

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE

Words Cannot Express

Dear Reverend Mother, I composed these stanzas with a burning love.

God's wisdom and love are so vast that they reach "from end to end" (Wis.8:1) and the soul taught by God shows the same abundance. So, I will not try to set forth all the greatness of love. These stanzas arise from mystical understanding and cannot be explained in words. Yet "the Spirit helps our weakness" and intercedes for us with unspeakable groanings. (Rom.8:26) Who can describe what God shows to loving souls? Who can express with words what He makes them feel or for what they long?

Even these souls cannot express this. Therefore, they use comparisons and figures of speech. They hide some of what they feel. They utter secret mysteries rather than use clear words.

Not the Language of Reason

These expressions must be received by a simple heart. Otherwise, they will seem like effusions of folly rather than the language of reason. In the Song of Songs (and other parts of Scripture) the Spirit uses similitudes because ordinary speech cannot convey His meaning. Even the words of saintly learned men cannot express the full meaning of these comparisons.

I wrote the following stanzas under the influence of an overflowing mystical intelligence. Therefore, I cannot explain them. I can only throw some light upon them (the better approach). In this way, the stanzas are not reduced to one meaning and everyone can receive something according to their capacity. The reader is not bound to the explanation that I put forth. Mystical wisdom produces tenderness even without being distinctly understood. Like faith, we love God without understanding Him.

Not For Beginners

I shall be concise but I will use more words to explain certain points (especially the effects of prayer). I shall pass over the ordinary effects and write about the extraordinary effects (those beyond the state of beginners). This is for two reasons. First, much is already written for beginners. Second, I am writing for those who have been led to the bosom of divine love.

I trust that my use of scholastic theology concerning the soul's faculties seeking God will benefit pure spirituality. Some might not know scholastic theology (which discusses divine truths) but they do know mystical theology (in which the soul relishes these truths).

I submit everything to the judgment of the Church. Although I will use what I have learned from my own experiences and from others, I will not rely on this unless I can confirm everything by the divine writings, especially in difficult matters.

I will cite the text of the poem and explain it. Then I will explain each line.
(The saint wrote this text while in prison in Toledo. It was obtained by Venerable Anne of Jesus, for whom he wrote this commentary.)

STANZA 1
THE BRIDE

*Where have You hidden Yourself,
And abandoned me to my sorrow, O my Beloved!
You have fled like the hart,
Having wounded me.
I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.*

STANZA II

*O shepherds, you who go
Through the sheepcotes up the hill,
If you shall see
Him Whom I love,
Tell Him I languish, suffer and die.*

STANZA III

*In search of my Love
I will go over the mountains and strands;
I will gather no flowers,
I will fear no wild beasts;
And pass by the mighty and the frontiers.*

STANZA IV

*O groves and thickets
Planted by the hand of the Beloved;
O verdant meads
Enameled with flowers,
Tell me, has He passed by you?*

STANZA V

ANSWER OF THE CREATURES

*A thousand graces diffusing
He passed through the groves in haste,
And merely regarding them
As He passed,
Clothed them with His beauty.*

STANZA VI

THE BRIDE

*Oh! Who can heal me?
Give me perfectly Yourself,
Send me no more
A messenger
Who cannot tell me what I wish.*

STANZA VII

*All they who serve are telling me
Of Your unnumbered graces;
And all wound me more and more,*

*And something leaves me dying,
I know not what, of which they are darkly speaking.*

STANZA VIII

*But how you persevere, O life!
Not living where you live;
The arrows bring death
Which you receive
From your conceptions of the Beloved.*

STANZA IX

*Why, after wounding
This heart, have You not healed it?
And why, after stealing it, Have You thus abandoned it,
And not carried away the stolen prey?*

STANZA X

*Quench my troubles,
For no one else can soothe them;
And let my eyes behold You,
For You are their light,
And I will keep them for You alone.*

STANZA XI

*Reveal Your presence,
And let the vision and Your beauty kill me.
Behold the malady
Of love is incurable
Except in Your presence and before Your face.*

STANZA XII

*O crystal well!
O that on your silvered surface
You would mirror forth at once
Those desired eyes
Which are outlined in my heart.*

STANZA XIII

*Turn them away, O my Beloved!
I am on the Wing.*

THE BRIDEGROOM

*Return, my Dove!
The wounded hart
Looms on the hill
In the air of your flight and is refreshed.*

STANZAS XIV, XV

THE BRIDE

*My Beloved is the mountains,
The solitary wooded valleys,
The strange islands,
The roaring torrents,
The whisper of the amorous gales;
The tranquil night
At the approaches of the dawn,
The silent music,
The murmuring solitude,
The supper which revives, and enkindles love.*

STANZA XVI

*Catch us the foxes,
For our vineyard has flourished;
While of roses
We make a nosegay,
And let no one appear on the hill.*

STANZA XVII

*O killing north wind, cease!
Come, south wind, that awakens love!
Blow through my garden,
And let its odors flow,
And the Beloved shall feed among the flowers.*

STANZA XVIII

*O nymphs of Judea!
While amid the flowers and the rose-trees
The amber sends forth its perfume,
Tarry in the suburbs,
And touch not our thresholds.*

STANZA XIX

*Hide yourself, O my Beloved!
Turn Your face to the mountains,
Do not speak,
But regard the companions
Of her who is traveling amidst strange islands.*

STANZAS XX, XXI

*Light-winged birds,
Lions, fawns, bounding does,
Mountains, valleys, strands,
Waters, winds, hear,
And the terrors that keep watch by night;
By the soft lyres
And the siren strains, I adjure you,*

*Let your fury cease,
And touch not the wall,
That the bride may sleep in greater security.*

STANZA XXII

*The bride has entered
The pleasant and desirable garden,
And there reposes to her heart's content;
Her neck reclining
On the sweet arms of the Beloved*

STANZA XXIII

*Beneath the apple tree
There were you betrothed;
There I gave you My hand,
And you were redeemed
Where your mother was corrupted,*

STANZA XXIV

THE BRIDE

*Our bed is of flowers
By dens of lions encompassed,
Hung with purple,
Made in peace,
And crowned with a thousand shields of gold.*

STANZA XXV

*In Your footsteps
The young ones run Your way;
At the touch of the fire
And by the spiced wine,
The divine balsam flows.*

STANZA XXVI

*In the inner cellar
Of my Beloved have I drunk; and when I
went forth
Over all the plain
I knew nothing,
And lost the flock I followed before.*

STANZA XXVII

*There He gave me His breasts,
There He taught me the science full of sweetness,
And there I gave to Him
Myself without reserve;
There I promised to be His bride.*

STANZA XXVIII

*My soul is occupied,
And all my substance in His service;
Now I guard no flock,
Nor have I any other employment:
My sole occupation is love.*

STANZA XXIX

*If then on the common land
I am no longer seen or found,
You will say that I am lost;
That, being enamored,
I lost myself; and yet was found.*

STANZA XXX

*Of emeralds, and of flowers
In the early morning gathered,
We will make the garlands,
Flowering in Your love,
And bound together with one hair of my head.*

STANZA XXXI

*By that one hair
You have observed fluttering on my neck,
And on my neck regarded,
You were captivated;
And wounded by one of my eyes.*

STANZA XXXII

*When You regarded me,
Your eyes imprinted in me Your grace:
For this You loved me again,
And thereby my eyes merited
To adore what in You they saw.*

STANZA XXXIII

*Despise me not,
For if I was swarthy once,
You can regard me now;
Since You have regarded me,
Grace and beauty have You given me.*

STANZA XXXIV

THE BRIDEGROOM

*The little white dove
Has returned to the ark with the bough;
And now the turtle-dove*

*Its desired mate
On the green banks has found.*

XXXV

*In solitude she lived,
And in solitude built her nest;
And in solitude, alone
Has the Beloved guided her,
In solitude also wounded with love.*

XXXVI

THE BRIDE

*Let us rejoice, O my Beloved,
Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty,
To the mountains and the hill,
Where the pure water flows;
Let us enter into the heart of the thicket.*

STANZA XXXVII

*We shall go at once
To the deep caverns of the rock
Which are all secret;
There we shall enter in,
And taste of the new wine of the pomegranate.*

STANZA XXXVIII

*There you will show me
That which my soul desired;
And there You will give at once,
O You, my life,
That which You gave me the other day.*

STANZA XXXIX

*The breathing of the air,
The song of the sweet nightingale,
The grove and its beauty
In the serene night,
With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain.*

STANZA XL

*None saw it;
Neither did Aminadab appear
The siege was intermitted,
And the cavalry dismounted
At the sight of the waters.*

Three Stages

These stanzas describe the soul's service of God from the beginning until its perfection in spiritual marriage. It also refers to the three states of perfection (purgative, illuminative and unitive) and their qualities.

The first stanzas relate to beginners in the purgative way. The second to the advanced soul in the illuminative way (the state of betrothal). The third is to the perfect soul in the unitive way (the spiritual marriage). The final stanzas treat of the beatific state in heaven which the perfect aim for.

STANZA I

The Soul's Understanding

The soul sees its obligations, sees that "the days of man are short" (Job.14:5) and the way of eternal life is straight. (Mt.7:14) It sees that "The just man shall scarcely be saved" (Mt.7:14) and that this world's things are empty (2Kg.14:14), that time is uncertain, that the last accounting is strict, that perdition is easy and salvation is difficult.

The soul also sees that God created the soul for Himself and that it should serve Him all its life. It recognizes God's blessings, that it has wasted much of its life and will render an account "to the last farthing" (Mt.5:26), that it is already late (possibly the day's end). Conscious of having grievously offended God the soul is touched with sorrow, especially at its imminent risk and ruin.

No Delay

It renounces everything and does not delay for a single day or even hours. With groanings from a heart wounded by God's love, the soul invokes the Beloved and says:

*Where have you hidden Yourself,
And abandoned me to my sorrow, O my Beloved
You have fled like the deer
Having wounded me
I ran after You, crying, but you were gone.*

Experiencing His Absence

Enamored of the Word (the Bridegroom) and desiring union in a clear substantial vision, the soul complains of His absence – especially since it has been pierced by love. Although the soul has abandoned everything (even itself) yet it still endures the Beloved's absence because He has not freed the soul from the body so that it can enjoy Him in eternal glory. So, it cries out:

"Where have you hidden Yourself?"

Experiences Are Not God

The soul says, "Show me the place where You have hidden." It wants the Divine Essence because the Word is hidden in this Essence (the bosom of the Father). (Jn.1:18) This transcends all mortal vision and understanding. Isaiah says, "Truly you are a hidden God." (45:15). From this we learn that even the most sublime experiences and most profound knowledge of God in this life are not essentially God nor have any affinity with Him. Amid all these grandeurs He is hidden. The soul must seek Him in His hiding place, so it asks, "Where have you hidden Yourself?"

Sweetness and Dryness

Sublime communications provide no certain proof of His presence, just as aridity does not prove His absence. “If He comes to me, I shall not see Him; if He departs, I shall not understand.” (Job.9:11) Although enjoying a spiritual communication, the soul must not imagine that it is enjoying God clearly and in His Essence or that this feeling draws it closer to God. Also, when the soul feels dryness (with no spiritual communication) it should not believe that God is far away.

The first is no sign of being in the state of grace and the second is no sign of not being in that state. “Man knows not whether he is worthy of love or hatred.” (Sir.9:1) The soul does not seek only for sensible devotion (which brings no certainty of possessing the Bridegroom in this life). It seeks the clear presence of His Essence, (which it wants to possess in the next life).

Seeking the Essence

The Bride desired union with the Bridegroom’s divinity when she said, “Show me where you feed, where you lie in the midday.” (Song 1:6) The Father feeds only in His Son (who is the Father’s glory), and the soul is asking to be shown the Word’s Essence. Also, “midday” means eternity where the Father is always begetting the Son. The soul again is asking to see the Essence of the Son, the sole delight of the Father Whom the Son alone can comprehend.

The Word (the Bridegroom) is the pasture where the Father feeds and the bed of flowers where He reposes. He is profoundly hidden from all mortal and created vision. This is why the bride-soul says, “Where have you hidden Yourself?”

Hidden Within the Soul

So that the thirsty soul may find the Bridegroom and quench its thirst with the drink from His hands (to the degree this is possible in this life), we must answer the question, “Where have you hidden?”. We should point out His special hiding place so the soul can find Him and not loiter uselessly with wrong companions.

The Word, together with the Father and the Spirit is hidden (in essence and in presence) in the soul’s inmost being. To find Him, the soul must leave everything that belongs to its own affections and enter into profound self-recollection. It must act as if nothing else existed. “In vain did I seek You in external things, for you are within.” (St. Augustine) The true contemplative seeks God hidden in his soul.

O soul (most beautiful of creatures), you long to know where your Beloved is hidden. Now you know that you are the tabernacle where He dwells, the secret chamber of His retreat. Rejoice, for all that you hope for is so near. He is within you. The Bridegroom Himself says “The kingdom of God is within you.” (Lk,17:21) Paul says, “You are the temple of the living God.” (2Cor.6:16)

What joy! God doesn’t even abandon a soul in mortal sin, much less one in the state of grace. Why seek anything outside of yourself, when you have your riches, satisfaction and kingdom within you? Rejoice with Him in interior recollection. Desire Him. If you go outside to seek Him, you will be distracted and will not find Him. The most certain, available and intimate enjoyment is within.

Seek Him In Hiding

One difficulty remains, He is within but He is hidden. You must know the place of His secret rest so you can seek Him with certainty. That is the knowledge you ask for when you ask “Where Have You Hidden Yourself”.

You will ask, “Why do I not find Him or feel Him if He is within me?” He is hidden and you must hide yourself so you can find Him. To seek what is hidden, the soul must secretly enter the secret place. When the soul finds, it will be hidden like the One for whom it searches.

The Bridegroom is “the treasure hidden in the field.” (Mt.13:44) The wise merchant gave all he had to buy. To find Him, you must withdraw from all created things, hide yourself in the retreat of the spirit, shut the door upon yourself, deny your will in everything, and pray to your Father in secret”. (Mt.6:6) You will be conscious of His presence and possess Him secretly in a way no tongue can express.

Coming to the Hiding Place

Courage, O soul! You know that your Bridegroom dwells within your breast. Be hidden with Him and you will embrace Him. He wants you to come to His secret hiding place. “Enter into your chambers, shut your doors upon you (These are your faculties.) and be hidden a little for a moment.” (This means your life on earth.) (Is.26:20) During this short mortal life you must close your faculties to what is created. If you “keep your heart with watchfulness” (Pr.4:23) God will give you “hidden treasures and mysteries of secrets.” (Is.45:3)

Attaining Interior Secrets

God Himself is the substance of these secrets and the object of faith. When what faith conceals is revealed the perfection of God will be made manifest. “When that which is perfect has come” (1Cor.13:10) the substance of the secrets will be revealed to the soul.

In this life, the soul will not attain these interior secrets as in eternal life. However, if the soul hides like Moses “in the cleft of the rock” and is protected by God’s hand, the soul will see the “back of his head” (Ex.33:22-23) The soul will be so effectively united to its Bridegroom and so instructed in His secrets, that it will no longer ask, “Where have you hidden Yourself?”

The Two Guides

O soul, you must lessen yourself to find the Bridegroom. Yet, hear this one word: “Seek Him in faith and love, without satisfying yourself in anything or seeking to know more than is necessary. Faith and love are the two guides who will lead you to God’s secret chamber.”

Faith is the foot that makes the journey and love is the guide for its steps. While meditating on faith’s secrets, the soul will merit the revelation of the Bridegroom. In this life, this revelation comes by grace and divine union. In the next life, it comes by glory, face to face.

Seeking God

Even if the soul attains to the highest possible state (divine union), the Bridegroom is still hidden in the Father’s bosom. The soul will long for eternal enjoyment and cries, “Where have you hidden yourself?”

By seeking God in His secret place, you exalt Him. You esteem God above all that you can attain. Do not rest on what your faculties can embrace. Be satisfied only with what you cannot comprehend. Do not rest on the delight which you can understand but only what is beyond your understanding. Seek Him by faith!

The Hidden God

God is hidden and inaccessible. You might think that you have found and experienced Him, but you must regard Him as hidden and serve Him as hidden. Do not be like the fools who think He is farther away when they cannot comprehend Him. On the contrary, He is nearer when they are least aware. "He made darkness His cover." (Ps.17:12) When you are near to Him, your vision's weakness makes the darkness palpable. Therefore, in prosperity and in adversity (spiritual or temporal) see God as hidden.

"And abandoned me to my sorrow, O my Beloved"

All Thoughts to Him

The soul calls him "My Beloved" so He will listen to its cry. The Bridegroom said, "If you abide in Me ... whatever you ask will be done to you." (Jn.15:7) The soul can call Him "Beloved" only when all its thoughts are directed to Him. Delilah said to Samson, "How do you say you love me when your mind is not with me?" (Judges 16:15) The mind includes both thoughts and feelings.

Many call the Bridegroom their "Beloved" but He is not. Their heart is not totally with Him. Their petitions will not be heard until they fix their hearts more totally upon Him. Only love obtains everything from God.

"Left me to my sorrow" shows the continual sadness caused by His absence. The soul loves no one else and nothing else can console it. This test discerns the true lover of God. Is he satisfied with anything less than God? True satisfaction comes by detachment from all created goods. Perfection lies in poverty of spirit by which we possess God. In this life, such possession does not give full satisfaction. David says "I shall be satisfied only when your glory appears." (Ps.16:15)

The Groaning of Hope

This satisfaction never relieves the soul from groaning for what is still lacking. Groaning belongs to hope. "We who have the first fruits, groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption as the sons of God." (Rom.8:23) The groanings of the person wounded by love are heard. The soul feels the Bridegroom's absence. It has heard His sweet conversation and now finds itself alone. He has gone away and the soul says, "you have fled like the deer".

The Bride says, "My Beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag". (Song 2:9) Besides being shy and avoiding companions, a deer appears and then disappears. This is how he acts. He visits devout souls to comfort them and then withdraws so that he humbles them and makes them feel the pain of His absence.

"Having wounded me"

Wounds and Visits of Love

The soul says, "Besides feeling continual suffering caused by your absence, you wound me with your arrow of love, increase my longing to see you and then you run away with the deer's swiftness. You do not allow me, even for a moment, to lay hold of you."

We must remember that, besides God's visits which wound with love, there are also secret touches of love. These penetrate the soul like an arrow which burns with love. These are called the wounds of love. These wounds so inflame the will that the soul is enveloped and seems to be consumed. They cause the soul to leave itself and begin another life, as a phoenix from a fire. "My heart has been inflamed and my reins have changed. I am brought to nothing and I knew not." (Ps.72:21-22)

The reins are the desires which are changed and melted to nothing by love. This change is a great pain. The soul longs for God Who seemingly treats the soul with an intolerable severity. This seems unendurable, not because of the wounds (which are its salvation) but because the wounds do not cause death so the soul can enjoy perfect union.

The soul says, "After wounding me You abandon me, leave me dying, and then hide Yourself, running away like a deer". This impression is deep in the soul. The affections lead quickly to possession of the Beloved. Then, just as quickly, the soul experiences its inability to enjoy Him because of His absence.

Not Satisfying

These visitations do not satisfy the soul. They wound rather than heal. They afflict more than satisfy. Because they increase the knowledge, they also increase the pain in longing for the divine vision. These spiritual wounds are sweet to the soul causing it to leave itself and enter into God. The soul says:

"I ran after You, crying; but you were gone."

Only God can remedy the wounds. Their very vehemence causes the wounded soul to run after the Beloved for relief. This spiritual running has two meanings. First, the soul leaves all created things. Second, the soul forgets itself due to God's love. This love vividly touches the soul and elevates it. The soul forgets itself and is drawn away from its own judgments and natural inclinations. It cries "O my Bridegroom, by Your touch You draw me away from all created things and even from myself (for soul and body seem to part). In total detachment I cried after you so I could be attached to You".

"You were gone"

Has Lost All

I sought but found you not. I was detached but unable to cling to you. I was without help in you or in myself." The bride says, "I will rise and go about the city ... I will seek Him whom my soul loves. I did not find Him and they wounded me". (Song 3:2 and 5:7) The bride rises from inferior love to an ennobling love of God. Like the bride, the soul is wounded and yet forsaken. The soul is in pain. It has sacrificed itself to possess the Beloved, but He withholds Himself. The soul has lost all (even itself) and gains no compensation.

This sense of God's absence is so oppressive, that souls seeking perfection would die if God did not intervene. Their will is wholesome. Their mind is disposed to God. They taste some degree of divine love. So, they suffer supremely. They have a glimpse of an infinite good which they cannot yet enjoy. Ineffable torment!

STANZA 2

*Shepherds, you who go
Through the sheepcotes up the hill
If you shall see
Him Whom I love
Tell Him I languish, suffer and die.*

The soul asks intercessors to make its sufferings known to the Beloved. When someone in love cannot speak with the Beloved, they always try to do so through others. The soul uses its groanings as messengers to make its secrets known.

“Shepherds, you who go”

The Groanings

The soul calls her desires “shepherds” which feed it spiritual things. By these groanings, God communicates with the soul and gives her divine pastures without groanings. The communications are slight. Only the groanings that go out in true love reach God.

“Through the sheepcotes up the hill”

The sheepcotes are the angel choirs by which our prayers ascend to God Who is “the hill”. In Him, we see the higher and lower choirs. The angel said to Tobit, “When you prayed with tears ... I offered your prayer to the Lord”. (Tob.12:12)

The shepherds are also the angels themselves whom God uses. They feed the soul with His inspirations and defend her against the wolves of evil spirits. The soul calls upon these shepherds to be its messengers by saying:

“If you shall see Him”

The Moment of Grace

In other words, “If you come into His presence so He sees you”. God knows all things but He only hears all petitions at the appointed time. Then He is said “to hear and see”. Only after four hundred years did God say to Moses, “I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt. I heard their cry and I am come down to deliver them.” (Ex.3:7-8) Yet, He always saw it.

Gabriel told Zechariah that God had heard his prayer. Yet, God heard the prayer for many years. (Lk,1:13) If we do not cease praying God helps us in His time, “a helper in due time and in tribulation”. (Ps.9:10). These words “If you shall see Him” mean the moment He grants the petition.

“Whom I love the most”

She loves “the most” when nothing can make the soul afraid to suffer. She loves God above all else is when she says:

“Tell Him I languish, suffer and die”

Sources of Distress

The soul names three sources of distress – sickness, suffering and death. In His absence, the soul suffers in understanding, will and memory. The intellect languishes because it does not see God its Savior. “I am your salvation.” (Ps.34:3) The will does not possess God, its Comforter. “You make them drunk of the torrent of your pleasure. (Ps.35:9) The memory recalls that it is deprived of the intellect’s vision of God and the will’s enjoyment of Him. Also, it realizes the soul could lose God forever. In the memory, the soul experiences a death-like sensation, realizing she can lose the enjoyment of God.

Jeremiah speaks of these three. “Remember my poverty ... the wormwood and the gall.” (Lam.3:19) Poverty refers to the knowledge of the Son of God in whom “all the treasures of wisdom ... are hidden. (Col.2:3) The wormwood refers to the will which experiences the bitterness of being deprived of God’s sweetness. “Take and swallow the scroll. It will turn your stomach sour.” (Rev.10:9) The gall refers to the memory and all the faculties because it signifies death.” Their wine is the gall of dragons ... which is incurable.” (Dt.32:33) This is the loss of God, the death of the soul. These three sources of distress are grounded on faith, hope and charity which relate to the understanding, will and memory.

Presenting the Pain

The soul needs only to present its pain to the Beloved. Whoever loves wisely doesn't ask for what he wants. She only hints at her necessities so the beloved can show his goodness. At Cana, Mary just said "They have no wine." (Jn.2:3) Lazarus' sisters just said, "He whom you love is sick." (Jn.11:3)

There are three reasons. First, Our Lord already knows what is best. Second, He is more compassionate when He sees our needs and our resignation. Third, we are more protected against self-love. The soul says, "Tell my Beloved that I languish and only He can save me. That I suffer, and only He can give me joy. That I am dying, and only He can give me life."

STANZA 3

*In search of my love
I will go over mountains and strands
I will gather no flowers
I will fear no wild beasts
And pass by the mighty and the frontiers*

The soul sees that its prayers do not find the Beloved nor have the messengers helped. Its searching is real and the soul will do all it can. The soul does not delay its efforts and is not satisfied. Even after doing everything it thinks that it has done nothing.

Praying and Working

Now the soul actively seeks the Beloved, saying that He is found in all the exercises of the active and contemplative life. It rejects all comforts and all the wiles of its three enemies (the world, flesh and devil) cannot delay or hinder it on the road.

"In search of my love"

Besides praying and asking help from others, the soul itself must work. God values our own efforts more than the help given by others. Remembering the Beloved's words "Seek and you shall find" (Lk.11:9) the soul resolves to actively seek God and not to rest until it finds Him. Others seek Him only with words (poorly uttered) and works that cost nothing. Others won't leave a place they like, expecting God's sweetness in their mouth and heart without their abandoning a single pleasure.

Until they go out, they will not find Him. The bride sought Him in this way, "I will rise and will go about the city; by the streets and the highways I will seek Him Whom my soul loves". (Song 3:1) After certain trials, she "found Him". (3:4)

Seeking By Day

The soul who seeks God according to personal comfort seeks Him by night and does not find. The soul who seeks Him in virtues and good works, casting aside the comforts of bed, seeks by day and does find. "Wisdom is easily seen by those who love her and is found by those who seek her. Whoever awakes early will find her sitting at this door." (Wis.6:13) If the soul leaves her bed of satisfaction and sets out from her house (the will) it will find the Word of God sitting at the door and says:

"I will go over mountains and strands"

Mountains (which are high and demand labor to climb) signify virtues, which are the works of contemplatives. Strands (which are low) signify penances and spiritual exercises, the work of the active

life. Both are necessary. The soul says, “In searching for my Beloved, I will practice great virtues and lowly mortifications. In seeking God, I must do good works in Him and remove evil in myself.

“I will gather no flowers”

Detachment

To seek God, the soul must be detached from all evils and from goods that are not God. The soul needs liberty and courage to search for God. To gather the flowers of the world’s delights would hinder the soul’s journey.

Spiritual Attachments

The three kinds of flowers are temporal, sensual and spiritual. All hinder the spiritual detachment needed for the journey. The soul decides to gather none “I will not seek this world’s goods nor indulge in the flesh’s satisfactions, nor seek the comforts of the spirit so nothing detains me on the toilsome mountains of virtues.”

If riches abound, set not your heart in them.” (Ps.61:11) This applies to sensual satisfactions, temporal goods and spiritual consolation. All know that goods and bodily pleasures can hinder our journey. However, attachment to spiritual delight also hinders the soul on the road of the cross.

The soul must gather no flowers and have the courage to say: “I will fear no wild beasts and I will go over the mighty and the frontiers.” The wild beasts are the world. The mighty is the devil. The frontiers are the flesh. These three make war upon the soul.

The Difficulties

The soul calls the world “wild beasts” because she sees them as fierce in three ways. First, the soul must give up the world’s favor. It will lose friends, reputation and goods. Second (just as cruel), the soul must always be deprived of the world’s comforts. Third, (the worst) evil tongues will speak of the soul with contempt. Some see this so vividly that it is difficult for them to enter this road.

Generous souls encounter wild beasts of an interior, spiritual nature. They must go through diverse trials and afflictions. God sends these tribulations to those He will raise to a high perfection. They are like gold tried in fire. “Many are the tribulations of the just. From them all, the Lord delivers them.” (Ps.33:20) Truly enamored souls prefer the Beloved, rely on His favor, and easily say:

“I will pass over the mighty”

Using God’s Power

The mighty are the evil spirits who try to control the passes of the spiritual road. Their temptations are harder to overcome and their craft more difficult to detect than the seductions of the world and flesh (which they use to strengthen their positions). “The mighty have sought after my soul.” (Ps.53:5) Job says that no power can be compared to “him who was made to fear no man.” (41:24)

No human power is equal to the devil’s power. Only divine power can overcome him and divine light penetrate his schemes. The soul needs prayer to overcome his might, and humility and mortification to detect his illusions. “Put on the armor of God to stand against the devil’s deceits. Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood.” (Eph.6:11) “Blood” means the world. God’s armor is prayer and the cross.

Spirit and Flesh

The frontiers are the resistance and rebellion of the flesh against the spirit. “Flesh lusts against the spirit.” (Gal.5:17) The flesh is a frontier which the soul must cross by trampling underfoot all sensual appetites and all natural affections. Otherwise, the spirit will be hindered in advancing. “If by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.” (Rom.8:13) The soul must observe this process to seek the Beloved, the soul needs a firm resolve not to gather the flowers, a courage not to fear wild beasts, strength to pass the mighty and the frontiers, and an intention of climbing the mountains.

STANZA 4

*O groves and thickets
Planted by the hand of the Beloved
O verdant meads
Enameled with flowers
Tell me, has He passed by you?*

God’s Presence In Creation

I have described the needed abstinence from pleasures and the needed courage to overcome temptations. This practice of self-knowledge is the first step to knowledge of God. In this stanza, the soul advances toward knowledge of God through knowledge of creatures. Knowledge of self and of creatures leads to a knowledge of God. “His invisible things are seen from the creation of the world, known by what is made.” (Rom.1:20) These created things are both visible and invisible. “The souls seeking answers about creation are really meditating upon the Creator. (St. Augustine) In this stanza the soul meditates on material things and upon heavenly spirits.

“O groves and thickets”

Stirred By Creation

The groves are the earth’s elements – earth, water, air and fire. I call them “thickets” because they are filled with a good variety of creatures, plants, animals, birds and fishes. God orders all of these with animals on the land, fish in the sea and birds in the sky. Seeing all this, the soul cries out:

“Planted by the hand of the Beloved”

The soul sees that only God’s hand could have created and nurtured this variety. In many works, God uses men and angels, but the work of creation is entirely from His hand. In seeing this the soul is stirred with love.

“O verdant meadow”

Stirred By Heaven

The meadow is the heavens (which have an incorruptible freshness). Here the just are refreshed as in green meadows. The Church when praying for the dying calls heavenly things green, “the ever pleasant green of His paradise.” This pasture is “enameled with flowers”, that is, the angels and holy souls. The soul asks three creatures “Tell me, has He passed by you?” meaning – “Tell me what perfections He created in you.”

STANZA 5

*Answer of the Creatures
A thousand graces diffusing
He passes through the grove in haste
And merely regarding them
As he passed
Clothed them with His beauty*

Signs of God

These creatures testify to the majesty and perfections of God. This stanza means that God created everything with great ease and quickness. He left signs of Himself and gave creatures beautiful qualities, all in mutual dependence. He created all this in His Wisdom, the Word.

“A thousand graces diffusing”

Thousand means they are impossible to number. He diffuses them by spreading them all over the world.

“He passed through the grove in haste.”

“Pass through” means to create. He also gave creatures the power to generate and self-serve. He left traces of His passage which reveal His Majesty and attributes. He passed through in haste because these are the least of His works. He makes them in passing. The Word becoming flesh is His greatest work. In comparison, everything else is done in haste.

*“And thereby regarding them as He passed,
clothed them with His beauty.”*

Clothed in the Word

The Word is “the very imprint of His being.” (Heb.1:3) God saw everything in His Son’s face and made all creatures perfect. “God saw that they were very good” (Gen.1:31) because He clothed them in the beauty of His Son. With man, He gave a supernatural being. In man, God exalted all creatures. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all things to Myself.” (Jn.12:32) In the Incarnation and Resurrection, the Father clothed creatures with new beauty and dignity.

STANZA 6

*The Bride
Oh! Who can heal me
Give me perfectly Yourself
Send me no more
A messenger
Who cannot tell me what I wish*

In vivid contemplation and knowledge of created things, the soul sees this multiplicity of beauty given by God. Creatures seem clothed with a supernatural beauty derived from the supernatural beauty of God’s face. “You fill with blessing every living creature.” (Ps.144:16) Wounded by that created beauty, the soul seeks its source:

Greater Desires

The soul sees traces of the Beloved in creation's beauty. Therefore, its love increases as does the pain coming from His absence. The greater knowledge causes greater desires to see. No remedy exists for this pain except to see the Beloved. The soul distrusts any other remedy, saying, "Do not send me just knowledge of Your grandeur. That only increases the pain. Only Your presence will satisfy." Only the vision of God will satisfy the will.

"O, who can heal me?"

No delight of the world or satisfaction of the senses nor sweet tastes of the spirit can content the soul.

"Give me at once Yourself."

Just Messengers

Every soul that loves God can never be content with anything created. Created things only increase the soul's hunger for God. Every knowledge and communication are just messengers which suggest Him. They are like crumbs of food which stimulate the appetite. Mourning this situation of seeing only messengers, the soul says "Give me at once Yourself."

Our knowledge of God in this life is not perfectly true, but partial and incomplete. The soul seeks essential knowledge and says:

"Send me no more messengers"

"I do not want to know You in this imperfect way. Your messengers are far different from my desires and increase my pain at Your absence. They renew the wound You inflicted and delay your coming. Don't send me this inadequate communication which satisfied me when I had only slight knowledge and love. My love is great now and they do not satisfy me."

The Bridegroom Himself

"O Bridegroom, You gave yourself partially. Now give me Yourself totally. You showed me glimpses. Now show Yourself clearly. You used messengers. Now come Yourself. In your visits you were about to give me the pearl of possessing You but now you have hidden this pearl. Give me Yourself in truth."

"Send me no messengers who cannot tell me what I wish"

I want You totally and your messengers cannot know or speak of You totally. Nothing created in heaven or earth can tell me what I wish. You, then, be the messenger."

STANZA 7

*All they who serve are telling me
Of your unnumbered graces;
And all wound me more and more
And something leaves me dying
I know not what, of which they are darkly speaking*

In the previous stanza, the soul was wounded or sick with love because irrational creatures gave her some knowledge of her Beloved. Now the soul speaks of knowledge gained from rational creatures

(angels and men). The soul is dying from love due to God's immensity which is partially revealed through rational creation. The soul says, "I knew not what," meaning it cannot be described.

Three Pains

The soul experiences three kinds of pain. The first is a slight wound which heals quickly because it comes from lower creatures. This is called "sickness". "Daughters of Jerusalem (the creatures) if you find my Beloved, tell Him that I languish with love." (Song 5:8)

The second is a sore, deeper than the wound and longer lasting. It is a festering wound and the soul feels it is dying. This sore comes from knowing the Incarnation and the mysteries of faith. These greater works produce greater love in the soul. The Bridegroom says, "Sister, you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck." (Song 4:9) The eye means faith in the Incarnation. The hair signifies love of the Incarnation.

The third pain is as if the whole soul is dying from a festering of the wound caused by knowledge of the Divinity. It is the "I know not what" which the creatures cannot describe. The touch is neither great nor continuous (otherwise, soul and body would part). The soul is dying from love, even more because it cannot die. This is called impatient love. Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, otherwise I shall die." (Gen.30:1)

A Wound and Death

These rational creatures cause two kinds of suffering. First, they cause a sore wound by describing a thousand graces in faith's mystery and in God's wisdom. Second, they cause death when they speak indistinctly. Their words unveil to the soul a knowledge of the divinity.

"All they who serve"

Only angels and men serve God with intelligence. Angels serve by contemplation in heaven. Men serve by longing for God on earth. Because the soul knows God more distinctly by the interior inspirations of angels and the exterior teaching of men, the soul says:

"Telling me of your unnumbered graces"

They tell me of your wonders in the Incarnation and the mysteries of faith. They tell much more because they have great desires to reveal.

"And all wound me more and more"

The more the angels inspire and the more men teach, the more they wound me more with love.

*"And something leaves me dying. I know not what,
of which they are darkly speaking."*

Unspoken And Unknown

Besides inflicting a wound (by telling the soul of unnumbered graces), angels and men leave some things unknown and unspoken. A trace of God's footsteps are revealed to the soul which then must search for a profound knowledge, called "I know not what". What the soul can comprehend inflicts a wound and a festering sore. What the soul cannot comprehend (yet feels profoundly) kills the soul.

Occasionally, this happens to advanced souls whom God favors with a profound knowledge. By this they apprehend the greatness of God. In this state, they see clearly that they do not know God. They see that the greatest comprehension is not to comprehend.

Unable to Comprehend

One of God's greatest favors (given briefly in this life) allows the soul to see so distinctly and feel so profoundly that the soul understands it can never comprehend God at all. These souls are like the saints in heaven because those who most perfectly perceive are able to see that God is infinitely incomprehensible. Those who see less clearly, understand this only indistinctly. Inexperienced souls don't understand this at all. Experienced souls know there is something further and call it "I know not what". Because this is felt but not comprehended, these creatures speak indistinctly. It is the speech of infants who cannot convey what they feel.

More Complaints

When God favors the soul, by giving it spiritual knowledge of other creatures, he gives some lesser illuminations. These revelations of God's grandeurs are not totally understandable and no explanation is given. The soul continues to complain and speaks to its own life, saying:

STANZA 8

*But how you persevere, O life
Not living where you live
The arrows bring death
Which you receive
From your conceptions of your Beloved*

Still Alive

The soul sees itself as dying of love, yet it cannot die to enjoy that love. So, it complains about having bodily life which delays the full spiritual life (in heaven). This stanza means: "O soul, how do you continue living in the flesh when it deprives you of your true spiritual life in God, where your true life is. If this is true, how can you stay in your frail body? The wounds caused by the Beloved are enough to end your life. They are very deep and all your feelings and all your knowledge are touches and wounds that kill.

"But how you persevere, O life! Not living where you live"

Life In God

Remember that the soul lives where it loves, not in the body that it animates. The soul does not live by the body but gives life to the body. Besides its love for God, the soul also has a radical and natural life in God (like all created things). "In Him, we live and more and have our being." (Acts 17:28) Our life and being is in God. All creation is life in God. "What was made, in Him was life." (Jn.1-3)

The soul sees that its natural life is in God (by creation) and that its spiritual life is in God (through love). It complains that a frail, physical body (which it has by nature) can hinder the enjoyment of its delicious life in God (which it has by love). The soul earnestly insists on this complaint. It suffers because the natural life in the body was against the spiritual life in God. Leading this double life causes great pain which hinders the delicious life. Natural life is like death depriving the soul of its spiritual life. The soul vividly depicts the hardships of this fragile life.

“The arrows bring death which you receive”

A Wounded Deer

How can the soul stay in the body when the Beloved’s touches of love (the arrows) are enough to end life? These arrows are so fruitful, impregnating the soul with knowledge and love of God.

“From your conceptions of your Beloved”

The soul knows of God’s majesty, beauty and power.

A deer, wounded by a poison arrow, seeks relief in every way. It plunges again and again into the water but the poison spreads until it reaches the heart and causes death. Pierced by the Beloved’s arrow, the soul always seeks relief but does not succeed. No matter what it does, the pain increases. There is no remedy. The soul resigns herself into the hands of the Beloved. He wounded her so He may relieve the soul and slay the vehemence of love. The soul says to the Bridegroom:

STANZA 9

Why, after wounding

This heart, have you not healed it?

And why, after stealing it,

Have you thus abandoned it

And not carried away the stolen prey?

Surrendered

Until it finds relief, the soul returns to the Beloved to complain of its pain and to set forth its griefs. The soul is wounded and lonely. Only the Beloved can heal it. Why did the Beloved wound the soul with knowledge yet withhold the vision of His presence which can heal? He has stolen the soul by love which inflames. Why has He now abandoned her? The soul now has no power over her heart. It is surrendered. Yet, the Beloved does not take the soul into the transforming love of glory.

“Why, after wounding this heart, have you not healed it?”

Wounded But Not Dead

The soul doesn’t complain of its wound (for its joy is greater when the wound is deeper). It complains that the wound doesn’t lead to death. These wounds are so sweet that they cannot satisfy unless they kill. Once wounded, the soul wants only to die. “You struck a deep wound but haven’t healed me by killing me.” You cause affliction by the wound but not health by death. The soul is wounded by your absence but is not healed by the glory of Your presence.

“And why, after stealing it, have you thus abandoned it?”

The robber dispossesses the owner of his goods to possess them himself. The Beloved is different. He has robbed the soul of its heart and left it behind. He has not taken the heart into his possession (as a thief does).

A person in love “has lost their heart” or had it stolen. The person no longer has herself. She is the property of the beloved.

Proof of Love

This enables the soul to know whether it loves God or not. If it loves God it will have no heart for its own pleasure but only for God's honor and pleasure. If it does not love God, the heart will be occupied with itself and less occupied it is with God.

There are two signs that God has stolen the heart. First, if the soul anxiously seeks God and secondly, if the soul takes pleasure only in Him. The heart has peace only by possessing something. When it loves something, the soul does not possess itself. It does not possess what it desires. This is a state of weariness and equals its degree of loss. Until it possesses it is not satisfied. Until then, the soul is like an empty vessel waiting to be filled or like a man suspended in air.

“and not carried away the stolen prey”

Reward of Love

“Why didn't You carry away what You stole so you could give it perfect rest in Yourself?”

To be conformed to the Beloved, the loving soul must seek recompense for its love. Otherwise, this would not be true love. This recompense is a greater degree of love until reaching perfect love. Love is the only reward for love.

The soul longs for love's consummation so it might be refreshed. Job says, “The wearied servant seeks the cooling shade. The hireling wants the day's work to end. I had empty months and wearisome nights.”(Job 7:2-4) The soul seeks the end of its work which is the perfect love of God. Until this is gained, Job's words will be true.” Months will be empty and nights wearisome.” The soul which loves God must seek no other reward than to love God perfectly.

Like A Sick Man

The soul, at this stage, resembles a sick man to whom food is loathsome. Everything is an annoyance. In all his thoughts and feelings he desires only health. Whatever doesn't contribute to that is oppressive. The soul has three peculiarities: First, in all circumstances, it thinks of the Beloved even though the soul must attend to business, its heart remains with the Beloved. Second, from this, comes a loss of pleasure in everything. Third, from this comes a weariness in all things.

Having tasted the food of God's love, the soul must always seek the enjoyment of the Beloved, as Mary Magdalene sought Him in the garden. “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him.” (Jn.20:15)

The soul is under an influence. It must find Him in all things. Not finding Him, the soul takes no pleasure in created things and is exceedingly tormented in them. The soul suffers greatly in worldly conversations and business.

Three Problems

The bride in the Canticle mentions these three. “I sought Him and found Him not. The keepers that go about the city found me. They struck me and wounded me. The keepers of the walls took away my cloak.” (Song 6:6-7) “Those that go about the city” are worldly affairs. They find the soul and inflict many wounds and impede the soul. The “keepers of the wall” are the evil spirits and worldly business that do not allow the soul to enter contemplation. All this is an infinite vexation. Without the vision of God, the soul gets no relief and complains to the Beloved.

STANZA 10

*Quench my troubles
For no one else can soothe them
And let my eyes behold you
For you are their light
And I will keep them for You alone*

The soul asks the Beloved to end its anxieties so her eyes can see Him for He is their light.

“Quench my troubles”

A Wearied Longing

The desire of love has this quality –whatever does not become conformed to the Beloved wearies and annoys the soul because her desires are unfulfilled. This weary longing for God’s vision is called “troubles” which only possessing the Beloved can remove. The soul asks that its fevered desires be cooled by His presence. “Quench” shows the sufferings are due to the fire of love.

“For no one else can soothe them.”

Rewarding the Beloved

To persuade the Beloved, the soul reminds Him that no other can satisfy. When a soul seeks no satisfaction outside of the Beloved, it will quickly be visited by the Beloved.

“And let my eyes behold You” –

That is “May I see you face to face”.

“For you are their light.”

God is the soul’s supernatural light, and in excess of affection, the soul calls God the light of its eyes. David lamented, “The very light of my eyes has failed.” (Ps. 38:11) “What joy do I have who see not the light of heaven?” (Tob.5:12) John speaks of the city “whose lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev.21:23)

“And I will keep them for you alone.”

Besides complaining of its darkness, the soul promises to look only on the Beloved. A soul is deprived of divine light when it looks at what is not God. In contrast, a soul is rewarded for shutting its eyes to all else and opening them only for God.

God’s Presence

The Bridegroom cannot stand to see the soul suffer for long. “He that touches you, touches the apple of My eye.” (Zech.2:8) “Even before they call, I will hear them.” (Is.65:24) God grants a spiritual presence of Himself to souls that have abandoned all things, including itself.

In that presence, He gives profound glimpses of His divinity which increase the soul’s desires. As a person throws water on coals of fire to cause more intense heat, God makes revelations to increase fervor and prepare for later graces. The soul, feeling this supreme good in God’s obscure presence, is dying in its desire for the vision and says.

STANZA 11

*Reveal your presence,
And let the vision and your beauty kill me
Behold the malady
Of love is incurable
Except in Your presence and before Your face*

Only One Remedy

The soul is anxious to be possessed by God. Because the soul cannot suffer more it asks God to reveal His Essence and by that vision kill it, separating soul from body. The soul outlines the distress which it suffers from love. It can find no remedy except in the vision of the divine essence. It cries out:

“Reveal Your presence”

God is present to the soul in three ways. First, He is present by His Essence in all souls (in grace or in sin) and in all creatures. Without this essential presence, all would return to nothing.

Second, He is present by grace in all souls pleasing to Him. Those souls in mortal sin lose this type of presence. Third, He is present by spiritual affection. God reveals His presence to devout souls in many secret ways (joy, gladness). Many kinds of His spiritual presence are kept hidden because our mortal condition could not receive these favors. “Reveal your presence” seeks all the manifestations of God.

An Infinite Hidden Being

The soul does not say “Be present” because God always is present by His Essence. She wants God to reveal his natural, spiritual and affective presence so she can see His beauty. God gives his natural presence so we exist. He gives grace so we are perfected. The soul now wants God to manifest His glory. The soul loves God fervently and asks chiefly for the affective presence of the Beloved. By this affective presence, the soul feels an infinite hidden being is there. From this presence God communicates obscure visions of His beauty and the soul faints from desiring what is hidden.

Seeks To Be Absorbed

Like David, the “soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord.” (Ps.84:3) The soul faints from a desire to be absorbed. Although God is hidden, the soul perceives the delight which is there and is vehemently attracted to this good. It is unable to contain itself, saying “Reveal Your presence”.

Moses saw glimpses of God’s glory and twice prayed, “Show me Your face that I may know you and find grace before your eyes.” (Ex.33:12,13) God answered, “You cannot see my face and live.” (Ex.33:20) In other words, “Moses, the joy would be more than your soul could bear in your weak mortal body.” The soul senses that there is some beauty in God which it cannot experience in this life. It anticipates this problem by saying.

“Let the vision and Your beauty kill me.”

In other words, “Since the vision is so full of delight that I would die in seeing You, then let Your beauty kill me.”

The vision of God will kill man. It kills by infinite health and bliss. To desire to die by seeing God is not strange. After one glimpse of God, the soul would most joyfully suffer a thousand bitter deaths to

see God for just one moment. Having seen God for one moment, it would be willing to suffer again for a second moment. In this line, the soul speaks conditionally because she believes that the vision must be preceded by death. She does not desire death but the vision of God. The soul presupposes that this corruptible life cannot coexist with God's incorruptible life.

The Vision and Death

Paul writes "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (2Cor.5:4) We do not want to die but to be clothed with glory. Paul knew he could not have both lives, so he writes, "Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ." (Phil.1:23)

Manoah, the father of Samson, said to his wife, "We shall die because we have seen God." (Judges 13:22) The Israelites wanted to avoid the vision of God so they would not die. Why does the soul want to die of this vision? There are two answers. First, Christ had not yet come. It would be better for the Israelites to stay in the flesh than be in Limbo.

The second reason is based on love. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were not confirmed in love and were afraid of the vision. Now, we are under Christ's grace. When the body dies, the soul can see God. So, it is better to live a short life and die and see God. By true love, the soul is not afraid of dying at the sight of Him. Love has perfect resignation and accepts whatever comes from the Beloved, even chastisements. "Perfect love casts out fear." (1Jn.4:18)

Welcoming Death

Death holds no bitterness for a soul that loves. The soul is not sad because death opens the door to all joys. For the soul, death is its friend and its bride. The soul sees death as the day of espousals, and yearns for it more than kings for kingdoms.

"O death, your judgment is good for the needy man." (Eccl.41:3) If it is good for the needy man (not even supplying his wants) how much more for the soul which dies for love. Death will complete the soul's love and supply all its necessities.

Absorbed In the Vision

The soul knows that in that vision, she will be carried away and absorbed by that beauty, made beautiful as the beauty itself is beautiful. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Ps.116:15) This is true because the soul partakes of God's glory. Nothing is precious to God except what is God Himself.

The sinner fears death, suspecting that death will deprive him of all good and will inflict evil. "The death of the wicked is very evil." (Ps.34:22) "O death, how bitter your memory to the man who finds peace in riches." (Sir. 41:1) The wicked love this life greatly and love heaven but little. So, they fear death. The soul that loves God lives more in heaven than on earth and esteems its bodily life as unimportant. The soul says, "Let the vision kill me."

"Behold, the malady of love is incurable, except in Your presence and before Your face."

Love and Health

This malady of love differs from every other sickness and requires a different remedy. In other diseases, contraries cure contraries but love is healed only by what is in harmony with it. The soul's health is the love of God. When that love is not perfect, the health is not perfect and the soul is sick.

The soul that does not love at all is dead. When it loves a little (no matter how little) it lives (although exceedingly weak). As love increases, it gets healthier. When love is perfect, the soul's health is perfect. Love is perfect only when the lovers reach an equality and are mutually transformed into one another.

Imperfect Love

Because the soul is now conscious that its love is not perfect, it yearns to be made like the Bridegroom. He alone is "the splendor of God's glory and the imprint of His being". (Heb.1:3) The sickness is cured only by His presence. This imperfect love is truly a sickness. The soul is enfeebled, cannot practice heroic virtue and can be cured only in His presence.

Another thought. If the soul understands that his love for God is incomplete, then he gives evidence of having this love. He has some love because he possesses, he knows he lacks something. Anyone not conscious of this lack has no love at all.

An Artist's Work

The soul is rushing to God, like a stone falling to earth conscious of its longing for God. The soul is like wax which begins to receive the impression of a seal but knows the representation is imperfect. The soul is like a lightly sketched picture crying out to the artist to complete his work. The soul's faith can trace the majesty of God, so the soul turns inward to that faith (which has given these impressions) and says.

STANZA 12

Crystal well!

That on Your silvered surface

You would mirror forth at one

Those desired eyes

Which are outlined in my heart

Spiritual Betrothal

The soul desires union and sees no comfort in created things. So it turns to faith. This provides a vivid vision of the Beloved which is used as a means to the end. This is the only way to spiritual betrothal. "I will betroth you to me in faith." (Hos.2:20) The soul cries out, "O faith of Christ, you have secretly and obscurely infused the truths of my Beloved. May these obscure communications become clear. May You withdraw the veil from these truths and reveal them perfectly in glory".

"O crystal well"

The Truths and Their Wrappings

Faith is called a crystal because it concerns the Bridegroom. It is a pure limpid well without error or natural forms. From it flow the waters of all spiritual goodness. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "My water shall become in him a well springing up to life everlasting." (Jn.4:14) This water is the Spirit "which those who believed in Him would receive". (Jn.7:39)

"O, that on your silvered surface"

The silvered surfaces are the articles of faith. They are the propositions that wrap the truth (which is the gold). This gold substance of faith is hidden behind faith's silver veil but will be seen now. "If you sleep between two choirs, the dove's feathers will be of silver and its wings covered with gold." (Ps.68:14) "Sleeping" means we close the intellect's eyes to earthly and heavenly things. Then we will

be firm in the faith of the dove whose wings are the truths of faith. These are overlaid with the veil of silver. When faith is fulfilled in the vision of God, the silver veil will be removed and faith will shine with the gold of glory.

A Veiled Gift

Although hidden, faith still reveals God. If a man gives us a gold vessel covered with silver, he still gives us a gold vessel. The Bridegroom says, "We will make you chains of gold inlaid with silver." (Song 1:10) He promises a gift of Himself, but under the veil of faith. So, the gold substance of God's light is hidden under silver of faith's definition. The soul wants these truths to be manifested, so it says:

"You would mirror forth at one those desired eyes!"

The eyes are God's rays hidden in the definitions of faith. "Oh that you would explicitly reveal what You teach implicitly in the definitions." The soul calls these truths "eyes" because of the Beloved's presence. He now seems to always look upon the soul.

"Which are outlined in my heart."

Truths In the Heart

These truths are outlined in the soul's understanding and will, and, through the understanding are infused by faith. They are "outlined" because the knowledge is not perfect. It is just a sketch, not a perfect picture. Although the infused truths are now in outline, clear vision will make them a finished picture. "When what is perfect (the clear vision) comes, what is partial (faith) will pass away." (1Cor.13:10)

Two As One

By love, the will receives another gift. By love's union, the Beloved's face is so deeply and vividly sketched in the soul, that the Beloved lives in the loving soul and the soul lives in him. By transformation, love produces a resemblance so the two are as one. In union, each gives themselves to the other, abandoning self for the other. Both become one by transformation.

Paul says, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal.2:20) His life was not his own. It was divine rather than human. He was transformed in Christ Who lived within him. Their lives were one by union. Every soul in heaven will be transformed in this way. They will live God's life, not their own.

Even On Earth

This can happen on earth (like St. Paul) but even in spiritual marriage it is not perfect and complete. This transformation is only an outline compared to the perfect image in heavenly glory. Yet, gaining this outline on earth is a great blessing and pleases the Beloved. He wants His bride to have Him outlined in her heart. "Put me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm." (Song. 8:6). The heart is the soul where God dwells and the arm is the will where his seal is present.

A Great Thirst

The state of the soul is indescribable but I do want to say something. The substance of body and soul is dried up by thirst. "As the deer longs for the fountains of waters, so my soul longs for you. When shall I come and appear before God's face?" (Ps.42:1-2) The soul is so thirsty that it is willing like David to invade the Philistine camp to fill its pitcher "with waters from the cisterns of Bethlehem". (1Chr.11:18) These waters are Christ. The soul considers the world's trials, Satan's rage and hell's

pains as nothing if it can plunge into this fathomless fountain. “Love is strong as death, jealousy is hard and hell.” (Song 8:6)

The soul’s longings are vehement because it is about to taste this water and yet God withholds it. The nearer the goal, the more painful is its denial. “Before I eat, I sigh.” (Job.3:24) The soul suffers according to its degree of knowledge.

A Dark Fire

The soul suffers because as it draws nearer to God, it comes to know of the emptiness of God and of the thick darkness of the spiritual fire which is purifying the soul. Even when God is near, He sends no supernatural light. He is intolerable darkness. God’s supernatural light obscures natural light. “Cloud and mist are around him.” (Ps.97:2-3) and “He made darkness his covering.” (Ps.18:12)

In approaching God, the soul will feel this darkness until, by transformation, it will enter within the divine brightness. God’s consolations are in proportion to the soul’s emptiness. “As the darkness, so the light.” (Ps. 139:12) God humbles the soul while exalting it. He sends divine rays in such glorious strength that they stir the soul’s depths and change its natural condition. So, the soul speaks to the Beloved in great awe:

STANZA 13
The Bride says:
Turn them away, O my Beloved
I am on the wing
The Bridegroom says:
Return, my Dove
The wounded deer
Looms on the hill
In the air of your flight and is refreshed

Ecstasy

In the soul’s fervent affections, the Beloved visits the bride tenderly and with great strength. God’s visits are great according to the greatness of the longings which precede them. The soul seeks the divine eyes, so the Beloved reveals a glimpse of His Majesty. These rays strike the soul profoundly and the soul goes into ecstasy. In the beginning this causes suffering and fear. Unable to bear these in the frail body, it cries out:

“Turn them away, O my Beloved”

Too Strong

Turn away your divine eyes which make me fly to the heights of contemplation. My natural powers cannot stand it. Thinking she is leaving the body, the soul asks the Beloved to turn away His eyes. He is not to show them while the soul is in a body which cannot accept or enjoy them. He is to show them when the soul is in the flight from the body.

The Bridegroom denies the request. “Return my Dove! because these rays are not the state of eternal glory which you desire. Return to Me for I, too, am like a deer, wounded with your love. Therefore, I begin to reveal myself in contemplation. I am refreshed by your love which comes from contemplation.”

“Turn them away, O my Beloved”

The soul intensely longs for the Godhead and receives from the Beloved an interior knowledge of God. However, our mortal nature is so wretched, that we can only accept this knowledge at the cost of our life. Although the soul seeks God’s eyes, she must say, “Turn them away” when they become visible.

During these ecstatic visitations, the soul suffers a pain which wrenches the bones and oppresses the faculties. Without God’s intervention, death would certainly come. The soul actually feels released from the body. She has become a stranger to the flesh.

Suffering Of Body

These graces cannot be perfectly received by the body. God’s Spirit visits the soul and the experiences are somewhat strange for the body. Therefore, the flesh must suffer. The soul also suffers by its union with the body. The great agony and fear in these visitations cause the soul to ask God to “turn them away”.

The soul doesn’t really want God to turn His eyes away. This plea just expresses natural awe. Cost what they may, the soul would not miss these visitations. Nature suffers but the spirit flies to this supernatural recollection where it enjoys the Beloved. The soul does not want to receive them in the body where it enjoys them only partially and with much pain. It covets them in the flights of the spirit where it can freely enjoy them. The soul is saying “Do not visit me in the flesh.”

“I am on the wing”

Violent Communion With God

The soul says, “I am taking my flight out of the body so you can show them to me outside of the body. That is why I take flight.” To understand this flight, the following must be said. During this visitation, the soul’s spirit is taken, with great violence, into communion with God. The body is abandoned. All the body’s acts and senses are suspended. They are absorbed in God. “Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell.” (2Cor.12:3) The soul hasn’t abandoned the body but the soul’s actions are not in the body.

In raptures and ecstasies the body has no feelings. It can be unconscious of even the most painful inflictions. These are like the body fainting. This rapture is not like natural faintings of the body where the person would respond to pain.

These violent visitations come to those who are not yet perfect but are advancing along the way of proficients. The perfect receive these visitations in peace and sweetness. For them, these raptures cease because they are meant to prepare for greater graces. There is a difference between raptures, ecstasies, other elevations and flights of the spirit which spiritual persons experience. However, I leave that to others. Blessed Teresa of Jesus has written well about these. Whatever I say of flight of the soul refers also to rapture, ecstasy and the elevation of the spirit in God.

“Return My Dove”

Spiritual Flight

The soul rejoiced in its spiritual flight. It thought its life was over and it would have eternal joy with the Bridegroom without any veil. However, He intercepts this flight and says, “Return my Dove”.

The dove has three qualities:

1. The rapid flight of contemplation
2. Burning love
3. Simplicity of advance

The soul must return from her desire for eternal enjoyment (because the time has not yet come) to a lower degree which is given in rapture.

“The wounded deer”

The bridegroom sees Himself as a “wounded deer”. By nature a deer climbs high. When wounded it seeks relief in cool waters. If the deer sees his consort wounded, he runs to comfort her because her wound is also His wound. He says, “Because you are wounded by My love, I, too, am wounded.

“looms on the hill”

Begins to Reveal

He says, “I am like a deer, at the tope of the hill (the heights of contemplation) where the soul went into its flight. On the height of contemplation God begins to reveal Himself, but not completely. He “looms” because He does not appear fully. In this life, knowledge of God is an incomplete vision.

“In the air of your flight, and is refreshed”

“Flight” is the contemplation received in the ecstasy. “Air” is the love produced in the soul by this flight. Scriptures uses the word “air” for the Holy Spirit, the breath of the Father and Son. In contemplation, the Father and Son breathe the Spirit into the soul. This love is the air of the Bridegroom because it proceeds from contemplation.

From Love Not Knowledge

The Bridegroom does not come at the flight but at the air of the flight. The flight is the soul’s knowledge of God. God communicates Himself, not by this knowledge but from love, which is the fruit of knowledge. Love is the union of Father and Son. Love is also the union of God with the soul.

A soul even with the greatest knowledge of God is nothing without love. The soul, with knowledge of all mysteries, can do nothing without love to gain union. (1Cor.13:2) “Have charity, which is the bond of perfection.” (Col.3:14) This love attracts the Bridegroom to drink of the soul’s fountain just as cooling waters attract the wounded deer.

“And is refreshed”

Burning Even More

The air of love comforts someone burning with fire. However, the same air that cools the fire also increases it. In the lover, love always contains a desire to burn even more. The fulfillment of this desire to burn more with the bride’s love, he calls “refreshment”. The Bridegroom says, “In the ardor of your flight you burn because love kindles love.”

God establishes His grace in the soul according to the soul’s good will. When the soul strives for love, God takes greater delight. The soul must practice the qualities of love listed by Paul, “Love is

patient, kind, not inflated, not rude. It rejoices in the truth. It bears, believes, hopes and endure all things.” (1Cor.13:4-7)

Enjoying Union

When the ark’s dove (the soul) flew over the deluge and found no place to rest, Noah put out his hand and brought her back into the ark. That happened when the Bridegroom said “Return, my dove”. The soul finds all it desires within the Ark and enjoys its union with the Bridegroom. It says:

STANZAS 14 and 15
My Beloved is the mountains
The solitary wooded valleys
The strange islands
The roaring torrents
The whisper of the amorous gales
The tranquil night
At the approaches of the dawn,
The silent music
The murmuring solitude
The supper which revives and enkindles love

Spiritual Betrothal

This spiritual flight denotes a high state and union of love. God lifts the soul to this state after many spiritual exercises. This is called the spiritual betrothal with the Word, God’s Son. At the beginning when the flight first happens, God reveals Himself, adorns the soul with the beauty of His Majesty and gives knowledge of Himself, just as the bride is clothed on the Betrothal Day. The soul ceases its loving complaints and enters a state of delight. Due to this sweetness, the soul (in these stanzas) recounts her Beloved’s magnificence which she knows, recognizes and enjoys in the betrothal.

In the remaining stanzas, the soul will speak of the peaceful communion with the Beloved because all its sufferings have ceased. These two stanzas contain all that God will give the soul at this stage. However, all advanced souls do not receive all these gifts, nor do they all receive in the same way or degree. Although all are in spiritual betrothal, they receive differently. These stanzas speak of the highest possible favors and include everything else.

The Foods In the Ark

The Ark had many chambers and “all the food that could be eaten”. (Gen.6:21) The soul in its flight to God’s bosom sees both the many mansions and all the food (God’s magnificence in which the soul rejoices). These stanzas explain these foods.

The soul has a vision and foretaste of abundant riches where it finds the desired repose and refreshment. It understands God’s secrets and has a strange knowledge of God (the food of those who know Him most). The soul becomes conscious of God’s awesome power, tastes the Spirit’s delights, finds true rest, drinks deeply of God’s wisdom, is filled with all good, is emptied of all evil, and consciously rejoices in love’s banquet. This is the substance of these stanzas.

Feeling That God Is Everything

In this ecstatic communication, the soul experiences that the Beloved is all these things and He is for her. She exclaims, “God is mine and all things are mine.” (St. Francis) This ecstasy shows to the soul that God is all good things to her. All the good described in these stanzas exist infinitely in God.

Every attribute is God and all together are God. The soul, now united with God, feels that all things are God. “What was made, in Him was life.” (Jn.1:304)

By this consciousness, the soul does not see all things in God as we see things in a light. Rather the soul feels that God is all things for her. Even though she enjoys God, the soul does not see God essentially and clearly. This deep sense is only a strong communication from Him, a glimmering light of what He is. In this light, the soul feels the goodness of all things.

“My Beloved is the mountains”

Mountains are high fertile, lovely and odorous.

“The solitary wooded valleys”

Valleys are tranquil cooling, shady with sweet waters. They have a variety of trees and songs of birds. Their silence procures us a refreshing rest.

“The strange islands”

The Undiscovered Island

Strange islands are surrounded by sea and are distant from human commerce. They produce unknown fruits and flowers, surprising those who see them. Because the soul finds marvelous wonders and knowledge far removed from our common thoughts, she calls them “strange islands”.

A person is strange either because he withdraws from society or is very distinguished and singular by his life. For both reasons, the soul calls God “strange”. He is like an undiscovered island and His ways are new and marvelous to men.

God is certainly strange to those who never see Him. Yet, He is also strange to angels and holy souls because they never see Him perfectly. On the Final Day, they will see that His deep judgments are new. His acts of justice and mercy will excite even more wonder. God is strange even to the angels. He is neither new nor strange only to Himself.

“The roaring torrents”

Overpowered

Torrents have three qualities. First, they overflow their banks. Second, they fill all holes. Third, they overpower all other sounds. The soul sees that God has all three qualities.

First, the soul feels violently overpowered by the Spirit’s torrents. All the world’s waters seem to surround it, drowning all its prior actions and passions. This is violent but not painful. “I will spread prosperity over her like a river.” (Is.66:12) This river fills everything with peace and glory.

Second, the soul experiences this divine water filling its humility and the emptiness of its desires. “He has filled the hungry with good things.” (Lk.1:52)

Third, the soul hears the spiritual sounds which overpower all the world’s sounds. This will need some explanation.

Interior Sound

This murmuring sound of the waters is an abundant overflowing which fills the soul with good. The soul is possessed by it because it is like roaring thunder. Nevertheless, this voice is spiritual. It contains no pain or trouble. It is a voice of majesty, delight and glory, an infinite interior sound which gives power to the soul.

At Pentecost, the Spirit descended upon the apostles “like a mighty wind.” (Acts 2:2) This interior voice, was heard exteriorly. The sound of a rushing wind filled all in Jerusalem. This exterior sound signifies what the Apostles received, a fullness of power interiorly.

When Jesus prayed in distress to the Father, an interior voice comforted Him. The Jews heard this exteriorly and said “An angel has spoken to Him.” (Jn.12:29) The outward voice was a sign of the power which Christ received inwardly. Others hear things outwardly. The soul hears inwardly. The spiritual voice is the effect produced in the soul, just as an audible voice produces effects in the ear and leaves a meaning. “He gives to His voice the voice of strength.” (Ps.68:34) God is an infinite voice communicating Himself and producing effects in the soul.

Different Descriptions

John writes, “I heard a voice from heaven as a voice of many waters and great thunder.” This caused him no distress. He says the voice “was as the voice of harpers”. (Rev.14:2) Ezekiel calls the sound of many waters, “the sound of the High God”. (1:24) God’s voice is infinite but is adapted to each soul’s capacity. The Bride says, “Let your voice sound in my ears for it is sweet.” (Song 2:14)

“The whisper of the amorous gales”

The gales are the Beloved’s graces which touch the soul because it is in union with the Bridegroom. The whisper is the sweet and sublime knowledge of God and His attributes. These attributes touch the soul’s substance and the effect overflows into the understanding. This produces the highest delight the soul can experience in this life.

The Bridegroom’s Touch

In a gale, both the touch and the sound can be observed. In the Bridegroom’s communications, the soul can also observe two things, the sense of delight and the understanding of it. The air refreshes the sense of touch and sound affects the ear, so the will enjoys the touch of the Beloved’s perfections and the understanding enjoys knowledge of God’s attributes.

The gale blows amorously. It strikes deliciously, satisfying the desires and soothing the sense of touch. The hearing delights in the air’s whisper more than the skin rejoices in the air’s touch. Hearing, much more than touch, is connected with the spiritual. Consequently, this delight is more spiritual. The bride calls this union and these touches, amorous gales because the soul’s substance receives intense satisfaction and enjoyment. In this gale, the Beloved’s perfections are communicated to the will and knowledge to the understanding. The whisper subtly penetrates the soul’s ear so that this delicate knowledge comes to soul’s substance with marvelous sweetness. This is the highest of all delights.

No Images

The reason is this. At this stage substantial knowledge of God is given to the understanding without any images. The intellect is totally passive and makes no natural effort. The soul delights because the understanding enjoys the vision of God. Elijah had a vision of God in the “whistling of a gentle word”

(1Kg.19:12). Some think that this “whistling” signifies substantial intelligence of God. The understanding is touched by a delicate communication from the Spirit. I call this “a whisper”.

Besides bringing substantial knowledge, this whisper manifests the Divinity and other secret mysteries. When God communicates his revelations by hearing, he manifests naked truths to the intellect. God gives these pure revelations (visions) to the soul without using the senses. Through the ear, God gives lofty truths. Paul wrote, “I heard secret words which no one may utter” (2 Cor 12:4).

The Ear

Paul wrote, “Faith comes by hearing”. (Rom.10:17) So the soul receives these substantial truths through spiritual hearing. Job says, “With the ear I have heard you, but now my eye sees you” (42:5). The soul uses its spiritual ear to see with its passive understanding. The “eye of my understanding” is the soul’s spiritual hearing.

The soul perceives the naked substance but this is not yet heavenly enjoyment. Although free from forms, the knowledge is dim, not clear. Contemplation is “a ray of darkness” (St. Dionysius). We can call it an image of enjoyment because fruition occurs in the understanding. This whisper, (the substantial truths) is the “eyes” which the bride desired but which she wanted taken away because she could not endure them.

God’s Loving Communication

Job (4:12-16) contains an important text. Eliphaz says “To me there was spoken a secret word”. This is the secret communication which the soul cannot endure and says “Turn them away.” He goes on, “My ear, as if by stealth, received the veins of its whisper.” This means the pure substance. “Veins” denote the interior substance. The whisper is God’s virtues touching the understanding. The amorous gales are a whisper of loving communication. The soul receives this “whistle” by “stealth” because the secret is alien to man’s nature. It doesn’t belong to him and cannot lawfully be received or repeated. “My secret to myself. My secret to myself” the prophet says. (Is 24:16).

Spiritual Dread

Eliphaz speaks of the horror of this night vision and the fear which seized him “In my thoughts during the vision of the night. Fear came upon me.” (4:13-14). This refers to the dread that comes in rapture when the soul cannot endure the Spirit’s action. In human life, nightmares happen between sleeping and waking moments. So, the soul has a spiritual interval between sleep (natural ignorance) and awakening (the gift of supernatural understanding). This is the beginning of ecstasy and rapture. This spiritual vision causes the soul to tremble.

Beyond Nature

Eliphaz says “All my bones were terrified” (4:14). In ecstasy, bones get dislocated. Daniel writes, “O Lord, when I see you my joints are loosed” (10:16). Eliphaz speaks of “When the spirit passed before me”. He describes these raptures when the soul’s spirit transcends nature’s limitations. He also said, “the hair of my flesh stood upright” (4:15) In ecstasy, the body becomes cold like a dead man.

He goes on, “There stood one (God) whose countenance I knew not”. In these visions, the soul does not know or see God’s face or being. However, the knowledge is so deep that it seems to be God’s face even though it is not.

These visits of God are not always filled with trembling. This happens only to those who are entering the state of illumination. For others, these communications are sweet and gentle.

“The tranquil night”

Sleeping in the Beloved’s bosom, the soul both experiences a calm and receives a dim, unfathomable divine intelligence. Therefore, the bride calls the Beloved “a tranquil night”.

“At the approaches of the dawn”

This repose in God is not a night of darkness (like the dark night). The soul experiences a tranquility. By her new knowledge of God, the mind is raised to divine light.

Twilight Repose

This light is called “the approaches of the dawn.” The morning twilight disperses the night and reveals day’s light. The soul rises from natural darkness to supernatural knowledge. This is still dim because the day is just approaching. As twilight is neither total day or nor total night, so this divine repose is neither perfectly illumined by divine light nor alien from it.

This tranquility lifts the understanding to the divine light in a strange way. The soul is like a man awaking from a profound sleep to an unexpected light. David says “I have watched and become like a lonely sparrow on the housetop” (Ps102:8). His understanding was lifted above all earthly considerations.

Five Qualities

In contemplation, the soul becomes a “lonely sparrow” with five qualities:

1. It frequents high places (the highest Contemplation)
2. It turns its face to the wind (the Spirit)
3. It is solitary, abstaining from companionship. In contemplation, it is far from all worldly thoughts, consenting only to solitude in God.
4. It sings sweetly to God, the praises come from the sweetest love, pleasing to self and precious to God.
5. It has no definite color. In this ecstasy, the soul has no tinge of sensual affection. There is no consideration of heavenly or earthly things. The soul is immersed in God’s abyss.

“The silent music”

Music and Repose

In the tranquility and in the knowledge of God’s light, the soul sees God’s wisdom in the diversity of His creatures. Each has a unique voice to proclaim what they have of God. They form a sublime melody. This music is silent. By this knowledge without audible voice, the soul enjoys both the sweetness of music and the repose of silence. Besides being “silent music” the Beloved is:

“The murmuring solitude”

Harmony of Diversity

This is almost the same as “silent music”. The senses cannot hear the music but the spiritual powers are filled with sound. Because these powers are emptied of all forms, they can receive the spiritual impression of God’s majesty (in Himself and in His creatures). John heard the voice of harpists on their harps (Rev 14:2). He did not hear material harps. He knew the praises of each one singing according to their degree of glory. Each saint sings to God in a different way yet all harmonize, as in a concert.

In this tranquil contemplation, the soul sees all creatures (highest to lowest) each sending forth its voice of witness to what God is. The soul sees each one glorifying God and possessing Him according to its capacity. All these voices unite in praising God's greatness and wisdom. "For the Spirit of the Lord fills the world and has knowledge of the voice" (Wis. 1:7). The soul knows the voice. It is "murmuring solitude", the witness which all things give to God. Detached from all exterior things, the soul hears this music and calls it "silent music" and "murmuring solitude". These are the Beloved.

"The supper which receives and enkindles love"

The Beloved's Supper

In feasts, lovers find recreation, satisfaction and love. This sweet communication produces these three effects. "Supper" means the divine visions. Supper concludes the day's work and begins the night's sleep. In this tranquil knowledge, the soul feels the trials are over, the possession of good begun and its love increased. The Beloved is the supper which revives the soul (by ending its trials) and enkindles love (by beginning the enjoyment).

The Beloved is the supper. He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will enter and will eat with him and he with me" (Rev 3:20). Obviously, he brings the supper with Him. He gives these delights to the soul which partakes in His joy.

Time of Absence

In this state of betrothal, the soul receives everything possible in this life but the tranquility is not perfect. Only in spiritual marriage do the sensual parts lose their imperfect habits and its powers are never totally subdued. I will show this later (Stanza 26). The soul receives all it can in spiritual betrothal. Later, it will receive greater blessings in spiritual marriage. Now, the soul enjoys the Beloved's visits but must also suffer His absences. It also suffers afflictions in its lower part and afflictions from the devil. These cease in spiritual marriage.

Enjoying Her Virtues

Because the Bride possesses the virtues in their perfection, she rejoices peacefully in the Bridegroom's visits. At times, the Bridegroom touches these virtues in her and she enjoys these virtues in their highest degree. In these visits, God sheds His light and the soul can see the virtues which God has given her. The soul binds these flowers together and presents them to the Beloved who truly accepts them as a great service. This all happens within the soul. She feels the Beloved is present within her. By presenting its virtues to the Bridegroom as her gifts, the soul renders the greatest service and experiences the greatest joy.

The Devil's Activities

The devil sees the soul's prosperity and envies all this good. He uses all his powers and all his tricks to stop this. Keeping the soul back from this bliss (even for an instant) is more important to him than having others fall into many mortal sins. These other souls have little to lose. This soul has much to lose because it has gained such treasures. Losing one grain of refined gold is more than losing greater quantities of other metals.

The devil uses the sensual appetites but these do not help him. They are purified and cannot distract the imagination. Sometimes, he stirs up the soul's sensitive parts, causing spiritual and sensual vexations. The soul cannot free itself and the Lord must send an angel to reestablish peace. "The angel of the Lord...shall deliver them" (Ps 34:8).

By experience the soul has learned the devil's tactics and its need for angelic protection. So it says to the angels:

STANZA 16

*Catch us the foxes
For our vineyard has flourished
While of roses
We make a nosegay
And let no one appear on the hill.*

The soul does not want these delights to be interrupted by envious devils, sensual desires, workings of the imagination or thoughts of created goods. It asks angels to seize all that interrupts this sweetness given by the Son of God.

“Catch us the foxes, for our vineyard has flourished”

Delights and Difficulties

The vineyard is the plantation of virtues which give forth the sweet wine. United to the Bridegroom, the soul is flourishing and delighting in Him. At the same time various forms assail the memory and desires trouble the sensual part. David, while drinking the spirit's sweet wine, felt this inconvenience, “For you my body yearns. For you my soul thirsts” (Ps 63:2).

These sensual stirrings are “foxes”. They pretend to be asleep so they can pounce on the soul. These sensual desires seem to be asleep until the flowers flourish and bloom. Then they awaken to resist the Spirit and to dominate. “The flesh lusts against the spirit” (Gal 5:17) The flesh grows disgusted when it tastes Spiritual wine and sensual desires prove extremely troublesome to experiencing spiritual sweetness.

“Catch us the foxes”

These evil spirits molest the soul. They excite the desires to assail the soul's flourishing kingdom. Even worse (when this fails) they assail the soul with bodily pains and noises. Even more severely, they fight with frightful torments. If God permits this, the devil can even present himself before the soul.

Recollection's Protection

Before the soul has full enjoyment, the devil can assail the soul with other horrors. At this stage, God is drawing the soul out of its sensual parts to enter the Bridegroom's garden by interior recollection. The devil knows that he cannot hurt the soul once it is protected by this recollection because when the devil goes forth to assail the soul, the soul quickly becomes recollected. In its interior, the soul finds sweet protection and the devil's terrors produce no fear. They even occasion joy. The Bride speaks of these terrors, “My soul troubled me for the Chariots of Aminadab” (Song 2:15). Aminadab is the devil and his chariots are the assaults.

The Bride says “Catch us the little foxes.” She uses “us” meaning herself and the Bridegroom. They are one and enjoy the flourishing vineyard. The vineyard flourishes but does not bring forth fruit because on earth the virtues only flower. The fruit comes later in eternal life.

“While of roses we make a nosegay”

Binding the Flowers

The soul rejoices in the vineyard and delights in the Beloved's bosom. The soul feels that these perfect virtues are in herself and in God as in one vineyard. They belong to both. The soul binds together all its virtues, makes acts of love in each, and gives them to the Beloved. In this she needs the help of the Beloved. "We make a nosegay" means the soul and the Beloved.

A nosegay is a strong cone which can hold many pieces together. This cone-like nosegay is the soul's uniform perfection. This embraces many rich endowments and all are formed into one. While the soul is gaining this perfection, the foxes must be caught so the interior communication is not hindered. Therefore the soul says:

"And let no one appear on the hill"

Empty Faculties

This interior exercise demands solitude and detachment in the lower (sensual) part and the higher (natural) part. These faculties and senses are the "hill". Our natural ideas and desires are like the hell's quarry. Among these the devil waits to injure the soul.

"Let no one appear on the hill" i.e., may no image appear in the presence of the soul and the Bridegroom. The memory, understanding and will must be totally divested. All the senses and faculties must be empty of all distractions arising from images and all workings. The soul says this because the perfect enjoyment of God's communications demand that all senses and faculties be emptied. If they are active, they will be a hindrance.

Because the soul has gained some interior union, her spiritual and sensual faculties are no longer active. The union has been gained in love, and the soul's faculties cease since they have gained the object. At this point, the soul must wait lovingly upon God. This waiting continues the unitive love. Let no one else appear. The soul wants only the Beloved.

Vehement Love and Pain

In Spiritual Betrothal, the soul suffers much when the Bridegroom is absent, even more than in other trials. The soul's love is vehement and the pain is vehement. Contact with creatures only increases this pain. The soul has a quickened desire for union and even finds conversations difficult to endure. A flying stone experiences a shock upon meeting any obstacles to its goal. Because the soul has tasted the Bridegroom's visits (more desirable than anything) it dreads even a momentary absence. Concerning aridities the soul says to Bridegroom's Spirit:

STANZA 17

*O Killing north winds, cease!
Come, south wind, that awakens love!
Blow through my garden
and let its odors flow
and the Beloved shall feed among the flowers.*

Spiritual dryness also hinders the enjoyment of this interior sweetness. The soul uses two means to overcome this. First, it uses unceasing prayer to shut the door. Second, the soul invokes the Holy Spirit Who drives away dryness and increases love so the Bridegroom can establish virtues and the Son of God can delight in the soul. The soul's only aim is to please the Beloved.

“Killing north wind cease”

Dead Affections

The cold north wind parches flowers and causes them to shrink. Dryness of spirit and the Bridegroom’s absence which produce the same effects are the “killing north wind”. All the soul’s affective devotions are dead. The soul says to itself “Killing north wind, cease.” The soul uses spiritual exercises to escape aridity. However, God’s communications are so interior that the faculties attain nothing if the Spirit causes no movements of love. Therefore, the soul says:

“Come, south wind, that awakens love”

The Holy Spirit’s Wind

The south wind is soft and brings rain making the flowers blossom and scatter their perfume. These are the opposite effects of the north wind. The south wind is the Holy Spirit who awakens love. The Divine Breath enflames the soul, quenches the will and stirs the desires (which were asleep). The soul prays to the Spirit:

“Blow through my garden”

The soul is a flourishing garden where the flowers of perfection flourish and give forth the wine of sweetness.

Experiencing Virtues

The soul says “blow through” not “in” the garden. A great difference exists. God breathes in gifts and virtues. To breathe through means to stir up perfections already possessed so they send out their fragrance. Shaking aromatic spices causes abundant odors to be perceived. Often the soul doesn’t realize the virtues it has. They are like aromatic spices which are covered over. The soul perceives their perfume only when shaken.

Beauty and Bliss

When the Spirit breathes through the garden God shows his mercy by exposing these aromatic herbs. This action shows the soul its treasures and reveals its beauty. The soul feels sweet in this abundance when the beauty of its flowers is revealed. No language can describe their fragrance. The soul says:

“Let its odors flow”

These odors are so abundant that the soul is bathed in inestimable bliss. These delights overflow and other people can discern them. The soul is a delectable garden whose grandeur can be seen at all times. These signs come from the soul’s familiar conversation with God. For example, after he spoke with God, the people could not look at Moses’ face because of its glory (Ex 34:30).

Making Ready the Chamber

While the Spirit is visiting the soul, the Son of God is giving Himself in a profound way. He sends the Spirit to make ready His chamber (the bride’s soul). The Spirit comforts, orders the garden and opens the flowers. The bride-soul desires this, and asks the south wind to blow because she profits so greatly.

Enjoyment, Delight and Bliss

The soul gains the enjoyment of both her virtues and her Beloved’s Who converses in intimate love and grants even greater favors. She gains because He delights even more in her. The sweet fragrance

becomes permanent and she entertains Him, “While the King was asleep (in the soul) my perfume sent forth its odor.” (Song 1:12) The perfume is the soul itself who sends forth the fragrance.

Every soul should ask the Spirit to blow through its garden because this is so blissful. The bride says, “Arise, south wind and come; blow through my garden and let the aromatic spices flow”. (Song 4:16). For the Beloved’s delight (not its own), the soul seeks this because it announces the presence of God’s Son. The soul says:

“And my Beloved shall feed among my flowers”

The Bridegroom Delights

The Beloved’s delight is a pasture which both gladdens and sustains. He abides because the place delights Him. “My delights were to be with the children of men” (Pr 8:31), that is, when they delighted to be with Him.

The Bridegroom communicates with the soul through the virtues (the flowers). The Beloved does not feed on the flowers but on the soul herself. He feeds among the flowers which send their sweet fragrance to the Son of God so He can feed even more in love. The Bridegroom’s love is union with the soul amid the flower’s fragrance.

In the Canticle, the Bride said “My Beloved is gone down to His garden, to the bed of aromatic spices, to feed and to gather lilies. I to my Beloved and my Beloved to me, Who feeds among the lilies” (Song 6:1-2). The Bridegroom delights among the soul’s virtues.

Great Suffering

In these espousals, the soul suffers greatly. She sees that she cannot possess these riches because she is still alive in the flesh. As the knowledge becomes deeper, the suffering becomes greater.

The soul is like a prince in a prison. He has no authority. His lands and wealth are taken. He receives a miserable dole. His slaves and servants plunder his table and give him no respect. The soul is receiving a foretaste of the glory prepared by God, but the wicked servants in the sensual past rise against the soul to rob it.

Captive in the Body

The soul is in the land of its enemies, like the dead among the dead. “How is it, O Israel, that you are in your enemy’s land? You are counted among those who go down into hell” (Bar 3:10-11). This misery is the captivity of the body. “Is Israel a bondman or a home-born slave? The lions have roared upon him” (Jer. 2:14).

The lions are the rebellious desires of the tyrant, King Sensuality. The soul suffers from this tyrant and wants his Kingdom destroyed or, at least, totally subjected to the spirit. So, it speaks in the next stanza to the Bridegroom:

STANZA 18

O nymphs of Judea

While amid the flowers and the rose trees

The amber sends forth its perfume

Tarry in the suburbs

And touch not our thresholds.

Sensual Hindrances

The bride sees the higher part of her soul adorned with treasures and the Bridegroom delighting in her. She wants security and continued enjoyment. She also sees that the sensual parts disturb this good. She asks these lower workings to cease, not to overstep their boundaries nor to trouble this sweetness, even for a moment. These lower movements disturb the spirit during the enjoyment.

“O nymphs of Judea”

The soul's lower parts are Judea. They are weak, blind and carnal like the Jewish people. The lower inclinations are nymphs, who attract men by their beauty. They entice the will to withdraw from the interior and to choose the exterior. They want the understanding to accept their low views and bring the raptured soul down to the sense level. These sensual workings are the “nymphs of Judea”.

“While amid the flowers and the rose trees”

The flowers are the virtues. The rose trees are the memory, understanding and will which produce these acts of virtue.

“The amber sends forth its perfume”

The amber is the Spirit of the Bridegroom dwelling in the soul. The Bridegroom sends forth his perfume by communicating Himself to the soul's powers as the Spirit fills the soul with sweetness.

The Suburbs and the City

“Tarry in the suburbs”. The suburbs are the interior senses (as the imagination) where images collect. Sensuality uses these images to steer the desires. They enter the suburbs (interior senses) by the outward senses. When they are quiet, the sensual desires sleep. The “suburbs” then are the exterior and interior senses which are outside the city walls.

The city itself is the interior, rational part which can converse with God and whose workings oppose sensuality. A natural communication exists between the images of the suburbs and the raptured powers of the city. The lower part compels attention and can disturb the soul's conversation with God. The soul wants the nymphs to “tarry in the suburbs”; i.e., to remain at rest.

“And touch not our thresholds”

The thresholds are the first movements of the higher part. These first movements have crossed the threshold when they enter the reason. When they touch the threshold they remain just first movements. When reason and sense are in contention they cry at the gate. The soul does not want these touches and wants everything against its repose to stay away.

Enemy of the Sensual

In this state, the soul is a fierce enemy of its lower parts and wants God to communicate absolutely nothing to the senses. Otherwise, the soul will faint (due to natural weakness) and be troubled. “The body that is corrupted burdens the soul.” (Wis. 9:15)

The soul wants the noblest conversation with God. Because this cannot happen when the sensual is active, the soul asks God to totally avoid the senses in His communications. St. Paul's vision of God in the third heaven was independent of the body. Otherwise, He could not describe the vision as, “I heard secret words which it is not lawful for a man to speak” (2 Cor 12:2-4). The soul knows that these great

graces cannot be received in the sensual and longs to receive them “outside of the body”. It says to the Bridegroom:

STANZA 19

*Hide yourself, O my Beloved
Turn your face to the mountains
Do not speak
But regard the companions
Of her who is traveling amid strange islands.*

Four Petitions

The bride has four petitions for the Bridegroom:

1. To converse interiorly in her soul’s secret chamber
2. To fill her faculties with His Divine Glory
3. To speak profoundly so the sensual part does not perceive
4. To love the graces He has planted. These virtues cause her to ascend to the highest divine knowledge and to experience singular and extraordinary transports of love.

“Hide Yourself, O my Beloved”

That is, stay in my innermost depths, manifesting yourself to no mortal eyes.

“Turn Your face to the mountains”

Essential Glory

God’s face is His divinity. The mountains are the soul’s memory, understanding and will. The soul wants the Bridegroom to enlighten her understanding with divine knowledge, to fill her will with divine love, and to possess her memory with His glory. She prays for all that can be prayed for. The glory of Moses who knew God only in His works is not enough. She wants to see God’s face, an essential knowledge of His divinity with no intervening medium. This is beyond sense, a contact of two pure substances – the soul and God.

“Do not speak”

God’s Essence

When God spoke before, the senses could understand. Now, the soul wants God’s conversation to be deep, substantial and interior (above the senses). The substance of the spirit cannot be communicated to the senses because sensual communication cannot be purely spiritual. The soul wants essential, substantial communication. The soul says “Do not speak” meaning, let the deep secret of spiritual union escape the senses’ notice. This is like St. Paul’s secret.

“But regard the companions”

God’s regard is love and grace. The “companions” are the virtues which God has given to the soul. In other words, “Look at the treasures You gave me. Be enamored of them. Dwell there and hide Yourself. They are Yours but you gave them to me.

“Of her who travels amid strange islands”

O Lord, knowledge leads my soul to you by ways that are strange to ordinary perceptions. My soul tends to you by a spiritual knowledge which is unknown to the senses. The senses cannot even see this knowledge which is given to me.

To attain the heights of spiritual marriage, the soul must be cleansed of all imperfect habits. Then this “old man” will be subject to the higher powers. The soul must also have courage and exalted love to experience such a strong, close embrace of God. From this close bond of union the soul acquires exceeding beauty and gains a terrible strength.

A Saying From the Canticle

To reach this state, the soul must have purity, strength and adequate love. In the Canticle, the Holy Spirit wants the soul to merit this. He says to the Father and Son, “Our sister is little and has no breasts. What about the day she is to be spoken to? If she is a wall, we will build bulwarks of silver. If she is a door, let us join it with boards of cedar”. (Song 8:8)

The “bulwarks of silver” are the soul’s heroic virtues brought forth in silver (faith). These virtues of the spiritual marriage are built upon the soul, the wall. Relying on the wall’s strength, the Bridegroom lies undisturbed. The “boards” are the affections and the “cedar tree” is deep love. “To join it together” means to adorn the bride. The door of the will must be kept perfectly open. This is the consent of the betrothal. The breasts are her perfect love which she needs in order to appear before the Bridegroom in perfection.

The Bride’s Response

The bride replies immediately, “I am a wall and my breasts are as a tower” (Song 8:10). This means that her soul is strong and her love is deep. In all our stanzas the bride has shown her desires for union and transformation. She has set all her virtues before the Bridegroom to make him her prisoner of love.

In the following two stanzas, the Bridegroom replies. He will perfectly purify and strengthen the soul’s (sensual and spiritual) parts and cause all rebellion (of flesh and devil) to cease.

STANZAS 20 and 21
Light winged birds
Lions, fauns, bounding does,
Mountains, valleys, strands
Waters, winds, heat,
and the terrors that keep watch by night
By the soft lyres
And the silver strains, I adjure you
Let your fury cease
And touch not the wall
That the bride might sleep in greater security.

The Bridegroom’s Actions

The Bridegroom leads the bride’s lower powers into a conformity with the higher. He subjects the natural powers to reason and cleanses all desires. The meaning is the following: The Bridegroom commands all vain distractions to cease. He controls the irascible faculties. He brings the understanding, memory and will to perfection. He commands the four passions (joy, hope, grief, and fear) to be still.

The Bridegroom subdues all the soul’s passions and faculties by His sweetness and courage. The bride enjoys these because God has surrendered to the soul. By this, God transforms the soul into Himself. The soul’s faculties, desires and actions lose their imperfection and become divine.

“Light winged birds”

These are distractions, which fly rapidly from one subject to another. While the will enjoys the Bridegroom’s conversations, these distractions produce weariness. Their swift flights quench joy. Heaven’s sweet abundance is now so continuous that these distractions cannot interfere as they did before. The Bridegroom bids them to cease. The rest of the stanza has the same meaning.

“Lions, fawns, bounding does”

Timidity and Rashness

These are other distractions. Lions are the raging violence of the irascible faculty which acts boldly. Fawns and bounding does are the soul’s timidity and rashness. The soul is timid. When things do not happen as planned, the mind grows discouraged. The soul is like a fawn, which is more timid than other animals. Rashness wants its own way. The mind is bold and gratifies its inclinations. Does are rash, leaping after what they desire.

The Bridegroom controls rage (the lions), strengthens the concupiscible faculty against timidity (fawns), and subdues the restless desires (does). God satisfies the soul by sweetness and delights.

The Bridegroom does not adjure anger and concupiscence directly because these passions never cease. Instead, He restrains their disorderly acts which must cease in the soul’s new purified state.

“Mountains, valleys and strands”

Vicious Acts

These are the vicious and disorderly acts of the memory, understanding and will. They are vicious in their extremes. The mountains (being high) are acts vicious in their excess. The strands (neither high nor low) are acts which depart slightly from true justice. These acts are not mortal sins but venial sins or imperfections. The valleys (being low) are extreme in their defects. The bridegroom wants all these to cease. By delights and sweetness God occupies these powers (memory, understanding and will) so they avoid both the extremes and modify even their slightest tendencies.

*“Waters, winds, heat and the terrors that
keep watch by night”*

These are the desires of the four passions (grief, hope, joy and fear). The waters are grief that rush in. “Save me, O God, for the waters have come in even to my soul” (Ps. 69:2). The winds are hope that desires what is not present. “I drew breath because I longed for your commandments” (Ps 119:131). Heat is joy that inflames the heart like fire “My heart waxed hot within me” (Ps 39:4). While meditating, I have joy.

The Fears

The terrors are the fears in those souls who have not yet attained spiritual marriage. These are very strong. Sometimes, they come from God, Before He gives a special grace, He fills the mind with dread. The flesh trembles and the senses go numb because nature is not prepared for these works.

These fears come also from the evil spirit who tries to disturb the soul by exciting horror. He sometimes utters his threats in the soul’s interior to destroy the blessing. When he cannot penetrate the soul who is recollected in God, he produces exterior distractions and sensible pain. These disturb the soul in the bridal chamber.

Trying to Rouse the Soul

These are “terrors of the night” because Satan tries to obscure the divine light and involve the soul in darkness. They “watch by night” because they rouse the soul from its sweet slumber and Satan is always on the watch to produce them. These terrors come to persons who have attained spiritual passivity. They come from God or Satan. They are not natural terrors because natural terrors cannot touch spiritual men.

Quieting the Passions

The Bridegroom compels these four passions to cease. By His sweetness and delight, He gives the bride force and courage. Because the soul in this state has great grandeur and stability, these passions cannot dominate or even cause distaste. Formerly the soul was overwhelmed by grief due to its own sins and those of others. Now there is no pain. Sensible feelings of sorrow do not exist, although their effects do.

Angels understand sorrow without their having pain. They perform acts of mercy without feeling pity. Such is the soul in this state of union. Sometimes, God does allow the soul to feel the pity so it becomes more fervent. He did this for His Virgin Mother and St. Paul. However, this is not the ordinary condition.

Other Results

The desires of hope do not affect the soul because it is satisfied in its union with God. The soul, seeing itself full of God’s riches, has nothing more to hope for. It grows in charity by saying “Your will be done.” Yet, it is free from the violence of desires. Even its longing to see God’s face is without pain.

The affections of joy are not sensibly diminished and their abundance causes the soul no distress. This abundant joy is like a sea, not diminished by the rivers flowing out and not increased by rivers flowing in. The soul is a fountain “springing up to life everlasting” (Jn 4:14).

Already Possesses Joy

In this state of transformation, the soul receives nothing new or unusual. The soul has accidental joys which cannot be numbered. Yet in this substantial communication of the spirit there is no increase in joy because the soul already possesses greater gifts than anything that comes anew.

When a joy is presented, the soul rejoices that it already has that gift. Its rejoicing is greater because the soul already possesses God. Because God delights in all things (especially in Himself), all new occasions of joy just remind the soul that it already possesses real joy an interior joy which is greater than accidental joy.

Receiving What It Already Has

When something does give the soul pleasure, it recalls that it already possesses something of greater value and gets greater pleasure from what it already has. These new accidental impressions are as nothing compared to the inner substantial source, God Himself. The soul has gained perfect transformation. It is full grown and no longer grows by spiritual accessions as do other less advanced souls. This is a marvelous experience. The soul receives no new delights but it seems to. It already possess these delights but experiences them afresh, as if it were continually receiving new gifts and, yet, having no need of them.

Revealing What is Already Present

I have no language to express the light of glory which God produces by embracing the soul. In this spiritual communion, God causes the soul to see and enjoy the abyss of delights which He has placed there. As the sun shines upon the sea and reveals its deep precious stones, so the divine sun (the Bridegroom) reveals to the bride the riches of her own soul. Even the angels look on with amazement, saying “Who is she who comes forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army in battle array” (Song 6:9). This illumination adds nothing to the soul. It just reveals what is already there so the soul can rejoice.

Enjoying All Delight

Because of the soul’s pureness and confidence in God, terrors cannot come close. The evil spirits cannot shroud her in darkness nor disturb her by violent assaults. Nothing can molest her. She has escaped created things and has entered into God. She enjoys perfect delight, as far as possible on earth. “A secure mind is a continual feast” (Pr 15:15). At a feast, we eat meat and enjoy the music. So, the soul enjoys all delight in the Beloved’s bosom. What I say falls short of what happens in the soul that has gained this state. Paul says this “surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7).

“By the soft lyres and the siren strains I adjure you”

The “soft lyres” are the sweetness which makes all troubles cease. Music carries a soul out of itself, and makes it forget its weariness and grief. So, the “soft lyres” of sweetness absorb the soul. Nothing painful can touch it. The Beloved says, “By my sweetness, let all your bitterness cease”.

The siren strains are like delicious music. The person is rapt out of himself and forgets everything. This union so absorbs and refreshes the soul that it becomes charmed against all troubles that might assail it.

“Let your fury cease”

Protecting the Garden

These are the troubles flowing from unruly acts and desires. As anger overflows its bounds and destroys peace, so these troubles overflow and disturb the soul’s tranquility. The Bridegroom says:

“And touch not the wall”

This is the territory of peace and the fortress of virtue which defend the soul. The soul is a garden where the Bridegroom feeds. It is guarded for Him alone, a “garden enclosed” (Song 4:12). He commands all disorderly emotions not to touch this territory or the wall.

“That the bride may sleep in greater security”

That she can delight herself in greater sweetness in the Beloved. At this stage, no door is closed against the soul. She can abandon herself whenever she wants to the sweet sleep of love. The bridegroom says, “O daughters of Jerusalem, do not make the beloved awake until she wills.” (Song 3:5)

The Embrace of Union

The Bridegroom was anxious to rescue his bride from the power of the flesh and of the devil. Now, He rejoices over her. He is like the good shepherd who has rescued His lost sheep and like the woman who found her money and “called together her friends and neighbors, saying ‘Rejoice with me’” (Lk 15:5,8,9). The Shepherd/Bridegroom delights to have the perfect soul on His shoulders and at last to hold her in an embrace of union.

He does not rejoice alone but with the angels and saints. He says, “Daughters of Zion, see King Solomon in the diadem with which his mother crowned him in the day of his betrothal” (Song 3:11). The soul is now His crown. He carries her in His arms as a bridegroom leads the soul into the bridal chamber. This is the next stanza.

STANZA 22

*The bride has entered
The pleasant and desirable garden
and there repose to her heart’s content
Her neck reclining
on the sweet arms of the Beloved.*

Because the bride has done all she can, the foxes are caught, the north winds cease, and the nymphs make no trouble. She has obtained the favorable wind of the Holy Spirit, the right disposition for this state. Now the Bridegroom calls the soul His bride and says two things:

1. The soul has won the victory and has entered into the spiritual marriage (which both of them desired);
2. The soul has gained perfect repose and now rests her neck on His arms.

“The bride has entered”

The Ordering of Stanzas

To understand how these stanzas are arranged, remember that the soul is tried by tribulations before reaching spiritual marriage. The trials were the theme of the first four stanzas. In the fifth stanza (“A thousand graces diffusing”) through the twelfth stanza, the soul began the contemplative life and passed through the straits of love.

The thirteenth stanza (“Turn them away, O my Beloved) is the moment of spiritual betrothal. After this, the soul advances by the unitive way, receiving many communications and jewels as one betrothed to the Bridegroom. Now, she grows into perfect love.

“The bride has entered”

Complete Transformation

The spiritual marriage between the soul and the Son of God must still be accomplished. Spiritual Betrothal cannot compare with Spiritual Marriage which is a complete transformation into the Beloved. God and the soul surrender the entire possession of themselves to each other in a perfect union in which the soul becomes divine and God. This participation happens as far as is possible on earth.

No soul attains this without being confirmed in grace because the faithfulness of both is confirmed. God is confirmed in the soul. This is the highest possible state. In marriage, they are “two in one flesh” (Gen 2:24). In spiritual marriage God and the soul are two natures in one spirit. Paul wrote “He that cleaves to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). When the light of a candle is united to the light of the sun, the sun’s light absorbs the candle’s light.

The bride has entered and left behind all things, all spiritual affections, all methods, all temptations, trials and cares. She is now transformed in this embrace.

“The pleasant and desirable garden”

The Soul Seems to Be God

The garden is God in whom the soul finds such delightful repose. The soul does not enter into the perfect transformation of spiritual marriage right away. It must first pass through spiritual betrothal with mutual, faithful love. Only after the soul has lived for some time as the bride of the Son does God call her to the flourishing garden to celebrate the spiritual marriage. Then the two natures are so united (what is divine is so communicated to the human) that each seems to be God without any essential change. This does not happen perfectly in this life. However, the way cannot be discovered or conceived.

The Bridegroom invites the bride to enter this state. “I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride. I gather my myrrh and my spices” (Song 5:1). He calls her sister and bride because before being called to spiritual marriage she had made her surrender. His myrrh and spices are his fruits, symbols of Himself which He has given to the soul.

Seeking Fulfillment

Both God and the soul desire the perfect fulfillment of this state. The soul never wearies until it reaches this goal. In this fullness, the soul finds a more perfect sweetness than in spiritual betrothal because it realizes that its repose is in the Bridegroom’s arms. Through His spiritual embraces, the soul has God’s life. “I live; now not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Imagine how happy and glorious is this life of God. God sees nothing displeasing in the soul and the soul finds nothing difficult. The glory of God has become the soul’s substance and it is transformed in Him.

“And there reposes, to her heart’s content; her neck reclining on the sweet arms of the Beloved”

Reclining in His Arms

The neck is the soul’s strength which allows this union to happen. If she were not strong she could not endure His embrace. Having used this strength to practice virtue and overcome vice, she can now rest.

By this reclining in God’s arms, the soul’s weakness is united with God’s strength. The transformed soul acquires God’s strength. The reclining of the neck on the arms best describes spiritual matrimony. God is the soul’s sweetness. He guards it from evil and lets it taste all good.

Kissing God

The bride says, “Who shall give you, my brother, to me, sucking the breast of my mother, that I may find You outside and kiss you and no man may despise me?” (Song 8:1). “Brother” shows their equality in the betrothal before the marriage. “Sucking the breasts” shows the drying up of the passions, (which are Eve’s milk). “Finding Him outside” means in solitude, detached from all things. “Kiss You” means to be alone with Him alone.

This is the nature of the union. The soul is in solitude, cleansed and alone with the Bridegroom. The marriage has only one love – the love of the Bridegroom. The bride kisses God and no one can despise her. She is not molested by the devil, the flesh, the world, or even spiritual desires. “Winter is now past. The rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land” (Song 2:11-12).

The Incarnation

Once the soul is lifted to spiritual marriage, she is God’s faithful consort. The Bridegroom, readily and frequently, reveals His secrets, hiding nothing from her. Mostly, He reveals the truths of His

incarnation and the ways of redemption (the subject sweetest to the soul). In the next stanza He speaks of His incarnation as the chief mystery.

STANZA 23

*Beneath the apple tree
There were you betrothed
There I gave you My hand
And you were redeemed
Where your mother was corrupted.*

The Bridegroom speaks of how the human race was lost. Our human nature was corrupted under the forbidden tree. It was redeemed by the tree of the cross where the Bridegroom stretched out His hand of mercy. By his death he “made void the law of commandments” (Eph 2:15) which original sin placed between us and God.

“Beneath the apple tree”

The Two Trees

The “apple tree” is the cross where the Son of God conquered and betrothed our human nature and every soul to Himself.

“There you were betrothed, there I gave you my hand”

His help lifted the soul out of its miserable condition to be His companion and bride.

“You were redeemed where your mother was corrupted”

The mother is human nature which was corrupted in the first parents beneath the forbidden tree. The soul was redeemed at the tree of the cross. At the tree, Eve sentenced the soul to death. From the cross Christ gave the soul life. God reveals His wisdom by turning the origin of evil into an instrument of greater good. The Bridegroom says “Under the apple tree I raised you up. There your mother was corrupted” (Song 8:5).

I am not speaking of the betrothal of the cross. This took place at Baptism. I am speaking of a betrothal in the way of perfection. This is a progressive work. Both works are one but there is a difference. God effects the betrothal of the cross in one action. The betrothal of perfection is done slowly within the soul.

Ezekiel’s Example

God spoke of this betrothal in perfection through Ezekiel. He describes a girl cast out the day of her birth. God saw her in her blood and told her to live and grow. She came to puberty and her breasts grew but she was naked. Later, God passed again and covered her nakedness for she was old enough for love. He swore a covenant, washed her, clothed her and adorned her with jewelry. She became beautiful with a queen’s dignity and she was renowned for her beauty. (Ez. 16:5-14) This is the state of the soul I am now describing.

The Divine, Chaste Bed

This stanza refers to their chaste and divine bed which comes after their mutual surrender. The bed is the Bridegroom Himself in whom the bride reposes. The bed is of flowers because the bridegroom Himself says, “I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys” (Song 2:1). The soul reposes not

only on the bed but on the flower that is the Son of God, containing all beauty. “With me is the beauty of the field” (Ps 50:11). The following stanza celebrates the qualities of the bed.

STANZA 24

*Our bed is of flowers
by dens of lions encompassed
Hung with purple
Made in peace
And crowned with a thousand shields of gold*

Overview

In the fourteenth and fifteenth stanzas, the bride-soul celebrated the magnificence of the Beloved. Here, she praises him and also her own security in this high state. She then tells of the rich gifts He has given her. She is strong in virtues through his union. She says she has attained the perfection of love and enjoys spiritual peace as much as possible on earth. First, she describes her joy in the union.

“Our bed is of flowers”

The Union of Love

The bed is the Bridegroom’s bosom. The soul now reposes in Him. She receives a knowledge of the wisdom, secret gifts and powers of God. These make the soul so abounding in delights that she seems to be lying on a bed of many colored, divine flowers. Each touch gives a thrill of joy.

This union of love is called a bed of flowers. “Our bed is of flowers” (Song 1:15). She calls the bed “ours” because the virtues and delights of the Beloved are common to both. “My delights were to be with the children of men” (Pr 8:31). The soul’s virtues are perfect and heroic. This only happened when the bed flowered into perfect union.

“By dens of lions encompassed”

A Secure Place

These are the virtues given to the soul in union. The dens are safe retreats protected against all other animals because they fear to enter or even to appear in the sight of lions. Christ is united to each virtue and each is a strong lion. The soul also is a strong lion, united to Christ in these virtues.

The perfect soul is so defended by reposing in divine union, that evil spirits fear to assault it and do not even dare appear. They dread the soul which is courageous and mature. They now fear the transformed soul as much as they fear the Beloved Himself. They do not even dare to look upon a soul in this perfection.

The soul’s bed is encompassed by lions because its virtues are ordered, joined together and supported by each other. No part is weak or exposed. Neither Satan nor worldly things can penetrate or disturb the soul. She is free from the troubles of natural desires and is a stranger to temporal anxieties. She enjoys God in security.

Commenting on Song 8:1

The bride had spoken of a “kiss”. This means divine union by which she becomes in a sense the equal of God. She calls the bridegroom “brother”. This marks an equality. “Sucking the breast of my mother” means that the imperfections inherited from mother Eve are destroyed. She finds the

Bridegroom “outside”, that is, in total detachment. “No man may despise me” means the devil, the world and the flesh cannot assail her. The soul now enjoys habitual sweetness that never fails it.

The Flowers of Virtues

Besides this habitual contentment, the flowers now open and diffuse their odors (the fullness of God’s delights). Although the soul always possesses these virtues she did not always enjoy them. These virtues are like budding flowers. They offer a beautiful sight for the soul and diffuse marvelous perfumes under the Spirit’s direction.

Sometimes the soul sees mountain flowers (the full beauty of God), mixed with the lilies of the valley (rest, refreshment and defense). There are roses (the strange knowledge of God) the water lilies of the roaring torrents (God’s majesty filling the soul). The soul enjoys the jasmine’s fragrance, the whisper of amorous gales (the enjoyment of union) as well as the calm knowledge, the silent music, the murmuring solitude, and the sweet supper. “Our bed is of flowers.” Blessed is the soul that deserved to enjoy the perfume of these flowers.

“Hung with purple”

Other Qualities

This is the King’s color and it means charity. The riches flourish because of love for the King of heaven. Without this love, the soul cannot delight in the bed or the flowers. All the soul’s virtues depend on the love of God which preserves them. Each virtue makes the soul love God and advance the soul to a greater love.

The Bible says, “King Solomon made a carriage of wood from Lebanon. Its columns were of silver and its roof of gold. Its seat of purple cloth. The midst he paved with charity” (Song 3:9-10). The wood of Lebanon are the virtues which God gives the soul. The silver columns and the gold roof are love because the virtues are maintained by love.

“Made in peace”

This fourth excellence depends on perfect charity which casts out all fear (1Jn 4:18). Remember that each virtue is peaceful and strong. The soul that possesses them produces gentleness and fortitude. Peace, gentleness and strength are three qualities unassailable by the world, Satan and the flesh. Upon these virtues, the soul is built in peace.

“Crowned with a thousand shields of gold”

Virtues and Protections

This is the bed’s fifth quality. The shields are the virtues which reward the soul’s toil. They are a protection against vices. The bridal bed is adorned with these virtues and protections. The “gold” shows their worth.

There are “a thousand shields” to express the variety of virtues given to the soul. The Bridegroom says “Your neck is as the tower of David. A thousand shields hang upon it, all the armor of valiant men” (Song 4:4).

Gifts of Others

The soul is not content in praising God or giving thanks for its joy. It praises the gifts of others which the soul can see in its own divine union.

STANZA 25

*In your footsteps
The young ones run Your way
At the touch of the fire
And by the spiced wines
the divine balsam flows.*

The bride thanks the Bridegroom for three graces which she has experienced in the state of union and which encourage her to love God even more. First, a sweetness makes her run swiftly on this road. Second, a visit of love sets her on fire. Third, overflowing charity inebriates her to utter God's praises.

"In your footsteps"

By marks on the ground, we can follow the path of someone whom we seek. These footsteps are the sweetness and knowledge of Himself which God gives to the soul. "In your footsteps" means "in the traces of the sweetness that you give forth".

"The young ones run Your way"

Devout souls run with youthful vigor according to vocation of each soul. The road to eternal life (and evangelical perfection) has diversified forms of service where the soul meets the Beloved in love and attachment.

By this sweetness, God leaves an impression which makes the soul run after Him. By its own strength the soul does nothing. The divine footsteps attract her and she runs. The bride prays for this divine attraction, "Draw me and we will run after You to the odor of Your ointment" (Song 1:3). "When you enlarged my heart, I ran the way of Your commands" (Ps 119:32).

*"At the touch of the fire, and by the spiced wine,
the divine balsam flows"*

Three Interior Acts

Before I spoke of exterior works. These three lines refer to the will's interior acts. When the soul receives these graces and divine visits, these are called the touch of fire, the spiced wine, and the flowing of divine balsam.

The contact of fire is the Beloved's delicate touch when the soul does not expect it. This sets the heart on fire as if a spark had fallen and made it burn. In an instant, the will is rescued from sleep and burns with a love which praises God and worships Him.

The Balsam of Comfort

These interior acts are the balsam which flows from the touch of fire. The balsam comforts the soul and heals it with its odor and substance.

The bride says, “My Beloved put his hand through the opening and my belly trembled at the touch” (Song 5:4). The hand is the grace bestowed. The opening is the soul’s call to perfection. The touch will be heavier or lighter according to its spiritual state. The belly is the will. The trembling is the stirring of desires to praise God. The balsam flows from the touch.

“The spiced wine” is an extraordinary grace sometimes given to advanced souls. The Spirit inebriates them with the luscious wine of love. This love is reserved for a soul prepared by virtue and gives this soul such a strong inebriation that the soul pours forth acts of rapturous praise and longs to work and suffer for the Beloved.

Unlike the touch of fire, this spiritual inebriation does not pass away quickly. The spiced wine and its effects continue for a considerable time, even for many days. The soul cannot control the inebriation, nor the degree of intensity. Without any effort, the soul is conscious of a sweet, inner inebriation of love burning within. “My heart waxed hot within me” (Ps 39:4).

Sometimes, the outpourings of this inebriation last as long as the inebriation itself. At other times, there are no outpourings. When they do occur, they are as intense as the inebriation itself. These outpourings, (the effects of the fire) generally last longer than the fire itself which leaves them behind. They are more vehement than the effects of inebriation. Sometimes, this fire burns up and consumes the soul in love.

Difficulties With New Wine

Concerning fermented wine, there is a difference between the old and the new. The new wine has not settled and is still fermenting and we cannot judge its quality until the fermentation has ceased. Otherwise there is great risk. The taste is rough and sharp and it immediately causes intoxication.

Because old wine has settled and no longer ferments, its quality is easily understood. This wine is safe. Fermentation has ceased and well-fermented wine is rarely spoiled. Its taste is pleasant and its substance contains a strength. Drinking produces health and a sound body.

New lovers are like new wine. They are beginners in God’s service and their fervor is seen by the outward senses. They have not yet settled and they measure love by the sensible sweetness which gives them strength for good works. We place no confidence in this love until fermentation has subsided.

These fervors lead men to love and are an excellent means when the imperfections are cleaned away. However, love can easily fail when sensible sweetness is fresh because this sweetness can vanish. Many times new lovers are tormented by their feelings and must put restraints on them. The wine’s strength can make souls anxious and fatigued because the new wine is still rough and sharp. Perfect fermentation occurs only when love’s anxieties are over. I will show what I mean.

Value of Old Wine

“A new friend is like new wine. When it grows old you shall drink it with pleasure” (Eccl 9:15). Old lovers have proven their service to the Bridegroom. They have no sensible emotions, no outbursts of zeal. They drink the fermented wine which has settled in the soul in the sweetness of spirit and in perfect good works. Because these souls do not seek fervors they do not suffer weariness. Anyone who turns over the reins to his sensual desires will suffer disgust in mind and body.

Old lovers are free from sensual sweetness. They suffer no anxieties of love and always prove faithful to God. They have risen above the flesh (which is an occasion for failure). They drink wine which is fermented and spiced with perfect virtues which allow no corruption (a problem with new wine).

“Forsake not an old friend, for a new friend will not be like him” (Eccl 9:14). The Beloved produces the divine inebriation by fermented and spiced wine. This influences soul and sends delicious outpourings to God. These three lines mean “By the fire which stirs the soul and by the spiced wine which inebriates it, the soul pours forth acts of love which You work within.”

Living Water of the Spirit

Such is the soul on the bed of flowers where she receives all God’s blessings. The bed is the Son of God. Its hangings are the Bridegroom’s love. The bride says, “His left hand is under my head” (Song 2:6). In its interior spirit, the soul is bathed in the Divinity and filled with divine delights in these waters. David describes the experience. “They shall be inebriated by the plenty of your house. You shall make them drink of the torrent of Your pleasure” (Ps 36:9).

This torrent is the Holy Spirit in the soul’s substance. “He showed me a river of living water, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb” (Rev 22:1). The water is the Spirit of the Bridegroom and it flows into the soul which sings:

STANZA 26

*In the inner cellar
Of my Beloved have I drunk; and when I went forth
Over all the plain
I knew nothing
And lost the flock I followed before*

The soul speaks of God’s sovereign decision to take the soul into His house of love. This has two effects – forgetfulness of worldly things and mortification of desires.

“In the inner cellar”

The Final Gift

Here, I need the Holy Spirit to guide my pen because the “cellar” is the highest degree of love in this life. Therefore it is “inner”. Other cellars exist which are not so interior. They are lesser degrees of love. There are seven cellars. The soul which possesses the seven gifts of the Spirit in their perfection has entered all seven cellars. The final cellar is the spirit of fear which a son has who perfectly loves his father. The soul with perfect fear has perfect love. Scripture describes this soul as one who fears God. “The spirit of the fear of the Lord shall replenish him.” (Is 11:3) Luke writes that Simeon was a “just man full of fear” (2:25).

Many souls enter the first cellar. Few enter the innermost cellar where spiritual marriage takes place. What God bestows in this cellar is beyond all words (as is God Himself) because God gives Himself in a marvelous bliss of transformation. God and the soul are united like a coal with the fire (but not as completely as in heaven). In this wine cellar, the soul can only say:

“Of my Beloved have I drunk”

Drinking of God

As a draught of wine is felt throughout the body, so, God diffuses Himself substantially in the whole soul. The soul drinks of God and His spiritual powers. The understanding drinks wisdom. The will drinks the sweetest love. The memory drinks refreshment and the sense drinks bliss. “My soul melted as He spoke” (Song 5:6).

The understanding drinks wisdom. This is shown by the bride’s kiss of union. “There you shall teach me, and I will give you a cup of spiced wine” (Song 8:2). God teaches the soul and her love is mingled with His. The bride also speaks about the will, “He brought me into the wine cellar; He has ordered in me charity” (Song 2:4); i.e. He tempered His Charity so it could be mine. The soul drinks of the very love of the Beloved.

Greater Love Without Greater Knowledge

Some say that the will can only love what the intellect understands. In the order of nature it is true that we cannot love what we do not know. God, however, can infuse love without infusing distinct knowledge. Many spiritual persons have experienced this. Their love for God burns greater even though their knowledge does not grow. Some know little and love much. Others know much and love little.

Their knowledge of God is not great but their will is very rich. Infused faith suffices for knowledge and God uses infused faith to increase charity. He increases the soul’s acts of love without increasing knowledge. The will drinks in love even though the understanding drinks no fresh knowledge. In this instance, all the soul’s powers are in union in the inner cellar and drink of the Beloved. The soul also drinks in its memory which can remember the blessings it enjoys in union.

“And when I went forth”

This is after the inebriation. The drinking has deified the soul and inebriated it in God. Although the soul is in the state of marriage by being placed in the house. Yet, the actual union of all its powers with God is not continuous even though substantial union is. In this union, the soul’s powers do drink of His cellar. Saying the soul “went forth” does not mean this substantial, essential union has ceased. It only means that the union with its faculties is not a permanent state.

“I knew nothing”

When the soul drinks God’s wisdom, it forgets all the world’s things and considers all its previous knowledge as pure ignorance. In this high state the soul ignores the world’s things because it possesses supernatural knowledge. Compared with that, all other knowledge is ignorance. Possessing this profound knowledge, the soul realizes that any knowledge that is not included in this is worthless. “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor 3:19).

Having drunk of divine wisdom, the soul says it knows nothing. By drinking of the Bridegroom’s love the soul learns that this world’s wisdom is mere ignorance and desires no attention. “The mortal man said, ‘I am not God. I am the most stupid of men’” (Pr 30:1-2).

Effects of Divine Wisdom

The soul sees that all natural science, if accompanied by ignorance of God, is really ignorance. Where He is not known, nothing is known. “The deep things of God are foolishness to man” (1 Cor 2:14). The divinely wise and the worldly wise are fools to each other. The latter cannot understand

God's wisdom and the former cannot understand the world's wisdom. They are as ignorance to one another.

When the soul is lifted up and absorbed in love, it cannot dwell in earthly matters. It is detached even from itself, undone, and dissolved in love. It goes out of itself into the Beloved. The bride expresses this ignorance, "I know not" (Song 6:11). The soul is like Adam in paradise who knew no evil. The soul is innocent and sees nothing amiss. It hears and sees evil but cannot understand it, because it has no evil habits to judge evil by. By the virtue of perfect wisdom God has rooted out all ignorance resulting from sin. The soul knows nothing of evil.

Ignoring Evil

The soul doesn't meddle in other people's affairs and forgets even its own. God's Spirit leads the soul to ignore what doesn't concern it (especially what does not build it up). The Spirit withdraws the soul and it knows nothing of what it formerly knew. Infused knowledge improves its previous virtues of knowledge. On occasion, this gives particular knowledge.

Absorbed But Not Destroyed

The soul enjoys a union with divine wisdom and its knowledge unites with God's still higher wisdom. Its little light is overwhelmed by a great light but it still shines and is perfected. In heaven, our acquired habits of knowledge will not be destroyed but they will be of no great importance because the soul will know so much more from divine wisdom.

In this absorbing love, the soul loses and ignores all ideas, forms or images for two reasons. First, the soul cannot pay them any attention. It is absorbed in the draught of love. Second (and most important) the soul is conformed to God's simplicity (in which there are no forms of knowledge). It is emptied of all figures and enlightened only by simple contemplation. All stains in the glass become invisible when the sun shines. They appear again when the sun's light is withheld.

This ignorance continues as long as the effects of love continue. The soul cannot observe anything until these effects cease. Love has transformed the soul into love and has destroyed all that is not love. "My heart has been inflamed, and my reins have changed; I am brought to nothing, and I knew not" (Ps 73:21-22).

Besides bringing all previous knowledge to nothing, drinking the wine has a second effect. The old life of imperfections is destroyed and a new man is renewed.

"And lost the flock I followed before"

Destruction of Imperfections

Before it reaches perfection, the soul has many desires and likings (natural and spiritual). It seeks these desires and tries to feed them. The intellect is imperfect in desiring knowledge. The will has imperfections in its desires to possess temporal things. The will has attachments, prejudices and vanities that savor of the world. In eating and drinking, the soul prefers one food over another. In spiritual things, the soul seeks sweetness or other imperfections, too numerous to mention. The memory has inconsistencies, anxieties and unseemly memories which captivate the soul.

Until they enter the inner cellar, the four passions (hope, joy, fear and grief) have much influence. In that cellar, this flock of imperfections is easily destroyed (like rust in the fire). The soul is free from pettiness and vanities and says "I have lost the flock which I followed before".

God's Humility and Comfort

God communicates to the soul this interior union of love which is so intense that no human love (of a mother, a brother or a friend) bears any likeness to it. The heavenly Father's love is tender and deep. He exalts the humble soul as if He were the soul's servant. So great is God's humility that He is like a slave anxious to serve a master. Jesus described this, "I say to you, He will gird himself and make them sit down to eat and will minister to them" (Lk 12:37).

He now comforts the soul like a mother with her bosom. "You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they will caress you" (Is 66:12). How does the soul feel when it sees God's bosom open to it? It is in the middle of these delights and the soul gives itself to these breasts using the bride's words, "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth to the field to see if the pomegranates flourish. There will I give you my breasts" (Song 7:10-12), that is, "I will use all the strength of my will to serve your love". The following stanza shows this mutual surrender.

STANZA 27

*There He gave me His breasts
There He taught me the science of sweetness
And there I gave to Him
Myself without reserve
There I promised to be His bride*

The soul and God are the two contracting parties in this spiritual betrothal. They meet in the inner cellar. God gives freely the breasts of His love and instructs the soul in mysteries. The soul surrenders without reservation and promises to be His forever.

"There He gave me His breasts"

God is a friend who loves and communicates secrets. The soul says God gave His love and His secrets.

"There He taught me the science full of sweetness"

This is mystical theology, the science of contemplation which is full of a sweetness given by love. This science is sweet to the understanding by knowledge and sweet to the will by love.

"There I gave to Him myself without reserve".

Total Surrender

The soul willingly surrenders. It wants to be totally God's and to retain nothing unworthy of its Master. God gives both the union itself and the perfection needed for the union. By this transformation God makes the soul totally His and He empties it of anything alien to Himself. Because God has given Himself freely, the whole soul (in will and in act) becomes God's. Both the will of God and the will of the soul are satisfied. Neither fails the other in the constancy of the betrothal.

"There I promised to be His bride"

The First Impulses

A bride must have all her love, thoughts and actions directed to her bridegroom. In this state, the soul refers everything to God and is absorbed in God. Even its beginning desires do not vary from God's will.

In the imperfect soul, these first impulses are generally inclined to evil. However, for the soul in this state, even the first movements of memory, will and understanding are directed to God. This comes from the help God gives and from the soul's perfect conversion to goodness. "Shall not my soul be subject to God? He is my God and my Savior. He is my protector. I shall be moved no more" (Ps 62:2-3). The soul is under God's protection and no longer subject to impulses contrary to God.

The Delights of Betrothal

The soul which has gained a betrothal knows only the delights of the Bridegroom. The more perfect a soul the more it loves. This soul has arrived at perfection whose very substance is love. All the soul's energies are absorbed in love. It is a wise merchant and sells all to gain this treasure hidden in God (Mt 13:44). The Beloved cares only for love. Because the soul is anxious to please, it is totally occupied in love and is totally influenced by God's love.

A bee draws from all plants with one goal – to make honey. In like manner, the soul makes everything a servant of God's love. The soul is animated only by love. It has no other sense, feeling or knowledge. In everything, its joy is in God.

Pleased Only By Love

I have said that God is pleased only with love. Before explaining this, I want to show the foundation of that assertion. All our works are nothing in God's sight because we can give Him nothing. His only desire is the growth of our soul.

However, the soul can only grow by becoming, in some manner, equal to God. Therefore, He is pleased only by love. This places the beloved on a level of equality. By its love, the soul is called the bride of the Son of God. This signifies equality. The Bridegroom has said "I have called you friends because what I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15)

STANZA 28:

*My soul is occupied,
And all my substance in His service;
Now I guard no flock,
Nor have I any other employment;
My sole occupation is love.*

Fulfilling Her Tasks

Having given herself to the Bridegroom, the soul tells Him that she fulfills her task. "My soul and body, my abilities and capacities are occupied in service to the Bridegroom". She does not seek her own satisfaction or gratification. She isn't busy about anything foreign to God. Even her communion with God is love. She has changed her way of conversing with him into loving him.

"My soul is occupied"

The soul surrenders and devotes all her faculties to His service. Her understanding considers what most serves Him. Her will desires Him in all things. Her memory recalls what is most pleasing to Him.

“And all my substance in His service”

“Substance” means the soul’s sensual part. This includes the body and its natural capacities (the four passions and natural desires) and the whole substance of the soul (including the natural and spiritual parts).

The body is now ordered to God in both interior and exterior senses. The soul’s four passions are also under control because the soul’s joy, hope, fear and grief seek only God (as do all its appetites).

Totally Concerned With God

The whole substance of the soul is so occupied with God that even its inadvertent impulses are toward God. All affections, desires and longings rise instantly toward God, even without the soul making any conscious effort. The soul works for God without even reflecting on what it is doing for Him. This constant, habitual practice deprives the soul of any conscious reflection or even feelings of fervor which it used to have. The soul is so occupied that it says,

“Now I guard no flock”

That is, “Since my desires are so fixed on God I no longer feed or guard them.” The soul has only one occupation – to wait upon God.

“Nor have I any other employment”

Before surrendering herself to the Beloved, the soul was entangled in what pleased herself and others. These entanglements were her habits of imperfection.

A Freedom

They include speaking, thinking and doing what is useless and not using these acts to acquire perfection. The soul also served others by compliments, flattery, human respect, wanting to be well thought of and other useless actions. All this is wasted effort. Now the soul says “All of this is over”. All thoughts, words and deeds are directed to God. The soul is free, no longer following its own or other’s likings nor occupying self with useless pastimes.

Totally Love

The soul is totally occupied (in all its powers and desires) in loving God. All suffering is in this sweetness of love. The bride said, “I will keep my strength for you” (Song 7:13).

In this state, all the soul’s acts (spiritual or sensual; active or passive) bring about an increase in love and delight. Even the soul’s communion with God (once done by methods of prayer) is now totally love. Whether involved with temporal or spiritual things, the soul says “My only occupation is love”. Oh, happy life and state, when all is the substance of love and the delights of betrothal. The bride says, “The new and the old, my Beloved, have I kept for you” (Song 7:13), meaning “The bitter and painful, the sweet and pleasant, I keep for you”. When the soul is in the state of betrothal, it habitually waits lovingly upon God.

Martha and Mary

The soul is lost to things and found only in love. Occupied only with love, the mind becomes deficient in the active life and exterior duties. It does only the one thing the Bridegroom finds necessary, the continuous practice of love (Lk. 10:42). Jesus rebuked Martha who would withdraw Mary from His feet. Martha thought Mary was doing nothing. Really, it was quite otherwise. Nothing

is better than love. The Bridegroom tells the daughters of Jerusalem (who symbolize created things) not to disturb the bride's sleep of love, "Oh daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up or awake my beloved until she pleases" (Song 3:5).

The Unique Value of Love

Please note. If the soul has not reached unitive love, she must still make acts of love (in both the active and contemplative life). When she reaches unitive love, the soul should be involved only in matters of obligation. Otherwise, these duties would hinder her love for God (even though they might be serving Him). An instant of pure love is more precious to God and more profitable to the Church than all other works put together.

Certainly, the preaching of Mary Magdalene would have pleased God and benefited the Church, yet she hid for thirty years in the desert to surrender entirely to love. She knew that an instant of pure love is much more profitable to the Church.

Solitary Love

We must not interfere with a soul which possesses this gift of solitary love. This would inflict a grievous wrong on the soul, and on the Church by occupying this soul, even for a moment, in exterior duties no matter how important. If God adjures us not to awaken the soul, who can do so and be blameless? We are created for this love.

All the preachers who want to convert the world, would please God and help the Church more if they would spend half their time in prayer (even if they are not in unitive love). They would do more good by a single work than by a thousand because their prayer brings merit and strength. Otherwise, the preacher just beats the air, doing nothing, or worse, doing some harm. God gives these preachers up to vanity. They seem to do something but their work bears no fruit. Good works are done only in God's power. Much more could be written but this is not the place.

In the following stanza, the soul will reply to those who question its tranquility. These people want to do outward works so their own light can shine. They have no idea of the hidden roots which truly nourish the fruit.

STANZA 29

*If then on the common land
I am no longer seen or found,
You will say that I am lost;
That, being enamored,
I lost myself; and yet was found.*

Reproached By the World

Worldly people tacitly reproach and censure those who surrender themselves to God. They claim that these souls are extravagant in their life and in their withdrawal from the world. They claim they are useless in the important matters and lost to what the world prizes. The soul faces this reproach courageously by despising all that the world claims. Having gained a living love, the soul accounts this reproach as nothing. It even agrees with the charge and boasts of its folly. The soul is lost to the world for the Beloved.

The soul says to the world “I am no longer engrossed with the world’s pastimes. I am lost and a stranger to them. This is my own choice for I seek the Beloved.” This loss is really a gain, not a delusion or foolishness. All is done deliberately.

“If then on the common, I am no longer seen or found”

The common is a public place where people assemble. This is the world where men amuse themselves and feed their desires. The soul says, “You no longer see me where I was because I gave myself to God. Consider me as lost and say so”. The soul wants men to speak of her in this way.

“Say that I am lost”

The soul is not ashamed of what she does for God, even if the whole world would condemn her. If she were, then the Son of God will be ashamed to acknowledge the soul before the Father (Mt. 10-33). The soul is courageous in honoring the Beloved. She does all for Him and is lost to the world.

Many Are Not Detached

Few spiritual persons arrive at this perfect courage and resolution in their conduct. Some attempt it. Others even think they are proficient but on some points, they do not lose themselves concerning the world or themselves. They are not perfectly detached nor totally despise the world’s opinion. They can never answer “Say that I am lost”. They are not lost to themselves nor unashamed to confess Christ to the world. They still have human respect.

“That being enamored”

This means practicing virtues

“I lost myself; and yet was found”

Losing Self

The soul remembers Jesus’ words, “No one can serve two masters. He will hate one and love the other” (Mt. 6:24). To gain God, the soul must lose all else, even self. All is lost to love for Him. The soul becomes a shipwreck to gain the Beloved. The soul has lost itself, deliberately and on purpose.

The soul loses itself in two ways. First, the soul freely and deliberately seeks nothing for itself. Second, only the interests of the Beloved are important. The soul seeks neither gain nor reward. It wants to lose all, even itself. To die for Christ is to profit spiritually. “To die is gain”(Phil 1:21). The soul says it “was found”. Jesus said, “Whoever saves his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”. (Mt. 16:25).

To lose self has an even deeper spiritual meaning. The advanced soul is lost to all natural means of communing with God. It no longer seeks God in images, impressions or sense representations. It rises above all these and finds God in truth. The soul is lost to all that is not God.

The soul has gained all and all its works are gain. All its powers are used in spiritual intercourse with the Beloved. This is so delicious that no tongue can describe and no understanding comprehend. On her betrothal day, the bride thinks only of the festival. She brings forth her jewels for the bridegroom’s pleasure and He, too, exhibits his riches for his bride’s pleasure. “I to my Beloved and my Beloved to me.” (Song 6:2) For the bridal celebration both the bride’s virtues and the Bridegroom’s magnificence come into the light. Each communicates to the other the joys of sweet wine – love in the Holy Spirit.

STANZA 30

*Of emeralds, and of flowers
in the early morning gathered,
We will make the garlands,
Flowering in Your love,
And bound together with one hair of my head.*

Mutual Love

The stanza describes the delight which the bride-soul and the Son of God find in possessing and using each other's gifts. They rejoice in their mutual love. They will make garlands rich in virtues, gained at the right season. These are beautiful in the Bridegroom's love and held together by the bride's love. "Making garlands" is to rejoice in virtues which are bound in their mutual love (the garlands).

"of emeralds, and of flowers"

The emeralds are God's gifts. The flowers are the soul's virtues.

"in early morning gathered."

They are acquired in youth. This is most pleasing to God because, in youth, vices are strong and resist the acquiring of virtue. Virtues acquired in early youth are more perfect. They have the freshness of a spring morning.

A Winter Morning of Dryness

The fresh morning means the acts of love by which we acquire virtues. There are also good works during spiritual dryness. This is the freshness of a winter morning, and is very pleasing to God. In dryness we acquire abundant virtues because what we acquire with toil is better, more perfect and more lasting than what is acquired in sweetness. In dry seasons, virtue must send its roots a great distance. "Virtue is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

The garland shows forth the excellence of these virtues gathered in the early morning. Only these perfect emeralds please the Bridegroom. So the soul says:

"We will make garlands"

Virtues Set In Order

All the virtues and graces are a garland which adorns the soul in rich embroidery. As material flowers are formed into a garland, so the spiritual flowers are acquired and set in order until the perfection is complete. Both the soul and the Beloved rejoice in their mutual beauty.

Having made these garlands by its virtues, the soul presents herself worthily before the King. She is in equality with him and merits by her beauty to be a queen at his right hand. "The queen stood at your right hand, clothed in vestments of gold." (Ps 45:10)

Christ and the Soul

The soul says "We will make garlands". God and the soul work together because she cannot acquire them alone and God does not create virtue unless the soul cooperates. Truly, "every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17) but they enter the soul only with its consent. The soul says "Draw me. We will run after you" (Song 1:3). All inclinations to good come from God alone, but running (good works) come from God and the soul together. Therefore, we will run.

These words apply also to Christ and His Church. The garlands are holy souls born to Christ in His Church. Each soul is a garland and together they form a crown for Christ's head.

There are three kinds of garlands, the white flowers of virgins; the brilliant flowers of Church Doctors; and the purple flowers of the martyrs. Because these adorn Christ's head, heaven itself says, "Go forth, daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon in the diadem given by his mother on his betrothal day" (Song 3:11).

"Flowering in Your love"

The virtues flower only in God's love. Otherwise, they are dry and worthless in God's sight (even if humanly perfect).

"And bound together with one hair of my head"

The hair is the love which the soul has for the Bridegroom. As thread binds flowers, so love knits together the soul's virtues. "Love is the bond of perfection" (Col 3:14), binding together the supernatural gifts. When love fails, our virtues perish. Any flowers without the thread would drop from the garland. God loving us is not enough. We must love Him to receive and preserve His gifts.

The Importance and Beauty of the Binding

"One hair" signifies the will fixed in God and detached from all strange love. This garland costs a great price. When the will is fixed, the virtues are perfect and flower in God's love. The soul knows that this love is beyond price.

I cannot describe the beauty of this binding or the majesty which this harmonious arrangement gives to the soul. Words fail me in portraying of the soul's expressions. God says of the devil "His body is like molten shields, shut close up, one joined to another with no air in between (Job 41:6-7). If the evil spirit clad in molten shields of evil is so strong, what is the strength of a soul clothed in virtues which are so united that no impurity can penetrate. Each virtue adds strength, beauty, wealth and dominion to all the other virtues.

Arranged Like An Army

What a marvelous vision the bride-soul will enjoy when, clad in virtues, it sits at the right of the Bridegroom-king. "O prince's daughter, how beautiful are your feet in sandals" (Song 7:1). Because of its power, the soul is called "the prince's daughter." If its feet clothed in sandals are beautiful, what must its whole vesture be like?

Its strength comes from the intertwining of the flowers "Terrible as the army set in battle array" (Song 6:3). Besides refreshing the soul by their perfume, these virtues also give strength. The bride was weak and languishing because she had not been able to bend the flowers with the hair of her love. She sought strength from the union, "Stay with me flowers. Compass me about with apples, because I languish with love" (Song 2:5).

A Union Beyond Description

I have shown how the intertwining of the garlands and their lasting presence in the soul explain the divine union which now exists. The Bridegroom is the "flower of the field and the lily of the valleys" (Song 2:1). The soul's love is the hair which unites it to Him. Love is the bond of union with God. The soul is different because she is the subject of this glory. She is the perfect flower because the thread of

love binds God so closely with the soul that it makes them one. In essence, they are different; but in glory and appearance the soul seems to be God and God the soul. This union baffles all description.

Jonathan's "soul was knit with the soul of David" (1 Kg 18:1). If human love can knot together Jonathan and David cannot God's love knit the soul to the Bridegroom? God is a lover who absorbs the soul with a greater efficacy that fire absorbs a single drop of morning dew. The hair, then, must be strong, subtle and penetrating because it binds the soul and God. The soul explains the hair's qualities:

STANZA 31

By that one hair

*You have observed fluttering on my neck
and on my neck regarded,
You were captivated
And wounded by one of my eyes*

The soul mentions three things. First, this love is strong enough to preserve the union of the virtues. Second, God is taken by this hair. It stands alone and strong. Third, God loves the soul because of the integrity of its faith.

*"By that one hair You have observed fluttering
on my neck"*

A Strong Independent Love

The neck signifies strength and the hair is the strong love which binds the virtues together. Love is not enough. It must be strong so that no vice destroys the garland's perfection. If one thread is broken, all is lost. The hair flutters because of the soul's love for God. It flutters strongly and with hindrance.

The breath of the Spirit causes the fluttering, and stirs so the soul can fly to God. Unless this divine wind excited the soul to love, the virtues would become fruitless. The Beloved sees this hair fluttering because strong love always attracts God's attention.

"And on my neck regarded"

God is Captivated

God esteems this love (which is only for Him) and loves it because it is strong. "Neck" is repeated here because it symbolizes strength. God loves the soul because she is strong, without fear, with no other love, and flying fervently upwards.

Until now, God had not been captivated by this hair because He had not seen it separated from feelings and affections which burdened its lonely fluttering. However, mortifications and trials have detached the soul. The love is strong and nothing can break it. God sees this and is taken by it because this love can keep the virtues united in the soul.

I have described these temptations which lead the soul to such strength in the "Dark Night" in four stanzas beginning with "O Living flame of love". Once past these trials, the soul merits divine union.

"You were captivated"

God Looks on the Soul

God is captive to a hair which He observed fluttering on the soul's neck! Only because God first loved us (1 Jn 4:10) could He be captivated by our miserable love. Only because He first looked upon us, did we have the strength to fly high enough to gain His attention. He makes the soul pleasing to Himself and is then captivated by His creature. A low flying bird can capture an eagle only if the eagle chooses to fly low and be captured.

“And wounded by one of my eyes”

The eye is faith. This faith has wounded the Beloved because it is not mixed with other considerations. Only this kind of faith wounds God. The eye that wounds and the hair that attracts must be alone and detached. Then the Bridegroom loves the bride because her faith is simple. This one eye wounds Him because of His tender affection for the bride. This causes a great progress in her love.

The Bridegroom says, “You have wounded my heart, my sister and bride; you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck” (Song 4:9). He says twice that his heart is wounded by the eye and the hair. This shows that the union is in both the intellect (by the eye of faith) and in the will (by the love of the hair).

The soul thanks the Bridegroom for this union because she sees the greatness of returning His love and of being her captive. The soul delights in her prisoner. For a long time she was His prisoner, enamored by Him.

Love's courage and power are great because God is its prisoner. Blessed is the soul who loves God. The lover will do what is asked. Without love, all other effort is fruitless. The soul knows this and is conscious of having blessings far beyond what it merits. Raised to this high level, the soul attributes all to the Beloved, saying:

STANZA 32

*When You regarded me,
Your eyes imprinted in me Your grace:
For this You loved me again,
And thereby my eyes merited
to adore what in You they saw.*

Attributing All to God

Perfect love seeks and accepts nothing for itself and attributes all to the Beloved. In the previous two stanzas, the bride seems to attribute some powers to herself, such as to bind with a hair, to capture the Beloved or to wound with her eye. Now she removes any wrong impression that she has any merit.

She attributes all to God. He is the cause of becoming her captive and of being wounded by her faith. His mercy made her lovely and pleasing in His sight. Only what He gave to her merited His love. He alone made her worthy to adore Him.

“When You regarded me”

That is, with loving affection.

“Your eyes imprinted in me Your grace”

The eyes signify His divinity which mercifully inclined toward the soul and imprinted His beauty. This elevated the soul to partake of His Divinity. The soul sees this height and says:

“For this You loved me again”

To love again is more than simple love. It is a two-fold love. In the beginning, the Bridegroom was captivated by the hair. Later, he was wounded by the eye. Thus, He loved the soul again. He loved the soul deeply because He gave it more grace to please Him.

“For This You loved me again”

To say that God shows favor means that He makes the soul capable of love. The soul says, “Having showed me Your favor, You loved me again”. John calls this “grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). Without grace, we cannot merit grace.

God loves only Himself and nothing more than Himself. He loves all things in reference to Himself. He loves the soul to bring it to Himself, so He can make it His equal. He loves the soul in Himself with His own love. Only because the soul is exalted does its works merit God’s love. A soul in God’s favor merits God Himself in every act.

“And thereby my eyes merited”

That is “When You looked at me, You made me worthy and pleasing.”

“To adore what in You they saw”

“My eyes were once fallen in their lowly occupations, but now they have merited to see You”, that is, do works in grace. The soul can merit because adorned with grace. Their eyes now can adore what they see in the Beloved. Before they were blind and saw nothing. Now they have seen His power, sweetness, infinite goodness and innumerable benefits (even when they were far away). Before, the eyes could neither adore or even look upon Him. Such is the blindness in a soul without grace.

It is depressing to see how far a soul departs from God when not enlightened. It does not acknowledge His favors nor worship Him unceasingly. It is unworthy even to think of Him and renders Him no account. This is the misery of those dead in sin.

God blesses the soul in four ways: He cleanses, adorns, enriches and enlightens it. (The same effects that the sun has upon the earth). Having made the soul pleasing, God remembers not its sins. “All the sins he has done, I will not remember” (Ez 18:22).

Effects of Sins Removed

Having removed our sins, He will see them no more, for He never punishes twice. “There shall not arise a double affliction” (Nahum 1:9). Although God forgets, we should not forget. “Be not without fear about forgiven sin” (Eccl 5:5). There are three reasons to remember our sins: so we do not presume, so we give perpetual thanks and so we can hope for greater favors. If God was merciful when we were in our sins, how much greater now that we are in His love?

The soul remembers all God’s mercies and sees its own dignity in this divine union. It recalls its former condition of sin when God could not call its name. “Nor will I be mindful of their names upon my lips” (Ps 16:4). The soul sees that nothing it had attracted God’s eyes. Seeing that all came from His goodwill, she attributes all blessings to the Beloved. Because she can now merit, she becomes bold and prays for Divine union in the following stanza:

STANZA 33

*Despise me not,
For if I was swarthy once,
You can regard me now;
Since You have regarded me,
Grace and beauty have You given me.*

Because of the Bridegroom's gifts, the soul now respects itself and becomes bold. By these gifts, the soul can merit. She says, "Despise me not". Before she deserved contempt due to her sins. Now that God has once adorned her with beauty, He may do this a second time. After all, He did this when the soul did not deserve it. Now, she can hope that He will do this again.

"Despise me not"

A soul that loves God finds joy in insults. So, the soul gladly acknowledges that it merits to be despised unless God had blessed her.

"For if I was swarthy once"

Before You looked at me, I was full of imperfections and sins.

"You can regard me now; since you have regarded me"

Effects of God's Look

You, however, took away my swarthy complexion and all that was disagreeable. You made me lovely. Now, I am worthy to be looked at and to receive more favors. By Your first look, Your eyes took away my swarthy complexion and made me worthy.

"Grace and beauty You have given me"

Grace Upon Grace

These lines are a commentary on "grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). When God sees a lovely soul, He grants more graces because He is well pleased with her. Moses always prayed for further graces. "If I have found favor in Your sight, show me your face, that I may know You and find grace in Your eyes" (Ex. 33:12-13).

A soul exalted in loveliness becomes an object of God's unutterable love. Before the state of grace God loved the soul for His own sake. After grace, He loves the soul also for itself. Enamored of the soul's beauty, He bestows further graces. By these new graces, God is even captivated more.

Multiplying Favors

God says, "Because you have become glorious in My eyes, I have loved you" (Is 43:4). That is, "Because I looked on you and made you honorable in my sight, you have merited more favors". Because God loves, He multiplies His graces.

The bride says, "I am black but beautiful" (Song 1:4). The Church adds "Therefore, the King has loved me and brought me into His chambers (Vesper of B.V.M.) As if saying, "Do not marvel that the heavenly King has plunged me into the depths of His love. Although I am swarthy, He looked at me.

After looking, He was satisfied only by betrothing me to Himself and by calling me into His inner chamber.

How great is the soul's exultation when God is pleased with her! No language suffices. God alone does this as God's actions can be understood only in the following way. He gives more to those who have more. He multiplies His gifts according to what the soul has already received. Jesus said, "More is given to Him who has. He that has not, even what he has shall be taken away" (Mt 13:12).

The servant who did not use the one talent had even that removed and given to one who had more (Mt 25:28). God gives His greatest favors to His greatest friends. This is for His honor, as the great light absorbs many little lights. "I am the Holy One of Israel. I have given Egypt for your atonement and Seba for you. I will give men for you, and people for your life" (Is 43:3).

"O God, you can prize the soul because by Your look, You have made her precious. Now, You are captivated. Because You have looked upon her once, the soul desires that You regard her many times. "He is worthy when the King has in mind to honor". (Esth. 6:11)

These gifts of love bestowed by the Bridegroom are inestimable, and their mutual expressions are beyond all expression. The soul praises God and God exalts the soul. The Bridegroom says, "Behold, O my love, you are fair; your eyes are as those of doves". The bride replies "You are fair, my Beloved, and comely" (Song 4:1 and 6:3).

At first, the soul despised itself and said it was swarthy. Later, she praised the Beloved for making her beautiful. In the next stanza, the Beloved praises the soul. He calls her a white dove and praises her dispositions.

STANZA 34

*The little white dove
Has returned to the ark with the bough;
And now the turtle dove
Its desired mate
On the green banks has found*

The Bridegroom celebrates the present state of the soul's purity and the rich rewards she has gained by her efforts to come to Him. He speaks of her blessedness in finding the Bridegroom, of the fulfillment of her desires, and of her delight, now that the time of trials is over.

"The little white dove"

The soul is a dove because of its purity. She is a "little white dove" because of her natural gentleness and contemplation. Besides being simple and without guile, the soul's eyes are clear, full of love. In the Canticle, the Bridegroom points out the soul's loving contemplation by saying, "Your eyes are a dove's eyes" (Song 4:1).

"Has returned to the ark with the bough"

Total Victory

The Bridegroom compares the soul to the dove in Noah's ark. At first, it returned to the ark because it found no rest until it had the olive branch – a sign of God's mercy in drying up the waters. When created, the soul left the ark of God's omnipotence, traversed the deluge of its own sins, found no rest

for its desires and returned to the ark of God's bosom. It gained its entrance only when God dried up its imperfections.

Having won the victory, the dove returns to the Beloved's bosom, triumphant over its enemies and rewarded for its merits. The olive branch symbolizes the triumph and the reward. Besides returning white and pure (as it was created), the dove has gained its reward by self-conquest.

*“And now the turtle dove its desired mate on the
green banks has found”*

Restless Until United

The Bridegroom describes the soul as a turtledove who cannot find its mate. Surprisingly, until a turtledove finds its mate, it will not sit on green boughs, drink water, go into the shade or mingle with its companions.

To attain union, the soul also cannot rest on the boughs of any other joy nor drink this world's glory, nor enjoy earthly consolation, nor find shelter in anything created. The soul must avoid society and mourn its loneliness until it finds the Bridegroom.

The Bridegroom speaks of the goal of her labors and the fulfillment of her desires. “Now the turtle dove its desired mate on the green boughs has found”. The bride-soul now rejoices in her Beloved. She drinks the water of the highest contemplation, is refreshed by His consolations and is sheltered by His protection. She is deliciously comforted and nourished. “I sat down under His shadow when I desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate”. (Song 2:3).

In the next stanza, the Bridegroom describes His satisfaction in seeing the bride's happiness in the solitude of stable peace and unchangeable good. Confirmed in her solitary love, the bride reposes in God and God in her. She requires no other means or teachers. God Himself is her light. He promised this through Hosea, “I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart” (2:14). In solitude, He communicates Himself and satisfies her heart. So, the Bridegroom says:

STANZA 35

*In solitude she lived,
And in solitude built her nest;
And in solitude, alone
Has the Beloved guided her,
In solitude also wounded with love.*

Solitude For the Beloved's Sake

The Bridegroom does two things. He praises solitude which detached the soul from all anxieties so she could find Him. Having abandoned all created consolation, she merited to possess this peace. Now, she reposes alone and with no anxieties.

Secondly, it was for the sake of the Beloved that she desired it. Because she is alone, He has fallen in love, has held her in His arms, has fed her and guided her to God's deep things. He is the soul's only guide. No help comes from angels or men, or forms or figures. In this solitude, the soul is detached from all subordinate means and has attained true liberty,.

“In solitude she lived”

Before finding the Beloved, the turtle dove (the soul) lived in solitude because the soul that seeks God finds no outside help. Companions only increase her solitude until she finds Him.

“And in solitude built her nest”

All is Satisfied

Her previous solitude was her voluntary detachment from this world’s comforts. The “nest” is her perfect solitude where she attains union with the Word and complete refreshment. These words mean, “In her previous solitude, she found afflictions because she was not perfect. Now she has found perfect rest in God”. The psalm says, “The sparrow has found herself a house and the turtle a nest for herself where she can lay her young ones” (Ps 84:4). In her sure rest in God all her desires are satisfied.

“And in solitude”

Emptied and Filled

Because the soul lives alone with God, He can elevate her to divine things. He lifts up her understanding because she is detached from other knowledge. He can freely move the will because it has no other affections. He can fill the memory with divine knowledge because emptied of all images.

As soon as the soul empties its faculties of both earthly realities and spiritual things, God fills them with the invisible and divine. Paul says “They are led by the Spirit of God”, that is “In solitude has He guided her”.

“Alone has the Beloved guided her”

God Alone Works

He alone works directly and immediately in the soul. In the spiritual marriage God communicates Himself directly, not by angels nor by natural capacities. The exterior and interior senses and even the soul itself, contribute very little in receiving these supernatural favors which cannot result from natural effects or ability. God alone brings them about.

Importance of Being Alone

God finds the soul alone. So, He will not entrust the work to another. This is fitting. The soul has abandoned all things and has risen above the ordinary means to God. So, God Himself has become her guide. Having ascended above all things, the soul can ascend higher only by God’s help. God is enamored with the soul and He alone bestows the graces. He says:

“In solitude also wounded with love”

The Bridegroom loves the soul’s solitude and is wounded by her love. The soul lives in solitude because she also is wounded with love. He will not leave her alone because He alone can satisfy her in this solitude. So He comes. He draws the soul and absorbs her. He does this only because He found her in spiritual solitude.

Need to Be Alone

People in love find greater pleasure in being alone than being with others. If lovers meet in the presence of others they are robbed of the pleasure of their meeting. This happens because love is the union of two persons who will communicate fully only when they are alone. The soul has reached the summit of perfection and liberty of spirit in God. All resistance of the flesh is subdued. At this stage, the soul enjoys only the intimate love of the Bridegroom. God restored Tobit after all his trials. “The rest of his life was in joy” (Tob 14:4). Secondly, the soul rejoices in all its blessings.

Isaiah describes the soul that has been tested and has gained perfection, “Your light shall arise in the darkness and the Lord will always give you rest. You shall be as a fountain whose waters never fail. If you turn away your foot on the Sabbath from doing your own will and if you call the Sabbath holy, then you shall be delighted in the Lord. I will lift you above the earth’s heights and will feed you on Jacob’s inheritance” (Is 58:10-14).

The soul can only delight in this pasture and desire one thing – the enjoyment of eternal life. The soul now asks the Beloved to admit her to the clear vision of God:

STANZA 36

The Bride

*Let us rejoice, O my Beloved,
Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty,
To the mountain and the hill,
Where the pure water flows:
Let us enter into the heart of the thicket.*

Three Requests

Since the perfect union has been accomplished, the soul wants to be occupied with love. So, she makes three requests of the Beloved. She asks for the sweetness of love – “Let us rejoice”. Second; she prays to be like Him “Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty”. Third, she begs to know His secrets “Let us enter into the heart of the thicket”.

“Let us rejoice, O my Beloved”

The soul wants to rejoice in the sweetness of our love, not just in ordinary union. This happens in two places – internally by affections and externally by good works of service to the Beloved. A deeply rooted love always seeks the delights of exterior and interior love.

“Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty”

Shared Beauty

The soul sees itself in His beauty of everlasting life. That is, “Let me be transformed so I am like You in Your beauty. Each will see his own beauty in the other. The beauty is Yours but I am absorbed into it. I shall then see both You and myself in Your beauty and You shall see me in Your beauty. In your beauty, I shall seem to be You and You will seem to be me. My beauty will be Yours and Yours mine.”

The Vision of Glory

This is God’s adoption and the soul uses Jesus’ words to the Father, “All My things are Yours and Yours are Mine” (Jn 17-10). He, by essence, is God’s Son by nature. We, by participation, are God’s Son by adoption. Jesus says these words for Himself and for His Mystical Body, the Church, which will see God face to face and share in the Bridegroom’s beauty. The soul prays for this vision of glory.

“To the mountain and the hill”

The mountain is the morning knowledge of the Divine Lord, that is, God in Himself. Isaiah invites us, “Let us go up the mountain of the Lord” (2:3).

The hill is the evening knowledge of God, that is, God in His creatures, works and laws. This knowledge is lower. It is a hill, not a mountain.

When the soul says “Let us go to the mountain to see ourselves in your beauty”, she asks to be transformed into the beauty of Divine Wisdom. When she asks to go to the hill, she wants to be instructed also in God’s knowledge of His creatures and His works.

When transformed by divine wisdom, the soul will see herself in God’s beauty for all is seen and possessed in Divine wisdom. The bride said “I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense” (Song 4:6). The mountain is the clear vision of God. The hill is knowledge of His works. The myrrh of divine wisdom is greater than the incense of knowing God’s creatures.

“Where the pure water flows”

Pure water is God’s wisdom. It clears the understanding of ignorance and detaches it from all other knowledge. The more the soul loves divine truths, the more she desires to understand them. Therefore, she says:

“Let us enter into the heart of the thicket”

Penetrating God’s Depths

She wants to enter into the depths of God’s works. These are a “thicket” because they are many and diverse. The Psalmist wrote, “The mountain of God is a rich mountain” (Ps 68:16). God’s wisdom is so deep and immense that the soul can always penetrate further. Paul writes, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways” (Rom. 11:33).

Willing to Endure Anything

The soul seeks deeper knowledge and wants to enter this thicket of incomprehensibility, which is an inestimable delight. “The judgments of the Lord are to be desired above gold and many precious stones. They are sweeter than honey and the honey comb”. (Ps 19:10-12) The soul wants to be engulfed in His wisdom and would endure all possible afflictions to have this deeper knowledge. It would endure any pain and would go through death agonies to enter deeper into God.

Therefore, the thicket also symbolizes the great tribulations which the soul seeks. Suffering is sweet and profitable. By trials, the soul enters more deeply into the thicket of God’s wisdom. The purest suffering leads to the greatest knowledge and to the highest joy (an effect of this knowledge). The soul is not satisfied with ordinary suffering. She wants to enter into the “heart of the thicket” (even death itself) to see God.

The Sufferings of the Cross

Job desired to suffer to see God. “Who will grant that He who has begun may destroy me, that He may loose His hand and cut me off. Afflicting me with sorrow, may He spare me not” (6:8-10). Let souls understand! They cannot have God’s manifold wisdom without entering the thicket of manifold suffering. The soul that longs for Divine Wisdom must seek first of all for the sufferings of the Cross.

Paul told the Ephesians to have courage. “May you be able to comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ’s love which surpasses all understanding, so you can be filled with God’s fullness”. (Eph 3: 17-19) The cross is the gate to the riches of God’s knowledge. Although many desire God’s joys the gate is narrow and few deserve to enter.

The soul wants to be released to see Christ face to face and penetrate the mysteries of His incarnation. Jesus said, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ

whom You have sent”. (Jn 17:3) After a long journey, the person wants to see and talk with the person whom he sought. After attaining the Beatific Vision, the soul wants to enjoy the deep secrets of the Incarnation. So, the soul says:

STANZA 37

*We shall go at once
To the deep caverns of the rock
Which are all secret;
There we shall enter in,
And taste of the new wine of the pomegranate.*

Entering into God’s Wisdom

The soul wants to enter this thicket of divine wisdom to unite its understanding with God concerning the mysteries of the Incarnation, which is the greatest of all God’s works. The bride says that after the spiritual marriage (which takes place on earth) she will understand the mysteries, the highest wisdom hidden in God. The bride will be engulfed and absorbed in the Bridegroom. Together they will rejoice in the knowledge of these mysteries and the attributes (mercy, wisdom, power, justice and love) which these mysteries reveal.

“We shall go at once to the deep caverns of the rock”

Deep With Rich Veins

The rock is Christ and the deep caverns are the deep mysteries of the union of a human nature with the Divine Word, of how God saved mankind through His justice and mercy. His judgments are “deep caverns” due to the depth of mystery and of wisdom. Caverns have many “windings”, as do God’s secret judgments and God’s foreknowledge concerning men.

Although holy doctors and holy souls have discovered these mysteries, many more remain unknown. Christ is a rich mine which has many recesses filled with treasures. We can descend deeply but will never come to the end. Every recess has new veins of new treasures in all directions. “In Him are hidden all the treasures of Wisdom and knowledge.” (Col 2:3).

To reach these hidden treasures, the soul must pass through the thicket of interior and exterior suffering, because knowledge of Christ’s mysteries are gained only with great sufferings. There must also be intellectual gifts, moral gifts and many spiritual exercises. All of these are only a preparation for the knowledge of Christ’s mysteries.

Absorbed in Glory

When Moses asked to see His glory, God said, “Man cannot not see me and live.” Yet, God showed Moses all He could. He set him “in a hole of the rock” (Christ) so he could see the back of His head, (Ex 33:20-23) which are the mysteries of Christ’s sacred humanity.

The soul desires to enter these caverns so she can be absorbed in Christ and inebriated in knowing these mysteries by hiding in the Beloved’s bosom. The bridegroom invites her into these caverns “Arise, my love, my dove and come into the clefts of the rock, in the hidden places in the wall”. (Song 2:13-14)

The bride responds:

“And there we shall enter in”

Notice that the bride does not say “I will enter” (even though the Bridegroom has already entered). She says, “we will enter” (both Bridegroom and bride). This is the work of both the bride and the Bridegroom. Now united in spiritual marriage, the soul does nothing alone. “We will enter” means “There we will transform ourselves”. The soul sees God’s thoughts, His predestination of the just and His foreknowledge about the wicked. The soul is exalted by this knowledge, loving the Father again and again for the sake of His Son. She does this in union with Christ. The soul describes the sweetness of this praise:

“And taste the new wine of the pomegranates”

Enjoying God’s Mysteries

These are the mysteries of Christ and the judgments of God’s wisdom and knowledge. They are also knowledge of His attributes (which are infinite). Pomegranates have many grains. In each are an attribute and power of God. Each round pomegranate signifies one power and attribute of God and each is God.

The pomegranate’s circular figure, symbolizes this, for they have no beginning or end. In contemplating these, the bride says, “His belly is of ivory and set with sapphires” (Song 5:14). The belly is Wisdom and the sapphires are His mysteries and judgments.

Drinking Wine Together

The wine of the pomegranate is the soul’s enjoyment of God’s love which overflows in her in understanding the mysteries. Many pomegranate grains pressed together give forth the one wine. So, all the marvels of God infused into the soul bring one enjoyment of love, the drink of the Holy Spirit. With great tenderness the soul offers this at once to her Bridegroom.

The bride promised Him this divine drink if He would give her knowledge. “These you will teach me and I will give you a cup of spiced wine, the new wine of my pomegranates.” (Song 8:2). Although they really belong to God, the bride calls them “my pomegranates” and offers them as if they were hers. God gives this wine to the soul to taste. She then gives it back to Him and both taste it together.

The bride has sung of what the Bridegroom will give her in eternal bliss, namely, her transformation. This will happen in the beauty of created and uncreated wisdom and in the beauty of the union of the Word with flesh. In this way, she can see His face, not just the back of His head.

Now the soul will describe how she tastes the wine. She also speaks of her eternal glory.

STANZA 38

*There You will show me
That which my soul desired;
And there You will give me at once,
O You, my life,
That which You gave me the other day.*

The soul wanted to enter the caverns to attain consummation of God’s love. She always desired to love God as he loved the soul. The soul wants the Bridegroom to show her what she always aimed at – how to love Him as perfectly as He loved her. Second, she asks for the essential glory that He predestined for her from all eternity.

“These You will show me that which my soul desired”

Loving Perfectly

The soul’s natural and supernatural desire is to love God as much as He loves the soul. A person in love wants to love as much as they are loved. The soul sees that in this life she cannot equal God’s love for her. Therefore, she desires the transformation of heaven where she shall equal the perfection of God’s love for herself.

The soul can reach a real union of the will. Although in this life she cannot possess the perfection of love that exists in the heavenly union of glory. “Then, I shall know even as I am known” (1 Cor 13:12). That is, “I shall love God as I am loved by Him.” The soul’s understanding will be God’s understanding and her will shall be God’s will. So, her love will be God’s love. In heaven, the soul’s will is not destroyed. It is so intimately united to God’s will that it loves Him as perfectly as it is loved by Him. Both wills are united in God’s will and love.

Loving With God’s Love

The soul can love God with God’s own strength because the Holy Spirit (God’s strength) supplies to the soul whatever is lacking. By this perfect transformation of spiritual marriage, the soul is clothed in grace and loves in the Holy Spirit.

The bride does not say “There will You give me Your love”. Rather, she wants Him to show her how she can perfectly love Him. God does not just teach the soul to love but enables her to love as He loves the soul. He transforms the soul and gives her His power. He places an instrument in her hands, teaches her to play it and then plays it Himself. He both shows the soul how to love and endows it with the power to love.

Until it reaches this point, the soul is not satisfied. St. Thomas teaches that even in heaven the soul would not be happy unless it loved God as He loves the soul. This is what happens in spiritual marriage even before death. Although not the same as heavenly glory, the soul enjoys a vivid vision of that perfection.

“And there You will give me at once, O You my life, that which You gave me the other day”

This is essential glory, the vision of God. A question arises. If essential glory lies in seeing God and not in loving Him, why does the soul long for God’s love instead of His glory? Why begin the stanza with love and only later mention the glory, as if it is of lesser importance?

There are two reasons. First, love resides in the will (which seeks to give and not receive). Essential glory resides in the intellect (which seeks to receive and not to give). A soul inebriated with love thinks first of an entire surrender, not of its own essential glory.

Second, the vision of glory is included in the love. Perfect love requires a perfect vision of God. By its will, the soul gives God His due and, by its intellect, she receives from God and does not give.

Predestined From the Beginning

What day is meant by the “the other day”? What did God give which the soul seeks afterwards in glory? The “other day” is the day of God’s eternity when God predestined the soul to glory and determined her degree of glory. He freely gave this even before He created the soul. This so belongs to

the soul that no event (high or low) can ever take it away. The soul will enjoy forever what God predestined from all eternity.

This glory which He gave “the other day” is the same glory the soul wants to visibly possess in heaven. This is what “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has man conceived” (1 Cor 2:9). “O God, what things You have prepared for those who await You” (Is 64:4). The soul describes this as “what” because no expression can explain the experience of seeing God.

I want to say something further. Christ used many phrases in Revelations because one word cannot describe these gifts. He spoke seven times:

1. “To the victor, to him that overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of My God” (Rev 2:7).
2. He adds, “Be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). But even this is insufficient. He explains more.
3. “To the victor, to him who overcomes I will give the hidden manna and a white stone, upon which a new name is written which no one understands except he who receives it” (2:17).
4. Even this is insufficient. He speaks of greater power and joy. “To the victor who keeps my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations. He shall rule them with an iron rod. And I will give him the morning star” (Rev 2:26-28). He adds more.
5. “The victor shall be vested in white garments and I will not erase his name from the book of life. I will confess his name before My Father and his angels” (Rev 3:5).
6. All this falls short, so Jesus says, “The victor I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he will never leave it. I will inscribe upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my own new Name “(Rev 3:12).
7. He says, “To him who overcomes. I will have him sit with me on My throne. “I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on His throne”. (Rev 3:21) and “Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (Rev 2:22).

These words correspond most accurately what is given to the soul. However, even they cannot explain this infinite good.

David says, “How great is the multitude of your sweetness” (Ps. 31:20) and “You shall make them drink of a torrent of pleasure” (Ps 36:9). He speaks also of “the blessings of sweetness” (Ps 21:4). However, no expression describes the soul’s predestined bliss. The soul just says:

“That which you gave me”

That is, “The weight of glory predestined from all eternity.” This You will give me on the day of the nuptials when I am released from the flesh and led into the deep caverns of Your bridal chamber. There we will drink the wine of the sweet pomegranates.

The Soul Describes the Nuptial Bliss

The soul, in spiritual marriage, gets some experience of this glory and she must say something about its pledges and signs. “Who can withhold the words he has conceived?” (Job 4:2) Therefore, the bride explains, as far as possible, her future enjoyment in the beatific vision.

STANZA 39:

*The breathing of the air,
The song of the sweet nightingale,
The grove and its beauty
In the serene night,
With the flame that consumes, and give no pain.*

Five Expressions

The soul describes this beatific transformation by five expressions:

1. The aspiration – of the Holy Spirit for the soul and the aspiration of the soul for God
2. The soul's praise for her enjoyment of God
3. The knowledge of creatures
4. The clear contemplation of God's essence
5. Perfect transformation in love

“The breathing of the air”

The Spirit's Breath of Love

The Father gave the soul a power in the Holy Spirit, Who will breathe upon the soul so that the soul herself can breathe with the same breath of love that the Father and Son breath (which is the Spirit). This transformation will be true and perfect only if the soul is transformed in the Three Persons in a manifest degree. No mortal tongue can describe the deep joy of the Spirit breathing in the soul. The transformed soul breathes in God with the same divine aspiration that God Himself breathes in the soul.

This breathing of the soul in God and of God in the soul happens often and causes exquisite delight. (Not, however, as in the same degree as heaven). St. Paul wrote “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal 4:6).

Becoming Like God

By participation the soul is able to breathe in God as God breathes in her. Has not God united the soul to the Holy Trinity by which she becomes like God and God by participation? Why should the soul not use her faculties of understanding and will? Or more accurately, to have this happen in the Trinity together with the soul as the Trinity itself does? This happens by participation. God does it. God created the soul so she could be transformed in the three Persons and become like God.

Explaining the Gift

The Son of God has raised us to a high state. He has given us “power to become children of God”. He prayed “that they may see My glory which You have given Me” (Jn 17:24). The soul does by participation what the Father and Son do by nature. They breathe the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one, as You Father, in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us... the glory which You have given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one as we also are One”. (Jn 17:20-23). In divine union, the Father bestows the love which He has for the Son upon the soul (though not by nature but by participation).

Doing the Work of the Trinity

Christ did not pray that the saints be one in essence and nature with the Father. He wanted them to be one in love. They have by participation is what the Son has by nature. They are gods by participation.

Peter writes, “He has bestowed very great promises on us, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature...” (2 Pet 1:4). Because of this substantial union, the soul will partake of God Himself and will do with God the work of the Trinity. Although this is perfect only in heaven, some anticipation of the sweetness is given here on earth. This is indescribable.

You souls who are called to this, what are you doing? What are you involved in? Your aims and your enjoyments are miserable. You, children of Adam, are blind to the light and deaf to the voice. Seeking after worldly glory, you are ignorant and unworthy of the great blessings.

“The song of the sweet nightingale”

A Song in Freedom

The Bridegroom’s voice speaks to the soul and she has her own song of joy to Him. These are songs of the nightingale, which are heard in the spring when the trials of winter are past. They fill the ear with melody and the mind with joy.

Thus it is with the bride. She is delivered from the world’s trials and from the darkness of mind and body. By her liberty and joy she experiences a new spring in which she hears the Bridegroom’s voice. He is her sweet nightingale. He refreshes the soul which is now prepared to journey into eternal life.

That voice calls sweetly, “Arise... for winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared, the time of pruning is come and the turtle dove is heard in our land” (Song 2:10-12). Hearing this voice in her inmost soul, the bride feels her troubles are over and her prosperity has begun. She is like a nightingale who sings a song as the Bridegroom moves her.

The Beloved sings so the Bride can join Him in song. He wants the soul to sing with the spirit. He says, “Arise and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears” (Song 2:13-14).

The Perfect Song

The Bridegroom wants the soul to be perfect. He wants it to sound “in the clefts of the rock” (the fruits of the transformation which result from Christ’s mysteries). Because of their union, the soul sings both to Him and with Him. The song pleases God because the soul’s acts are perfect in this state of union.

The Bridegroom says “Your voice is sweet to you and to Me for we are one and your voice is one with Mine.” This song is perfect only in heavenly glory. Yet, the soul has a foretaste and says that its portion in heaven will be the song of the nightingale.

“The grove and its beauty”

The grove contains plants and animals. This signifies God Who gives life to all creatures who reveal Him and make Him known. The beauty of the grove is not just God’s loveliness in created things but the total harmony and arrangement of the lower and higher creations.

“In the serene night.”

The soul contemplates the grove. It is called night because it is dim, meaning the secret wisdom of God. There is no sound of words, or intervention of the senses. In silence, God teaches the soul. How this happens the soul does not know because it is done in a hidden way.

Writers call this understanding without understanding. The teaching takes place without forms or images from the physical senses. Without these forms, the understanding can receive substantial knowledge only passively and free of all images. Because there is no effort, contemplation is called night. The soul, even in this life, learns that it possesses divine grace with all its beauty.

Night Becoming Day

On earth, it is still dark night compared to heavenly glory. Therefore, the soul prays for a clear contemplation, the enjoyment of the grove's beauty. The soul wants the night to be serene when the dim contemplation of earth becomes clear beatific contemplation. This serene night is the unclouded contemplation of God's face. David said, "Night shall be my light in its pleasures" (Ps 139:11). The delight is in the essential vision of God when the night becomes as day.

"With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain"

Fire On Earth and in Heaven

This flame is the Holy Spirit. "Consumes" means leading the soul to absolute perfection. The Beloved will give everything and the soul will hold his favors in absolute love without any pain. Perfect love has two qualities. It must consume the soul in God and must give no pain. This state happens only in heaven where the flame is sweet love and both sides enjoy contentment. There is no pain because no change (to a greater or less degree) occurs.

The soul abides in this state. His love is sweet because "The Lord your God is a consuming fire" (Dt 4:24). The heavenly transformation is quite different from the earthly one. On earth the flame still consumes the soul and wears it away. Coals are transformed into the fire and no longer seethe or smoke, yet the fire consumes and reduces them to ashes.

This is an image of a soul perfectly transformed in this life. It still suffers some pain and loss. Pain, because the soul still lacks the beatific vision. Loss, by the corruption of the flesh coming into contact with such a deep love. Everything pains our natural infirmity. "The corruptible body is a weight upon the soul" (Wis 9:15). In heaven, there is no loss or pain. God will give power to the soul and strength to its love. He perfects the understanding with wisdom and the will with love.

In these past and future stanzas, the soul prays for the boundless knowledge of God. This demands the greatest love because she must love according to her infused knowledge. She wants to receive everything in consummated love.

STANZA 40

*None saw it;
Neither did Amenadab appear
The siege was intermitted
And the cavalry dismounted
At the sight of the waters.*

Everything Accomplished

The soul sees that her will is detached. She cleaves to God. Her sensual parts are now conformed to the spirit. All rebellion is forever quelled. Satan is overcome and driven far away. Her soul is united to the abundance of heavenly gifts. Leaning upon the Beloved, she is prepared to go up "by the desert" of

death (Song 3:6 and 8:5) to the glorious throne of her espousals. She longs for the end and places five considerations before the Bridegroom:

1. The soul is detached
2. The devil is overcome
3. The passions and desires are subdued
4. The sensual, lower nature is purified
5. This nature actively partakes of the gifts

“None saw it”

The soul is denuded and estranged from created things. Nothing can come within sight of the soul’s intimate joy in the Beloved. Nothing can cause pleasure by its sweetness or disgust by its vileness. The soul is so absorbed that nothing can hold her back.

“Neither did Aminadab appear”

No Devil and No Warfare

Aminadab signifies the devil who is always fighting and disturbing the soul. He does not want the soul to enter the secret place of recollection. She is triumphant in virtue. In that place, God so defends the soul that the devil does not approach. The soul’s perfection is a victory over Satan. He is so fearful that he will not even appear. Aminadab cannot keep the soul away from the Beloved.

“The siege was intermitted”

The sieges are the passions and desires which surround the soul and fight on all sides. This siege is “intermitted.” Now, the soul can seek all the graces because the siege is no hindrance. Until the four passions were ordered by reason and the desires were mortified, the soul could not see God.

“The cavalry dismounted at the sight of the waters”

The waters are the soul’s interior joys. The cavalry are the exterior and interior senses which contain images and figures. In spiritual marriage, the senses dismount at these waters because, they have become spiritualized and can share in God’s spiritual grandeur. “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God”. (Ps. 84:3)

The cavalry did not dismount to taste the waters but only to look. The soul’s sensual part cannot substantially taste spiritual blessings (on earth or in heaven). However, a certain overflowing of the spirit sensibly refreshes and delights the senses. This delight attracts these bodily powers into the interior recollection where the soul drinks of the spiritual blessings. The senses dismount to see, not to taste the waters. When the soul drinks the spiritual waters, the workings of the senses merge into spiritual recollection.

Marriage in Heaven

The bride places all of her dispositions before the Beloved. She longs to be taken out of this spiritual marriage (her place in the Church militant) into the glorious marriage of the Church triumphant. To that goal may the Bridegroom bring all those souls who call upon the name of Jesus,

To Whom be all glory and honor, with The Father and the Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.