

# "Let nothing make us afraid" St. Teresa of Jesus

Recently, friends of mine have been shocked, even upset when they read both Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and Blessed Teresa of Kolkata (Calcutta) experienced a phase of "dry and empty" times in their spiritual lives. How could both of these great saints of the Church, being such great examples of faith... How could they not feel the presence of the God they served so generously? What explanation can we give as part of Carmel when a friend or relative asks us about the seeming lack of faith on the part of these two vibrant saints and "models" of generosity and spirituality?

I believe the answer involves two other Carmelite saints: St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. In the writings of both saints there seems to be evidence to suggest that the "experience" of the "Dark Night of the Soul" is to be expected as we grow in Carmel, and as we continue to live the contemplative life as Lay Carmelites. When we start to experience this "Dark Night" we need to identify or define what seems to be the loss of our ability to recognize, feel or experience the fellowship or presence of God. This would be the effective definition of what both our Thérèse and Teresa lived through, and I believe Teresa and John lived through....and if we continue to grow in our faith experience, we too, will live through the "Dark Night".

For many Catholics, as well as many other Christians, we certainly can question why we would experience such lack of feeling but it is next to impossible to imagine these two great women suffering for so long and with such depth. And, if so, what chance do we as "lay people" have to "live through the experience of a dark night".....but this is just the point, John of the Cross has attempted to share his own experiences as a help to his fellow brothers and sisters in Carmel!

If we read of St. John's life and writings we can clearly see his habitation of "The Dark Night of the Soul." This "Dark Night" may be part of most people's experience of the Carmelite or contemplative life. It seems to suggest in St. John's writing that the experience of our own dark nights is to be expected more than not. Our ownership of the dark night experience must be recognized by us as not necessarily a psychological ownership, or emotional acedia, but a

psychic malady, (i.e. having to do with our "soul" and the growth of our relationship with God's Holy Spirit). In this regard, it's important for us to recognize (as with anything else we do for long periods of time) we might just not be letting God speak and we are not listening. Also, we run the risk (as I always seem to be doing) of too much "doing" and not enough "resting" in the Lord; sitting and reflecting, and being in "God's Garden."

That being said, we still need to climb the Mountain. We in the family of Carmel must climb, and continue to climb, one step at a time; to concentrate. We need to be still and to look with the eyes of faith, not to the eyes of 'self'. We cannot rely on feeling, feeling being the most fickle of emotions.

We accomplish our climb by the "Prayer of the Interior," by recalling our thoughts to the still center, and by quieting the noise of our world and our own hearts down to our very center. In doing this we should be emptying ourselves to be filled anew with the Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son) and Sanctifier (Holy Spirit). This would be to experience, as de Chardin so poetically put it, *the moth dancing to the flame*; at one instantaneous moment bright blinding light and heat of flame is united with the moth and in that moment they are one in both brightness and heat. This is our path to unity with the Trinity.

As we are called to journey up the Mountain of Carmel we are given witness by St. Thérèse and Blessed Teresa, not to doubt but to rejoice! They have lived the Dark Night, and they grew through it! When we experience the lack of feeling (that the Lord is not hearing us or that we are alone on our climb) we must realize we are not alone. We are not forgotten and our direction leads us to the Dark Night, not to harm us but so we can listen and, along with Teresa of Avila, we can say "Let nothing make us afraid." Using John of the Cross as a spiritual map maker, we see our journey up the Mountain is based not on our FEELINGS of God's love, but the KNOWLEDGE of His love in our Creation, Salvation and Sanctification and in our call to climb Carmel's Mountain until we arrive at the pinnacle and embrace our destination.☩

— Dr Jim Bryan, T O Carm.