

## 19. Longing for God

We are made for love. It is our longing to be in communion that drives our basic desire to know. It drives all our ways of engaging the world. It is our longing for communion with God that drives all our praying.

Though this longing is natural, our practical, busy, everyday lives, especially in the extroverted world in which most of us live, can mean that we live largely unaware of it. When we do become aware of it, we can wonder what is happening to us and we are tempted to wonder if it is real. Maybe it is something for saints, but not for us.

It is vital that we listen to this yearning, and we may need encouragement to do so. The experience of the Psalmist can help:

O Lord, all my longing is known to you; my sighing is not hidden from you (Psalm 38:9).

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? (Psalm 42:1).

We must trust this longing. Like the deer longing for flowing streams we may not know what direction to take, or we may not have the energy to run. Let us be gentle with ourselves. It is God who has placed the longing in our heart, and, provided we attend to it, we will continue to find ourselves drawn.

We do not have to go anywhere to be with God. God is within us. We are simply to say Yes to God as God draws us inwards into our own heart where God longs to be in communion with us. Give in to the longing. Create times of stillness. Learn to 'waste time' in prayer, listening to the murmuring of the longing as it washes over the rocks of uncertainty, doubt, inexperience and novelty. The experience of the Psalmist can help persuade us that in experiencing this longing we are not alone:

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).

We are encouraged, too, by the words of Jeremiah, which tell us of God's response to our longing:

When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord (Jeremiah 29:13).

Teresa tells us that if we wish to grow in prayer we will need the eyes and the heart of an eagle. She assures us beginners that, though great desires for God can mask illusions and pride (we might fancy ourselves as better than others), the answer is to be found in humility and trust, not in the blunting of desire. She prays:

No, my God, no; no more trust in anything I can desire for myself. Desire from me what you want to desire, because this is what I want: for all my good is in pleasing you (*17th Soliloquy*).

Before the Spouse belongs to you completely, He makes you desire him vehemently by certain delicate means which you do not understand (Interior Castle 6.2.1).

To begin a life of prayer we must be attentive to the invitation of God whose Spirit is drawing us into the very centre of our being where God has made a home as in a temple.

To persevere in prayer we must, with awakened and attentive heart, stay in touch with the longing of our soul for God, for, as John of the cross reminds us:

God does not place his desire and love in the soul except according to its desire and love. Anyone truly loving God must strive not to fail in this love, for you will thereby induce God, if we may so express it, to further love you and find delight in you (*Spiritual Canticle* 13,12).