

THE PROCESS AND THE PROMISE

Call to Holiness. We live in an age of spiritual hunger. There is a pervasive desire for God growing. Many note the ever increasing spiritual needs and interests that people voice in their conversations with others. There is a splendor and shadow in all this. The splendor lies in the spiritual reawakening that surrounds us; the shadow looms in the manipulation of that awakening for monetary gain or public acclaim. The splendor is found in the willingness of people to speak of God as present and active in their lives; the shadow is cast by the counterfeit "spiritualities" that pretend to guarantee a means of securing that presence and activity without the need for lifelong transformation. The splendor dwells within the hunger as it searches; the shadow darkens the doorways to nourishment. We live in an age of spiritual hunger.

It is imperative that the richness and power of the mystical tradition of the Church be mobilized to address that hunger. Otherwise, an injustice would be done to those who sincerely need the presence and activity of the Lord in their lives. In this time of hunger, it is good to recall the significance of the teaching of John of the Cross for it constitutes an irreplaceable source of nourishment. John is pointing the way to know, to embrace, and thus to love the presence and activity of the Lord within our lives. John presents a process and a promise. The process guides us in moving towards knowledge and love. The promise reveals the majestic splendor within us. The process and the promise are John's legacy to the Church. Sanjuanistic spirituality is comprehensive, covering all aspects of our relationship with the Lord from commencement to conclusion, sensitive to the diverse competencies of those moving toward union with the Lord. This process touches and affects the internal and external faculties to the most profound degree; every aspect of life is probed. The presence of God within us is the main principle on which the spiritual growth process rests.

John asserts unequivocally that God chooses and finds a dwelling place within us. God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and the sinner always exists. This fundamental principle of the process is the irrevocable truth of our creation and our existence, even if we do not always experience or perceive it. God is present by essence. In this way he is present not only in the holiest souls, but also in all other creatures, for with this presence he gives them life and being. Should this essential presence be lacking to them, they would all be annihilated. Thus this presence is never wanting in the soul.

From this knowledge of the presence of God in the soul comes self knowledge. Of course, the soul must empty itself of all that is not God in order to go to God. And from this knowledge of self, the soul proceeds to knowledge of God. This is a call to detachment as the foundation of all sanjuanistic thought. Self knowledge is not a disregard for the goodness and beauty with which we have been endowed as creatures of God as we probe ourselves yet further in response to God's grace. The awareness of and the desire for more emerges, and the hunger awakened intensifies. We recognize even more clearly that "the soul's" center is God. The goal of self knowledge is nothing less than knowledge of God: the goal of detachment is to discover and celebrate our identity in God. Self knowledge and detachment drive us toward the God who is within; that drive necessitates a focus on self, but our fascination remains ever on God. There are no procedures for demonstrating that God dwells within the person. There is a call to faith, a call to accept what is not seen and to embrace what is not felt. The sanjuanist process takes us on a journey inward, to even deeper levels, to the discovery of God within us. The process is not an end in itself, but points the way to something beyond. This leads to union with God.

This union John speaks of is distinguished by its intensity and duration. "The transformation of the soul in God is indescribable", since its effect will be different in each person. The soul

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becomes God from God through participation in him and his attributes. This participation unto transformation is precisely the promise worthy of the highest place within the mystical tradition of the Church. We accept and move toward the promise in faith. For faith is the primary means through which union and transformation into love is realized. Without faith, the promise is impossible. With faith, the promise is not only acceptable but desirable. Something that is meaningful to our time, energy, and our lives. Faith is already a taste of that promise, because "the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing him. The Beloved lives in the lover and the lover in the Beloved. Love produces such a likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one.

This is the "promise". The promise is a matter of faith, once embarked the work of transformation has already begun within us. The fruits of faith, that is the quality of our daily lives and intensity of our love for the Lord, are clearly reflections of the transformation underway within us.

This promise of transformation into love through union is a source of hope and encouragement for those who embrace the process of self knowledge through detachment. We live in a world hungry for hope, a world thirsty for some meaning to explain pain and suffering and injustice in a world longing to be refreshed and recreated. Each of us experiences in some way the hunger and thirst and longing of our world. We groan for the promise of transformation into love through union and grow through the process of self knowledge through detachment. The groaning leads so ever more closely toward union, the growth is an expression and a confirmation of hope. Groaning and growth are the sounds and language of transformation.

"We know that we shall be like him", the soul shall be God through participation. Self knowledge through detachment is the process that engages us; love through union is the promise that beckons us. The process will include self revelations that are most uncomfortable, and the promise apart from the power of grace is unattainable. The process and the promise are aspects of our participation in the life of God. The process of self knowledge through detachment strips away our excesses to reveal the simple truth of who and what we are; creatures of God. Whose love knows no bounds and who sets no limits to the expression of that love. The process of this stripping is uncomfortable because it reveals the shallowness of our idols and leaves us vulnerable even before ourselves. The un-comfortability may urge us to resist the process but if ever we are to acknowledge our likeness to Jesus and to participate in God's life, we must willingly embrace this process. The promise of transformation into love through union draws us to participate in the life of God to such a degree that our self identity is unrecognizable apart from life. We can be astonished at the majesty deep within us that beckons us toward union.

This promise of transformation is unattainable without grace, our own efforts are not enough. The process of self knowledge through detachment feeds that hunger, that hunger that is always burning within us, that hunger for union. The promise of transformation into love through union fulfills that hunger, drawing us to participate in God's life. The promise discloses the splendor of intimate union with God. The process and the promise rests upon a sure foundation that will not pass away, for this foundation is God's love for the world.