28 November 2026
ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
Part XII
"Union with God"

To conclude this short series on aspects of the spiritual life, I would like to offer a brief glimpse of what awaits us when we live in complete union with God, to the extent that this is possible on earth.

It so happens that I am writing this final reflection on November 24, which, in the Old Rite, is the Feast of St. John of the Cross. This Carmelite, closely associated with St. Teresa of Avila, is one of the pre-eminent teachers of the spiritual life. Let us therefore turn to him for some words of instruction.

To begin, let us hear Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene from his work *Divine Intimacy*.

"The life of the soul that has attained total union can be described as a single, continuous, intense exercise of love, through which it ceaselessly gives itself to its God. All its faculties, not only purified but also perfectly harmonized, compete with one another in devoting themselves to divine service. This is how St. John of the Cross describes it:
'Its understanding [the soul] employs in the understanding of those things that pertain most nearly to His service in order to do them; its will, in loving all that pleases God and in having affection of the will for God in all things; and its memory and care in that which pertains to His service and will be most pleasing to Him.'" (J.C. SC, 28,3).

The holy Doctor of the Church goes on to describe:

"The inward and outward senses are directed toward Him in all their operations and all the four passions of the soul [that is, joy, hope, fear, and sorrow], it likewise keeps bound to God, because it neither has enjoyment save from God, nor hope save in God, nor fears any save only God, neither does it grieve save according to God; and likewise all its desires and cares are wholly directed to God alone"

A soul in this state has fully awakened to the love of God. It has left behind the trials of inner purification and considers them all insignificant in light of the closeness to God it now experiences. Perhaps it is similar to a woman holding her newborn child in her arms. She no longer thinks of the hardships of pregnancy, given the joy of gazing upon her child!

Love has now become the law of all action. It is the atmosphere in which the soul moves. It is a pure love that is no longer diminished by self-interest. John of the Cross says of it:

"A little pure love, is more precious in the eyes of God and of more value to the Church than all other works put together"

He goes on to explain:

"As the flame of a candle, united to the flame of an immense fire, becomes one with it, burning and shining with a single brightness, so that it is impossible to distinguish it from the great fire in which it is immersed, similarly the soul united to God by love loses itself in Him, (…). By the perfection of charity and of grace the Holy Spirit dwells with singular plenitude in such a soul, and in this divine Spirit—the Spirit and bond of Love—the soul lives completely united to the Blessed Trinity."

May this wonderful vision be enough to inspire us to walk the path of following Christ to the full. God has something glorious in store for us, and just as the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin, so the Holy Spirit desires that everything within us be transformed and that we be fully united with God.

It is now up to us whether or not we accept God's offer to grow in love and take the necessary steps. Let us keep in mind what St. John of the Cross said:

"A little pure love, is more precious in the eyes of God and of more value to the Church than all other works put together"

The point is that we grow in the love of God. Everything else will follow from this, for then I will begin to love my neighbor with the love of God, and I will perform all the works I do to glorify God.

God our Father will not hold back if we strive to love Him more and give everything for that purpose.

I hope that this short series has served to invite us more deeply onto the path of discipleship and to help us leave behind those things that hinder the unfolding of divine love. The Advent season now beginning may be a very fitting time to deepen our conversion to God and to allow ourselves to be loved by Him.

I would like to conclude with a prayer by St. John of the Cross, who has left us these words:

"Even as a maiden that is betrothed sets not her love upon another than her spouse, nor directs her thoughts or her actions to any other, grant, O Lord, that my soul may no longer have any affections of the will or acts of knowledge of the understanding, nor any thought or action which is not wholly turned to Thee. Grant that I may know naught save how to love Thee, O my divine Spouse, and seeing that Thou prizest nothing and art pleased with nothing besides love, help me to employ everything purely for love of Thee and to serve Thee perfectly.
Permit not that I should seek my own gain nor pursue my own tastes nor busy myself in other things and in inter- course that has naught to do with Thee. May I have no other style or manner of intercourse save the exercise of love."

Reflection on the Daily Reading in the Novus Ordo:
https://en.elijamission.net/come-lord-jesus-maranatha-3/