

Thursday 14 December 2023

St John of the Cross



Juan de Yepes was born near Avila in Spain in 1542. It was a noble family but so poor that his older brother starved to death. He entered the Carmelite order when he was twenty-one.

He was ordained in 1567 and met Teresa of Ávila soon afterwards. John made a great impression on Teresa: she persuaded him to help with her reform of the Carmelite order. His labours caused conflict with the religious authorities who imprisoned him. The experiences inspired his finest poetry and mystical writing. He wrote *Dark Night of The Soul* as God purified its approach towards God.

He was banished to southern Spain, where he died after a severe illness on this day in 1591.

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Prayers of intercession John of the Cross.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,
<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Love one another

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven.

Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin,

let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,

firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria It is usual to omit the Gloria during Advent

The Collect for St John of the Cross

O God, the Judge of all,
who gave your servant John of the Cross
a warmth of nature, a strength of purpose
and a mystical faith
that sustained him even in the darkness:
shed your light on all who love you
and grant them union of body and soul
in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Song of Songs

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyards are in blossom.

'My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the cleft mountains.'

Song of Songs 2:8-17

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First letter to the Corinthians

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

1 Corinthians 2:1-10

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 [Friends, love one another](#)[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All **Glory to you O Lord.**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.' *John 14:18-23*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All **Praise to you O Christ.**

Sermon

Many people think the Song of Songs is a strange book to include in the Bible because it nowhere mentions God. Some people think it represents a transcript of poems or songs intended for a Jewish wedding. Whatever the originally intended purpose, one of its central images concerns two lovers looking for each other, distraught and desperate because they can't find one another.

It's appropriate to read the Song of Songs when we remember John of the Cross because a central theme running through many of his writings concerns this idea of loss: we love God and know He loves us yet He appears distant or absent. What's going on?

Whichever way we look at the art of becoming a Christian disciple, all require a form of self-emptying. All journeys start from somewhere. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both start their stories of Christianity with the birth of Jesus, but the older Gospel of Mark starts in the desert (a place of radical emptiness) and Gospel of John starts with a different emptying, with Word becoming flesh. The Gospels,

then, employ three routes into their topic: a seed growing inside a human body, radical repentance, and deliberate renunciation.

Prayer is always an encounter with God and Jesus tells us that one of the prerequisites for seeing God during that encounter is self-emptying: he tells us to 'die to self'; we must 'take up our cross'; we must be 'poor in spirit' if we are to 'see God'; it is as impossible for a rich man to enter heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle; and so on. We therefore need a way of looking at self-emptying that tells us how to self-empty in a way that is useful, that goes beyond caricatures of saying 'no' to everything that smells good, tastes good, feels good.

We need to empty our soul of self because something of God 'rubs off' when we encounter Him. We therefore need to find space for that extra 'something' of God to reside. The longer-term effects of those encounter can be felt and studied: that's what the 'fruit of the Spirit' is all about for example; and it's also the idea behind holiness. We can therefore follow these tangible fruits of encounter as a means of growing in Christlikeness. Archbishop Rowan Williams was implying something of the sort when he said a true disciple would, 'See what the Spirit is doing—and join in!' But we obviously need to learn how to discern what the Spirit is doing, then hone those skills, if we are to follow intelligently. We need to devise a method.

The founder of the Jesuit movement, Ignatius Loyola, was looking for the fruits of encountering God when he came up with his famous idea of 'consolations and desolations'—broadly, feelings of whether God seems present or not in prayer. The consolations are times when God seems particularly close and tangible. To catalyse growth into Christlikeness, we should ask questions such as 'what', 'how' and 'why' during such times and look for patterns.

Desolations are times when we feel that God is not listening or is absent. They are different because it's usually difficult to know what's happening if we can't feel anything. At its extreme, Ignatius even counsels us to do as little as possible (in a spiritual sense) during such periods of desolation. But inability to do anything during a desolation can become a big problem because we could be making things worse, repeatedly creating the conditions that helped cause the desolation. Without help, then, we could be stuck with all growth into Christlikeness thwarted.

We therefore need a different way of looking, which is why we need John of the Cross and the Carmelite tradition. John was a seventeenth-century Spanish monk who helped reinvigorate the ancient monastic order of Carmelites, which started in the Holy Land during the tenth or eleventh century.

John's analysis often centres on self-emptying and its fruit of sanctification—becoming holy. One Collect for St John actually starts, 'Almighty Father, you endowed John of the Cross with a spirit of self-denial and a love of the Cross ...'

When talking of self-emptying, John uses a strange language of ‘nights’ (‘night of the senses’ and ‘night of the spirit’, active and passive, and so forth ...) to help describe the way God Himself helps us empty our souls of self. He looks at different kinds of spiritual dryness and their causes, then tells us how to cope and what to do. All of us enter these spiritual nights but fewer of us pass safely through to the other side, to an actual knowledge of God and real Christlike holiness. We must therefore undergo processes of self-emptying in order to grow as Christians.

The Mary Rose was a Tudor warship that sank in the 1540s and was brought to the surface in 1986. The silt of the Solent helped preserve its wood to a remarkable extent but the timbers started to rot as soon as the carcass of the ship was raised. The wood reacted to bacteria in the air, which caused the wood to rot. Engineers devised an elegant way to preserve the remains of the ship: they sprayed the wood with a dilute solution of wax (similar in composition to car polish). The wax replaces the water, and mould cannot form in those pores in the wood in which the wax resides. The entire process requires constant irrigation and will not be finished until the late 2050s—a timescale that almost matches a typical human lifespan. In exactly the same way, we as Christians need to be irrigated by the Spirit of God. The desired effect is to replace self with God: it’s a life-long process of relentless self-emptying. In just the same way as the wax replaces the water in the timbers of the Mary Rose, so the Spirit replaces self in a human soul.

The wax neither argues nor explains. It simply swaps place with the water: it ‘rubs off’. Similarly, self-emptying just ‘happens’ each time our prayer is authentic even if the encounters are not immediately tangible. Self-emptying, then, is vitally important. It can follow discernible stages. There’s a pattern, a framework.

As Christians, we’re in the business of looking for God and hoping that something rubs off. John of the Cross tells us that we are more likely to know God’s presence, and feel that something of God has rubbed off, when that prayer is accompanied by a deliberate self-emptying. So we must pray for self-emptying as a means of attaining the central goal of growing into Christlikeness *and finding God when we look for Him*.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

O Blessed Jesus,

give me stillness of soul in You.

Let Your mighty calmness reign in me.

Rule me, O King of Gentleness,

King of Peace.

Give me control, control over my words, thoughts and actions.

O dear Lord, deliver me from all irritability, want of meekness,
want of gentleness.

By your own deep patience give me patience, stillness of soul in you.

Make me in this, and in all, more and more like you.

All Amen.

Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth.

Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners.

The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine;

and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me.

What do you ask, then, and seek, my soul?

Yours is all of this, and all is for you.

Do not engage yourself in anything less

or pay heed to the crumbs that fall from your Father's table.

Go forth and exult in your Glory!

Hide yourself in it and rejoice,

and you will obtain the supplications of your heart.

All Amen.

We must dig deeply in Christ.

He is like a rich mine with many pockets containing treasures:

however deep we dig we will never find their end or their limit.

Indeed, in every pocket new seams of fresh riches are discovered on all sides.

All Amen.

St John of the Cross

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Let Your mighty calmness reign in us.

Rule us, O King of Gentleness,

King of Peace. *St John of the Cross (adapted slightly)*

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Brother, sister, let me love you [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who makes saints of sinners,
who has transformed those we remember today,
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 How deep the Father's love for us [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.
In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with John of the Cross and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God of truth,
whose Wisdom set her table
and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine
of the kingdom:
help us to lay aside all foolishness
and to live and walk in the way of insight,
that we may come with your servant John of the Cross
to the eternal feast of heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.