

To start the homily today, I want to invite you into a simple prayer experience. Simply close your eyes... and still your mind by releasing any distractions around you. Let them go. Open your palms in a gesture of reception. Take a big deep breath in, through the nose... holding it for 5 seconds... and as you exhale pray: "*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.*" One more time, in... and out: "*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.*" **Stillness. Silence. Solitude.** God's presence in "*the sound of a gentle breeze [or in the] sheer silence.*" Friends, **this** is the space into which Jesus speaks.

I wonder... if you chose to do the exercise, what did Jesus say. It might've been a word, but maybe not an **audible** word – perhaps an image, a feeling or emotion. The writer, in today's Psalm, gives an indication of **what to listen for** when we pray: "*I will hear that the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace,*" which means, **wholeness, well-being** and **harmony**.

If you chose **not** to participate, I'm curious why... Is it fear? Sometimes it feels safer to keep God at arm's length by holding on to a faith that's rooted in what **we** faithfully do, rather than seeking to listen and recognise Jesus' resurrected presence in our lives. It's easy to turn up to Mass, say our prayers, receive Eucharist and go home – having satisfied an obligation. It's into **this** sentiment that Paul grieves for his Jewish brothers and sisters who have not recognised the risen Christ in their lives. "**They were adopted,**" Paul says. "**They were given the glory and the covenants; the Law and the ritual were drawn up for them.**" But they held on to what is only an echo of the fullness of God's gift of His Son: Jesus. The same could be said for us – you and I.

I want to tell you a story. About two-and-a-half years ago, I was driving in my car, listening to Catechism in a Year – a Podcast by Fr Mike Schmitz. Fr Mike was reading out a part of the Catechism – articles 457-460 – which talk about **why** the Word become Flesh; **why** God became human. There are four reasons: So that we could be **saved** from our sins – i.e. separation from God; so that we could **know** God's love; so that we have **a model of holiness** to follow; and so that we could **participate** in God's **Divine life**. After reciting the articles, Fr Mike explained them a little more clearly. He rephrased the words so that they hit a little closer to home – bringing them in from arm's length, right in close to the heart. Loaded up with **passion, emotion** and **desire** for his listeners, I can remember his saying, *"God became human in the person of Jesus so that **you** would be saved; so that **you** might **know** God's love; so that **you** have a model of holiness to follow; and so that **you** can participate in God's Divine life."* At the moment Fr Mike said, "So that **you** might **know** God's love," I felt God speak to me as Jesus' love pierced my heart. It was a steering-wheel-slapping moment of **joy** and abiding **peace** that I'll never forget.

Friends, moments like these are given - whether we recognise them yet or not – so that amidst the storms of our lives, **we** might lean back into those gift moments and **know** that Jesus is alive and present in our midst. But it takes a desire to go beyond the familiar; to break with what might seem comfortable; and above all, to perhaps stop rowing in the opposite direction of Jesus. Did you notice in the Gospel that *"when evening came,"* Jesus was still up in the hills praying, while the disciples were far out on the lake, battling the sea, trying to row into a head wind - **until** the **fourth watch** of the night? That means between 3 and 6am!? That's crazy stuff. I'd never noticed that detail before, but it's often what we do – battling mighty winds, earthquakes, and the fires of life in the

misguided belief that God is testing us; that if we persevere, we'll be doing God's will. God isn't in those things, but in the sound of a gentle breeze or sheer **silence, stillness** and **solitude**.

Jesus is fully and wonderfully present in the Eucharist, but that's sometimes the limit of peoples' experience of His risen presence. He's fully and wonderfully present during the difficult parts of our lives - especially when we choose to listen in prayer rather than simply battle against the wind. And He's also fully and wonderfully present in the people He places in our lives – those who **encourage** us, **challenge** us, **forgive** us, **pray** for us, and sometimes simply **stand beside us** when the wind is strong and the waves are high. The Christian life isn't about convincing **ourselves** or blindly believing that Jesus rose from the dead two thousand years ago. It's about learning to **recognise** that the Jesus is alive and present in the **here** and **now** of our lives. In the Eucharist. In prayer. And in the people He sends to us. This week, don't just ask God, *"What do you want me to do?"* But instead, *"Jesus, where are you already present in my life today?"* And then, with open hearts and hands, **listen** for the *"voice that speaks of peace"* in **Stillness, Silence** and **Solitude**.