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The Simple Path, the Journey to Intimacy in the Dark Night

I opened to my beloved,
but my beloved had turned and gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer. (Song of Songs 5:6)

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Now, My beloved, My bride, I allow you to come out of yourself to seek Me, yet I do not allow you to find Me, for this is the dark night. Yet, the seeking of your soul for your Bridegroom in the dangerous dark night of the city perfects you, My bride, in perfect faith, hope, and love. 9/12/26

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How can the soul grow in intimacy with Jesus when it seeks Him and does not feel His presence? This reflection approaches that question through the voice of Wisdom found in the Song of Songs and the Simple Path as the soul enters the dark night of the third nail of crucifixion. In this deep quest, a soul is purified in the virtues of faith, hope, and love as it journeys to intimate union with its Beloved.

The theme of seeking at the heart of the Song of Songs also appears in the Book of Wisdom. In Bishop Barron's homily[1] on the Book of Wisdom, 6:12-16, he defines Jesus as the wisdom of God made flesh. He references Thomas Aquinas's description of wisdom being the "view from the hilltop." The view of things from the highest possible perspective; looking at the world from the greatest pattern of meaning.

My mind immediately began to ponder the beginning of our Path, in which Jesus, who is Wisdom, comes to pull us out of the pit of our wound. Living stuck in the pit of our wound is the opposite of seeing from the hilltop; it is a very dimmed view of the world, ourselves, and God. Jesus came to pull each of us out through the wisdom of the Cross, expressed in the Scriptures and made a living personal experience through the Simple Path.

Just as in the Song of Songs, Bishop Barron explains that Wisdom is a Person. In the OT, the Bible personifies wisdom as a beautiful woman who powerfully seeks us. The more you seek her, the more she seeks you. Bishop Barron asked, "How do you come to know wisdom, the pattern of all patterns?" And he answered, "She rewards the quest." For me, living the *Simple Path* has been an ongoing quest for union with God, a quest to reach the hilltop, heaven.

The Song of Songs is the love poetry of the bride and the Bridegroom seeking one another.

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but my beloved had turned and gone.

[1] https://www.wordonfire.org/videos/sermons/wisdom-is-seeking-you-out/

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The message our Lord gave us from 9/12/26 expresses this seeking powerfully, but it also reveals that Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate, seeks us all the more. The dark night is a stage in our spiritual ascent where Wisdom invites us to enter, as a means to reach the hilltop and discover the glory of God in all things, people, and situations.

Now, My beloved, My bride, I allow you to come out of yourself to seek Me, yet I do not allow you to find Me, for this is the dark night. Yet, the seeking of your soul for your Bridegroom in the dangerous dark night of the city perfects you, My bride, in perfect faith, hope, and love. 9/12/26

Before we enter tonight's reflection on the dark night of the third nail of crucifixion and turn to Chapter 5 of the Song of Songs, we need to understand the movement of the previous chapters. In the opening chapters, the Bridegroom invites His beloved to "Come away with me" (Song 2:10), but she at first refuses His call. Later, she has a change of heart, goes out immediately, and finds Him (Song 3:4). In Chapter 5, however, her search does not lead to an immediate encounter. She looks but cannot find Him; she calls, but He does not answer. He seems completely absent. She has entered the Dark Night: a season in our faith life when we do not feel God's presence within us, yet long deeply for Him. As we approach the third nail, we enter this reflection with the understanding that deeper seeking makes us more vulnerable and opens us more fully to God's presence and action. In such times, our own hearts ask, "God, where are you? Why is this happening?"

St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Ávila, St. Catherine of Siena, and Edith Stein would describe the intimacy of the dark night as a profound, loving, and purifying embrace in which God strips away many of our superficial comforts and securities to unite us more profoundly to Himself through a deepening and perfecting of our faith—a first fruit of the dark night. Enduring this profound inner darkness is the necessary preparation for ultimately receiving God's supreme divine light.

St. John of the Cross' most famous poem, *The Dark Night,* is also a prayer poem that draws us into the Psalmist's lament, helping us understand what every earnest soul yearning for the Lord experiences at one time or another. "Why, O Lord, do you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1, 27:9, 44:24, 69:17.)

In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross explains how God passively prepares the soul through two distinct purgations: the night of sense and the night of the spirit. Through these purifications, the soul emerges from darkness into the Light and into a more perfect union with its Beloved. St. John stresses that we cannot achieve this ultimate perfection of love through our own effort, but only through God's grace. Our book, *Silence: The Embrace of Love between a Soul and God*, presents these two distinct dark nights: chapters 1–5 address the night of the senses, and chapters 6–9 address the night of the spirit.

Our Blessed Mother said to us that it is Jesus' grace that will accomplish the impossible in us:

> *This last stage of your soul's purification is very difficult, but not impossible, for God, in His infinite goodness and mercy, is granting you and all His little victims of pure love, the graces obtained for you through my Son's passion, death, and resurrection.* 12/18/25

This is the gift Our Lord is granting us, His victims of love.

St. John emphasizes that the "dark nights" are distinct from ordinary human suffering. While illnesses, failures, or depression may purify the soul when borne with love, these experiences differ fundamentally from the contemplative purification of the dark nights. God, as the divine physician, performs spiritual surgery on the soul, purging its deepest imperfections. St. John of the Cross explains: "The very fire of love which afterward is united with the soul, glorifying it, is that which previously assails it by purging it, just as the fire that penetrates a log of wood is the same that first makes an assault upon it."

The Lord has explained this process of purification of the dark night with a similar analogy. He said:

> *When you enter the fire of My Sacred Heart, you are not yet consumed in the fire as one with the fire. It is as the log you throw in the hearth. It takes time for the log to be fully consumed in the fire until the log and the fire are one. This process has stages of transformation, just as the log has stages of decomposing. Once you've entered the fire of My Sacred Heart, you must be willing and abandoned to enter the dark night of the senses. My fire of love, which is the Holy Spirit, wants to purify you completely. 8/24/11*

Saint John of the Cross says that the first and principal benefit of this arid and dark night of contemplation is knowledge of oneself and one's misery. Here God enlightens the soul, giving it knowledge not only of its lowliness and wretchedness, but likewise of the greatness and excellence of God. From this arid night, there first comes self-knowledge; hence, as from a foundation, rises this other knowledge of God. For this cause Saint Augustine said to God: "Let me know myself, Lord, and I shall know thee." This is the work accomplished in the *Simple Path* at the foot of the Cross with Mary, in which we grow in self-knowledge, knowledge of God, and a spirit of true repentance.

From these aridities and self-knowledge, the soul begins to grow in spiritual humility and a deeper desire for God. These fruits distinguish a soul living the dark night from a soul living through ordinary dryness.

The writings of Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Edith Stein all sound so familiar to us, the mothers of the cross and missionaries of the cross of Love crucified. *The Simple Path to Union with God,* which God has given to us for the Church, forms us through many so-called *dark nights*. We begin our journey, as St. John describes, opening our hearts to intimacy with God by honestly seeking to enter the depth of our wounds. The *Simple Path* then leads us to uncover and face the lies, the disorders, sins, and falsities at work within us. The process of dealing with the pain of our wounds is a dark night, yet in this dark night the light of Jesus crucified penetrates into our wounds and unites them to His wounds, thus bringing us the delight of experiencing the intimacy of Christ's loving touch, the intimacy of

coming to know and personally experience the pain in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As we live the *Simple Path*, we venture into this work of opening the depths of our hearts, and Jesus can bless us with the knowledge of what lies in the depths of His Heart. The relationship of intimacy with Christ begins, and this intimacy continues throughout the entire *Path* until we reach the summit of union.

The *Dark Night of the Senses* offers a way to reflect on the stages of the Simple Path, beginning with the kissing of the feet of Jesus crucified and the journey of self-discovery and discovery of God's love. With the first nail of crucifixion, we enter the dark night of dying to our desires, expectations, goals, and earthly attachments. With the second nail, we enter the dark night in which our emotions are dimmed and purified, so that we may live them according to God's purpose and desire. Finally, the third nail leads us into the dark night of entering Jesus's desolation on the Cross. This comparison traces the movement of surrender along the Path without making every stage identical to the night of the senses.

The bride seeking her Bridegroom discovers the mystery of suffering as the means to intimacy with her Beloved. Edith Stein, in her book *The Science of the Cross,* writes:

> For in suffering she finds the greatest joy and her highest gain because it is a means to penetrate deeper into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God. Suffering purifies, and the more the purity increases, the deeper and clearer the knowledge, and therefore the purer and more exalted the joy, because it is a knowing from further within.[2]

She continues her insightful writings on the importance of suffering as the means, and only means, to union with God:

> "Oh! When will we fully understand how a soul cannot reach the thicket and wisdom of the riches of God, which are of many kinds, without entering the thicket of many kinds of suffering, finding in this her delight and consolation? When will one be convinced that the soul with an authentic desire for divine wisdom wants suffering first in order to enter the wisdom by the thicket of the cross? The gate entering these riches of the wisdom of God is the cross… and it is narrow."[3]

Hasn't this wisdom of the Cross, which is the wisdom of suffering, been our formation from the Heart of God from the beginning of the *Simple Path*? What has our Lord taught us that confirms the writings of these great saints?

> *All suffering lived united to Me, the perfect sacrificial Lamb, receives the power of God to bless the world with an abundance of grace… My little one, this suffering you are about to enter will purify you in God's radiant Light and transform you in Love…Focus now on suffering with great patience, love, and gratitude, with your eyes fixed on My Love crucified… 8/22/23*

[2] The Science of the Cross, Edith Stein, p.268
[3] Ibid

Long-suffering, if lived in faith and hope in the God who loves you, brings forth the fruit of joy, as you see in the lives of Tobit and Sarah (Tobit 2–3). Their long-suffering brought to light the darkness in their hearts, and when they were both confronted with the truth of their misery, they repented with tears and supplication, and God listened to their cry and blessed them with a joy beyond their imagination. 6/7/23

The Mystery of the Cross is revealed in My Sacred Heart. The mystery of God's suffering for love can only be found in My Heart; it can only be known in the communion of hearts, as revealed in the Two Hearts—the Heart of Mary and Mine. Participation in the Mystery of Divine Love can only be lived in the silence and hiddenness of your heart, love in sorrow unknown to the world and only known by God. The mystery of My death and Resurrection is reserved for those that journey into the deep of their own hearts to encounter My Heart. 11/20/20

Our LC motto is anchored in this divine mystery of Love:

SUFFER ALL WITH ME, NO LONGER TWO BUT ONE, IN MY SACRIFICE OF LOVE. 2/3/12

As we give ourselves to living the *Simple Path to Union with God*, and also come to know some of the writings of these great saints, we discover that they are all centered on the process of entering deep within ourselves to discover God within us, and that this inner path of transformation takes place ONLY through Christ crucified. In his fourth stage of ascent, St. Bonaventure explains that the solution to man's brokenness is the Eternal Word made flesh. And that only through Jesus Christ alone, the Crucified One, is the image of our soul restored.

> Who, then, will help the soul bridge the abyss which separates it from full union with The Beloved—humanly speaking, that which is unbridgeable? For there is one Being that is between the Absolute and all of us lowly creatures: the One Mediator, Jesus Christ. As the Crucified One, He came to St. Francis and, quite literally, transformed him into His own image and likeness. Therefore, the soul must now continually fix its gaze upon the Crucified and wait confidently, expecting the consummate union with the Most Blessed Trinity. In the Crucified Alone, all of us weary and battered souls know that everything is given—an undeserved free gift—even the grace of mystical union.[4]

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, through her long dark night of many years, is transformed into Love crucified. It was precisely in remaining in the dark night in perfect faith, hope, and love that she was consumed in the Light of God. She prayed from the depth of her dark night of soul illumined by the radiance of God's light:

> Jesus, hear my prayer. If this pleases you, if my pain and suffering, my darkness and separation give you a drop of consolation, my own Jesus, do with me as you wish, as long as you wish, without a single glance at my feelings and pain. I am your own. Imprint on

[4] https://franciscanmissionaries.com/the-stages-of-ascent-in-st-bonaventures-itinerarium-mentis-in-deum/

my soul and life the sufferings of your heart. *(Mother Teresa of Calcutta in a letter to Jesus, from Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light).*

Reflection:

- Our souls have deep, persistent longings for love, belonging, security, purpose, being appreciated and accepted... What is the greatest yearning of your heart that remains unfulfilled? How has this affected you, and how have you responded to it?

- How has the Path helped you grow in self-knowledge, knowledge of God, and deeper repentance? Have you discovered your wounds and named your disorders, sins, falsities, and masks?

- What has the Lord stripped or purged from you through the 1st and 2nd nails that has been most difficult and brought you deeper into the first dark night of the senses?

- Have you come to experience the deeper inner joy of intimacy with God through your sufferings?

- Ponder pages 90-98 in the book *Silence: The Embrace of Love Between a Soul and God.*