

I. The Gift of the Spirit

Contemplative prayer is a communion in the very prayer of Jesus. The more we surrender to his love, the more we say Yes to his longing to draw us into the intimacy of the love which he receives from the Father. This is the very love which he gives to the Father, the bond of love who is the Holy Spirit. In contemplative prayer we share in the communion of love in which the very Being of God consists.

The communion of love which we experience in contemplative prayer is an experience of Jesus' own Spirit. This is the gift which Jesus gave his contemporaries all through his life. He was able to give this Spirit in a complete way when he reached the goal of his life in the complete self-giving which he offered on the cross. That was the hour which the Beloved Disciple calls his 'hour of glory'. This is the gift which the risen Jesus continues to offer to anyone who wants to be open to his love. This is the gift which comes to us through all the encounters which we have with Jesus, for his one desire is to draw us to enjoy the love which is the fount of his own life. In contemplative prayer we experience a love which wells up from God who dwells in the depths of our being; we are touched by a spark issuing from the fire of love which is God's Holy Spirit dwelling in the depths of our soul as Jesus promised he would (John 14:17).

Paul knew that the only way we can belong to Jesus is by sharing Jesus' Spirit (Romans 8:9). The more we allow ourselves to be led by this Spirit the more we allow ourselves to be taken into the heart of God, the more we enjoy the communion in love for which we are created. Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus:

'I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love'(Ephesians 3:16-17).

In pre-contemplative prayer we respond to the inspiration of God's Spirit inviting us to be in love. In contemplative prayer we offer our whole selves to God, trusting God to do the drawing. This is the work of the Spirit whom Paul calls the 'sanctifying Spirit'(Romans 1:4), the Spirit through whom 'God's love has been poured into our hearts'(Romans 5:5). It is Jesus' Spirit who inspires and directs our contemplation:

'The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit'(Romans 8:25-26).

It is Jesus' Spirit who transforms us through love (2Corinthians 3:17-18), till we can say with Paul:

'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me'(Galatians 2:20).

Since the second century, Christian writers have spoken of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit¹. The number seven is symbolic and signifies fullness. The traditional list comes from the Greek, and later, the Latin versions of Isaiah:

'The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety [not in the Hebrew text]. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord'(Isaiah 11:2-3).

Saint Ambrose, towards the end of the 4th century, wrote:

¹Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 87; Irenaeus Against the Heresies III,17,3.

‘Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts’ (*On the Mysteries* 7,42 - quoted in the Catholic Catechism n. 1303).

God’s love is all-embracing and so there is no limit to the ways in which we are graced by God’s Spirit of love. There is value, however, in following tradition by reflecting on the ways in which God’s transforming grace acts in our hearts through the seven gifts which, according to the thirteenth century theologian, Thomas Aquinas, dispose us to respond promptly to God’s inspiration. They may be compared to seven sails given us by God to enable us to pick up the divine breeze. They enable us to surrender to God’s action and so to move in accordance with the mysterious motion of God rather than our own determined and obedient will. Aquinas quotes Psalm 143:10: ‘Let your good spirit lead me on a level path’ and adds: ‘No one can inherit the land of the blessed unless he is moved and drawn by the Holy Spirit.’² A modern theologian expresses it thus:

‘The gifts of the Holy Spirit are special salutary modifications of the openness for God which is intrinsic to human nature. They also hold in check the forces of self-assertiveness, selfishness and sloth which resist the inspirations of grace.’³

In speaking of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit we are not dealing with a central dogma of faith. Nor should we be too precise in distinguishing between them or think of them as an exhaustive list. The traditional seven gifts do, however, express significant aspects of the way in which we are graced by God, and they represent a time-honoured way of reminding us of the fullness of God’s gift of his Spirit to us. In the Rite of Confirmation n. 25 the Bishop invokes the outpouring of the Spirit in these words:

‘All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord’(quoted in Catholic Catechism n.1299).

Speaking of the sacrament of Confirmation, the Catholic Catechism n. 1303 writes:

‘Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, ‘Abba! Father!’
- it unites us more firmly to Christ.
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us.
- it render our bond with the Church more perfect.
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross’.

Let us examine more closely the seven traditional aspects of the full participation of the graced soul in the life of the Blessed Trinity: seven effects on the soul of the living flame from the lamp of fire which is God’s love.

1. Divine Wisdom

²Summa 1^a 2^{ae} q 68, a.1-2.

³M. Schmaus in *Encyclopedia of Theology* Ed. Rahner, Burns & Oates 1975, page 648.

Human wisdom is an acquired skill in judging the best way of acting in the changing and often complex circumstances of life, and in putting decisions into operation. What interests us here is that special wisdom which concerns the purpose of life itself and the way in which we relate to the source of life, God Himself. To have this kind of wisdom we need to be graced by God in a way that is beyond the capacity of our nature. This is the gift that is most relevant to contemplative prayer, for it gives us a special sensitivity and openness to receive God's revelation of himself to us. It enables us to savour and relish the divine. When Paul claims that God alone is truly wise (Romans 16:27), he is speaking for the whole of the Biblical tradition:

'I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?' (Ecclesiastes 7:23-24).

'The root of wisdom - to whom has it been revealed? Her subtleties - who knows them?

There is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne - the Lord.'

(Sirach 1:6-8)

'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Divine Wisdom is God Himself present in creation and in history, gracing all things and 'ordering all things in harmony' (Wisdom 8:1). The Book of Proverbs tells us that God 'rejoices in the inhabited world and delights in the human race' (Proverbs 8:31). The prophet Zephaniah has God dancing to the music of the spheres and the harmony of nature 'renewing his people in his love, exulting with loud singing as on a day of festival' (3:17). In the Book of Wisdom we are told that divine Wisdom:

'renews all things, passing into holy souls in every generation making them friends of God.

God loves nothing so much as the man or woman who lives with wisdom' (Wisdom 7:27-28).

It is through God's gift of himself to us, the gift of this Spirit of Wisdom, that we 'learn what is pleasing to God' (Wisdom 9:10). We are assured that if we truly love this divine wisdom and if we earnestly seek it, we will find it, for we will find God (Wisdom 6:12).

Jesus is the incarnation of divine Wisdom (1Corinthians 1:30), the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14). He invites all who are thirsty to come to him and drink (John 7:37). He invites all who are walking in darkness to come to him, the light of the world (John 8:12). He invites all who labour and are overburdened to come to him and he will give rest to their souls (Matthew 11:29-30). Saint Paul exclaims:

'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?' ...

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.

Amen'

(Romans 11:33-36)

All things are *from* him, for God is the origin and source of all wisdom. All things are *through* him, for it through God's action that we participate in divine wisdom. All things are *to* him, for all wisdom is directed towards God, the goal of our existence. It is by keeping our eyes on Jesus and by opening our souls to receive his Spirit that we learn wisdom:

'There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.'

(1Corinthians 8:6)

In contemplating Jesus we see who we really are and we learn how to respond to the action of divine Wisdom in our lives. By his Spirit we are transformed, so that the life of Jesus becomes our life, his thoughts become our thoughts, his responses become our responses, his prayer becomes our prayer.

To speak of divine Wisdom is to speak of God's design for the world. Each of us is created and held in existence by God to be part of the beauty of this design. We will fulfil our purpose only by being open to the inspiration of grace. If we choose to resist grace, God can use even our resistance to further his mysterious designs. What a personal tragedy it would be, however, for us not to enjoy being part of the beauty of divine communion.

With the gift of contemplative prayer comes an invitation to surrender to God's loving action in our souls. If we respond in faith and allow the initiative to come wholly from God, then, and only then, all that we are and all that we do becomes suffused with divine Wisdom. Then we can begin to say with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). It is a journey of faith, for we journey in darkness. Our eyes are unable to take the brightness of God's light. It is a journey of hope, for now we have only touches of the embrace for which we are made and for which our hearts long. It is a journey of love, for it is in being in trusting communion with God that our souls find peace.

2. The spirit of the 'fear of the Lord': wonder and awe in God's presence

The following texts represent a frequently recurring motif in the Hebrew Scriptures:

'The eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love' (Psalm 33:18)

'Praise the Lord! Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments' (Psalm 112:1).

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 9:10).

In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux writes (Sermon 38.3):

'The Bridegroom intends to inspire the fear that purifies, that by this purification the soul may be made ready for the vision she longs for. It is a vision reserved for the pure in heart.'

Confronted with the transcendent and absolute Other on whom we are utterly dependent and who has absolute power over life and death, we are faced with our own mortality and sinfulness. We cannot ensure our survival. We are powerless and dependent. Yet revelation opens us to God who is love. The gift of 'fear of the Lord' disposes us to a sentiment of profound awe and wonder at God who holds us in being and who loves us so personally. 'Fear of the Lord' is a foundational religious attitude of living one's life in the presence of God and according to God's will. Something of this sentiment is found in the following words of Isaiah:

'And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"' (Isaiah 6:3-5).

We are not to fear God in the sense of being afraid as though God were a threat to us. But we are meant to take seriously our capacity to be lost. We are to fear our sinfulness and recognise our need for God's grace and forgiveness. The Book of Exodus makes this distinction nicely:

'Do not be afraid [God is not a threat].

God has come only to test you and to put the fear of Him upon you
so that you do not sin' (Exodus 20:20).

An anonymous monk in a book entitled 'The Hermitage Within' writes:

‘The point of departure for great mystical ascents is always the intense activity of the gift of fear. People like insisting on the “filial” character of this fear, but this presupposes a perfectly clear view of everything, which by definition keeps us in an abyss of nothingness below our heavenly Father. Harmless, artificial insults to your self-esteem are not going to make you humble. Humiliation has its compensations in religion: an ‘edifying’ acceptance of it raises our prestige and ministers to our vanity. But the Holy Spirit will deprive you of self-esteem from inside, by contrasting God’s grandeur and your baseness by its light: to the point perhaps of making you cry for mercy in horror of your abjectness: “Alas for me, I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips”’(Isaiah 6:5).

Saint Julian of Norwich writes:

‘Reverent fear makes us hastily to flee from everything that is not good, and to fall into our Lord’s breast, as the child into the mother’s bosom with all our intention and with all our mind, knowing our feebleness and our great need, knowing his everlasting goodness and his blessed love, seeking for salvation only in him, cleaving to him with faithful trust. The fear which leads us in this direction is gentle and gracious and good and true ... For the natural attribute of fear which we have in this life by the grace-giving operation of the Holy Spirit will be the same in heaven before God, gentle, courteous, most sweet; and thus in love we shall be familiar and close to God, and in fear we shall be gentle and courteous to God.’

(*Showings*, chapter 74)

‘Reverent fear softens and strengthens and pleases and gives rest. False fear (fear that comes from doubt and leads to a lack of trust) belabours, assails and perturbs. Recognise them both, and reject false fear, for God wants us always to be strong in our love, and peaceful and restful as he is towards us; and he wants us to be, for ourselves and for our fellow Christians, what he is for us. Amen’(The final words of ‘*Showings*’, short version, ch.25).

3. The spirit of reverence (found only in the Greek and Latin versions)

This gift disposes us to be ‘poor in spirit’(Matthew 5:3), to be ‘humble like a child’(Matthew 18:4). Saint Paul writes: ‘God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’(Galatians 4:6).

4. The spirit of understanding

This gift is especially active in theologians, catechists, and teachers. It enriches the capacity of our minds to grasp the implications of revealed truth and the meaning revelation has for our lives. The Holy Spirit disposes us to integrate our faith and to gain insight into the ways in which other areas of knowledge take on a more profound relevance when seen in the perspective in faith: ‘I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have understanding, I have strength’(Proverbs 8:14).

5. The spirit of knowledge

The grace of the Holy Spirit also disposes us to grasp truth more richly and more readily by guiding our judgment to assert truth and to reject error. Our judgments are true to the extent that our understanding is in conformity with the way things are. The gift of knowledge helps us to judge truthfully in the light of who God is and how God has chosen to relate to us. It disposes us to judge all things in the knowledge that nothing can be properly understood without grasping its relationship to the source of all being, God himself.

6. The spirit of counsel or right judgment

This gift enriches our judgment as regards how we should respond most creatively and in a way that is most responsive to grace in the changing circumstances of our life. The Holy Spirit disposes us to make moral decisions under God’s inspiration.

7. The spirit of courage

Everyone suffers. We are all tested by life. However, Paul reassures us:

‘No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it’ (1Corinthians 10:13).

The Holy Spirit is always offering us all the love we need to do God’s will and to tend towards the perfection of love in which holiness consists. The gift of courage disposes us to receive this support and sustenance from God in our trials and so to endure to the end and find salvation (Matthew 24:13). It helps to keep us trusting and alert to God’s grace even when our circumstances tend to reduce us to fear and impotence. The following statement comes from a book describing the crucifix of San Damiano before which Francis of Assisi prayed:

‘It is courage that makes saints, and courage is nothing more nor less than trusting in the grace that comes from God, and that is always present. For, in our trials and sufferings, God is always there ... like the space that surrounds a bird.’

John of the Cross reminds us of our need for this gift:

‘Though the path is plain and smooth for those of good will, you who walk will not travel far, and you will do so with difficulty, if you do not have good feet, *courage*, and tenacity of spirit’ (*Sayings of light and love* n.3).

We conclude this brief survey of the gifts of the Holy Spirit with the sequence composed for the Feast of Pentecost:

Holy Spirit, Lord of light, from your clear celestial height your pure beaming radiance give.
Come, Father of the poor, come with treasures which endure. Come, light of all that live.

You of all consolers best, you the soul’s delightful guest, You refreshing peace bestow.
You in toil are comfort sweet, pleasant coolness in the heat, solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine, visit these hearts of thine and our inmost being fill.
If you take your grace away, nothing pure in us will stay; all our good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew. On our dryness pour your dew.

Wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will. Melt the frozen. Warm the chill.

Guide the steps that go astray.

You, on us who evermore you confess and you adore, with your sevenfold gifts descend.
Give us comfort when we die. Give us life with you on high. Give us joys that never end.

II. The Fruits of the Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit make it possible for us to surrender to God's love and to experience contemplative prayer. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the fruits of the communion with God that we have in contemplative prayer. Their presence in our life is a good sign that our prayer is genuine. Teresa of Avila writes:

'When the active works arise from this interior root, they become lovely, very fragrant flowers. For they proceed from this tree of God's love and are done for him alone, without any self-interest. The fragrance of these flowers spreads to the benefit of many.'

(On the Song of Songs 7.3)

'The will must in some way be united with God's will. But it is in the effects and deeds following afterward that one discerns the true value of prayer. There is no better crucible for testing prayer' (*The Interior Castle* IV.2.8).

In his Letter to the Galatians (5:16-24) Saint Paul describes some of the fruits of a living our lives according to the Spirit of Jesus:

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit,
and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh;
for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want ...

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious:

sexual vice, impurity, unrestrained gratifying of sensual desire,

²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, divisiveness, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

I am warning you, as I warned you before:

those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, long suffering in doing good, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

²³gentleness, and self-control ...

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'

Let us follow Paul's example and look first at the kind of life we live when we are not living the new life given us by Jesus. Paul speaks first of sexually irresponsible behaviour. He puts this first because the way we relate sexually is central to who we are and to the way we express or fail to express love. He goes on to speak of impurity. We are aware of the harm caused by polluting our physical environment. This is nothing compared to the harm that comes from polluting the mind and heart. He then speaks of a general lack of discipline, whereby we give ourselves over to whatever gratifies our sensual desires.

Paul then lists idolatry. To find out what it is that we worship, we need to look at what it is that ultimately determines the choices we make. Do I idolise my so-called freedom, my reputation, my independence? What do I cling to even when it is clear that truth and love require me to change? He speaks also of sorcery. Rather than accepting our human limitations and the mystery inherent in things and placing trust in a loving God, we can be tempted to seek false assurances from people who claim to know the future or to be able to control spirits. Paul goes on to speak of enmities and strife. We think of the terrible results of racism and of other ways of failing to treat people as our brothers and sisters, made in God's image and likeness.

If we fail to respond to God's invitation to live as branches of the vine who is Christ, we will find ourselves acting jealously. In our insecurity, we hold on to what we have so tightly that we

treat people as objects and are unwilling to share with others when love requires it. When Paul mentions anger, he is not speaking of appropriate anger which aids us in defending ourselves or others against unjust aggression. He is speaking of the unreasonable and spiteful passion that can come over us when we fail to get our own way or have our own whims gratified. He speaks of selfish ambition, of stirring up trouble and causing strife as well as dividing people one from another rather than attempting to reconcile them. He speaks of envy: acting out our feelings of unhappiness that others are prospering, wanting what others have, never satisfied with who we are or what we have. He concludes his list by speaking of the lack of moderation and control in our behaviour as we seek to satisfy what we see as our needs.

In stark contrast to this is a life that blossoms when our behaviour flows from the communion of love which Jesus shares with us, the way we find ourselves behaving once we have handed our life over to the Spirit of Jesus. It is to this way of life that we are led when we are drawn into contemplative prayer. We recall Paul's words, speaking of what he experienced through sharing Jesus' life:

'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'(Galatians 2:20).

We are not surprised to find that the first fruit of the Spirit is 'love'(agapê). Paul is not referring to the spontaneous feeling that one associates with one's spouse or family; nor is he referring to passionate desire, or the affection experienced between friends. He is speaking of the recognition one has of the value of another person in the light of what God has revealed in Christ. He is speaking of the decision to give one's life for others the way Christ gave his life for us. 'Love', as used here by Paul, speaks of faithful commitment to others whatever feelings circumstances may cause to arise within us; it refers to our sharing in the love of the heart of Jesus.

The second fruit of which he speaks is 'joy': the joy of having Christ living in us; the joy of experiencing his Spirit in our hearts (Galatians 4:6); the joy of knowing that we are heirs to the promise (Galatians 3:29); the joy of experiencing the love of one's brothers and sisters in the faith.⁴

The third fruit is 'peace', a peace for which Paul regularly prays at the beginning and end of his letters. It is the peace we experience when we are in the right relationship with God and are living the life of Christ. It is highlighted in the post-resurrection Gospel narratives (John 14:27; 20:19). It is a harmony which is experienced in every dimension of our lives as Christ's redeeming love gradually transforms our heart and mind, our soul and body. It finds expression in the community when differences are no longer sources of injustice or insecurity, but variations which enrich the community as various instruments enrich an orchestra. It will be complete only when all creation unites in a cosmic hymn of praise.

The fourth fruit is 'long suffering in doing good'. This is sometimes translated as 'patience'. It is not the patience of bearing the burdens which life places upon us. Rather it is the patience of continuing to do good even when it is hard and causes us to suffer, and when we do not see the fruits of our good deeds. Paul is speaking of the passion of love that is determined and persistent and cares enough not to stand back while someone is destroying him or herself through sin. It is a fruit of the Spirit because it can come only from God; it is a sharing in the passionate and persistent caring that is revealed most persuasively in Jesus' giving of his life for us on the cross.

⁴Paul expressed this feeling often in his First Letter to the Thessalonians(2:19-20; 3:9). He also spoke there of the joy of knowing that 'we shall always be with the Lord'(4:17; See 5:9). This gift of the Spirit can last through all kinds of affliction (1:6).

The fifth fruit is a general one, 'kindness': it refers to whatever is pleasing, desirable, useful, lovely, valuable or morally good. Matthew associates it with the yoke of Christ as against the yoke of the law (Matthew 11:30), and for Luke it is characteristic of God who is 'kind to the ungrateful and selfish'(Luke 6:35). Closely associated with kindness is the next fruit, 'goodness': a disposition by which one is ready to do good to others (see 1Thessalonians 5:15). God is 'faithful': his love and his promises will never be withdrawn. One who lives by the Spirit of Christ shares also in this quality, as also in the 'gentleness' characteristic of the heart of Jesus (Matthew 11:28-29).

'Self-control' was considered a most important virtue in the Greek world. For Paul it too is a fruit of the Spirit in that the mastery over one's wayward desires is not something we achieve on our own. Rather, it comes from belonging to Christ. Paul is speaking not of control *by* the self, but of giving over control of the self to the Spirit of Jesus.

Looking back over this list we become conscious of an important and fundamental dimension of Christian morality. Paul does not take away the Jewish law to replace it with a Christian equivalent. The command is not directly to follow certain precepts: it is to 'walk by the Spirit'(Galatians 5:16), to be 'led by the Spirit'(Galatians 5:18). If we do this, the Spirit will cause the above fruits to grow in our lives. We are reminded of Paul's words to the Thessalonians: 'He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it'(1Thessalonians 5:24). Rather than our struggling to obey a law etched on stone, we are to open our hearts and minds to the call of the Spirit, and allow Christ to live in us.

Christian morality is a morality of love, the love revealed by Jesus on the cross. It is not an achievement of the self; it is a fruit of the Spirit. It is not possible without faith, but it is possible with it, and it is here that Paul places his emphasis. If we are concerned that we are sinning, the answer is not to subject ourselves to a system that is outside us. That will not give us the life we seek. The answer is to become more and more a 'slave of Christ'(Galatians 1:10), more and more allowing his Spirit to penetrate every aspect of our life. To 'belong to Christ'(Galatians 3:29) demands, of course, that we die with him on the cross (Galatians 2:20), dying to our selfishness (Galatians 5:24) and giving our lives in love for others. It is to live 'in Christ'(Galatians 2:16-17; 3:26-28; 5:6). It is to 'put on Christ'(Galatians 4:6). It is to have Christ as my Lord (Galatians 1:3,10) and my Redeemer (Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; 4:4-5; 5:1). It is to live by his Spirit (Galatians 4:6).

In contemplative prayer we surrender ourselves to God's love. This is made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love that binds Jesus to his Father. It bears fruit in a life which is an overflow of the communion of love into which God graciously invites us. We have reflected on the early stages of contemplative prayer. We are ready now to follow the great masters of mystical prayer as they share with us what happened to them in their prayer as they responded to God's invitation to enter more deeply into communion with him.