

and revealed in a different way, for grace increases with the soul, and the soul with grace. And the purer the soul and the more withdrawn from love of the world, the more powerful is grace, and the more inward and spiritual is the soul's experience of the presence of God. So the same grace which first turns a man from sin and enables him to begin and make progress by the exercise of virtues and good works, also makes him perfect. And this form of grace is called a *lively consciousness of grace*, for one who possesses it feels it strongly, and is fully conscious by experience that he is in grace. To him it is lively indeed, for it wonderfully refreshes the soul, and infuses such health into it that it does not feel the pain of bodily disease, although the body may be feeble and sickly. For the power of grace is such that both body and soul are brought to their fullest health and ease.

When this grace is withdrawn, the soul is plunged into sorrow, for it thinks that it will be able to retain it always, and that nothing can take it away. But this is not so, for it passes away very easily. Nevertheless, although the consciousness of grace in all its fullness passes away, its influence remains; it preserves the soul in tranquillity, and makes it desire the return of grace. This is also what is known as the *wakeful sleep of the spouse* of which Holy Scripture says: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat* (Song of Solomon v, 2). I sleep, and my heart keeps watch. That is: I am spiritually at rest, when the love of the world is destroyed within me by grace, and the sinful impulses of bodily desires are so deadened that I hardly feel them and they do not trouble me. My heart is set free, and then it keeps watch, for it is vigilant and ready to love and see God. The more deeply I am at rest from outward things, the more awake I am to the knowledge of God and of inward things. I cannot be awake to Jesus unless I am asleep to the world. So while the grace of God closes the bodily eyes, the soul is asleep to the vanities of the world: the eyes of the spirit are opened, and it wakes to the

sight of God's majesty hidden within the clouds of His precious humanity. As the Gospel says of the Apostles when they were with the Lord Jesus at His transfiguration, they first slept, and then *vigilantes viderunt maiestatem* (S. Luke ix, 32); they woke to see His majesty. This sleep of the Apostles represents the soul's death to worldly love through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their awakening represents its contemplation of God. Through this sleep the soul is brought from the turmoil of worldly desires into peace, and through this awakening it is raised up to the sight of God and spiritual things. The closer that the eyes of the soul are shut to earthly things in this kind of sleep, the keener is its inward vision, which is enabled to see the beauty of heaven in loving contemplation. This sleep and this awakening are wrought by the light of grace in the soul of one who loves God.

CHAPTER 41: *How the special grace of the contemplation of God is sometimes withdrawn from a soul; how a soul should act in the absence or presence of God; and how a soul should constantly desire the gracious presence of God*

SHOW me a soul whose eyes have been opened by the action of grace to the contemplation of God, a soul so entirely detached and withdrawn from love of the world that it possesses *purity and poverty of spirit, spiritual rest, inward stillness and peace of conscience, refinement of thought, solitude and retirement of heart, and the wakeful sleep of the spouse*. Show me a soul that has lost all desire and love for the world, that is enraptured by the joys of heaven, and continually athirst for and quietly seeking the blessed presence of God. Then I can say with full conviction that this soul is burning with love and radiant with spiritual light. It is worthy to be called the spouse of Christ, for it is reformed in feeling, and ready to receive the grace of contem-

plation. These are the signs of the inspiration which comes to it when the eyes of the soul are opened, for when its eyes are opened the soul has for the time being the full exercise of all these gifts that I have mentioned.

Nevertheless, it often happens that grace is partly withdrawn because of the weakness and corruption of human nature, and the soul relapses into its former subjection to the body. This causes it great sorrow and pain, for it is blind, insensate, and incapable of good. It is weak and powerless, burdened with the body and the bodily senses. And when the soul seeks and desires the grace of God again, it cannot find it. For Holy Scripture says of God: *Postquam vultum suum absconderit, non est qui contempletur eum* (Job xxxiv, 29). When God has hidden His face, none may behold Him. When God reveals Himself, the soul cannot help but see Him, for He is Light; and when He hides Himself, it cannot see Him because it is in darkness. God's hiding of Himself is only a subtle testing of the soul, and His revealing of Himself is to comfort the soul by His wondrous goodness and mercy.

Do not be surprised when all consciousness of grace is sometimes withdrawn from one who loves God. For Holy Scripture says that the spouse shares the same lot: *Quaesivi et non inveni illum: vocavi et non respondit mihi* (Song of Solomon iii, 1). I sought Him, and did not find Him; I called, but He did not answer. That is; when I relapse into my natural weakness, grace is withdrawn, and the cause of this is my own failure, and not His departure from me. But when God is absent from me I am miserable, so I seek Him with great and heartfelt desire; but He gives me no answer that I can hear. Then I cry with all my soul: *Revertere, dilecte, mihi!* (Song of Solomon ii, 17). Return to me, my Beloved! But even then He does not seem to have heard me. The painful consciousness of myself, the assaults of worldly loves and fears, together with my own lack of spiritual strength, unite in a continual cry from my soul to God. Even

so, God remains withdrawn for a while and does not come, however constant my cry. He acts thus because He is sure of one who loves Him, and knows that he will not entirely relapse into love of the world, because he no longer has any desire for it. So God remains withdrawn from the soul the longer.

But at last, when He wills, God returns, full of grace and truth, and visits the soul which is fainting with desire and seeking His presence with so much love. He gently touches it, anoints it with the oil of gladness, and relieves all its pain. Then the soul cries out to God with heartfelt gladness: *Oleum effusum nomen tuum* (Song of Solomon i, 2). Your Name, O God, is like oil poured out. For as long as my soul is sick and sore with sin, burdened by the body, saddened and disquieted by the perils and miseries of this life so long, O Lord God, your Name to me is not oil poured out, but sealed up. But when my soul is suddenly flooded with the light of grace, soothed and healed from all the filth of sin, and when divine light and love brings spiritual strength and unspeakable joy, then I can say with hearty praise and gladness of spirit: 'Your Name, O Lord, is oil poured out to me.' For by Your gracious visitation the true significance of Your Name is revealed to me, that You are JESUS, Healing. For Your gracious presence alone can raise me from sorrow and from sin.

Blessed is the soul that is constantly fed by the experience of God's love when He is present, and supported by the desire for Him when He is absent. Wise and well grounded is the lover of God who behaves himself humbly and reverently in His presence, who contemplates Him with love but without familiarity, and who remains patient and calm, without despair and bitterness, when He is absent.

This variable feeling of the absence and presence of God does not mean that the soul has attained perfection, nor does it prevent the soul receiving the grace of perfection or of contemplation; but in so far as it persists, the soul remains less than

perfect. For the more a soul hinders itself from reaching a continual awareness of grace, the less grace it enjoys. However, the grace that it already possesses is the grace of contemplation. For this variable feeling of the absence and presence of God occurs in the state of perfection, as well as in the beginning of the spiritual life, but in a different way. And just as the presence of grace is experienced in different ways in these two states, so is the absence of grace. As a result, one who does not realize when grace is absent is liable to be deceived, and one who does not recognize the presence of grace will not be grateful when it comes to him, whether he is a beginner or has entered the state of perfection. Nevertheless, the more stable, unimpaired, and constant grace is, the more beautiful is the soul, and the more like to Him in whom, as the Apostle says, 'There is no instability.' And it is right that the soul should resemble Jesus its spouse in behaviour and in virtues, wholly conformed to Him in the stability of perfect love. But this happens seldom, and nowhere except in the true spouse of Christ.

For one who recognizes no variation in his experience of grace, but thinks that it is always at full tide, stable and constant, is either wholly perfect or wholly blind. When a soul is perfect, it is isolated from all carnal affections and from contact with created things. All barriers of corruption and sin between God and the soul are broken down, and he is perfectly united to Him in peace and love. But this is an unique grace, transcending human nature. And a man is very blind if he imagines himself to be in a state of grace without feeling God's inspiration, and thinks himself to be established in grace, as though all his feelings and actions were the fruit of special grace; for such a person imagines that everything that he does, feels, and says is inspired by grace, and that this favour will never be withdrawn. If there is such a person – and I hope there is not – he is entirely ignorant of the ways in which grace is experienced.

But you might say that we should love by faith alone, and

have no desire for spiritual experiences nor overestimate them if they occur, since the Apostle says: *Justus ex fide vivit* (Heb. x, 38). The righteous man lives by faith. I reply that we should not desire physical experiences, however pleasant, nor overestimate them should they occur. But we should always desire spiritual experiences such as I am speaking of now, if they come about in the way that I mentioned earlier. These experiences include the uprooting of all love of the world, the opening of the eyes of the spirit, purity of spirit, peace of conscience, and others similar. We should desire always to be conscious – so far as we may – of the lively inspiration of grace brought about by the spiritual presence of God within our souls. We should desire to contemplate Him constantly with reverence, and always to feel the sweetness of His love in the wondrous nearness of His presence. This should be our life, and this our experience of grace, for God is the Source of all grace, and grants this gift as He wills, to some in greater measure and to others less. For He grants this experience of His presence in various ways, as He sees best. And this experience is the goal towards which we should direct our lives and exertions, for without it we cannot live the life of the spirit. For just as the soul is the life of the body, God is the life of the soul by His gracious presence. But however real this experience may be, it is as yet only in faith, and cannot be compared to the experience of God Himself which we shall enjoy in the bliss of heaven.

We should have a deep desire for this experience, for every rational soul should desire with all its strength to draw close to God, and to be united to Him by its awareness of His unseen presence. It is easier to attain knowledge of this presence by personal experience than by reading books, for it is life and love, strength and light, joy and peace to a chosen soul. A soul that has once experienced it cannot therefore lose it without pain; it cannot cease to desire it, because it is so good in itself, and brings such comfort. And what can bring greater comfort

to a soul than to be withdrawn by grace from the clamour of worldly affairs, from the corruption of its own desires, and from unprofitable love of creatures into the peace and joy of spiritual love? Nothing can exceed this joy. Nothing can bring greater joy to one who loves God than His own gracious presence revealed to a pure soul. He is never depressed or sad except when he feels imprisoned by the body, and he is never completely glad or happy except when he is utterly unconscious of self, as he is when he contemplates God in the spirit. However, perfect joy is not possible in this life, because the heavy burden of bodily corruption oppresses his soul, bearing it down and greatly lessening his spiritual joy: and this must always be so as long as he remains in this life.

Nevertheless, when I speak of these variations of grace, how it comes and goes, do not fall into the error of thinking that I am referring to the ordinary grace possessed and experienced by a man through faith and goodwill towards God. Unless he possesses and perseveres in this grace, he cannot be saved, for it exists in the least of chosen souls. I am speaking of the special grace that is inspired by the Holy Spirit, as I mentioned earlier. Ordinary grace, that is, charity, remains undiminished whatever a man may do, as long as his will is directed towards God, so that he would not commit mortal sin or do anything that is forbidden as a mortal sin, for this grace is only lost through sin. Sin is mortal when a man's conscience warns him that it is mortal, and yet he deliberately does it. The same applies if a man's conscience is so blinded that he deliberately does something that is forbidden under pain of mortal sin by God and His Church.

The awareness of special grace that accompanies the invisible presence of God and makes the soul perfect in love, does not always continue at its highest intensity, but comes and goes unpredictably as I have said. For our Lord says: *Spiritus ubi vult spirat: et vocem ejus audis, et nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat* (John

iii, 8). The Holy Spirit breathes where He wills, and you hear His voice; but you do not know whence He comes or whither He goes. Sometimes He comes secretly when you are least aware of Him, but you will recognize Him unmistakably before He goes, for He stirs your heart in a wonderful way, and moves it strongly to contemplate His goodness. Then your heart melts with delight at the tenderness of His love like wax before the fire, and this is the sound of His voice. Then before you realize it, He departs. He withdraws a little, but not entirely, and the soul passes from ecstasy into tranquillity. The intense awareness of His presence passes away, but the effects of grace remain as long as the soul keeps itself pure, and does not wilfully lapse into carelessness and worldliness, or take refuge in outward things. For sometimes it will do so out of natural weakness, and not because it has any pleasure in them. It is this variability in grace that I have just been discussing.

CHAPTER 42: *A commendation of the prayer offered to God by a contemplative soul: how stability in prayer is a sure foundation; how every experience of grace in a chosen soul may be said to be of God; and the purer the soul the higher the grace received*

WHEN man's soul is untouched by special grace, it is sluggish and incapable of spiritual activity, unable to make progress. This is due to its own weakness, because by nature it is cold and dry, lacking devotion or delight in spiritual things. Then it is touched by grace, and becomes quick and refined, ready for and capable of spiritual activity. This liberates it, and makes it eager to respond to and cooperate with every stirring of grace. Sometimes this grace will move the soul to pray, and I will now tell you about this form of prayer.

The prayers that people use most frequently and find most helpful are probably the Our Father and the Psalms; the Our Father for the simple, and psalms, hymns, and other devotions of the Church for the educated. Having received this grace, a person will not use these prayers as he did before, nor in the usual way that people pray, using a loud voice or a normal tone. His prayer will be uttered in a very low voice and with deep feeling, because his mind is not troubled or distracted by outward things, but wholly withdrawn from them, and his soul is as it were in the presence of God. Therefore every word and syllable is uttered with understanding, sweetness, and delight; and his lips and heart are in complete harmony. This is because the soul has been set on fire with love, and all its interior prayer is like a flame leaping from a firebrand, kindling every power of the soul and transforming them into love. It fires them with such consolation that the soul desires to 'pray without ceasing', and to do nothing else. The more the soul prays in this way, the better it is able to pray, and the stronger it becomes. For grace brings great help to the soul, and renders everything light and easy, so that it takes delight in reciting the psalms and sings the praises of God with heavenly joy and sweetness.

This spiritual activity is the food of the soul, and this form of prayer is of great power, for it reduces and defeats all the temptations of the devil, both subtle and open. It removes all memory and love of the world, and of carnal sins. It protects both body and soul from being overwhelmed by the sorrows of this life. It keeps the soul alive to the workings of grace and divine Love within it, and constantly feeds the flame of love as sticks feed a fire. It dispels all weariness and dejection, and fills the soul with joy and gladness. Of this prayer David says: *Dirigatur oratio mea sicut incensum in conspectu tuo* (Ps. cxli, 2). Let my prayer ascend in Your sight, O Lord, as the incense. For as incense cast on to the fire causes a fragrant odour as the smoke

risers into the air, so a psalm sung or said with love understanding in a fervent heart rises as a fragrant odour in the sight of God and the whole company of heaven.

No fly tries to rest on the rim of a pot boiling over a fire; similarly, no worldly desire can survive in a pure soul that is enveloped and warmed in the fire of love, boiling over with psalms and praises to God. This is true prayer. It is always heard by God, gives glory to Him, and is rewarded by His grace. It makes the soul the friend of God and of all the angels of heaven. Therefore let anyone who can pray in this way do so, for it is good and brings great grace.

Although this form of prayer is not full contemplation, and is not due to the direct action of Divine Love itself, it is nevertheless a measure of contemplation, for it cannot be practised without abundant grace through the opening of the eyes of the spirit. Therefore one who has attained this freedom and state of grace, and has tasted its heavenly joy, has reached a certain degree of contemplation.

This kind of prayer is a rich offering of devotion, which is taken by the angels and presented before the face of God. The prayer of those who are engaged in active works has a double nature, for while their preoccupation with worldly matters often causes them to have one thing in their minds while the words of the psalm they are reciting expresses another. However, provided that their intention is right, their prayer is good and commendable, although it lacks savour and devotion. But the prayer offered by a contemplative has a single nature, for heart and lips are in complete harmony. The soul is so integrated by grace, and so detached from worldly things, that it is master of the body. The body then becomes no more than an instrument and trumpet of the soul, on which it sweetly sounds the spiritual praises of God.

This is the trumpet of which David speaks: *Buccinate in neomenia tuba, in insigni [die] solennitatis vestrae* (Ps. lxxxii, 3).

Sound the trumpet at new moon. Meaning: You souls who have been reformed in the spiritual life by the opening of your spiritual eyes, sing psalms with devotion, and blow on the trumpet of your bodily tongues. This prayer is so pleasing to God and so profitable to the soul, that anyone who is newly turned to God, who wishes to please Him, and to receive His special grace, should have a strong desire for it. He should strive by grace to attain this freedom of spirit, so that he may offer his prayers and praises to God constantly, stably, and devoutly, fixing his whole mind and ardent love on Him alone, and be ready to pray in this way whenever grace moves him to it.

This is a sure and true form of prayer. If you can practise it and remain steadfast in it, you have no need to go around here and there asking every spiritual man what you should do, how you should love God, how you should serve Him, and discussing spiritual matters that are beyond your understanding, as some may do. This is not at all profitable unless it is really necessary. Hold fast to your prayer even if it is difficult at first, so that you may in time reach this peaceful state of spiritual prayer. This will bring you all the knowledge you need, and guard you from all deception and illusion. If you already possess this grace, try to preserve it and do not give it up; but if it is withdrawn from you for a time, and you are moved to pray in another way, then leave it and resume it later. Whoever has the grace of this kind of prayer has no need to ask what he should fix his thought upon during prayer, whether upon the words of a prayer, or upon God, or the Name of Jesus, for his experience of this grace is a sure guide. For the eyes of the soul turn to God and contemplate Him clearly, and it knows with certainty that it knows and sees Him. I do not mean that it sees Him as He is in the fullness of His Godhead, but that it sees Him to whatever extent He wills to reveal Himself to a pure soul in this mortal life, according to the measure of its purity. For you can be sure that every experience of grace is an experience of

God Himself, and may be called God; and the soul's experience of God is greater or less in proportion to its own degree of grace. Indeed, the soul's first experience of special grace at the beginning of the spiritual life – the grace of compunction and contrition for its sins – is an experience of God Himself, since it is He who infuses contrition into a soul by His presence. At that time the soul has only a crude and elementary knowledge of God, and has no experience of the nature of His Godhead, for its own impurity prevents it seeing Him clearly. But later, if it grows in virtue and purity, grace will bring it to a fuller vision and experience of God. This experience will be of a more spiritual nature, and correspond more nearly to the nature of God Himself.

What is most pleasing to God is to have a soul become by grace what He is by nature, and this is achieved through spiritual contemplation and love of Him. And this must be the aim of all who love God. So whenever you feel your soul moved by grace, especially in the way I have described, by the opening of your spiritual eyes, you may be sure that you are seeing and experiencing God. Hold fast to Him, try to retain this grace, and do not easily let Him go. Seek God alone for Himself, and cooperate with His grace with increased devotion, so that it may grow within you more and more. And although your experience of God is not of Him as He is in the fullness of His Godhead, have no fear that you may be deceived if you surrender to your feeling. If you truly love God, be sure that your experience is real, and that by His grace you may have as True an experience and vision of Him as is possible in this life. Therefore surrender yourself to this experience when grace draws you, and maintain it with love and delight, in order that you may gradually reach a fuller and better knowledge of God. For grace itself will always direct you if you yield to its guidance until you reach your end.

You may possibly wonder why I say at one time that grace

does all this, and at another that it is Divine Love, or Jesus, or God. My reply is that when I say that grace does it I mean both Divine Love, Jesus, and God; for all are one and inseparable. Jesus is Divine Love, Jesus is grace, and Jesus is God, for He does everything within us by grace through His divine Love as God. So when writing of this matter I may use whichever of these names I please.

CHAPTER 43: *How a soul, by the opening of its spiritual eyes, receives the grace of love, which enables it to understand Holy Scripture; and how God, hidden in the Scriptures, reveals Himself to those who love Him*

WHEN one who loves God has this experience of God in prayer as I have described, he thinks that he will always retain it. But it sometimes happens that grace puts an end to vocal prayer, and calls on the soul to see and experience God in a different way. At first it moves the soul to see God in Holy Scripture, where God, who is Truth, is hidden under the precious cloak of beautiful language, for He wills to be seen and known only by the pure in heart. For Truth will not reveal itself to those who hate it, but only to friends who love and seek it with a humble heart. For truth and humility are true sisters, united in love and charity, and there is no disharmony between them. Humility depends on truth, and not on itself, while truth depends on humility, so that they are in complete accord. In so far, therefore, as the soul of one who loves God is made humble by the opening of its spiritual eyes through grace, recognizing its own nothingness, trusting entirely in the mercy and goodness of God, and depending solely on His help and favour, it has a true desire for Him, and so sees Him. For it sees the truths of Holy Scripture clearly and marvellously revealed

in a manner far beyond the reach of arduous study or natural intelligence. And this may well be termed an experience or perception of God, since God is the well of wisdom, and by infusing a small portion of His wisdom into a pure soul, He enables it to understand all Holy Scripture. This wisdom is not bestowed on a soul all at once in a single revelation, but through grace it receives a new and lasting ability to understand anything that comes to its notice.

This clear understanding is brought about by the presence of God within the soul. For in the Gospel we are told how two disciples were going to Emmaus, burning with love for Jesus and speaking of Him, when He appeared to them in the guise of a pilgrim, and taught them how the prophecies of Scripture applied to Himself. *Aperuit illis sensum, ut intelligerent Scripturas.* (Luke xxiv, 45). He opened their minds to understand the meaning of the Scriptures. In the same way the spiritual presence of Jesus opens the minds of those who love Him and burn with desire for Him. Through the ministry of the angels it brings the words and teachings of Holy Scripture to their minds without effort and study, and reveals their meaning, however difficult or obscure. Indeed, the more difficult and remote from human understanding they are, the greater the joy of the soul when their true meaning is revealed to it by God Himself. And if the words permit it, they are interpreted both in a literal, moral, mystical, and heavenly sense. By the literal interpretation, which is the simplest and most direct, man's natural intelligence is satisfied. By the moral interpretation of Scripture the soul is taught about virtues and vices, and enabled to distinguish between them. By the mystical interpretation the soul is illumined to recognize God's workings within His Church, and to apply the words of Scripture to Christ our Head, and to His mystical body, the Church. The fourth, or heavenly, interpretation refers solely to the activity of love, and attributes all the truths of Scripture to the workings of love. And since this

corresponds most closely to the experience of heaven, I call it heavenly.

One who loves God is His friend, not because he has deserved this privilege, but because God in His merciful goodness takes him as His friend with a solemn pledge. He reveals His secrets to him, and treats him as a true friend who pleases and loves Him, and does not merely serve Him with fear like a slave. Thus Jesus Himself says to His Apostles: *Iam vos dixi amicos, quia quaecumque audivi a Patre meo, nota feci vobis* (John xv, 15). I now call you My friends, for I make known to you all that I have heard from My Father. To a pure soul, whose palate is cleansed from the corruption of worldly love, Holy Scripture is nourishing food and delicious sustenance. Its taste is wonderfully sweet when fully assimilated by the understanding, for within it is concealed the life-giving spirit which quickens all the powers of the soul, and fills them with heavenly sweetness and spiritual delight. But anyone who wishes to eat this spiritual bread must have good teeth, white and clean, for heretics and those who love the world cannot pierce its inmost substance. Their teeth are dirty, so that they cannot taste its true savour. By teeth we mean the interior powers of the soul, which in lovers of the world and heretics are rotten with sin and vanity. They would like to reach the true knowledge of Holy Scripture by the exercise of their own reason, but they cannot do so, for their reason is corrupted both by original and actual sin, and is not yet healed by grace. As a result they can only gnaw on the outer bark, and whatever they may say to the contrary, they are incapable of reaching the inner savour. They are not humble and pure enough to find it, nor are they the friends of God, so that He does not reveal His secrets to them.

The secrets of Holy Scripture are locked away and sealed with the signet of God's finger, which is the Holy Spirit, so that none may learn them without His love and grace. God alone holds the key of knowledge, as Scripture says, and He

Himself is the key. He admits whom He will by the inspiration of His grace, and does not break the seal. And this is how God treats those who love Him. He does not treat all in the same way, but grants special favours to those who are inspired to seek truth in the Scriptures after devout prayer and diligent study. These may learn the truths of God when He chooses to reveal them.

See, then, how grace opens the eyes of the soul and enlightens its understanding in a wonderful manner beyond the capabilities of our weak and fallen nature. As I said earlier, it gives the soul a new ability to understand Holy Scripture and to grasp its truths, whether it is reading it or meditating upon it. It is enabled to understand the spiritual meaning of all the words and teachings that it hears. And this is nothing strange, for the spirit that reveals its meaning for the comfort of a pure soul is the Holy Spirit who first inspired it. This grace is granted to the unlettered as well as to the learned, for these can and do grasp the substance, the truth and the spiritual savour of Holy Scripture. And although they may not understand all its implications, this is not necessary for them. And when grace gives the soul this ability and enlightenment, it sometimes wishes to be alone, away from the distraction of creatures, in order to employ freely the instrument of reason, and consider the truths contained in Holy Scripture. At such times sufficient words, teachings, and phrases will come to mind, and keep the soul regularly and profitably occupied.

A soul can only learn by experience what comfort and spiritual joy, savour, and sweetness this light of grace may bring to it, whether inward perceptions, hidden knowledge, and sudden visitations of the Holy Spirit. And I am sure that such a soul will not go astray provided that its teeth – that is, its spiritual senses – are kept white and clean from pride and intellectual presumption. I think that David was experiencing great joy in this way when he said: *Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua, super mel ori meo* (Ps. cxix, 103). How sweet are Your words to

my lips, O Lord; sweeter than honey to my mouth. That is: O Lord God, Your holy words, recorded in Holy Scripture and brought to my mind by grace, are sweeter to my lips — that is, to the affections of my soul — than honey to my mouth. How wonderful it is to see God in this way without wearisome labour!

As I said earlier, this is one way of seeing God. We do not see Him as He is, but under the forms of works and words, *per speculum etiam in enigmate*: in a glass and under a symbol, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. xiii, 12). God is infinite power, wisdom and goodness, righteousness, truth, holiness, and mercy. But what God is in Himself none may see or know, but He may be seen in His works by the light of grace. His power is seen in His creation of all things out of nothing, His wisdom in His ordered disposition of them, His holiness in His gifts of grace, His righteousness in the punishment of sin, His truth in His sure reward of good works. All these things are shown in Holy Scripture, where the soul sees them together with all the other attributes of God. Hence you may see how such knowledge, whether bestowed through the Holy Scriptures or through any other writings inspired by grace, is nothing other than an affectionate correspondence between a loving soul and Jesus whom it loves: or more correctly, between Jesus the true Lover and the souls whom He loves. He has a tender love for all His chosen children who are subject to the limitations of this mortal body, and therefore although He dwells apart from them, hidden from their sight in the bosom of the Father and in full enjoyment of the Godhead, yet He bears them in His Heart, and often visits them with His presence and His grace. He comforts them with His words in Holy Scripture, and drives away heaviness and weariness, doubts and fears from their hearts. He gives gladness and joy to all who truly believe His promises, and humbly abide the fulfilment of His will.

Saint Paul said: *Quaecumque scripta sunt, ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt, ut per consolationem Scripturarum spem habeamus* (Rom. xv, 4). All that is written for our learning is written that through the consolation of the Scriptures we may have hope of salvation. And this is another aspect of contemplation, that once our spiritual eyes are opened, we see God in the Scriptures. The clearer our vision in contemplation, the deeper the love of God that we feel. When a pure soul experiences even a little of this grace given through the Scriptures, it will set little value on the seven sciences or on any worldly knowledge. For the end of this sacred knowledge is the salvation of the soul in eternal life, while unless grace re-directs it to this right end, the end of the other is but vanity and passing satisfaction.

CHAPTER 44: How the secret voice of God sounds within the soul, and how the illuminations brought to the soul by grace may be called God's voice

THESE new experiences within a pure soul are wonderful, and could a soul enjoy them continually, it might truthfully be described as partly reformed in feeling, although not as yet fully. For God reveals even more to it, and draws it closer to Himself. He begins to speak to it even more intimately and lovingly, and the soul is eager to respond to the stirrings of grace. For the prophet says: *Quocumque ibat spiritus, illuc gradientur et rotæ sequentes eum* (Ezek. i, 20). Wherever the spirit goes, there go the wheels following him. The wheels represent the true lovers of God, because they are perfectly round in virtue, without any angle of obstinacy, and they turn freely because their wills conform to the movements of grace. For, as the prophet says, they obey and act as grace moves and directs them. But before they do so, they are able to make a sure test and verification of this voice of grace, so that they are not

deceived by their own imagination or by the devil. Our Lord says of those that love Him: *Oves meae vocem meam audiunt, et cognosco eas, et cognoscunt me meae* (John x, 27). My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they know Me. The secret voice of God is true, and it makes the soul true. In it there is no deception or illusion, no pride or hypocrisy, but gentleness, humility, peace, love, and charity, and it is full of life and grace. So when this voice sounds within a soul, it is sometimes so powerful that the soul immediately lays aside whatever it is doing – whether prayer, speaking, reading, meditation, or any physical occupation – and listens to it alone. And as it listens to the sweet sound of God's voice, it is filled with peace and love, transported far beyond all thought of earthly things. In this peace God reveals Himself to the soul, sometimes as Lord to be feared, sometimes as a Father to be revered, and sometimes as a Spouse to be loved. At such times the soul is absorbed in a wonderful reverence and loving contemplation of God, which brings it a delight far transcending anything it has ever known. It enjoys so great a sense of security and peace in God, and so acute a realization of His goodness, that it wishes always to remain in this state, and never to do anything else. The soul feels that it is touching God Himself, and by virtue of His ineffable touch it is made whole and stable, reverently contemplating God alone, as though nothing existed save God and itself. At these times it is upheld solely by His favour and wonderful goodness, and is profoundly conscious of this truth.

This feeling often comes without any special study of Holy Scripture, and with only a few words in mind. But the soul may employ words to give expression to the feelings in its heart, whether of love or worship. While it enjoys this grace, it is far removed from all love of the world, and from any thought of it: it pays no attention to it, and has no time to spare for it. At these times grace will bring to the soul certain illumin-

ations, which I call the words of God and the perception of spiritual things. For you will realize that the whole purpose of God's action in a soul is to make it His true and perfect spouse in the height and fullness of love. And because this cannot be done suddenly, God who is Love, and wisest of all lovers, employs many wonderful ways to bring this about. And in order that the chosen soul may come to be truly united to Himself, He addresses it in the gracious words of a lover. He shows it His wonders, and gives it rich gifts, promising even more, and showing it great affection and courtesy. I cannot describe the workings of God in detail, nor is it necessary. Nevertheless I will say something as grace inspires me.

Firstly, when the eyes of a pure soul have been opened, it is drawn towards perfect love by the revelation of spiritual matters, not in order that the soul should rest content with these and cease its quest, but that it should seek and love God Himself, who is above all things, having no regard for anything but Him. If you enquire about the nature of these spiritual matters that I am often speaking of, my answer is that they are all the truths revealed in Holy Scripture. Therefore a soul that by the light of grace comprehends the truths of the Scriptures sees these spiritual things to which I have referred.

CHAPTER 45: *How when grace opens the eyes of a soul, it is given wisdom which enables it humbly and surely to recognize the various degrees in the Church Militant, and the nature of the angels*

NEVERTHELESS, there are other spiritual matters that the light of grace reveals to the soul, and they are these. The nature of rational souls, and how God works in them by grace: the nature and activity of the angels, both blessed and fallen:

and the knowledge of the Blessed Trinity in so far as grace reveals it.

Scripture says of the spouse in the Song of Songs: *Surgam et circumbo civitatem; et quaeram quem diligit anima mea* (Song of Sol. iii, 2). I shall rise and go about the city, and seek Him whom my soul loves. That is, I shall lift up my thoughts and go about the city. This city symbolizes the whole of creation, both material and spiritual, which by God's decree is governed by the laws of nature, of reason, and of grace. I go about this city when I study the nature and origins of material creatures, the gifts of grace, and the joy of spiritual beings. And in all these I seek Him whom my soul loves. It is wonderful for the eyes of the soul to see God in the material universe, and to see His power, His wisdom, and His goodness in the ordering of it. But it is far more wonderful to see Him in spiritual beings. First we see Him in rational souls, both chosen and reprobate; we see how mercifully He calls His chosen; how He turns them away from sin by the light of His grace; how He helps them, teaches them, corrects them, and comforts them; how He sets them right, cleanses and nourishes them; and how He makes them burn with love and light by the richness of His grace. And He does this not to one soul alone, but to all His chosen, according to the measure of His grace. In the case of the reprobate, we see how justly He forsakes them and leaves them in their sin, yet does them no wrong thereby; how He allows them their reward in this world, and afterwards punishes them in eternity.

This is a partial vision of the Church Militant as it is in this world. We see how black and foul it appears in souls that are reprobate, and how fair and lovely in chosen souls. And all this spiritual vision is nothing other than a vision of God, not as He is in Himself, but in His secret and merciful operation and in His awful and just judgements, which are daily revealed to and renewed in rational souls. Furthermore, we see with the eyes of

the soul the anguish of the reprobate and the joy and bliss of chosen souls brings great consolation, for a pure soul cannot see truth without feeling great delight and ardent love.

This vision also reveals the nature of the angels, both blessed and fallen. The pure soul feels great joy when grace enables it to see the devil as a clumsy ruffian, bound by the power of God, and unable to harm anyone. The soul does not see him in bodily form, but spiritually, with his true nature and malice revealed. It throws him down, strips him, and reduces him to nothing. It scorns and despises him, paying no attention to his malice. In this way it fulfils the scriptural injunction: *Verte eum, et non erit* (Prov. xii, 7). Overturn the wicked, that is, the devil, and he shall be as nothing. The soul is astonished that the devil has such great malice, and so little power. There is no creature so powerless as he, and it is therefore great cowardice when men fear him so greatly. He can do nothing without God's leave, not so much as enter into a swine, as the Gospel says, much less harm a man. And if God gives him leave to trouble us, He does so only with a good and merciful purpose. Therefore welcome God, both in Himself and in all His messengers. The soul need have no more fear of the devil's blusterings than of the movements of a mouse. The devil is full of anger if we refuse to listen to him, but his mouth is stopped by his own malice, and his hands are tied like those of a thief who deserves to be condemned and hanged in hell. So the soul accuses him and condemns him justly according to his deserts. Do not let this surprise you, for this is what Saint Paul meant when he said: *Frater, nescitis quoniam angelos judicabimus?* (1 Cor. vi, 3). My brothers, do you not know that we shall judge angels? Meaning those who through malice have become wicked spirits, but who were created good angels by nature. This judgement takes place before the Last Day in the case of contemplative souls, for in a small measure they already take part in all that God will do openly and perfectly in due time.

It brings great shame and disgrace to the devil when he receives this treatment from a pure soul. He would like to escape, but cannot, for the eye of God is upon him still, and this gives him greater distress than all the fires of hell. The soul then turns humbly to God with heartfelt praise and thanks for having saved a simple soul by His power and great mercy from all the malice of so deadly an enemy.

CHAPTER 46: *How by the same light the soul may perceive the nature of the blessed angels, and recognize how Jesus is both God and man, transcending all things*

AND after this by the same light the soul may see the beauty of the angels, the nobility of their nature, the refinement of their being, and how they are confirmed in grace and in the fullness of eternal bliss. It can also recognize the various orders of angels, distinguish between them, and see how they all dwell in the light of eternal truth, each in his own order aflame with the love of the Holy Spirit, constantly seeing, loving, and praising God in perfect peace. This perception of the angels is neither physical nor figurative, but wholly spiritual.

The soul then begins to have a real affinity and fellowship with these blessed spirits. They give it loving and active help, they become its instructors, and often dispel its fears by their presence and by the light that they bring. They bring the light of grace to the soul, and sometimes they speak sweet words of comfort to the heart. And if the soul is afflicted by any spiritual malady, they serve it and minister to all its needs. So Saint Paul says of them: *Nonne omnes sunt administratorii spiritus, missi propter eos qui hereditatem capient salutis?* (Heb. i, 14). Do you not know that all these holy spirits are ministers sent by God to those who are to be heirs of salvation? That is, to chosen souls.

In other words: Understand that all this spiritual activity by which words and teachings are brought to the mind, and other wonderful things as well, are due to the ministry of the angels when the light of grace shines brightly in a pure soul. It is not possible for mortal men fully to describe their experiences, this spiritual light, the graces and consolations which pure souls receive through the favour and fellowship of the blessed angels. The soul is so happy to watch their activity that it would like to attend to nothing else.

But with the help of the angels the soul sees even more. For a pure soul rises above all these things to contemplate the blessed nature of Jesus Himself. First it sees His glorious manhood, and that it is rightly exalted above the nature of all angels. Then it begins to contemplate His divinity, for knowledge of creatures leads a soul to knowledge of the Creator. The soul then begins to perceive a little of the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity. And it may well do this, for the light of grace is its guide, and it will not err so long as it walks in this light.

Then, so far as it is possible in this life, the soul clearly perceives the unity of substance and the distinction of Persons in the Blessed Trinity, and it understands many other truths concerning the Trinity which are set forth and interpreted by the doctors of the Church in their writings. And these selfsame truths concerning the Blessed Trinity which the holy doctors are inspired to set forth in their books for our instruction may be perceived by a pure soul by the light of grace. But I will not enlarge on this matter, for it is not necessary.

When enabled to do so by special grace, the soul feels wonderful love and heavenly joy in the contemplation of this truth, for light and love are inseparable in a pure soul. For no love that springs from contemplation brings the soul so close to God as this does; it is the highest and most perfect knowledge of Jesus, God and man, that the light of grace can bring to a soul. Therefore the burning love kindled by this is greater than that

kindled by any knowledge of created things, whether material or spiritual.

All this knowledge of God's creation and of God Himself, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, which is infused into a soul by grace as I have mentioned, I call the fair words and communications of God to the soul chosen as His true spouse. He reveals mysteries and often offers rich gifts to it out of His treasury, and adorns the soul with them with great honour. She has no need to be ashamed when she appears before the face of God her Spouse in the company of her fellows. All this loving and intimate conversation between God and the soul may be called a secret word, of which Holy Scripture says: *Porro ad me dictum est verbum absconditum, et venas susurr i ejus percipit auris mea* (Job iv, 12). A secret word is spoken to me, and my ear has caught the low murmur of His voice. The inspiration of God is a secret word, for it is hidden from all who love the world, and revealed to those who love Him. It is by this means that a pure soul readily catches the sound of His murmured words, by which He reveals His truth. For each truth revealed by grace, and received with inward delight and joy, is a secret murmur of God in the ear of a pure soul.

One who wishes to hear these sweet spiritual murmurs of God must possess great purity of soul, meekness, and all other virtues, and be partly deaf to the clamour of the world. This is the voice of God, of which David said: *Vox Domini praeeparantis cervos, et revelabit condensa* (Ps. xxix, 9). The voice of God prepares the harts, and He will show them the thickets. That is: the inspiration of God makes souls as light as harts, that spring up from the ground and leap over the bushes and briars of worldly vanity. And He shows them the thickets, that is, His secrets, which can be discerned only by sharp eyes. This contemplation, surely founded in grace and humility, makes a soul wise, and fires it with a longing to see the face of God. These

are the spiritual matters that I spoke of earlier, and they may be called new experiences of grace. I only touch on them briefly, for the guidance of your soul. For a soul that is pure, and moved by grace to engage in this spiritual activity of contemplation, may learn more in an hour than could be written in a long book.