

## 13. Part V Encounter continued

### 5. Prayer: Should we? Can we? (pages 134-141)



‘Something is taking place, and it is important to be part of it.  
That is the intuition which John of the Cross has been communicating.  
It comes across in the whole pattern he has traced –  
an approaching God who gives where he finds space,  
and who works in darkness to create that space.  
It is there when the pattern concentrates into the here and now –  
faith, hope, love, and our Yes to God’s gift of himself.  
Now the happening has received the name “Jesus” –  
who has searched out the darkness and is himself the gift.  
This is taking place. And it is important to be part of it.  
For John, becoming part of it is prayer.’

## Method?

‘Our inventiveness would surely stretch to finding a method, if we were given assurance about the more fundamental questions:

Is prayer really what I need?

Is the prayer I want a real possibility?’ (page 134).

‘Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me groaning?

You fled like a stag having wounded me;

I went out in search of you and you were gone’ (Spiritual Canticle 1).

‘At the centre of John’s story is his need.

Prayer meant getting in touch with that need’ (page 135).

John was sensitive to individuals.

He was courageous in speaking out in their defence

‘Whenever he spoke out, it was after spending a long time in prayer and communion with our Lord’(contemporary witness)

‘Ask God ... suspending one’s life upon belief in God’s involvement.’

(page 136)

‘We have many needs to bring to God in prayer .

Our deepest need is that we have an infinite capacity for God.

(page 136).

‘Our needs – for answers or love or solutions to our problems – are symptoms of a greater need – for God.’

‘Our incompleteness is our dignity,  
and when we feel it we are most truly ourselves.

When we utter our appeal from there, we are being mature,  
being what we are meant to be.

For the human person, then, prayer is a supreme value.’

‘When the soul reaches the state of union of love,  
a little of this pure love is more precious to God,  
more precious for the soul,  
and of more benefit to the Church,  
even though it seems to be doing nothing,  
than all other works put together’ (Spiritual Canticle<sup>2</sup>, 29:2).

‘Let those who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer, (even though they may not have reached a prayer as sublime as this). They would then certainly accomplish more, and with less labour, by one work than they otherwise would by a thousand. For through their prayer they would merit this result, and themselves be spiritually strengthened. Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm’ (Spiritual Canticle 29,3).

Prayer is a real possibility



Audio begins here

‘How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him’ (Luke 11:13).

‘Look at my Son ... he is my total reply’ (Ascent 11.22.5).

‘John’s focus is not on asking for things, but on being with God.’

(page 138)

‘Is prayer really possible for those whose lives are too battered to be pretty, or too busy to cover all the exits?’ (page 138).

‘There is an unseen vitality at the heart of the human person which guarantees the possibility of prayer’ (page 139).

- See Mary Magdalen on Easter morning
- See the two on the Emmaus journey later that day
- Indwelling Paul: 'Christ in you'  
John 14

'Enter within your heart,  
and work in the presence of your bridegroom,  
who is always present loving you' (Sayings 89).

'The Gospel has eyes and they pierce to the soul.  
What John said about God's loving gaze has its place here.  
The gaze guarantees the possibility of prayer.  
It is the risen Christ, universally available' (page 140).

‘God’s gaze is his love, and his love does things.

God’s gaze works four blessings in the soul:

it cleanses, makes beautiful, enriches and enlightens’ (page 140).

‘Is prayer possible now for me? Here is John’s contribution.

Christ’s loving gaze is constantly upon us,

and he makes it possible’ (page 141).

## 6. Prayer, a 'being with' (pages 142-154)

Prayer = joining in something that is already happening:

Where?

'The soul is God's most beautiful creation.  
So then, you who are so anxious to know  
the whereabouts of the One you love  
so that you may seek Him and be united to Him,  
know that you yourself are His dwelling place,  
his secret chamber,  
the place where he lies hidden.  
Rejoice and be glad, for all you ever wanted,  
all you ever hoped for, is so close  
as to be within you.  
You cannot be without Him' (Spiritual Canticle 1.7).

Prayer = joining in something that is already happening:

How?

‘Be glad, find joy there, present to Him who dwells within.  
Since he is so close to you, *desire Him there,*  
*adore Him there,* and do not go off looking for Him elsewhere ...  
There is just one thing: even though He is within you,  
He is hidden’ (Spiritual Canticle 1.8).

‘God is making space for union  
through the pain of his remaining hidden’ (page 143).

## Method

John's advice to novices, quoted by Iain Matthew on page 143,  
from José de Jesús Maria Quiroga, *Don que tuvo San Juan de la Cruz*,  
printed in Ruiz (1968) pp. 511-512)

*'The first thing is to summon up the **mysteries of Jesus** by imagining them. Be present to Jesus as he sits wearied at the well, hot, alone, waiting (John 4). 'Imagine', not in detail, but impressionistically, as entering, not observing.*

*Then **ponder** in your mind the mystery you have evoked. Jesus is there, weary, for me ... He demands no expiation; he wants to quench thirst with living water ... He allows me to be with him*

*Third, **attentiveness** to God in loving stillness: this is where the fruit of the other activities is plucked, and where the door of the mind is opened to God's light. Attentive in love; desire him there; adore him there; be with him in faith.*

‘The outpoured Spirit, fruit of the Risen Christ, claims prayer as God’s enterprise.’

‘Any prayer is good so long as it engages with Christ.’

‘The Master is here and wants to see you’ (John 11:28).

‘Prayer can be a being with.’ ‘Abide in me.’

‘The Our Father is good; praising is good; pleading is good; set or spontaneous, shared or alone, spoken or sung or silent, Scripture and palms and liturgy and stillness, chapel or garden or mountain or car park – all this prayer is very good if, by believing and loving, we are attending to the Other Person.’

‘The Son who elected to “be with” us has opened new possibilities in prayer. In the gospels people do indeed ask Jesus for things, and praise him for his ministry. But there is a deeper movement, expressed by the attitude of the sinners whose concern to “sit with him” (Mark 2:15), whose happiness is to know themselves “received by him” (Luke 15:2). The apostles primary call is “to be with him” (Mark 3:14). In John’s gospel, this is the fruit of Jesus’ resurrection: “abide in my love” – remain, stay with, be with’ (John 15:9) (pages 145-146).

‘The night of prayer means positive growth.

It is the gaze of Christ laying claim on the person  
at increasingly deep levels.

It is a more total communication of God’ (page 146).

‘Then the soul, too, should go on just with a loving attentiveness  
to God without making detailed acts, being open to what is  
happening ... with a simple and open loving attentiveness,  
like someone opening their eyes with the attentiveness of love.’

(Flame 3.33)

‘When God circumvents our radar,  
the instruments we once employed to connect with him  
are going to feel redundant,  
and his deeper presence will go unnoticed  
until we adjust our expectations.

The temptation is to keep fiddling with the control panel.  
A better alternative, John suggests, is to surrender.  
Surrender and be content to be with the One  
who is content to be with us.’

‘Not every darkness is blessed,  
but it can be turned into a blessing.’

Darkness resulting from the gift of contemplative light.

‘The signs of inner recollection are three:

first, the soul is not hankering after passing things;

second, she has a love for solitude, silence

and whatever will bring her to wholeness;

third, the things that used to help – like series of reflections –

now get in the way,

and she brings to prayer no other support than

faith, hope and love’ (Sayings 118).

‘You should not bear being attached to anything, whether it be to the practise of meditation, or to anything, whether sensory or spiritual, which delights you, or any way of thinking. You should be very free regarding everything, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction upon which you may want to lean would impede and disquiet you, and make noise in the profound silence of your senses and spirit, which you possess for the sake of this deep and delicate listening’ (Flame 3.34).

‘As John expresses these signs elsewhere (see Ascent II, 13; Night I, 9)

(1) I cannot pray as I used to.

Perhaps mechanically I could say the prayers or think the pictures, but this would not be feeding me, it would not be real.

(2) It is not that I am looking for an alternative to God.

I am not coming to God with a divided heart.

(3) In this emptiness I have (initially) an anxiety to meet him, or (once I have adjusted) a contentment in being with him.

This being alone, in love, attentive to God, is home.’

‘I can’t pray as I used to. I do not want an alternative. I do want God.’

‘Wider than specific signs,  
John is holding out the promise of an inflowing God.’

‘Whatever the darkness comes from  
(lukewarmness, indisposition, contemplative growth),  
John’s witness confirms that now, for me, in my weakness,  
prayer is possible:  
possible, because God never ceases to press in upon my spirit;  
possible, because Christ has not stopped welcoming the weak;  
possible, because I can decided now, again, to be with him,  
to want to be with him.’

‘What prepares the person to be united to God is the desire for God’ (Flame 3.26).

‘Distraction works by suction. My ego gets glued to it, and I’m off.’

‘To become recollected means owning my truth  
(this is how I am feeling)

and affirming a love for the Christ who is seeking me even in that.

Affirming “I want you. I want to want you.”

‘John’s story began here,  
with his need for the One who had “wounded” him.  
There he found Christ, poor enough to share the wound,  
risen enough to heal it.  
Out of that he confidently proposes prayer to us,  
not as an escape from the darkness that lies beyond our threshold,  
but as a journey into it.  
Prayer renames that darkness, not chaos, but the inner cavern,  
the space within the heart of the Risen Christ.’