

Our love for God



"Whom have I in heaven but you?
Earth has nothing I desire besides you ...
My flesh and my heart fail;
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion for ever ...
As for me, it is good to be near God" (Psalm 73:25-28).

1. Luke 10:25-28

"A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and your neighbour as yourself". And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

2. Luke 10:38-42

"Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Reflection from Saint Teresa of Avila

"I sometimes remember the complaint of that holy woman, Martha. Her complaint was not merely of her sister. I feel sure that the chief cause of her sorrow was the thought that You, Lord, had no compassion on her for the labour that she was enduring nor cared whether or no she was with You. Perhaps she thought that You had less love for her than for her sister, and this would have troubled her more than serving One Whom she loved so dearly, for love turns labour into rest. And so she said nothing to her sister, but made her complaint to You, Lord, alone, for love made her bold enough to ask why you did not care for her. Your answer, which seems to imply that the source of her complaint was as I have been saying, was that it is love alone which gives value to all things and that the most needful thing is that it should be so great that nothing can hinder its operation" (from Exclamations of the soul to God, Peers vol 2, page 406).

Reflections from John of the Cross

"In Deuteronomy 6:5, we receive the command to employ all the faculties, appetites, operations and emotions of our soul in God, so that we may avoid the use of our ability and strength for anything else" (Ascent III, 16,1).

"The soul arrives at the true fulfilment of the first commandment which, neither disdaining anything human, nor excluding it from this love, states: You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Dark Night II, 11,4).

2. The essential focus

"The union of love of God is a habitual and loving attentiveness of the will to God"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 28,10).

"The will should rejoice only in what is for the honour and glory of God"(Ascent III,17,2).

"Although the Holy One continues to be deliverer and sustainer, love calls us beyond using God to satisfy our needs, to heal us, to get us out of trouble, or to enhance our efficiency. Love calls us to gratitude, relinquishment, celebration, service, play, praise, companionship, intimacy, communion, and always to deeper yearning. In other words, love calls us to love"(Gerald May The Awakened Heart: opening yourself to the love you need, page 78).

"The heart yearns, in simple, silent, pleading, for action that does not mimic love but springs forth from it, for efficiency that is not an end in itself but a beginning of love's play, for love to reign over all service. ... My single desire for God will be of more help to my friends because my single desire for God will birth the kind of action that will really help them. It is not desiring God instead of doing helpful actions, but desiring God as the source of the actions that are going to be really helpful. It is that simple: put efficiency first, and the world gets to be the way it is today; put love first, and the whole meaning of efficiency is transformed" (Gerald May page 234).

"Like billowing clouds, like the incessant gurgle of the brook, the longing of the soul can never be stilled. It is this longing with which holy persons seek their work from God."

(from *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen* Santa Fe NM, 1982, page 70).

"As long as our will retains whims that are opposed to the divine union, fantasies of 'Yes' or 'No', we remain children, we do not walk with the giant steps of love; for the fire has not yet burned the whole alloy, the gold is not pure, we are still seeking ourselves"

(van Ruusbroeck, *Oeuvres choisies*, 157).

3. The place of feelings

"I am moved with tender feelings of love for you, Lord, my strength"(Psalm 18:1).

We may indeed experience feelings of love for God. The opening words of Psalm 18 use a word for "love" derived from the word for the "womb"(see Psalm 22:10; 110:3). This word for love is found 14 times in the psalms, though it is important to note that on every other occasion it refers to the tenderness of God's love for us (Psalm 25:6; 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 77:9; 79:8; 103:4,13; 112:14; 116:5; 119:77,156; 145:9).

Psalm 18 alone in the whole of the Bible uses it of our love for God.

"Since the soul cannot in this life enjoy God essentially, all the sweetness and delight it tastes, however sublime, cannot be God. ... If, in any way, the will can comprehend God and be united to Him, it is through love, and not through any gratification of the appetite. And since the delight, sweetness, and satisfaction that can come to the will is not love, no delightful feeling can be an adequate means for the union of the will with God. It is the operation of the will which is the proportionate means for this union."(John of the Cross, Letter 14th April 1589).

"The will's operation is quite distinct from the will's feeling. By its operation, which is love, the will is united with God and terminates in Him, and not by the feeling and gratification of its appetite, which remains in the soul and goes no further. The feelings serve only as stimulants to love"(John of the Cross, Letter 14th April 1589).

4. What we can do

"To love is to labour to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God"(John of the Cross, Ascent II,5,7).

"When the soul completely rids itself of what is repugnant and not conformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love"(John of the Cross, Ascent II,5,3).

"The soul can know clearly whether or not she loves God purely. If she loves him, her heart, her love, will not be set on herself or her own satisfaction or gain, but upon pleasing God, and giving God honour and glory. In the measure she loves herself, that much less she loves God"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 9,5).

"God does not place his grace and love in the soul except according to its desire and love. Anyone truly loving God must strive not to fail in this love, for he will thereby induce God, if we may so express it, to love him further and to find delight in his soul"(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 13,12).

"Our decision must be to give God everything; then do our duty, serve others and love, whatever the feeling and whatever the cost. If our faculty for choosing is not be like a worn our battery, we must decide what we really want and concentrate on that"(Ruth Burrows, Ascent to Love).

5. Where is this God whom we are to love in this way?

"I asked the earth ... I asked the sea ...

and they replied: 'We are not your God. Look beyond us!'

I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars,

and they said: 'Neither are we the God whom you seek!'

I said to all these things:

'You have told me that you are not my God.

Tell me something about him'.

With a loud voice they cried out: 'He made us!'

My questioning was my looking upon them.

Their reply was their beauty".(Augustine, Confessions, 10.6.9.).



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As the deer longs

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As the deer longs

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As the deer longs for running streams,
so I long, so I long, so I long for you.

As the deer longs
for running
streams,
so I long,
so I long,
so I long for you



Athirst my soul for you the God who is my life.
When shall I see, when shall I see, see the face of God?

As the deer longs

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As the deer longs for running streams,
so I long, so I long, so I long for you.

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Echoes meet as deep is calling unto deep,
over my head, all your mighty waters, sweeping over me

As the deer longs

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As the deer longs for running streams,
so I long, so I long, so I long for you.

As the deer longs
for running
streams,
so I long,
so I long,
so I long for you.



Continually the foe delights in taunting me:
“Where is God, where is your God?” Where, O where, are you?

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Defend me, God, send forth your light and your truth,
they will lead me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling place.

As the deer longs
for running
streams,
so I long,
so I long,
so I long for you.



Then I shall go unto the altar of my God.
Praising you, O my joy and gladness, I shall praise your name.

As the deer longs

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As the deer longs for running streams,
so I long, so I long, so I long for you.