

All-Enfolding Playfulness and Repose, Overflowing in Loving Compassion

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself just as he is pure.”

“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atonement for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. . . . So we know and believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” (John 3:1-3; 4:10-11, 16)

These two passages from the First Letter of Saint John express well the spirit of our vocation in Christ. They unveil before our eyes the inner heart of the Gospel, which speaks its word of hope and consolation into the depths of longing present in every human heart: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God... So we know and believe in the love God has for us.” To know oneself as seen and loved by the heavenly Father, as cradled ceaselessly within his Love, and in Christ to abandon oneself as a child into this embrace. To know that, from the immensity of God’s love, each one of us has been created to rest in him alone, and, within his embrace, to experience profound communion with every other person whom he has made. This is the heart of the Gospel and the foundation of everything else in our life.

Yes, the source of the identity of each one of us is being a beloved child of God, seen, willed, and delighted in by him from all eternity, and held unceasingly in existence by his love. Our very being and existence is a pure gift of God’s love, and in gratefully welcoming this gift we are spontaneously awakened to give ourselves back totally to God, and to give ourselves also to our brothers and sisters, to whom we are inseparably united. It is precisely through this movement of acceptance and self-giving, this radical and loving openness that blossoms within the all-encircling Love of God, that the communion that God desires can grow and mature to its full depth and beauty.

This awareness of God’s encircling Love, and of our vocation to communion, has a profound effect on our inmost attitude toward life, which can be expressed in this way: it is *childlike repose within the love of God, and joyful playfulness in his presence, in which alone everything else in our existence finds its place*. This spirit, truly, is but an expression of the innermost disposition of Jesus himself, for whom all activity is enfolded in an enveloping repose, and all responsibility is enfolded in a deeper playfulness. The very flames of divine Compassion are, in truth, but the expression of the eternal Joy of God and the mystery of his divine Playfulness, penetrating into the darkness and sorrow of our world in order to reopen them to the light of the Trinity. This divine restfulness and this eternal play is so pure, so strong, that it penetrates every moment of the life of Christ and flashes forth from the very heart of his Paschal Mystery. In the place where we feel ourselves to be so far estranged from the shelter of Love, Jesus abides, and embraces us, as the One who is cradled always in the arms of Love, and in the shelter of this Love rejoices as a little child.

“Marian” and “Johannine” Spirit: Against the Breast of Jesus—At the Foot of the Cross

The most concrete expression of this mystery is that of Mary and the beloved disciple standing at the foot of the Cross of Jesus. In Mary we see most clearly, most radiantly, the essence of true holiness—

which is incarnated uniquely in each one of us and yet binds us together in a profound unity. She reveals to us the filial and bridal receptivity before God's gift that lies at the origin of every human life, every vocation, and is the source of true happiness and freedom. In her complete "Yes" to the love, the gift, and the call of God, she opens the space in this world, the space of receptive love, where each one of us can dwell to receive the gift of God and to give ourselves to him in return. In Mary we experience the mystery of the Church in her origin and her fullness, the Church as the "Home of Communion" where all hearts, returning to the attitude of childhood that they lost in sin, are intimately united to the Trinity in profound love, and to one another within this love.

In the experience of the beloved disciple, also, we find profoundly expressed the contours of the gift we have received: *to repose lovingly against the breast of Jesus, and, from this intimacy, to learn to live the meaning of true love for God and for all of humanity*. John the Evangelist calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" as a grateful affirmation of the generous friendship and intimacy that he has received from Christ, but also as an invitation for each of us to recognize ourselves, also, as beloved disciples of the Lord. On the evening of Holy Thursday, during the precious moments in which Christ gives himself in the Most Holy Eucharist and completely unveils his Heart to his disciples, John is reposing close against the Lord's breast. Through the human and spiritual intimacy that he knows with Christ, he is able to welcome the whole mystery of the Trinity's love which beats unceasingly within the Heart of Jesus.

Both Mary and John understand that the meaning of Jesus' own identity is simply *to be the beloved Son of the Father*, and that only in this light do all of Jesus' words, actions, and sufferings derive their meaning. And it is precisely their own loving acceptance and joyful repose—in which they too know themselves to be beloved children of the Father—that enables them to remain with the suffering Christ in compassion through his Passion and Death. Here at the foot of the Cross, they receive the outpouring love of God as it floods forth into our world; they are the first to taste the newness of life that flows from the Crucified Heart of the Lord; and they both share, each in their unique way and degree, in the innermost mystery of the Church as the Bride of Christ, born from the wounded side of the Redeemer and espoused intimately to him here.

Because of their certainty in being loved by God and cradled unceasingly within this Love, they have the strength—or rather the childlike trust—that allows them to remain constant in love and fidelity to the One who has touched them and chosen them for himself. Further, precisely in and through this closeness, they find themselves participating in Jesus' own mysterious work of salvation and his role of mediation between God and humanity. The life of the one who is close to Jesus becomes like a chalice raised up to the Lord's Heart, receiving from him the fullness of divine Love, in order that it may thus flow more freely into the hearts of all. On the other hand, as they draw near to Christ, they find themselves drawing near to all of suffering humanity, and they lovingly embrace them as the Crucified Lord embraces them, bearing them back to the Father. Finally, because of all of this, Mary and John also have the eyes of faith to recognize, in the smallest of signs, the reality of the Risen Jesus, and to welcome the torrent of his joy, unbreakable and sure—this undying joy in the Love that is stronger than death.