

ONLY JESUS

Love is unknown upon this earth. We speak of it admiringly, earnestly, believing that love is happiness; but we neither understand it nor know its laws. We falsify its concept. We have no true idea of its genuine character or its secret and delightful end. Love is unknown; blessed are they who have received the revelation of love!

The world, in its falsifying spirit, dresses what is precisely most opposed to love—egoism—in the celestial apparel of love. For the world, to love is to enjoy, not with the pure, disinterested joy proper to love, but with the despicable, egoistic pleasure characteristic of self-interest. The beloved object thus becomes an instrument of pleasure, something subordinated to the advantage and caprice of the lover. The worldling who thinks he loves does not try to please the beloved, but to be pleased himself. Such love does not go out of itself, but turns in to itself; it is not an ecstasy but a selfish concentration. Since the spirit of the world penetrates farther than we think, even among Christians and pious persons, the love for God that we profess is thoroughly mixed with egoism and self-interest unless it is purified and elevated by grace seconded by our own efforts.

We form for ourselves a false, or at best a narrow, concept of love. We think that love consists primarily in receiving, and because we are possessed of an egoistic eagerness to receive, we imagine that we are languishing with love. We want to receive consolation, to feel sensible impressions, which by a psychological illusion we confound with love. And when these fleeting illusions are dissipated, like all human things, we believe we have lost everything. Without vigor or hope, we lament and weep over the irreparable loss of love.

But this is not love. "Not death itself is so strong as love. . . . Love is a fire no waters avail to quench, no floods to drown."¹ Love does not merely consist in receiving, much less of receiving consolations and sweetness. Love, it is true, accepts whatever comes from the hands of the lover. The quality of the gifts signifies nothing. Joy or grief, smiles or tears, life or death are equal in the eyes of love, provided they come from the hands of the Beloved enveloped in His unmistakable celestial perfumes. Love consists in giving and receiving. It is an ebb and flow of gifts and of life which does not cease until the lovers, consummated in unity, have reciprocally given to each other all that can be given, and nothing further re-

mains to them except to continue their eternity in the incomparable ecstasy of their mutual love. Love consists essentially in giving rather than receiving. It receives because its complement and perfection is reciprocity. It gives because it is love. It receives because it is loved. It gives because it loves.

God, who is love, gives without measure or limit; giving is His name, His essence and His cherished law. I shall not speak of those gifts of love which constitute the mystery of the interior life of God. "Kings have their counsel that must be kept."² In all the divine acts which concern creatures, what has God done, what is He doing, what will He do eternally, but give? He gave the universe being and life, perfection and beauty. Communicating with men through the prophets, He gave us His word, which is spirit and life. And when, in the excess of His love, the Divine Word appeared, what did He do but give Himself to us, as St. Thomas Aquinas sang in those immortal verses: "By His birth, He became man's companion; at this supper He became man's food; in His death He became man's price; in His kingdom He becomes man's prize."³ Love is a gift. When the giving is imperfect, love is desire; when it is consummated, love is rest; when it is eternal, love is bliss.

To give is the essential function of love. Love gives without tiring, without counting its gifts, without feeling their loss, without attending to them except to impregnate them with love's aroma. Love lavishes its goods, gives whatever it possesses, and after giving all—or rather, by giving all—it gives and spends its own self without stint, without reserve, completely, forever. He who loves does not look to himself nor does he seek himself. To the lover, what matter his own well-being, his pleasure, his honor, his future, even his very life? He is totally preoccupied with the beloved. Let him rejoice although I suffer; let him be rich although I be poor; let him smile although I weep; let him live although I die! But is it possible to suffer and to weep if the beloved is happy? My joy is thy joy; my glory is thine; my happiness, thy happiness. When I love, the *I* disappears and dies, to let my beloved live and reign in me. He is my life, my *I*. Truly, love is both death and life—the most absolute death, the most blessed life. "Love is strong as death."

But what can I give to God, if He is in Himself eternally rich, happy, the fount of love and ocean of beatitude? What can I give Him, if I receive everything from Him?

Lord, feel the imperious need of loving Thee. It is my duty, my glory, my happiness. If I do not love Thee, my life has no reason for being. O

God of love! If love consists in giving, how can I love Thee? And if I cannot love Thee how can I live?

There is one thing I can give to God, only one: I can give Him glory. For the glory of God the universe was created; for the glory of God Christ lived and the Church exists. I ought to live for the glory of God. To love God is to give Him glory. The motto of St. Ignatius, "For the greater glory of God," is the supreme formula of love.

Nevertheless, every creature gives glory to God, but not every creature loves Him. There is the glory of love and the glory of justice; the glory of order which is consummated in heaven and the glory of disorder whose consummation is hell. To love God is to give Him the glory of order—that which has grace as its beginning and heaven as its end. How pleasing to God is the glory given him by love! It is a spontaneous, free amorous giving by the creature, a giving which returns to God what belongs to Him, but by a new title which moves the heart of God. God has in Himself the sovereignty of power over every creature as well as the glory which proceeds therefrom. But the sovereignty of love and the glory following from it are given to God through us by an act of our liberty.

God, whose proper action is to give, has found in His wisdom and love the means of adapting to Himself the joy of receiving, a joy peculiar to the creature, and has granted to the latter the divine joy of giving, of giving himself to the Creator. Let us take an example from the world around us. A father has whatever he needs and even the present which his small son gives him is his own, for he himself gave it to the boy. Nevertheless, how much it pleases the father to receive from the child the insignificant gift of love. He esteems it more than all his property, however extensive it may be. What has the gift received upon passing through the hands of the son? Something that is worth more than all the earth's treasures, which is not bought with riches nor obtained through power; something that only his son can give him: love.

In order to obtain from His creatures that glory of love, God has rightly permitted even sin—sin, which is contempt, ingratitude, disorder, evil. If the creature is not free, he cannot love; if he is free, he can sin through his natural imperfection. Therefore God permits the outrage as a means of obtaining love.

The glory that fills God with complacency exalts and divinizes the creature. When I give glory to God, I do a divine work. My action has as its end the same end as the action of God. I rise above all created things. I enter into the thoughts and desires of God. If it were known what the

glory of God is, one would think of nothing else. One would love that glory as the saints have loved it, passionately, regarding as lost every action that did not have it as the end.

A merchant, who can double his capital in a secure business, would be foolish to be content with a small gain, and still more unwise if he merely saved what he had. We receive from God a very rich capital—the talents of which the Gospel speaks—which is the aggregate of the natural and supernatural goods with which the Lord has endowed us. At each instant we can multiply our talents. To raise our thoughts, affections and actions to a heavenly level, it suffices to perform them for the glory of God, to do them for love. Is it not madness to pull our life down to a natural plane, even to the brink of sin, by seeking ourselves and creatures? If only we knew what the glory of God means! Would that we understood the first petition of the *Our Father* which expresses the glory of God and begs for it: "Hallowed be Thy name."

The glory of God is the one necessity of which Jesus spoke to Martha of Bethany. Such is generous and disinterested love! My happiness is the effect of the glory of God in my soul. It is the reflection of this glory within me. My happiness arises from knowing that He is happy, that He is glorified by my knowledge of Him and my complacency in Him, that I contribute with my insignificance to His happiness and glory. Let my soul glorify the Lord and, as a natural result, my spirit will rejoice in God my Savior, as the most blessed of creatures has sung: "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

Thy glory, O Lord, Thy glory! Let Thy name be sanctified among us, and Thy kingdom will come to us, Thy kingdom which is our happiness because it is justice, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit! O Divine Master, listen to our plea, the unspeakable cry which Thy own Spirit utters within: "Hallowed be Thy name."

How often in those delightful moments, when God visits our souls, bathing them in the effusions of His love, we feel the weight of life and we desire to remain there forever like Peter on Thabor. "Lord, it is well that we should be here."⁴ Why descend from the mountain of love and glory to the prosaic plain of ordinary life to work and fatigue ourselves, to talk with men and to live among earthly affairs? Why lose ourselves in the inextricable labyrinth of business and the cares of life, so low, so painful, so oppressive, when one has breathed the pure, living atmosphere of the heights?

In those moments there comes to our hearts and lips the cry for lib-

eration which the Psalmist uttered: "Save me from the enemy's power."⁵ Then we understand why and how Mary had chosen the better part and we should like to live as she did, at the feet of Christ, doing nothing else but looking at Him and loving Him. Blessed are they who live in the house of the Lord, who have no other occupation or recreation, no other care or rest than to contemplate and love the Beloved of their soul. "Lord of hosts, how I love Thy dwelling place! For the courts of the Lord's house my soul faints with longing. . . . How blessed, Lord, are those who dwell in Thy house! They will be ever praising Thee."⁶ "Shall I never again make my pilgrimage into God's presence?"⁷ "Had I but wings, I cry, as a dove has wings, to fly away and find rest!"⁸

Can it be possible to live on earth, as the elect live, in contemplation and love? Can so great a happiness be possible in this vale of tears? Love is strength. Love has powerful, white wings like a dove to support us in our wretchedness and to raise us to the regions of felicity.

¹ Cant. 8:6, 7.

² Tob. 12:7.

³ Connolly, *Hymns of the Roman Liturgy*, pp. 122, 124.

⁴ Matt. 17:4.

⁵ Ps. 30:17.

⁶ Ps. 83:1-5.

⁷ Ps. 61:2.

⁸ Ps. 54:7.

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