

Abide: Betrothal and Union

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

What We Found

Union with God is Jesus's own image for discipleship itself: "Abide in me, and I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). The connection is organic, one life-sap in stock and branch: the old vine of Israel failed of fruit (Psalm 80; Isaiah 5), and Jesus is the true vine who finally yields it, with us made branches in him (the grafting image is St. Paul's, from the olive tree of Romans 11).

The New Testament does not blush at the result: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20); we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The Fathers made it the purpose of Christmas itself: the Son of God became man so that we might become God (CCC 460, quoting St. Athanasius), and the Church calls us all to this union (CCC 2014), though its extraordinary graces are given only to some.

The Carmelites give the grammar that keeps it Christian: God by participation, never by nature; the log in the fire remains wood; Teresa's rain falling into a river becomes one water without the creature being erased. And the sign she most trusts is not delight but the desire and strength to serve: sap you cannot see, fruit you can.

Voices of the Church

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Of the spiritual marriage Teresa writes that the union is like rain falling from the sky into a river or a stream: it becomes one water, and none can divide or separate the water of the river from that which fell from heaven; or like a little stream entering the sea, or light entering a room through two windows and becoming one light. The soul remains itself, yet lives no longer alone: as St. Paul said, she notes, for me to live is Christ. And the sign she most trusts, drawn out in ch. 4, is not delight but the desire and strength to serve.

The Interior Castle, Seventh Dwelling Places, chs. 2 and 4.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

John teaches, in substance, that in the union of likeness the soul, purified of every attachment and transformed by love, becomes God by participation: it remains a creature by nature, yet all its operations, knowing, loving, willing, are so taken up into God that it appears more divine than human. His careful word is participation: the log in the fire is transformed into flame without ceasing to be wood; the window filled with sunlight becomes light without ceasing to be glass. Nature is never erased; it is set ablaze. The whole road of nada exists for this: emptied hands can be filled with God.

Summarized from his teaching on union; the window and sunlight image is in The Ascent of Mount Carmel II.5, the log in the fire in The Dark Night II.10, and God by participation is his language in The Spiritual Cantic and The Living Flame of Love.

ST. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

Elizabeth found her vocation in a phrase of St. Paul: to be the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:12), and signed her last letters with it as a new name, Laudem Gloriam. Union, as she lived it, was not exotic: it meant letting the indwelling Trinity of Session 3 have the whole house, every thought and hour becoming a yes. Dying at twenty-six, her last words, as her community recorded them, were that she was going to light, to love, to life; and in her letters she had promised to spend her heaven drawing souls into the same interior union she had found in an ordinary Carmel of Dijon.

From her letters and last retreat notes; her last words are given as her community recorded them; the

name is from Ephesians 1 (see also her 1904 prayer in Session 3).

Live It This Week

- Pray Galatians 2:20 from memory each morning this week, and once before a specific hard obedience you named tonight.
- Read John 15:1-11 on three separate days; each time, choose the verse to carry into that day.
- Receive the Eucharist this week with union intention: CCC 2014 ties the mystical life to the sacraments; go to the source and say only, "Abide in me, and I in you."

MEMORY VERSE · GALATIANS 2:20

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Before next session: Read Acts 2:1-4 and Song of Songs 8:6-7.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 460, 2014, 795.