

# John of the Cross

## I. Spiritual Canticle 1-12

The intense longing and suffering of the lover searching for the Beloved.

## Spiritual Canticle 1-3



## Bernard of Clairvaux Sermon 79 on the Song of Songs (Canticle)

Who is it whom your soul loves, for whom you inquire?

Has he no name? Who are you and who is he? ...

In this marriage song it is affections, not words, that are to be considered. Why is this, except that the holy love which is the subject of the entire song cannot be expressed by words, but only 'in deed and in truth'.

Here love speaks everywhere. If you desire to grasp these writings, you must love. For anyone who does not love, it is useless to listen to this song of love, for a cold heart cannot catch fire from its eloquence.

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I

*'Where have you hidden Beloved,  
and left me moaning?*

*You fled like a stag*

*After wounding me;*

*I went out calling you, and you were gone.*

- a cry from the heart that 'feels that God is far off and hidden, and feels that this is because she is so caught up in the midst of creature as to forget God'(I.I).
- 'The Beloved is hidden in the bosom of the Father'(I.3).
- 'The sublime communication and the feeling of God being near is not a sure sign of the presence and grace of God, nor is dryness and the lack of a feeling of God's closeness a sign of God's absence'(I.3).
- The communion for which we long is found only  
'in the mutual embrace of Father and Son'(I.5).

## Canticle 2:8-14

Hark, my lover! See, he comes: leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle, like a young stag. See, here he is standing behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, peering through the lattice. My lover speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come!"

See, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The blossoms appear in the land; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree yields its figs; the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come!

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff,  
let me see your face, let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."

## Canticle 3:1

Upon my bed night after night I sought him whom  
my soul loves; I sought him, but did not find him; I  
called him, but he gave no answer.

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I continued

*'Where have you hidden Beloved?'*

- 'The Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit ... is hidden in the soul and it is there that the contemplative must seek him with love'(I.6).
- 'The soul is God's most beautiful creation. So then, soul, so anxious to know the whereabouts of the One you love so that you may seek Him and be united to Him, know that you yourself are His dwelling place, his secret chamber, the place where he lies hidden. Rejoice and be glad, for all you ever wanted, all you ever hoped for, is so close as to be within you. You cannot be without Him'(I.7).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I continued

*'Where have you hidden, Beloved?'*

- 'Come then O beautiful soul! Since you know that the Beloved whom you desire lives hidden within your heart, strive to be yourself truly hidden with him, and you will embrace him within and experience him with loving affection'<sup>(I.I0)</sup>.
- 'More than all else, keep watch over your own heart, since the wellsprings of life are there' (Proverbs 4:23 – referred to in I.I0).
- God speaking to Moses who has expressed a longing to see God's glory: 'While my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen' (Exodus 33:21-23 – referred to in I.I0).
- 'Seek him in faith and love'(I.II).



## Indwelling



‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father is in me’ (John 14:9-10).

‘I will ask the Father and he will give you the Spirit to be with you for ever’ (John 14:16).

‘I am coming to you’ (John 14:18).

‘My Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home with you’ (John 14:23).



## Indwelling: John of the Cross

‘God says to the soul: 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).

‘The soul is like the air within the flame, enkindled and transformed in the flame, for the flame is nothing but enkindled air’(Living Flame 3,9).

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

‘The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he continues to speak in eternal silence. In silence it must be heard by the soul’(Maxims on Love n.2I).

## Living Flame Stanza 4

'How gently and lovingly  
you stir in my breast  
where in secret you dwell alone;  
and in your sweet breathing  
filled with good and glory  
how delicately you swell my heart with love!'

## Romance 4.15-17

'He [the Word, the Bridegroom] would take his bride [creation] 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.'

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I continued

*'Where have you hidden, Beloved?'*

'However confident you may be that you find, experience, and understand God, you must, because God is inaccessible and concealed, always regard Him as hidden and serve Him who is hidden in a secret way. Do not be like those foolish people whose understanding of God is so poor that they think that God is absent just because they do not understand, taste or experience Him'(1.12).

- 'Nothing is obtained from God except by love'(1.13)
- 'If you abide in me, you may ask for whatever you desire and it will be done for you'(John 15:7 – referred to in 1.13).
- 'Perfection consists in poverty of spirit in which God is possessed by a very intimate and special grace'(1.14).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I continued

You left me moaning

You fled like a stag

After wounding me.

- It is love that causes the wounds from which the moaning rises, crying out in the feeling of His absence, especially after tasting some sweet and delightful communication of the Bridegroom' (I.14).
- 'The soul, through love, is reduced to nothing, and knows nothing except love'(I.18).
- 'In that love-wound which God causes in the soul, the affection of the will rises with sudden rapidity toward the possession of the Beloved whose touch was felt. Just as quickly she feels His absence and the impossibility of possessing Him as she wants. These visits ... serve to stimulate knowledge and increase the longing to see God, (and consequently the pain when the longing is unfulfilled)'(I.19).



John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza I continued

*I went out calling you, and you were gone.*

- 'Going out from oneself through the self-forgetfulness which is achieved by the love of God'(I.20).
- 'Totally detached so as to be attached to You'(I.20).
- 'I will rise and seek Him whom my soul loves, by going about the city through the squares and suburbs ... but I did not find Him'(Canticle 3:2; 5:7 – referred to in I.21).
- 'An immense good is shown to these souls, as though through a fissure of a rock, but it is not given to them. Hence their unspeakable pain'(I.22).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 2

Shepherds, you that go  
Up through the sheepfolds to the hill  
If by chance you see  
Him I love most,  
Tell him that I sicken, suffer and die.'

She appeals to those who have mediated God to her,  
through whom she has experienced God's nurturing.

- 'By means of them God communicates Himself to her and gives her His divine pasture'(2.2).
- 'Even though God does not answer our prayer immediately, God will not on that account fail to answer at the opportune time, so long as we do not become discouraged and give up prayer'(2.4).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 2

If by chance you see  
Him I love most,  
Tell him that I sicken, suffer and die.'

- 'The soul loves him most, more than all things, when nothing intimidates her in doing and undergoing for love of Him whatever is in accordance with His will'(2.5).
- 'The discreet lover does not asks for what she lacks or desires, but is content to indicate her need, that the Beloved may do what He pleases'(2.8).
- 'You are better safeguarded against self-love and possessiveness by indicating your lack, rather than asking for what, in your opinion, is lacking'(2.8).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 3

Seeking my love

I will head for mountains and watersides

I will not gather flowers

Nor fear wild beasts

I will go beyond strong men and frontiers

- 'Some people will not take even one step to mortify themselves and lose some of their satisfactions, comforts and useless desires. If you don't go in search of God, you will not find Him'(3.2).
- 'The person who seeks God and wants also his/her own satisfaction and rest will not find Him'(3.3).

John of the Cross :*'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 3

**I will not gather flowers  
nor fear wild beasts**

The 'flowers' are the gratifications, satisfactions and delights which occupy the heart. Even spiritual consolations, if our attention is taken up with them or if we become attached to them, hinder the openness of spirit to walk the 'narrow way' of Christ, the way of the cross of the Bridegroom (see 3.5).

The 'wild beasts'

- fear of 'losing friends, reputation, importance'(3.7)
- concern: 'how will I ever endure the permanent lack of the contentments and delights of the world, and all its comforts?'(3.7).
- hardships, trials and temptations (3.8).



John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 3

**I will go beyond strong men and frontiers**

'Put on the armour of God that you may be able to resist the wiles of the devil, for this struggle is not against flesh and blood' (Ephesians 6:11-12, referred to in 3.9).

'If by the Spirit you mortify the inclinations and appetites of the flesh, you shall live' (Romans 8:13, referred to in 3.10).

- we need steadfastness and courage (3.10).

This picks up the theme of detachment – see Meditation 4