

And now let us ask the Lord a question with the prophet and say to him: Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill?

He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour.'

From the Prologue of the Rule of St Benedict quoting Ps 14 (or Ps 15 in the Jerusalem Bible) and setting the tone for the silence and general lack of talk which should characterise the monastic life because Benedict is well aware that silence breeds peace while dissension and discord come from the tongue. Silence indeed not merely as a counterpoint to talk but as a generator of good and holy speech

'When words are many, transgression is not lacking' (quoting Proverbs 10) and elsewhere, *'Death and life are in the power of the tongue.'* (Proverbs 18)

So, *'if sometimes we ought to refrain from good conversation for silence's sake, how much more ought we to put a stop to bad talk because of sin's punishment.'* (RB Prologue)

So often we speak to fill up silence, to stop silence in a sense doing its work which is in another sense to reveal us as we are. Dom Gregory was famous for his silences, for his ability, that is, to stay silent in a group until members of the group in desperation to put an end to the silence would reveal themselves as they are – and provide then an opportunity for healing through talk, bringing to light all the terrible interior conflicts which otherwise fuelled their speech and condemnation of others and not least of themselves. So this is Gregory using the dynamic of silence and talk to a good purpose and one could see this as a microcosm of what takes place in the monastic life over a much longer period: a lifetime of restraint in speech so that silence can have its say – can do its work of purifying the soul so that when speech does come it can be pure, to the point, truthful. Colin Heber-Percy gives a delightful example of this in 'Tales of a Country Parish'

I remember listening to (Lord) Coe on a radio phone-in being taken to task by a caller who said her neighbourhood park was being bulldozed to make room for Olympic facilities (this was in 2012). Coe pointed out that after the redevelopment there would be more 'ecologically managed green space' in the neighbourhood than there had been previously: the city would be greener. The caller responded by saying: I'm talking about our park. Where I grew up, where I used to play as a child and where I take my children to play now.' Missing from 'ecologically managed green space' is story.

And I would say 'truth' – the woman was speaking truth to power in words which were direct, pure, from the heart. Lord Coe was speaking from a script in words deliberately designed to evade this truth, words which we now so often hear elsewhere such as 'collateral damage'; 'clean energy'; 'the freedom to choose'.

And so on. This gospel passage is not then simply about avoiding making judgements – never criticising another for fear of hypocrisy, but of cultivating a pure heart so that hypocrisy is no longer an issue – and the test of this will be one's capacity to love. The critic of Lord Coe has a right to speak as she does because this green space -insignificant to Coe - was a place where she learned what it means to belong, what it means to love. This is to be our story also.

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