

04. The Gospel has Eyes & Making Space



5. The Gospel has eyes (pages 28-34)

‘Imagine sitting on a quiet bench in the park, between some flower beds and backed by a hedge, composing a quite personal letter, absorbed in writing.

‘Someone is there. You notice this out of the corner of your eye. Someone is there looking at you; and has been for some time!’

‘The gospel has eyes – ‘the eyes I long for so’, John calls them – and the point comes on the journey where we meet those eyes which had long been looking on:

In the ‘*Flame*’ John has captured that moment, and delivered it to us. In fact it encompasses our whole existence.

‘If only, on your silvered-over face, you would suddenly form the eyes I so long for, which I bear sketched deep within my heart’(SC, 12)

‘It has been said that ‘a person is enlightened’, not ‘when they get an idea, but ‘when someone looks at them.’ A person is enlightened when another person loves them. The eyes are windows on to the heart. They search the person out and have power to elicit life.’

- ‘God’s gaze works four blessings in the soul:
 - it cleanses,
 - it makes beautiful,
 - it enriches
 - and enlightens’(Spiritual Canticle 33.1).

‘You looked with love upon me
and deep within your eyes imprinted grace.
This mercy set me free,
held in your love’s embrace,
to lift my eyes adoring to your face’(SC 32)

‘God is always like this, as the soul now sees God to be:
stimulating, guiding, and giving being and strength
and graces and gifts to all creatures,
holding them all in Himself’(LF 4.7)

‘The Father spoke one word, who was his Son,
and this word God is always speaking in eternal silence.
It is in silence that we must hear it’(Sayings 99)

Faith gives knowledge – the knowledge that can come only through love. Recalling Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman ('The water that I give you will become for you a spring of water, welling up to eternal life', John 4:14), John of the Cross in Stanza 12 of the Spiritual Canticle, compares faith to a spring, and goes on: 'If only, on your silvered-over face, you would suddenly form they eyes I so long for, which I bear sketched deep within my heart.'

In commenting on these lines, John states that 'it seems that he is now always looking at the beloved.'

Later in Stanza 32 he writes: 'When you looked at me, your eyes imprinted in me your grace, so ardently did you love me.'

'You looked with love upon me
and deep within your eyes imprinted grace.
This mercy set me free,
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I. 'The created world answers that he did pass this way, clothing whate

'Pouring out a thousand graces,
He passed these groves in haste;
And having looked at them,
with his image alone,
He clothed them in beauty'(SC 5).

2. 'The Son is God's face smiling upon the world.'

- ‘The Son is God’s face smiling upon the world.’
- ‘In the first place, you should realise that if you are seeking God, much more is your Beloved seeking you’(LF 3,27).
- ‘Where God is concerned, the problem lies in our desiring too little, and growing means expanding our expectations; or rather, making God’s generosity, not our poverty, the measure of our expectations.’

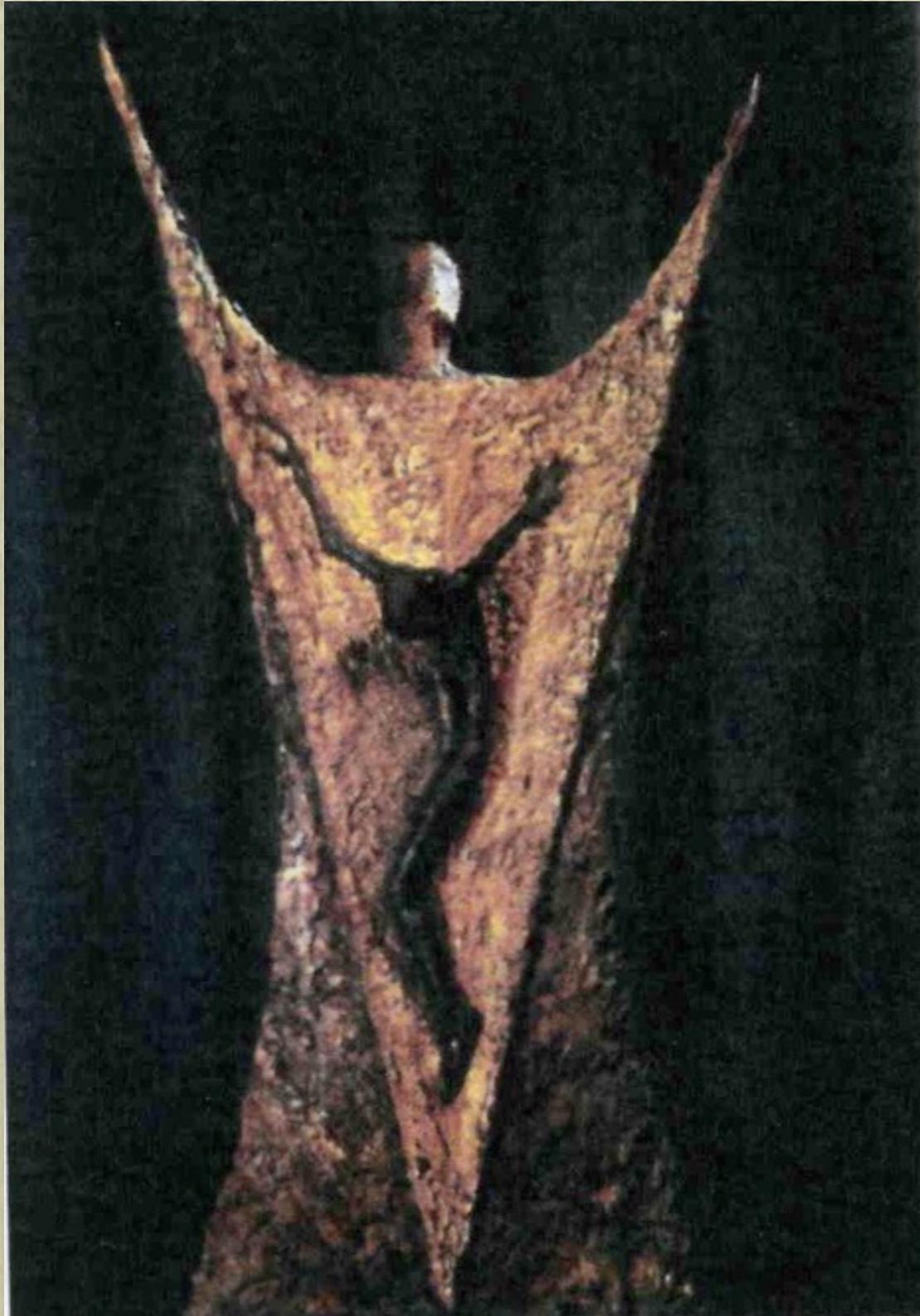
‘Enter within your heart and work in the presence of your Bridegroom who is always present loving you’(Sayings 89).

- The proper response to God's offer is trusting belief which engages desire.

‘Desire with all your soul's desire to come to what in this life lies beyond your mind or the capacity of your heart’(2Ascent 4.6).

‘Awaken us, my Lord, and shed your light upon us, that we might recognise and come to love the blessings that you always hold out to us, and we shall realise that you stepped forward to show us your favour and that you have not forgotten us’(LF 4.9)

Part III Space



6. The right kind of emptiness
(pages 35-38)

‘If you are seeking God,
much more is your Beloved seeking you’(LF 3.28).

‘Stranded and starving, somebody has to get packed up and sent off into the unknown to search for food, taking what water is left, hacking a way through the undergrowth, hoping somehow to forge a path to something somewhere.

But then comes the noise of a helicopter, and rescue approaching.

That changes everything. The one thing needed now is some space, so that what is coming can come.’

‘Making space for God in order to receive’(LF 2.27).

Make space to receive God’s gift which is nothing less than God himself.

- Make space to receive God's gift which is nothing less than God himself.
- John of the Cross speaks of climbing a mountain. This requires energy and discipline and a lot has to be left behind. He reminds us that the energy comes from God, and that we are to climb only in response to and relying on God's grace. We do not climb alone. God's Spirit is with us.

‘John steps out with vigour because the Other's love has wounded him, and there can be now only one thing to care about.’

- John uses the image of allowing the flame to enter into and transform the log.
- Also the flame that draws air into itself till it is transformed into flame.

‘It is the flame that does the entering, and the essential activity belongs, not to us, but to the Other, to the ‘Spirit of the Bridegroom.’

- He uses another image of unblocking a spring. The spring is from God and God wants it to well up within us, but we have to co-operate with grace to remove what is blocking it.
- In each of these ‘the emphasis is not on our forging a way, but on our getting out of the way.’

‘The summit of the mountain is a huge space – ‘and on the mountain, nothing’ – because it holds a total presence.’

The crucial question is not ‘What must I achieve?’, but ‘What stands in his way?’

7. Blockages (pages 39-45) The Ascent of Mount Carmel

- ‘proposes a way to break through the circle of our mediocrity.’
- ‘For John created beauty is beautiful – people, art, nature. What concerns him is not so much the person or things being loved, as the loving heart.’
- ‘When desire is out of order, it increasingly causes fatigue, anxiety, confusion, a sense of guilt, and finally an inability to do anything about it. It is a picture of addiction where the person’s dependence is killing him.’
- ‘Establish your freedom by saying ‘no’. No, I don’t need this, I need You!’

‘We are not talking here about giving up things, because that does not strip the soul if one’s affective drive remains set on them. We are talking about stripping away the craving for gratification in those things. That is what leaves the person free and empty in their regard, even though one still owns them. Because it is not the things of this world that take up space in the person or do one harm ... No, it is the will and the hunger for them that dwells inside’(Ascent Book I, 3.4).

‘The person has only one will, and if this gets caught up in a particular thing, it will not be free, complete, single, or pure – yet that is what is needed if God is to transform it’(Ascent Book I, II.6).

- ‘It is denying, not the thing or the person, but one’s dependence on the thing or the person, so clearing a space for genuine communion.’
- A bird held by a thread.
- The issue is ‘affirming a greater love, and transcending one’s cravings for the sake of that love.’

There is no freedom in having my eyes focused in on myself, and my heart twisted back and curled over on itself.

I must say No to giving in to this self-centred and self-focused movement and all that emerges from it.

I must deny dependence on feelings, on others, on gratification.

God is offering himself to me, and I must not allow myself to be absorbed in and distracted by anything that directs me away from opening my heart to God's Spirit.

My longing is to be a person in communion with the persons of the Trinity. This is love, not the false security of isolating myself in meeting my own more demanding and superficial needs.

‘Say No to your desires and you will discover what your heart really desires. What makes you think your longings are God's longings?’ (Sayings, 15).

- To live at the level of ‘sense’ is ‘to be hostage to one’s own needs.’

To live at the level of ‘spirit’ is to ‘live as a person among persons – fit for communion, for the love which can hold the Other, and be held, on open palms.’

It is to ‘make space for the gift of the Other.’

God is offering himself to me, and I must not allow myself to be absorbed in and distracted by anything that directs me away from opening my heart to God's Spirit.

My longing is to be a person in communion with the persons of the Trinity. This is love, not the false security of isolating myself in meeting my own more demanding and superficial needs.

8. Some kind of remedy (page 46-50).

Ascent Book I, chapter 13

‘To bring peace to passion and lay it to rest ...

endeavour always to be inclined

not to what is easier, but to what is harder ...

not to what is more, but to what is less ...

not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing ...

longing to enter in utter nakedness, and emptiness, and poverty

into Christ’(Ascent Book I, 13.5-6).

‘Essentially the message here runs: choose the person of Christ, and get used to making him, not your feelings, your ultimate basis for action.’

‘Endeavour always to be inclined

not to what is easier, but to what is harder ...

not to what is more, but to what is less ...

not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing ...

1. Context is on behaving in an appropriate and measured way

‘It will often be ‘appropriate’ to do what is easier.’

2. John is offering this as interim advice en route to inner freedom.

3. John wants us to see the value of being inclined in this way,
and to acquire the facility for making such choices where appropriate.

John is not telling us to ‘always do’, but to be always ‘able to do’.

Begin with a 'yes' (a Yes to interior imitation of Christ).

The 'no' is 'an affirmation of a greater love, a constant longing for Christ.'

'We are being invited to look again at our activities, including their burdensome side, and to commit ourselves to them afresh each day, for God. It is simple. It transfers us to the level of spirit, and opens a space for the gift.'

Do I really want to be free? Do I want to, but only partly?

'Step free!' 'I can't!' Then try to let a different love set you free.'

'The whole enterprise is a response.'

- ‘We are being invited to look again at our activities, including their burdensome side, and to commit ourselves to them afresh each day, for God. It is simple. It transfers us to the level of spirit, and opens a space for the gift.’ ‘The whole enterprise is a response.’

‘Who can free himself from his meanness and limitations,
if You do not lift him to yourself, my God, in purity of love?
How will a person brought to birth
and nurtured in a world of small horizons, rise up to you, Lord,
if You do not raise him by your hand – the hand that made him?
You will not take from me, my God, what you once gave me
in your only Son, Jesus Christ, in whom you gave me all I desire.
So I shall rejoice: you will not delay,
if I do not fail to hope’ (Sayings 16 - Prayer of the soul in love).

- I have to learn to say: "I don't need this, I need God!"
The Yes I say to God is in the context of saying No to my separate self. Only God can enable me to do this, but the spring will not force through the debris, nor the flame drag the log into its consuming embrace.

In the final paragraph of his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* Book I, John wrote:

‘In self dispossession the heart is at rest. It wants nothing. Because it is grounded on Jesus not on itself. It does not matter whether it feels elated or dejected.’



Opening to Love

I am opening to your love.
Safe in your heart,
safe in your arms.