

Between the Silence of Man and the Silence of God (Metropolitan Silouan of Byblos, Botrys and dependencies (Mount Lebanon))

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**Pastoral Letter of
Metropolitan Silouan of Byblos, Botrys and dependencies
on the 6th Anniversary of the Kidnapping of
His Eminence Metropolitan Paul of Alepo**

April 22, 2013-2019

The “Master of Eloquence and Silence”
Between the Silence of Man and the Silence of God

“God finished on the seventh day His work, which He had done:
and He rested on the seventh day of all His work, which He had made”
(Genesis 2:2)

“Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo is on an ecclesiastical mission.” This is an expression that occurred to me in the first days after Monday, April 22, 2013 (the day he was kidnapped), an expression that opened a window through which I have tried to explore the mystery of that great day, a day of God’s work in the history of humanity.

Arriving at the threshold of the seventh year of this invisible “ecclesiastical mission,” we notice that infertility and drying up are encircling us; the infertility of hope and the drying up of inspiration. Consequently, you believe that time is uprooting hope from you, while you have no inspiration regarding how to defend the work of God within us and in us. In that case, how can you possibly defend your hope and your faith, and what may you say regarding this matter? An answer comes to you: “Keep silence!” But how could you manage, with silence, to defend your hope and your faith in this “ecclesiastical mission?”



In seeking a satisfactory answer to this question, you rejoice that the Bible reveals to you the work of God the Creator, when, at the end of the six-day work of creation, It tells us, with majesty and modesty, that “on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made” (Genesis 2:2). This fact makes you dive into the work of God the Creator, as we are on the threshold of the seventh year of that great day, while contemplating, with reverence and perspicacity, the mystery of the work of God Himself in us, since He says, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working” (John 5:17) — and how this work has manifested itself in a paradoxical way, both in expression and in the absence of expression; both in revelation and in the absence of revelation. It is, in fact, the secret of “silence” that appeared on the seventh day, when God the Creator rested from all His works, a silence that the author could not express — and how could he? Indeed, the expression, “God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:4; 10; 12; 18; 21; 25) accompanies us from the first days of creation, as well as the expression, “that [it] was very good” (Genesis 1:31) at the end of these days. However, the sacred “silence” of God is present on the seventh day as a blessed seal appended on His words of the previous days.

This biblical reality introduces you to the dynamic of the Bible where the “silence” of God confronts the man who meanders in the paths of life, so as to provide him with hope, abundant hope. In this regard, man’s difficulty resides in his lack of forbearance towards such a silence, especially if this silence is prolonged in our eyes, and if we are not sufficiently imbued with the Holy Spirit. God be praised that His silence is not sterile. Likewise, he who is filled with the Spirit, his silence is not sterile either. It is clear that the source of this silence is the same one of which the Sacred Scripture spoke to us at the beginning of creation, when It revealed to us the presence of the “Master of Silence,” if it is permissible to speak like that. This is the Holy Spirit. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). And we realized that He is also the “Master of Eloquence” because He is the one who inspires and gives the speech, as the Lord, in circumstances similar to those we are talking about, explained to us: “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).

Is it possible that you are angry and disgusted with silence, the silence of the sterile man, a silence that we are accustomed to describe as the “silence of the grave,” when we refer to this great day? Or is it possible that you rejoice in the silence of God, a silence that turns out to be most eloquent, a silence that is the “language of the age to come,” according to Saint Ephraim the Syriac, a language that comes to you from the age to come, from the One who is Himself “the Master of Silence,” who was hovering over all creation since the dawn of its creation, and which feeds its existence and gives him the ability to speak, to listen and to understand His work in this creation so far?

In fact, on the threshold of this “seventh day,” or rather of the seventh year, you must behold yourself in reverence before the work of God the Creator during these past six years, and watch the manifestation of His work in His repose of all works, which took place in a remarkable silence that cannot be decoded by any word we may say. It is rather a silence that speaks in the hearts of those who accept the “Master of Eloquence and Silence” within them, in an act of prayer, faith or service; in a situation of life or death; in a state of suffering or liberation; in a desperate wait or a quick response; in an absence cruelly felt but that is counterbalanced by a stronger and more eloquent presence than the absence itself.

The difficulty of the seventh day is the “silence” that surrounds it and the length of the duration that accompanies it. In this case, we cannot do better than rely on the one who became the “master of eloquence and silence” to guide us in our passage through the silence of man and this silence of God concerning this “ecclesiastical mission,” invisible to men’s eyes, but alive in the spirit of God and His providence for us.

I thank the Lord for allowing me to write these lines, which I wrote “from here,” “from very near” (for some people), while in the past I have written them from “there,” “from far” (for some others), while praying to the Lord to confirm us all together in the work of the Spirit who unites us in times of adversity and trials, so that He may be glorified in us, and that, consequently, the one who became the “master of eloquence and silence” is present among us.