

Becoming still and silent.

How the soul is to be with God: blind, deaf, dumb and always meek. '*Blind, deaf, dumb and always meek.*' This is our maxim for today.

A creative disabling of faculties

To put this in the context of contemplative wisdom we could bear in mind how we, as human beings, are able to move from one mode of awareness to another. We can move from being asleep to being awake, and from being awake to a state of heightened perception. We can't simply make that happen, but we can create the right inner conditions by – in a manner of speaking - disabling our reliance on our present mode of awareness. This creative *disabling* of faculties of our usual mode of seeing, hearing, and speaking *enables* us to see, with the eye and hear with the ear of the Heart – and likewise, the disabling of speech makes way for wise speech to come from the heart.

So, as the maxim suggests, for the sake of this heightened spiritual awareness we willingly become, so to speak – blind, deaf and dumb in the silence of meditation and prayer.

This spiritual perception in stillness and silence of mind is known as the negative way, a 'dark' way of knowing not reliant on the 'light' of reason. Osuna meditates on the implications of this negative way, the *via negativia*, and gives us a kind of heads up on what we may expect if we persevere on this path. It's his inside view, if you like, of what's happens in the soul through silence and stillness of mind.

An inside view of silence and stillness

Firstly, in silence we have awakened in a more *direct* way of knowing God. It is direct in the sense that it cuts through or by passes our ordinary ways of understanding. So in silence we are learning to embrace and stay with the inner experience of *not* knowing or un-knowing without anxiety or despair or confusion.

And secondly, silence takes us into an ever deepening experience of *dependence* on the Spirit. In stillness we give over the initiative for activity to be reliant on the initiative and activity of Spirit.

Osuna says we learn to be led by hand , blindfold in a path we cannot see - in a relationship of blind trust of spiritual knowing.

The way of silence is a *way of embracing helplessness*. In stillness and silence we are learning to embrace our helplessness to improve and alter ourselves according to the agendas of our egoic selves. We learn in helpless silence in the heart to experience the paradox that this very seeming weakness opens us to powerful movements of Spirit in us.

Deepening our capacity for silence reveals the secret of *hidden prayer*. The wisdom of hidden prayer is that it exposes us to the hiddenness of God, of the unknowability of God, and invites us into a deeper place within our soul, the hiding place of the heart, in order to live hidden in this mystery no matter what may be happening in our lives.

And silence is also, lastly, a way that can open us to a particular *intensity* of love. Osuna uses the love language of *The Song of Songs* to evoke something of this spiritual eros that can be so intensely known. Sometimes it's an overwhelming intensity - our ordinary senses are struck blind and dumb in an irrevocable knowing of 'beloved-ness'.

Becoming blind in darkness of mind

If we continue contemplating the maxim – Blind , deaf, dumb and always meek' these four words can keep opening up some of what is going on in practising silent prayer.

So we could say that when we are becoming blind in meditation we are first of all just allowing the experience of being in the seeming darkness of our ordinary intellect and mind. And as we allow this as an experience of prayer and we learn to stay in it, in trust, we may begin to have a sense of that in the dark knowing there is a subtle sense of presence that infuses this darkness . It becomes a strangely radiant darkness.

Becoming deaf in quietness of mind

So, what is it going to look like to be become deaf in prayer? Osuna describes this voluntary deafness in the quiet of prayer as becoming deaf to the multitude of voices of our imagination. These voices of our imagination are our individual soundscape of impulses that are saying 'this is fearful', 'this is wrong' 'this is

necessary' and so on and on. The imperative voices seem to demand attention in our silence saying think me, feel me, act on me. But here in silence we are learning to stay in restful repose where right now it is possible to turn a deaf ear because we are doing something else at this moment – listening in silent communion. These demanding voices are not bad – they are just too noisy and disturbing for spiritual communication.

Becoming dumb in silence of mind.

How are we to become dumb in this same creative way in silence? Our capacity for speech is powerful . Why would we not use it ? In silent meditation we become dumb in the sense that we choose to no longer initiate speech from the self. So in silence we learn to wait dumbly . This expectant dumb waiting can in the end lead to a spontaneous flowing up of prophetic, more wise speech rising from the heart.

Becoming meek in repose

And then last but not least, the saying reminds us that in all of this the spiritual attitude for silence is meekness. Osuna describes meekness as the 'repose of the soul', where there's no longer a need to react to everything. Where there is a capacity to stay poised and in deep repose . And it is this kind of meekness that bears fruit in daily life and in our relationships. Learning meekness in stillness, where we're no longer controlling everything, we're no longer reacting to everything, is not, in any way, diminishing of our humanity, but in fact is magnifying it. Osuna loves this paradox - that we become more fully human in our meekness. He urges us to welcome the quality of meekness 'as a guest of prayer' and it is in silent meekness we are opened to the possibilities of our full humanity in God. Meekness magnifies this.