

WITHIN ME (PART I)

I.

There has been a tendency, Father,
throughout the history of human thought and life,
to radically divide the human person
into the carnal flesh and the pure spirit.
The inmost sanctuary of the heart
where each of us is lovingly invited
to the blossoming of intimacy,
to the joy of interpersonal embrace,
has been seen as radically opposed
to the emotions, to our human desires,
to what belongs to this body of ours.
(But where do we love except in the body,
and where does the thirst for communion exist
except in the concrete existence that is ours?)

Yes, the truth is that these are inseparable,
the body and the spirit, nature and grace.
And the most real, concrete human desires
that we bear within us come from you,
and provide the very groundwork
of our transformation in Jesus Christ,
and, indeed, never disappear,
but rather find their fulfillment
in being transfigured in loving communion
with the humanity of your incarnate Son.

The heart, in its true sense
as the inmost essence of the person
—of this unique individual who I am—
is not exalted in some purely spiritual realm,
and discovered through stripping off the body,
nor through estranging myself from the affections
of hope, joy, fear, and sorrow (and all the rest)
into a kind of apathy toward all things.
No, it is rather quite the opposite.

The heart is known and felt

when I no longer flee from myself,
from the concreteness of who I really am
in the humility and lowliness of this flesh.
The heart is the meeting-place of body and spirit
in the indivisible reality of my personhood:
my unique, unrepeatable, and precious "I."

Yes, when I cease to flee from my lowliness,
from the poverty that lies deep within me
(as well as from the mysterious beauty that is mine),
when I sink back into the wellspring of experience,
as the body communicates with the soul
and the soul with the body,
the two intermingling, yet distinct,
and both unceasingly in dialogue
with the world that surrounds me always...
in this place, mysteriously,
you come to me and reveal yourself.

In true knowledge of myself
I learn that I am known and loved by you—
or, rather, in letting myself be known by you
I come to know myself as I truly am.
And thus I know what it really means
to know myself: which is to be known by you;
for I am who I am, not through what I see,
but, Father, I am what you see and know in me.

Here I can let go of the need to control
and simply sink, restfully, into your loving arms.
Here, in the silence of my flesh,
I can feel and hear my heartbeat—
the beating of this heart within my breast,
which, yes, is mine, uniquely, from you.
I feel in myself, indeed, my fears and anxieties,
my hopes, my yearnings, my wounds.
And these, too, mysteriously, give you to me.

All the affections of my nature, Father,
all the feelings of this flesh,

all the thoughts that fill my mind,
become as sacraments that communicate,
in simple grace, the fullness of your presence
so tenderly and lovingly to me.

Then I learn that I need no longer
“lift” myself up above myself
in order to discover you.
I do not need to reject who I am
nor hate and cast away my weakness.
No, Father, you gently reveal to me
that true healing in your love consists,
not in being “ideally” flawless and without pain,
but in living within my woundedness
with open hands, not grasping or fleeing,
but simply welcoming your presence,
within all and deeper than all,
and abiding, always, in your secret embrace.

WITHIN ME (PART II)

If the heart truly resides
—and lives, so vividly!—
not in where I “prefer” to be,
but in the reality of my being, here and now,
then I seek you, God, and find you,
not through flight, but through surrender,
through letting myself be, as I am,
and as you love me, unceasingly.

And the mysterious thing is that,
when I let go of the frustration
which makes me continually fight myself,
I find a peace welling up deep within.
For I take refuge in the interior sanctuary
where you always dwell, holding me.
And from this inner place, your presence,
and your sure and undying love,
flows forth to suffuse and penetrate
the rest of my body, my being, my life.

And from this place of empty hands,
when I have let go of all, not to reject it,
but simply to be as I am in you,
I discover you present where I did not before.
In the weakness of my body,
in its illness, its anxiety, its struggle,
and in the frailty of my own spirit
before the great mystery of life,
before the ineffability of both good and evil...
in all of this, my loving God, I find your Love.

For I discover, when I no longer
flee from the sensitivity, the pain,
the heart-wrenching longing in the heart,
I discover that you are here, in this, speaking.
I enter into the silence and solitude,
my Father, not to estrange myself from humanity,
not to become somehow inhuman, or superhuman,
but just to be, as vulnerably as possible,
as human as can be...
and thus to draw near to you.

Therefore I am not afraid to love people
even when, before anything,
what it does is to wound my heart.
For in wounding...it makes me more alive.
I am not afraid to give this heart away
again and again, a thousand times—
and yet each time, unique,
as if the only one.
Indeed, I am not afraid
to allow love to knit those intimate bonds
between hearts that bear together a special affinity,
that are drawn to one another in a unique way.
For what is love if not unique,
what is communion if not the sharing of two hearts?

Indeed, Father, I thank you for this gift
that causes the heart, blessed, to bleed.

For this pain is a glimpse of heaven's joy.
Heaven's joy is alive
in the painful aching of the heart,
which, tasting love,
glimpses the beauty of the other,
and yearns for the eternity
in which alone all will be visible,
transparent in the light of your perfect love.