

### 03. God's Indwelling Spirit

We are created to be in communion with God. Grace draws us from the insecurity of our egoism towards God who is at the heart of our lives. When we respond to this divine invitation, we are drawn to share the life, the prayer-communion of Jesus himself. It is God who initiates prayer. It is God who draws us into ever more intimate communion. Transforming union happens as we allow ourselves to be drawn into divine communion by Jesus' own Spirit of love, the love he shares with the God he called 'Abba' (Father). Paul writes: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Romans 5:5).

To the Samaritan woman Jesus promised: 'The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (John 4:14). On a later occasion Jesus promised that rivers of life-giving water would flow from the heart of those who believe in him. John adds the following comment: 'Jesus was speaking of the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive' (John 7:38-39). At the last supper we hear Jesus say:

'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23).

'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us ... so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:21,26).

That God dwells in those who open their hearts to receive God is a constantly recurring theme in the writings of the mystics. Theophan the recluse, a Russian monk, writes in *The Art of Prayer*:

'Descend with the mind into the heart, and there stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you. The prayer takes a firm and steadfast hold when a small fire begins to burn in the heart. Try not to quench this fire, and it will become established in such a way that the prayer repeats itself. Then you will have within you a small murmuring stream.'

John of the Cross writes:

'The Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden in a person's innermost being' (*Spiritual Canticle* 1.6).

'God dwells in us and favours us with God's love. God says to us: "I am yours and for you. I am delighted to be what I am, so as to be yours and to give myself to you"' (*Living Flame* 3.6).

'Enter within yourself and work in the presence of your Spouse, who is ever present loving you' (*Maxims on Love* n.11).

'O most beautiful of creatures, transcendent spirit. You long to know where your Beloved is and where you may find your Beloved so as to be united with him. The One you love dwells within you. You are yourself God's tabernacle, God's secret hiding place. Rejoice, exult, for all you could possibly desire, all your heart's longing is so close, so intimate as to be within you; you cannot *be* without God' (*Spiritual Canticle* 1.7).

There is a danger here that we might think that because God is present in the centre of our being we might need to withdraw from the world to be in communion with God. We have already seen that God is at the heart of everything that exists. We cannot be in communion with God if we are out of touch with our own heart. In the same way to the extent that we cut ourselves off from the world we are cutting ourselves off from God. In the early years of the third century, Origen writes:

'Praying without ceasing means uniting prayer with the works that it is our duty to perform and joining appropriate action to our prayer, since virtuous deeds and the fulfilment of what we are

commanded to do are included as a part of prayer. If praying without ceasing means anything humanly possible, it can mean only this: that we call the whole life of a holy person a great synthesis of prayer. What we normally call prayer is only a small part of praying' (*On Prayer* 12.2).

A fourteenth century German Dominican, Meister Eckhart, writes:

'Many people withdraw from the crowd and wish always to be alone, finding peace in this and in being in church. Is this the best thing to do? No, it isn't ... Those for whom things are right truly have God as their companion, and whoever has God truly as a companion is with God in all places, both on the street and among people, as well as in church or in the desert or in a monastic cell. No one can hinder the person who possesses God aright. Why is this so? It is so because such people possess God alone, keeping their gaze fixed upon God and thus all things become God for them. Such people bear God in all their deeds and in all the places where they go, and it is God alone who is the author of all their deeds. If we keep our eyes fixed on God alone, then truly God must work in us, and nothing, neither the crowd nor any place, can hinder him in this. And so nothing will be able to hinder us if we desire and seek God alone, and take pleasure in nothing else' (*Talks of Instruction*).

While acknowledging the truth of this, we also acknowledge the special importance of interior communion with God and so of the inner journey of interior prayer. God is present at the heart of creation, but unless we are in touch with God at our own centre we will miss God's presence in creation and we will find ourselves dissipated and distracted in the whirl of things and events that happen around us and to us. For only to the extent that we are centred in God can we avoid being lost among the flotsam and jetsam of this world.

The inner journey is not, in itself, more important than the outer journey. What is important is to be in communion with God as we journey. In all our experiences it is important that our heart be awake and sensitive to the divine presence. If I am cluttered inside, my communion with God will be disturbed. Hence the importance of interior prayer. Hence the focus of these reflections on our inner journey. Discovering God within and being sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit in our minds and hearts makes possible a more intimate interior communion with God. It also makes possible a closer communion with God in our outer experiences.

A fourteenth century Rhineland mystic Johannes Tauler has this advice:

'Each time you are granted the solemn moment of recollection, leave your outer forms of devotion to one side if they become a hindrance to you, for inner prayer is precious divine life. Concentrate upon what leads you most to love, for instance the life, the sufferings, the divine wounds of Christ, God's essence, the Blessed Trinity, the power, the wisdom, the goodness of God, the good things which God has done for you. Whatever stirs you most, go with that, full of gratitude, into the ground of your soul, and wait for God there. Doing this with love enables us to receive God much more effectively than any outer spiritual exercise. The more inward something is, the better it is, for the external things derive their value from what is within. It is as if you had a good wine which was strong enough to change a whole ton of water into the best wine. It is the same with the life within, a single drop of which can lend our life of external devotion a higher value' (*Sermon 39*).

We all know what it is like to be distracted, to be out of touch, to be lost. We know how easily we get caught up in the outer world, and lose or fail to find ourselves. If this is descriptive of our whole life, we are indeed in a desperate situation. It was Jesus who asked the question: 'What is the point of

winning the whole world, if you forfeit your life? Is there anything which is worth exchanging for life?' (Mark 8:36-37). As individuals and as a culture we can be quite brilliant in our ability to discover, use, and even to a degree understand the external world. How good are we at coming to know and stay in touch with ourselves? Our deeds, our involvement, our engagement with the world and with other people are truly ours only when what we do comes from within.

To discover ourselves and to live authentic lives we must undertake an inner journey. We must be attuned to God's Spirit. Many people give us advice on how to do this. The advice we receive can be quite conflicting and confusing. Teresa of Jesus gives her answer and it is simple, direct and uncompromising: she tells us that the way to make the inner journey is to pray. If we are praying, other things can help. If we are not praying, all the advice and all the methods in the world are at best a way of filling in time. At worst they are further ways of deceiving ourselves. Teresa tells us that if we want to get to know ourselves we must learn to pray, and she is an acknowledged master in showing us how to do it.

Jesus invites us to pray always (Luke 18:1). To enjoy such prayer we commit ourselves to make space in our lives to focus on God within. The purer our inner gaze and the more intimate our inner communion the more we will respond to God's presence in the world as well as God's Word (God's self-communication) coming to us in and through every creature, every event and every encounter.

Constantly aided by God's Word, especially by the Word-made-flesh, we focus on God's Spirit and so on our life in the Spirit (our 'spiritual life'): our listening to God within and our responding in love to God, our communion with God within our own being in the experience we call prayer. At the same time we do not forget that this focus allows the Spirit to tune our being ever more sensitively to God's Word. When, through our communion with God's inner Spirit, we experience an echo of God's Word that comes to us from outside, we are vibrating to the divine harmony. We are giving ourselves over to the gravity of grace drawing us to the heart of the Father. We experience our heart in tune with the Heart of God.

Saint Augustine speaks of how he was searching outside himself. Then, through the grace of God, he became aware of the divine. His heart became engaged.

'Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you!  
For you were within me and I outside; and I sought you outside  
and in my ugliness I fell upon the lovely things you have made.  
You were with me but I was not with you.  
I was kept from you by those things,  
yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all.  
You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness.  
You sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness.  
You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and now pant for you.  
I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you.  
You touched me and I have burned for your peace' (*Confessions* x.27).

To share in such a religious experience, we must respect our heart.

'Heed the counsel of your own heart, for no one is more faithful to you than it is.  
Your soul often forewarns you. It is better than seven watchmen in a tower.  
While you heed your heart, beg the Most High to guide you in the path of truth' (Sirach 37:13).  
'More that all else, keep watch over your own heart, since there are the wellsprings of life.'  
(Proverbs 4:23)

We are to listen humbly and attentively to others, listening for God's Word. But we must remember that God dwells within us and God respects our heart. When God speaks his Word to us, we will know, for the Spirit within will say Yes to what we hear.

We have to stop giving in to distraction. We have to stop being too busy, for we will end up destroying our heart. We have to stop heeding the many voices that call us without truly caring for us. We have to stop running away from our heart. Let us listen again to Augustine:

'Return to the heart! Why are you running away from yourselves?  
Why are you getting lost, outside yourselves, entering on deserted ways?  
You are wandering aimlessly. Come back! To where? To the Lord!  
It can be done without delay! Return immediately to your heart!  
Exiled from your own self you wander outside.  
You fail to know yourself, you who want to know the source of your existence.  
Come back! Return to the heart ... See there what you can learn about God,  
for the image of God is there. In your inner self dwells Christ.  
In your inner self you are being renewed after God's image' (*Tractates on John* 18.10.1).

If we are attentive to God's Spirit in our hearts, we will hear God's Word in creation.

The Irish poet, Joseph Plunkett, experienced in creation Christ, the Word-made-flesh.

'I see his blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.  
  
I see his face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing of the birds  
Are but his voice – and carven by his power  
Rocks are his written words.  
  
All pathways by his feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,  
His cross in every tree' (Joseph M. Plunkett, 1887-1916).

The French Jesuit palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin (d.1955) speaks in a similar vein:

'Raise me up, then, O matter, to those heights, through struggle and separation and death. Raise me up until at long last it becomes possible for me, in perfect chastity, to embrace the universe ... Now the earth can certainly clasp me in her giant arms. She can swell me with her life, or take me back into the dust. She can deck herself out for me with every charm, with every horror, with every mystery. She can intoxicate me with her perfume, her touch ... She can cast me to my knees in expectation of what is maturing in her breast ... But her enchantment can no longer do harm to me, since she has become for me the Body of Him who is and of Him who is to come' (last word of *The Divine Milieu*).

To know God's Word let us grow in our knowledge of Jesus. To experience God's Spirit let us accept Jesus' offer to share his prayer-communion with God.

Before focusing out attention on Jesus, on what he said and how he lived, let us reflect on the central importance of love in our lives, for Jesus revealed God as Love.