

GENTLE BREEZES

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— OF CARMEL —



ST. THÉRÈSE SEMI-PROVINCE OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITE FRIARS

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BROTHERS & SISTERS,

As we approach the season of Lent, we prepare ourselves to walk the journey of this Holy Season by living the three traditional practices of Lent: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. To practice each of them we need to make some personal choices. It is necessary to decide what can help us in our prayer life, what kind of fast can help us in our self-knowledge, and what we can do to help our brothers and sisters in need. Our Church gives us advice on how to follow our Lenten practices through homilies and Lenten exercises. Some of us follow this advice and others look for their own ways to grow through Lent.

Whatever way you choose to live these practices of Lent I would like to invite you now to meditate with me about why we fast or do any other kind of penance, and why it is important in our Christian and Lenten journey. Perhaps some of you prepared yourself for the season of Lent by planning the kind of penance you will undertake. Most of the time we think about how to fast from our favorite food, how to stop watching a favorite tv show, how to use less internet and social media, or how to stop watching a favorite series on any of the popular platforms. This way of thinking or desire is very good and I encourage you to do so. Nevertheless, let's keep in mind the important reason the Church invites us during this season of Lent to do some kind of fasting, mortification, or penance. Our Holy Father St. John of the Cross can help us in our meditation.

St. John of the Cross understands the human condition and our human weaknesses very well. For this reason he can help us grow in our journey towards God. In the Ascent of Mount Carmel he says, *"The ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with divine Wisdom. But such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites."* (Book 1, Chapter 8, paragraph 4) St. John of the Cross teaches us that penance, like fasting, should be a detachment not only from material things, but more from our personal appetites. Likewise, St. John says that doing penances with the right intention can help us in our personal conversion. He teaches us that we do penance, not for

the sake of suffering, but hoping that it will help us grow in our spiritual life. He invites us to discern our acts of penance and mortification and choose those not *"based on quantity and quality so much as on the love of God practiced in them; and consequently that these works are of greater excellence in the measure both that the love of God by which they are performed is more pure and entire and that self-interest diminishes with respect to pleasure, praise, and earthly or heavenly joy."* (Book 3, Chapter 27, paragraph 5)

Some very important advice St. John gives those who like to offer penance in any time of our life or in this time of Lent is *"...in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ"*. (The Ascent of Mount Carmel Book 1, Chapter 13, paragraph 4). Whatever Lenten practices we decide to undertake must be done for the Glory of God, for the love of our Lord, and for the love of our brothers and sisters.

I ask the Lord to bless all of you and give you the wisdom and strength needed in persevering in your three practices of Lent: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. You are in our prayers and we will walk with you in your spiritual Lenten journey.

May you Live Lent for the Love of God and neighbor!

Fr. Luis Castañeda, OCD



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On the Cover:

Jesus Washing Peter's Feet
(ca. 1854) Ford Madox Brown

OH, BLESSED NIGHT!

Fr. Gregory Ross, OCD

For two years now, the world has been undergoing a time of great darkness and turbulence. The pandemic has led to “normal life” being turned on its head. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic and return to a more normal state of affairs during this Lenten season, part of our Lenten examination of conscience might be to reflect on how we have experienced God’s presence during these turbulent times and how this experience of darkness has afforded us new opportunities to deepen our faith and relationship with God.

One of the most iconic images from the spirituality of St. John of the Cross, the first Discalced Carmelite Friar, is that of the “dark night.” This image is most often associated with the experience of purifying suffering. However, the image of “night” has a many-layered significance for this mystical doctor of the Church. As we seek to discern God’s presence and loving action during

times of darkness, St. John of the Cross offers us wisdom and accompaniment.

The image of the dark night appears in St. John of the Cross’ poem by the same name, which begins:

*One dark night, fired by love’s urgent longings, Ah, the sheer grace!
I went out unseen, my house being now all stilled.*

This poem tells the story of someone who goes out in search of her beloved at night, a night characterized by its darkness. However, as she journeys towards her beloved in darkness, led by a light that burns within her heart, the night becomes a *glad night*. Finally, St. John of the Cross writes joyfully:

O guiding night! O night more lovely than the dawn! O night that has united the Lover with his beloved.

The night that began as darkness becomes the place of encounter with the beloved and the guide that leads the soul to this encounter is the light of faith.

This poem of St. John of the Cross teaches us that Jesus is waiting for us, calling us to encounter him during the nights that we experience during our lives. Just as night comes at the end of each day, enveloping us in darkness whether we want it to or not, the mystery of suffering enters our lives in ways that

are beyond our control. The Lord desires that we seek him at such times.

The pandemic descended upon us without our wishing it or being prepared for it. We may have suffered illness, or even lost loved ones to COVID. We may have suffered economically or experienced isolation and separation from loved ones. We may have felt put upon by oppressive restrictions. What bewildering times we have experienced! *Where has God been during this*



Starry Night (circa 1865) Jean-François Millet

night? one might ask.

And this is precisely the question St. John of the Cross invites us to reflect upon. In his writings, the mystical doctor reminds us that Jesus himself descended into the deepest of dark nights in his death on the cross, by which he reconciled humanity to the Father. By his own descent into darkness out of love for us, Jesus has transformed the darkness of the night of suffering into a place where he can be found. When we experience this night, he is there waiting for us, calling us to himself.

The light which guides us in our seeking of Jesus is the light of faith. When we trust in Jesus’ faithfulness and presence even in the darkness of the night, he lets us know in new and unexpected ways that he is indeed there waiting for us, calling us to

OH, BLESSED NIGHT!

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encounter him in faith. It is the presence of Jesus that transforms the night from an oppressive darkness to a night illuminated by the light of faith and the experience of Jesus as the true light of our lives. St. John of the Cross writes:

In the midst of these dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels the presence of someone and an interior strength which ... fortifies and accompanies it. (The Dark Night, II, 11, 7)

This “someone” is, of course, Jesus, who comes to us in our darkness. This encounter with Jesus in the night transforms us. St. John of the Cross teaches us what to look for in ourselves to see whether we have indeed found him in the night times of our lives. One fruit of this encounter with God, explains St. John, is a newfound reverence and respect for God. One becomes humbler and more docile to his will, realizing one’s dependence on him, having come to know in a new way his utter dependability. Together with this newfound humility comes a greater compassion for others. Conscious of one’s own weakness, one becomes slower to judge others and quicker to forgive. One shows charity more readily others, having experienced on a more profound level the Lord’s faithful love for oneself.

How have we lived through this night of the pandemic, or other times of darkness in our lives? Even if these times of darkness have passed, it is never too late to reflect upon them, to discover how our Lord has always been with us. He has descended into our darkness, always ready to transform it into a new day through the encounter of faith. May this Lenten season, by his grace, be such a night of glad encounter for us all, culminating in that blessed night of the Easter Vigil, which sees Christ, the light of the world, rising from the dead!

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PROVINCE UPDATE



Robert J. Allen

(1937-2021)

At the evening of life, you will be examined in love.

–St. John of the Cross

The St. Thérèse Province shares our gratitude for the legacy of Robert “Bob” Allen.

As a development consultant, Bob assisted more than 50 religious communities throughout the world, enabling them to touch many lives in service to the people of God. In working with the Semi-Province of St. Thérèse, he guided the friars in new development efforts, establishing the first newsletter for the Province in 2008. Because of his assistance and encouragement we now have *Gentle Breezes*, our semi-annual newsletter focused on sharing news and updates about the friars and communities in the Province as well as sharing Carmelite Spirituality with seasonal reflections.

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