. And that, my dear sisters and brothers, is the pattern for you and me. And when we read John 17:21-26, the scripture passage that we just heard, then we begin to appreciate this much more fully.

So I just want to pick out a few lines from the reading and situate it within the wonder and beauty of our everyday Christian meditation. What happens? First, we come to realise we are growing to be one with God, and that's what Jesus was praying for in verse 21, 'that they may all be one'. Oneness is not just some physical closeness, is not just about physical juxtapositioning. No. Oneness is a unity of being and a unity of purpose, and it comes out very beautifully in verse 21. 'Even as you, Father, are in me and I in you' – that's the being. What's the consequence? 'That they also may be one in us.' So, as Jesus and the Father are one, Jesus wants all of us to be one with him and the Father in the power of the Spirit. And that's what happens in Christian meditation. We grow into that oneness with God. So we leave everything behind and we get into that oneness of God so that in that oneness of God, when we leave our meditation and go back into the world in which we live, all those things become different. All those things are viewed differently. What is the difference is very beautifully put at the end of verse 21 'that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me'.

So you see there is a purpose in this oneness, that you and I and the whole world can be one with God. It's so that we disciples of Jesus may live for others. Who are the others? The others are not just members of our Christian community, the others are even those who are not in the community. That's the world, the whole world must come to know, the whole world must come to accept, the whole world must come to believe that Jesus was sent by the Father and in the power of the Spirit Jesus did the work that the Father sent him to do. And what is the work that the Father sent him to do is very beautifully brought out in verse 26. 'I made known to them your name. You sent me to make your name known to them. They didn't know you. They didn't know you but you sent me. They have come to believe in me, they have listened to me, and now they understand what I am all about. I am all about you, I am all about your name. I'm all about making your name known to them and this I have done and I will continue to make it known, because it's not a one-off thing. Therefore, we need to do our meditation every day, because every day we've got to get deeper into the name of God. 'Name' stands for person, 'name' stands for being. And to know the name of God and to grow into the name of God is to know the being of God, our Father, the Father of Love, the God who is love. And every day we go deeper into him. Every day we come to know him more. Every day we come to experience him more, and therefore meditation is so wonderful and so exciting.

We can do it in the morning, we can do it in the evening, some people do it in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening, because it's not a chore, it's not just some exercise. It's the whole experience of being in God, of enjoying God. Why? So that, as we know the name

of God, as we know the being of God, Jesus puts it very clearly, 'the love with which you have loved me may be in them'. Wow! That's what Christian meditation does. That love of God is not somewhere caught up or hidden in God. That love of God is in you and me. And when in meditation we experience that oneness with God, we begin to experience that awesomeness of his love – exactly what Jesus was saying. In verse 26, 'the love with which you have loved me, may be in them and I in them.' That's the whole purpose of meditation. And therefore I said our meditation is not just any ordinary intellectual or wellness exercise and all that kind of stuff. That's all worldly, that's all secular. Our meditation is to be rooted in Jesus 'so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them'. And therefore, we keep on repeating 'maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come' because you wanted to be in us and we are saying, 'Come, come be with us, come let us be with you.'

And so, my dear friends, these verses 21 and 26 of our reading today spell out the awesomeness of the wonder and the beauty of Christian meditation on the one hand and the importance and necessity of the meditation every day in our life, because verse 22-25 now develops the wonder of that meditation, and very beautifully.

What happens when we are caught up in that being of God? What happens when we get caught up in that love of God? We begin to experience the glory of God. That glory of God, is what you and I were made for, we were made to enjoy the glory of God. We were made to be one with God. That is paradise, absolute harmony. But it got broken because we lost our attention on God. We got distracted, we fell into sin. We made other choices in front of some very terrible options that were proposed to us in what we call temptation. We fell for the wrong choices. But that is our fault, that's our work, that's our misdeed. It doesn't destroy God. God is changeless. God always was, is, and will be, and God always *is* love. God, never *was* love, or not *will be* love. God *is* love. And so while we fell from him, he never drew away from us. His love is always there and therefore the great action of God is to bring us back to him. So we celebrated Pentecost, the Holy Spirit whose coming is to draw us back into God. And as we allow the Spirit to draw us into God, we come to experience the glory of God, the wonder of God, Father, Son and Spirit. And once again, we can take our place in that glory of God, and that's the process in which we are every day. And our Christian meditation helps us to move deeper into that process.

So the glory of God, is the great desire that you and I have. We want glory, but not this materialistic glory, not this passing glory, not this fading glory. We don't want the glory that lasts for 10 minutes, we want a glory that lasts forever, and only God lasts forever. Nothing lasts forever, whatever article you buy. You're so happy you got a 10-year guarantee, which means after 10 years this thing is going to get lost (you know what I mean) or going to get spoiled. I don't think that's a big joy, is it? After 10 years you got another hassle, isn't it? We don't want that kind, we want a glory that will never end, and that is God. How are you going to get it? Many people ask, and we say, meditation. Meditation brings us into that glory of God morning and night, or some of you may do it morning afternoon and night, I don't know. But it's a whole day spent in God. It's a whole day spent in that awesomeness and

wonder and glory of God, isn't it?

Now comes a very, very beautiful thing that Jesus says, 'Father, [this is verse 24] I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am.' This is a very powerful statement. This is a deep desire of Jesus (verse 24): 'Father, I desire that those you gave me will be where I am.' My dear friends, I earnestly implore you to contemplate in your meditation, where is Jesus today, right now? Where is Jesus?

Well, ten days ago we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. So we know Jesus is with the Father, is in the glory of the Father. So Jesus says, I want the ones you gave me, that is you and I, Christians in the whole world and the whole human race, I want them to be where I am. I want them to be in your glory. As I am enjoying your glory, I want all of them to enjoy the glory. So he wants us to be where he is, that is in the glory. But my dear friends where else is Jesus? Jesus is in every human being, especially the weak and the poor. 'Whenever you do this to the least of my brethren, you do it to me.' (Mt 25:40) Jesus is in every human being because we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Each one of us is an image and likeness of God. And for you and me to do a loving action to somebody is to do a loving action to Jesus, is to do a loving action for God. 'I want them to be where I am' means you and I have to be with one another. That's why the importance of the Christian community, that's why the Christian community is so important, because living in the Christian community offers us an opportunity to be where Jesus is, to be with one another. And my dear friends, when you think about it, we so often waste the opportunity because we are not with one another, and for many people, they don't want to be with one another. They want to be individualistic and isolated, and worse still some even want to be insulated. That is not the life for which we were created, that is not life with God, and Christian meditation draws us more and more into being with God in the glory that is his, and in the glory which we can experience in the life of one another.

So this is the great prayer that Jesus is saying very beautifully, we can conclude, 'Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you, but I have known you.' So the world has got its own philosophy, the world has got its own mechanisms. You and I are tempted to follow the way of the world, which is teaching us to ruin, isn't it? We Christian meditators are here so that the world will change. So we must make the world change into the way of God. We must not allow the way of God to be changed by the world, and that is what is happening today.

Even in the church, we are allowing the world to direct the way we are church. Instead of we church showing the world the way of God. And that's why the Holy Father says we need to rethink what being church is all about. It's not just going for devotions, being ritualistic. All that is good if it helps us to be in this oneness with God for the sake of showing the world the person and the way of God which, in Jesus and the power of the Spirit exists in the Christian community. So really, dear friends, the synodal approach that is going on now with the invitation of the Holy Father is helping us to re-examine our being church.

And what is being Church? Being church is to be one with God, Father, Son and Spirit, and to be one with one another, so that the world will know the wonder of the person and way of God, which is really our vocation. And you and I grow and develop in that vocation, hopefully, dear friends, with the power of our Christian medication. May we all be one as Jesus and the Father are one. May all of us, be one with him, with one another, in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

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