

Living Flame of Love

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B/H

St John of the Cross is welcoming us into his soul. This was his last poem and commentary before he died aged 49 (1542-1591).

His poetry takes us into a world of beauty and of mystery.

It reflects God and him.

Unlike the rich young man, John is staying. He says, “you are like this for me, thank you. You are there for me NOW. Like Mary’s Magnificat, it is a revelation of what we are receiving, a recognition and expression of gratitude for what God is for *us*. Mary did not mention what God had done for her, and John very rarely mentions himself, but just tells us what God is doing in us.

This place of recognition and gratitude is a good place to pitch your tent!

The Living Flame is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Bridegroom, Christ, the *living* Christ.

The poem, the Flame, invites us into the interior of Jesus Christ.

John’s commentary on the Living Flame echoes the poem. Compared with his other commentaries, there is less explanation and more impetus.

2.16

Father = the hand

Son = the touch

Spirit = cautery

This is a prose/poetry experience. John has to talk like this, poetry is his expression of God’s impression on him, leading to an echo, an exploration, with the prose.

John is bearing *witness* to that reality, the presence of the risen Christ, of what he is and what he does, sent by the Father.

When we are cruising and everything is going well, it is lovely. This is fine, God, I’m driving.

But when the wind blows and the waves billow (Teddy’s sermon on Christ in the storm today, “do not be afraid”) and I’m aware of my sin, I need to know what God is like. Will he accept me or reject me? Will he condone me and approve of me, or will he leave me on the shelf, with a tick – leave for later?

Or will he fill my life?

God enters through to the deepest centre. He enters to knowing me, filling me, giving God's self to me.

Catechism 2014: "Spiritual progress tends towards union with Christ, ultimate, mystical union. Mystical experiences reveal what God is like for *you*. They are grace revealed; therefore, John encourages us to trust.

3.6

God's gift empowers you, enables you. The lamps shine on the soul, it is many faceted, it is God communicating himself, filling the soul with joy and love. God is loving you, not in a toned-down way, but in its fulness. If I don't feel any of this, it doesn't mean it is not happening, it *is*.

No felt experience must be held on to, it is a pointer to how God is in you, loving you in the darkness of faith.

If I give myself to him, will he fill my life?

The caverns of my soul then give back, that is, empower me, capacitate me to be in a relationship[with God.

Deepest Centre

John marks out a continuum between my experience and reality. "You have not seen, yet you believe". I come to the realisation that I don't love like John did, that I am profoundly self-orientated. "Stay with me (not, depart from me), for I am a sinful man." The rich man walked away – if he had stayed God would have freed him.

In your deepest centre, God is having a fiesta, he is delighting in you.

We reach the deepest centre in heaven but we *are* centred here on earth. The centre of the human being is God. we cruise when we are in God, where we are meant to be, like a Lamborghini doing 110 mph instead of stuttering along at 30 mph.

Our centre is God within us, where we are most ourselves. We "feel centred", not fragmented and scattered and thereby unable to function.

DN 11,14 "Love the Lord your God with your heart ..." God is at work (re)collecting heart and soul, mind and strength. He excludes and rejects *nothing* that is human. We can't do this because bits of us are in the freezer!

This is an expression of God's project for you. Love is that gravity in you. The gift of self is giving yourself away to others, then I'm centred.

The four elements, earth, fire, water, air, tend towards their centres. So, earth, a stone, falls by gravity to the Earth's centre. But it gets stopped on the way, hits objects. If all these objects were removed, it would reach its centre. Fire reaches upwards.

Prayer

If I do love Jesus, that lets him unite himself to me. John uses several images:

Journey: up the mountain (narrow at the bottom and wide and embracing at the top).

Search for the Beloved in the dark night. LF 3.28 the Beloved is seeking her.

God coming in through clear glass.

Mother with her child, scooping him up.

Flame entering, cauterising, melting and reaching inwards.

All are God's endeavour, God's pressing in to fill me. What is required is not a programme, a "to do" list, but to pull back the curtains, to a letting go, a poverty. Clearing out the gunk is impossible by myself. It is part of me, stuck to me, so it has to be God who does it.

Night-time *comes* upon you (just as night follows day), is done to you, is what happens in you.

Gunk is the ingrown roots of selfishness in me. God transforms to a radiant coal/log. It feels deconstructing, I don't like the way I am. If God's love is infinitely generous, I feel my narrowness; if God's love is infinitely tender, I feel my hardness. This sense of deconstruction is a sign of the Holy Spirit's action.

The path to wholeness

Three kinds of trials:

If you are going through these, they do have a meaning. God desires to fill me, not with things but with himself. The door is stuck, we can walk away sad or we can say "thank you, God, for coming to me in this way".

Go to the place of the dental drill, where it hurts.