
4

Love and Union

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Mt 11:28-30

God calls us out of our loneliness into a state in which the boundaries between our limited, earth-bound awareness and the unlimited, universal consciousness of Christ have dissolved. In this state we are blessed with peace, for we know—more intimately than we have ever known anything—that the mercy and power of God dwell within us; in some mysterious way, they *are* us. Out of his infinite love God has fully awakened us from our dream of separation; his love has become the guiding force of our life, and his will has become ours. We rest in eternal freedom, immeasurably grateful and content to let his infinite wisdom direct us in all things, great and small, everywhere at all times.

“The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,” (Jn 1:14) to show us the path back to God. The divine Word, the eternal Son of God, descended into the depths of human sorrow, even unto death, so that however lost we might be we could still find him and rise with him into an awareness of our eternal status as God’s blessed children. Since Christ’s birth in human form and his transcendence of death, he has been working his way through history to awaken within each of us the awareness of the endless abundance of eternal life that is our inheritance: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (Rev 3:20-21)

COME TO ME

In the story of Adam and Eve, we are told that our spiritual isolation and sorrow have their origins in a primordial turning away from our true life in God.

The Serpent charmed Eve with the false promise of wisdom through knowledge of good and evil, and instead of resting content in God’s pure and all-embracing love, she listened; and in that act the foundation of human awareness shifted from the unity of God’s unchanging, absolute Being to the dualism inherent in his ever-changing, relative creation. We no longer allowed our lives to unfold freely in accord with the divine laws inherent in our existence by virtue of our paradisiacal participation in God’s Being. Instead, we asserted ourselves as individuals distinct from God with autonomous wills. We took upon ourselves the burden of limited individuality, personally responsible always to choose good over evil, yet, because of our separation from God, never entirely able to do so. Thus, as our awareness be-

came localized within the small boundaries of selfhood, we inescapably fell into sin and were banished from paradise.

Yet banishment from paradise and the inevitable suffering it represents is not our destiny. The Prophets of Israel encouraged us again and again to accept the profound security that comes from union with God. As the Psalmist sings: "Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation" (Ps 91: 14-16).

Most of us, even those who think of themselves as religious, have not fully accepted the radical proposition presented in the Bible. God's love is present everywhere like sunlight; yet somehow we remain lost in the tiny shadow of our lonely selfhood. It is a marvel that it can be, for God's grace is omnipresent; yet blinded by the darkness of ignorance we do not see.

Christ came into our world so that we might see him and thus come to know God. As St. John tells us, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." (Jn 1:18). Christ, "the true light that enlightens every man," (Jn 1:9) took a human birth, lived a human life, and died a human death, so that the power of God could be made visible to our human eyes.

The light of God, though present everywhere, is not perceived by a darkened mind. It is an abstract spiritual reality that exists beyond the workings of the senses, emotions, and intellect. Enthralled by the boundaries of individual, physical existence, we are unaware of our true status as children of God. Christ incarnated into our world to bring us this knowledge of our true existence in God.

But how are we to come to God? Christ gives us the enigmatic answer: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me" (Jn 14:6-7). We would like to believe that there is something we could *do* as separated selves to bring ourselves to God; but Christ tells us simply, "I am the way": the way to God is to transcend our separateness and experience that Christ and we are one and that Christ is one with God.

But who is Christ? The historical personality that he manifested in Galilee two millennia ago can be glimpsed through the Gospels, yet we should not allow our fascination with physical existence to restrict our understanding of the fullness of Christ. In the Gospel of St. John, Christ is identified as "the Word." In the Hebrew tradition, the "Word of God" signifies the eternal expression of divine wisdom that is given voice in history through the law and the Prophets; it is the means whereby God manifests and makes known his will. It is that transcendental level of divine intelligence through which God creates, sustains, and evolves the whole universe; an attribute of God, yet not less than him in glory. In St. John's Gospel, "Word" is a translation of the Greek word, "Logos"; Philo, a Greek-educated Jew of Christ's time, wrote of the Logos as being the intermediary between the transcendental Supreme Being, God, and the created order. He tried to express his intuition as to the nature of the Logos in such phrases as "the first born son of God," "the image of God," "the shadow of God," "God's ambassador," and "the suppliant," "the high priest," and "the advocate."

To both Jew and Greek alike, the Word or Logos was not limited by any form in the realms of matter, mind, or personality. It was understood to be a purely spiritual reality. St. John tells us, however, that in Christ, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

The Bible asserts that in the person of Jesus, God revealed himself to humanity in an unprecedented way: in his historical manifestation as the son of a carpenter Christ expressed his eternal, divine nature. He is first and foremost before and beyond the whole universe; as he says to his fellow Jews, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). Because our awareness was trapped within the confines of material existence, unable to comprehend the abstract truth of God in himself as pure spirit, God's "First-born Son" descended, as it were, from his transcendental domain as the supreme governing intelligence of the universe to walk among us and reveal to us his glory, "glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14). The Logos, the first, unmanifest expression of God's supreme intelligence, became enrobed in human form as "the Son of man" to show humanity the way back to God. God's purpose was to enable us, in St. Paul's words, to become "conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born of many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

Christ came to us to give us our eternal inheritance as children of God, so that we could say with St. Paul, "We have the mind of Christ," (1 Cor 2:16) and "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Our minds and hearts have been gripped by the small concerns of limited individuality for eons, but Christ came to enable each one of to transcend the narrow confines of our limited selfhood and realize God's unlimited greatness. Christ offers to free our awareness from the isolating boundaries of space and time; his great desire is to share with us his awareness of our eternal life in God. His life is our true life. As St. Paul says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

According to the Gospel of St. John, in his last prayer before rising to conquer death upon the cross, Christ prayed to the one Father of us all, ". . . that they may be one just as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that thou didst send me, and didst love them, even as thou didst love me." (Jn 17:22-23)¹