

## Love A: God's love for us

### Angela of Foligno

'Oh! I love you. I love you more than anyone else in this valley. It is I who come, and I bring you unknown joy. I will enter into the depths of your being. O my spouse! I have rested and taken my repose in you; now possess yourself and repose in me! Love me! All your life will please me, provided that you love me! I will do great things in you; I will be made known in you, glorified and praised in you'(quoted by Elizabeth of the Trinity in 'Let yourself be loved', page 181).

### Saint Bernard

"My advice to you, my friends, is to turn aside occasionally from troubled and anxious pondering on the paths you may be treading, and to travel on smoother ways where the gifts of God are serenely savoured, so that the thought of him may give breathing space to you whose consciences are perplexed. I should like you to experience for yourselves the truth of the holy prophet's words: "Make the Lord your joy and he will give you what your heart desires"[Psalm 37:4]. Sorrow for sin is indeed necessary, but it should not be an endless preoccupation. You must dwell also on the glad remembrance of God's loving-kindness, otherwise sadness will harden the heart and lead it more deeply into despair . . .

You must fix your attention on the ways of God, see how he mitigates the bitterness of a heart that is crushed, how he wins back the soul lacking in courage from the depths of despair, how he consoles the grief-stricken and strengthens the wavering with the sweet caress of his faithful promise.

By the mouth of the Prophet he declares: "For my praise I will bridle you, lest you should perish"[variation on Isaiah 48:9]. By this he seems to say: "Lest you should be cast down by excessive sadness at the sight of your sins, and rush despairingly to perdition like an unbridled horse over a precipice, I shall rein you in, I shall curb you with my mercy and set you on your feet with my praises. Then you will breathe freely again in the enjoyment of my benefits, overwhelmed though you be by evils of your own making, because you will find that my kindness is greater than your culpability"(Sermon 11:2 on the Song of Songs).

### Ruth Burrows

"God is always offering himself in love"(Burrows, Ascent to Love, page 100).

### Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

"O mad lover! Are you in need of your creature? It seems so to me, for you act as if you could not live without her, in spite of the fact that you are Life itself, and everything has life from you. Why then are you so mad? Because you have fallen in love with what you have made! You are pleased and delighted over her within yourself, as if you were drunk with desire for her salvation. She runs away from you and you go looking for her. You clothed yourself in our humanity, and nearer than that you could not have come."

(Dialogue: Divine Providence, chapter 153, page 325).

### George Herbert:

"Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,  
Drew near to me, sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

'A guest', I answered, 'worthy to be here'. Love said, 'You shall be he'.

'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear, I cannot look on Thee'.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, 'Who made the eyes, but I?'  
'Truth, Lord, but I have marred them; let my shame go where it doth deserve'.  
'And know you not', says Love, 'who bore the blame?' 'My dear, then I shall serve'.  
'You must sit down', says Love, 'and taste my meat'. So I did sit and eat"

### **John of the Cross**

"In the midst of these aridities, God frequently communicates to the soul, when it least expects, spiritual sweetness, a very pure love, and a spiritual knowledge which is sometimes most delicate. Each of these communications is more valuable than all that the soul previously sought. Yet in the beginning one will not think so because the spiritual inflow is very delicate and the senses do not perceive it"(Dark Night, I.13, 10 page 326.6)

"It is fitting that the soul be in this sepulchre of dark death in order that it attain the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes"(Dark Night II,6,1, page 337).

"How amazing and pitiful it is that the soul be so utterly weak and impure that the hand of God, though light and gentle, should feel so heavy and contrary. For the hand of God does not press down or weigh upon the soul, but only touches it; and this mercifully, for God's aim is to grant it favours and not chastise it"(Dark Night II.5,7, page 337).

"God humbles the soul greatly, but only in order to exalt it greatly afterwards"(Dark Night II,6,6, page 339).

"A person remains in this condition until his spirit is humbled, softened and purified, until it becomes so delicate, simple and refined that it can be one with the Spirit of God, according to the degree of union of love that God, in his mercy, desires to grant"(Dark Night II,7,4 page 341).

"Even though this happy night darkens the spirit, it does so only to impart light concerning all things. Even though it humbles a person and reveals his miseries, it does so only to exalt him. Even though it impoverishes him and empties him of all possessions and natural affection, it does only that, united to God, *he may reach out to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things*, with a general freedom of spirit in them all"(Dark Night II,9,1, page 346).

"There is nothing in contemplation or the divine inflow which of itself can give pain; contemplation rather bestows sweetness and delight. The cause for not experiencing these agreeable effects is the soul's weakness and imperfection at the time, its inadequate preparation, and the qualities it possesses which are contrary to this light. Because of these the soul has to suffer when the divine light shines upon it"(Dark Night II,9,11 page 349)

"The imperfections are the fuel which catches on fire, and once they are gone there is nothing left to burn . . . the soul's suffering terminates, and joy remains"(Dark Night II,10,5 page 351).

: Souls are "cleansed and illumined by love"(Dark Night II.12,1 page 355)

"Charity empties and annihilates the affections and appetites of the will of whatever is not God and centres them on God alone. This charity prepares the will and unites it with God through love"(Dark Night II,21,11, page 381). It provides defence against the flesh (Dark Night II.21,10-11).

"All fear remains outside; and the soul exults in a very clear consciousness of secure joy, in that quiet peace and delight of the hidden Spouse which neither the world nor the devil can give or take away"(Dark Night II,23,4, page 383).

### **Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 27**

*There he gave me his breast;*

*there he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;  
and I gave myself to Him,  
keeping nothing back;  
there I promised to be his bride.*

"In this interior union God communicates himself to the soul with such genuine love that neither the affection of a mother, with which she so tenderly caresses her child, nor a brother's love, nor any friendship is comparable to it. The tenderness and truth of love by which the immense Father favours and exalts this humble and loving soul reaches such a degree — O wonderful thing, worthy of all our awe and admiration! — that the Father himself becomes subject to her for her exaltation, as though he were her servant and she his lord. And he is as solicitous in favouring her as he would be if he were her slave and she his god. So profound is the humility and sweetness of God!

In this communication of love, he exercises in some way that very service that he says in the Gospel that he will render to his elect in heaven; that is, girding himself and passing from one to another, he will minister to them (Luke 12:37). He is occupied in favouring and caressing the soul like a mother who ministers to her child and nurses it at her breasts. The soul thereby comes to know the truth of Isaiah's words: you shall be carried at the breast of God and upon his knees you will be caressed (Isaiah 66:12)" (Spiritual Canticle 27,1, page 517).

"The soul is conscious that love is so valuable in the Beloved's sight that he neither esteems nor makes use of anything else but love, and so she employs all her strength in the pure love of God, desiring to serve him perfectly. She does this not merely because He desires it, but also because the love by which she is united to Him moves her to the love of God in and through all things. Like the bee that sucks honey from all the wild-flowers and will not use them for anything else, the soul easily extracts the sweetness of love from all things that happen to her, that is, she loves God in them. Thus everything leads her to love. And being informed and fortified as she is with love, she neither feels, nor tastes, nor knows the things that happen to her, whether delightful or bitter, since, as we said, the soul knows nothing else but love. And her pleasure in all things and in all transactions is always the delight in loving God" (Spiritual Canticle 27,8 page 519).

*"I turn to my Beloved, and he turns towards me. Come, my beloved, let us go into the field, let us abide together on the grange; let us rise very early and go to the vineyards to see if the vine is in flower and if the flowers bear fruit, if the pomegranates have blossomed; there I will give you my breasts"(Song of Songs 7:11-13).*

Spiritual Canticle 23<sup>1</sup> (32<sup>2</sup>).

"When you looked at me  
your eyes imprinted your grace in me;  
for this you loved me ardently;  
and thus my eyes deserved  
to adore what they beheld in you".

"O Lord, my God, who will seek you with simple and pure love and not find that you are all he desires; for you show yourself first, and you go out to meet those who *desire* you"(Sayings of light and love n.2, page 666).

"He [the Word, the Bridegroom] would take her [Creation, the bride]  
tenderly in his arms,  
and there give her his love.  
And when they were thus one,  
He would lift her to the Father,

where God's own joy  
would be her joy.  
For as the Father and the Son  
and He who proceeds from them  
live in one another,  
so it would be with the bride.  
For, taken wholly into God,  
she will live the life of God"(Romance 4,15-17, page 728).

### **Julian of Norwich**

"God, of your goodness, give yourself to me, for you are in love with me"

"Mercy is a sweet, gracious operation in love, mingles with plentiful pity, for mercy works, protecting us, and mercy works, turning everything to good for us. Mercy for love allows us to fail to a certain extent; and inasmuch as we fail, in so much we fall, and inasmuch as we fall, in so much we die. For we must necessarily die inasmuch as we fail to see and feel God, who is our life. Our failing is dreadful, our falling is shameful, and our dying is sorrowful. But yet in all this the sweet eye of pity is never turned away from us, and the operation of mercy does not cease ... Mercy is a property of compassion which belongs to motherhood in tender love; and grace is an honourable property which belongs to royal dominion in the same love. Mercy works, protecting, enduring, vivifying and healing, and it is all of the tenderness of love; and grace works with mercy, raising, rewarding, endlessly exceeding what our love and labour deserve, distributing and displaying the vast plenty and generosity of God's royal dominion in his wonderful courtesy"(Julian of Norwich, "Showings" chapter 48<sup>1</sup>).