THE CAVERNS OF OUR HEARTS

AN ADVENT RETREAT GUIDE ON ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

COMPANION GUIDE

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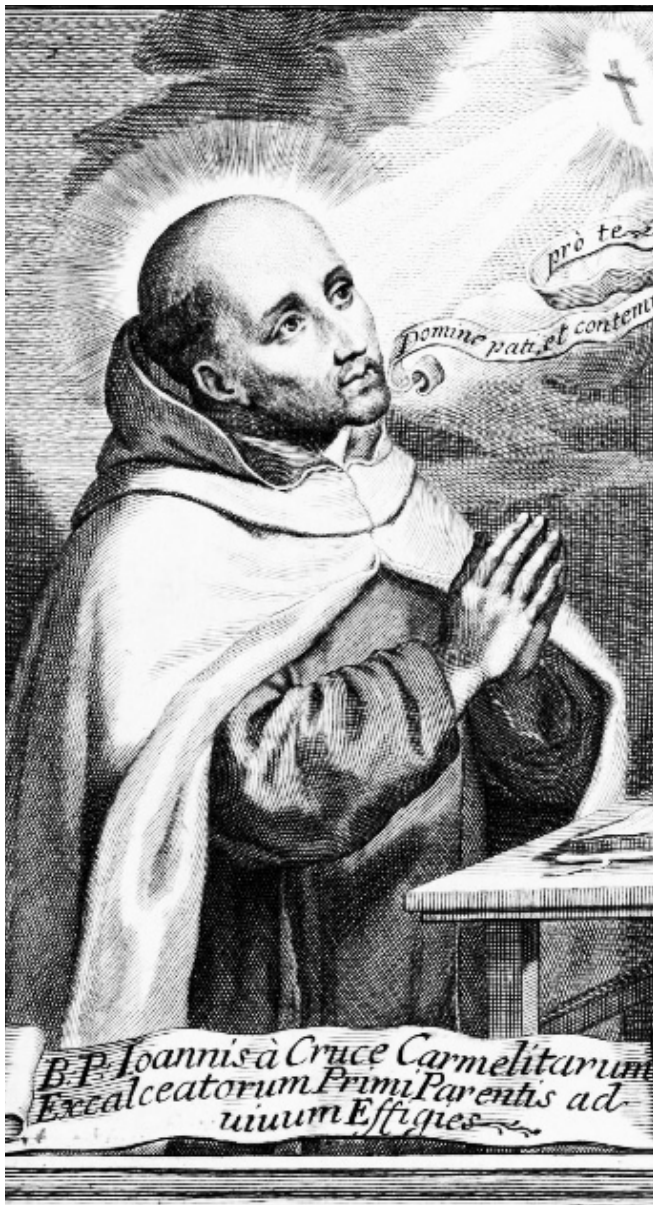


FIRST MEDITATION

God Alone

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How would I describe God's presence in my life right now?
2. What is my greatest desire?
3. How can I open that desire up to God and allow him to bring it into the safe place of his love?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

"The soul that is attached to anything however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds it fast; for, until the cord be broken the bird cannot fly.

—Ascent of Mount Carmel, XI.4
ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

"What more do you want, 0 soul! And what else do you search for outside, when within yourself you possess your riches, delights, satisfactions, fullness, and kingdom—your Beloved whom you desire and seek? Be joyful and gladdened in your interior recollection with him, for you have him so close to you. Desire him there, adore him there. Do not go in pursuit of him outside yourself. You will only become

distracted and wearied thereby, and you shall not find him, nor enjoy him more securely, nor sooner, nor more intimately than by seeking him within you.

—Spiritual Canticle, 1.8
ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved.
How long will you set up upon a man
to shatter him, all of you,
like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?
They only plan to thrust him down from his eminence.
They take pleasure in falsehood.
They bless with their mouths,
but inwardly they curse.

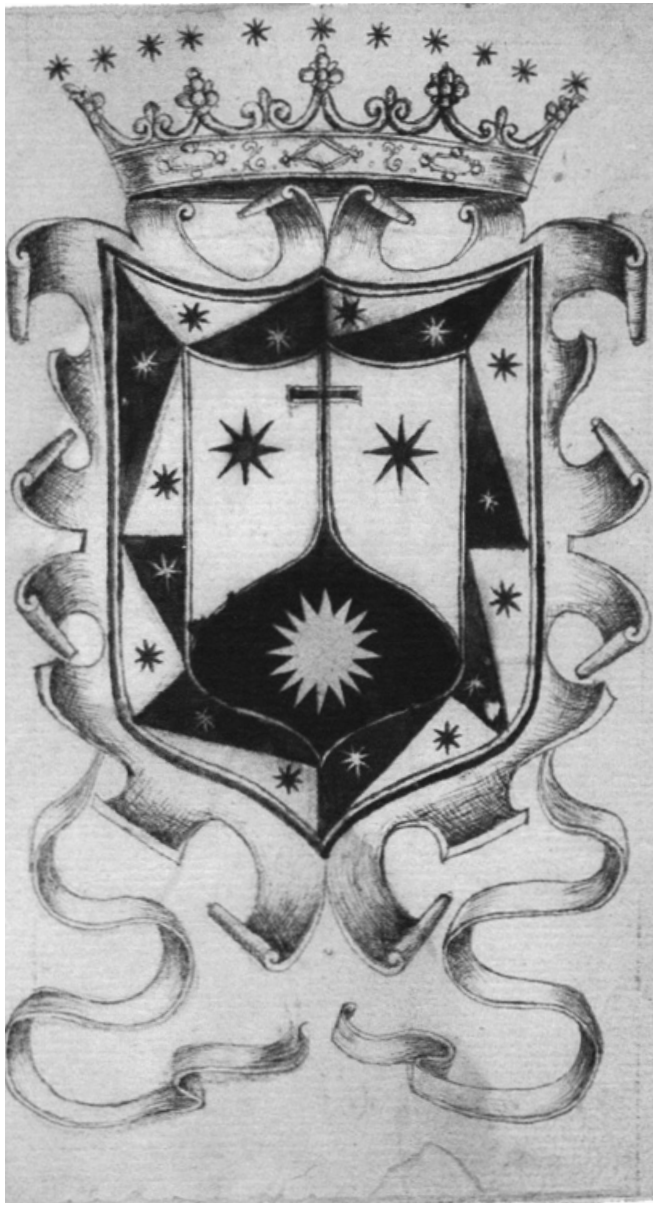
For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress, I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

Men of low estate are but a breath,
men of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath.
Put no confidence in extortion,
set no vain hopes on robbery;

if riches increase, set not your heart on them.
Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God;
and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love.
For you do requite a man
according to his work.

—Psalm 62
RSV CATHOLIC EDITION

NOTES



SECOND MEDITATION

Lord, Whatever You Want

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What resonated most in my heart during this meditation? What could that mean for my relationship with God?

2. In my life, where is God trying to create space for himself alone in my heart? Was there anything that was in a certain sense "uncomfortable" in this meditation, and how can I bring that to the Lord?

3. What do I sense the Lord is asking me to surrender to his love? What would it look like for me to open my heart to the Lord and offer that up to him?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

> The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place 'to which I withdraw.' The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.
>
> —Catechism of the Catholic Church, number 2563

You enter God's apprenticeship only by persevering in prayers that are not answered… By its very essence, love only thirsts for love… The missed opportunity is the one that counts. Tenderness through prison walls: this is perhaps the greatest tenderness. Prayer is fruitful to the extent that God does not answer it. And sharp stones and thorns are what nourish love.

—Citadelle
ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry come to you.
Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.

For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
My heart is stricken and withered like grass…
For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,
because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.

My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it; the appointed time has come…

For the Lord will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.
He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their prayer.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord:
that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die…

He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
"O my God," I say, "do not take me away at the midpoint of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations."

Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;
but you are the same, and your years have no end.
The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

—Psalm 102
RSV CATHOLIC EDITION

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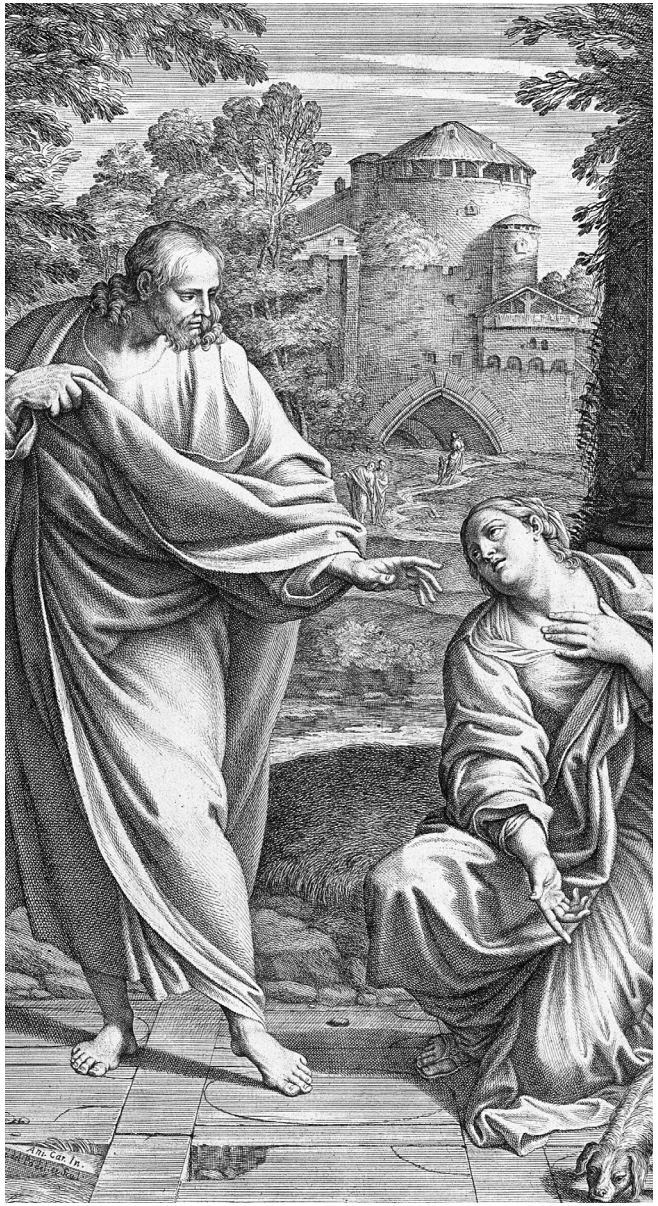

CONFERENCE

The Storm Is the Norm

1. What's on my heart as I conclude this retreat?
2. How can I bring that to the Lord's love?
3. In what ways has the Lord consoled me or "challenged" me?
4. How or where is he asking me to give him permission?
5. Are there any "action items" God has inspired in my heart? If so, what are they, and how can I put them into practice?

NOTES

FURTHER READING

The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross
translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD
and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD

The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross
by Iain Matthew, OCD

The Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel on Prayer
by Thomas Dubay, SM

Into Your Hands, Father: Abandoning Ourselves to the God Who Loves Us
by Wilfrid Stinissen, OCD

EXPLORING MORE

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