

The Song

Deep Calls to Deep · Praying the Scriptures with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila

What We Found

The Song of Songs is in the Bible on purpose. The literal sense comes first (CCC 116), and most readers today receive that sense as real love poetry, sung inside a Scripture where marriage was already the master image of the covenant: "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Jesus claims the role himself (Mark 2:19), Paul names the great mystery (Ephesians 5:31-32), and the Bible ends at a wedding (Revelation 19:7).

Its center is a mutual belonging that echoes the covenant formula in the key of love: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (Song 2:16), and its seeking scene ("I sought him... I found him whom my soul loves," 3:1-4) maps the praying life: longing, search, watchmen who cannot help, and finding. John's Easter morning can be heard in this same grammar: a garden before dawn, a weeping seeker, "Whom do you seek?", and recognition at her own name (John 20:15-16).

St. John of the Cross rework the Song into The Spiritual Canticle ("Where have you hidden, Beloved?") and, by the testimony of those present, asked for the Song on his deathbed; St. Teresa taught her sisters to take the bride's words boldly on their own lips. In this biblical tradition of prayer, the deepest name for a soul before God is not employee, defendant, or fan. It is beloved.

Voices of the Church

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

John's masterpiece opens with the bride's cry, in an adapted rendering: *Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning? You fled like the stag after wounding me; I went out calling you, and you were gone.* By the account of his early biographers, composed largely from memory of the Song of Songs in his Toledo cell, the Canticle then walks the whole road this study has walked: search, night, encounter, espousal, union. For John, the Song is not decoration on the spiritual life; it is its most exact grammar: the soul before God is first of all a beloved who has been wounded into seeking.

The Spiritual Canticle, stanza 1.

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Teresa wrote a small book of meditations on verses of the Song (a bold act for a woman in her century; an early confessor ordered one version burned, and she serenely wrote on). In it she teaches, in substance, that the Lord is not offended when a soul takes the bride's words on its own lips; he inspired them for that use. She lingers on the bride's security in the Beloved's affection and urges her sisters to ask boldly for the deep peace of his friendship. Where others blushed at the Song, Teresa saw the prayer book of holy audacity.

Summarized from her Meditations on the Song of Songs.

ST. JOHN PAUL II

In his catecheses on human love, St. John Paul II taught, in substance, that spousal love is stamped into the body and its meaning from the beginning, and that the Song of Songs stands in the canon as human eros bearing witness, in its truth, to the covenant: the language of self-gift. Marriage speaks of Christ and the Church (he loved to expound Ephesians 5), and consecrated virginity speaks of the same wedding by another road. Marriage and consecrated virginity alike, he taught, speak the one language of definitive self-gift to Love who gave himself first.

Summarized from his catecheses on human love (the Theology of the Body) and *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

Live It This Week

- Pray your chosen Song line as a repeated aspiration each day this week (at red lights, in queues, before sleep), alongside the fifteen-minute appointment.
- Read John 20:1-18 once mid-week, slowly, placing yourself in the garden. Let him say your name at verse 16.
- If you are married: pray once this week in thanksgiving for your spouse as a living sign of this mystery (Ephesians 5:31-32). If you are not: pray Isaiah 62:5 over your own life and state of life.

MEMORY VERSE · SONG OF SONGS 2:16

"My beloved is mine and I am his."

Before next session: Read John 15:1-11. Count how many times Jesus says the word "abide."

Catechism references for this session: CCC 116, 128-130, 796, 1612-1617.