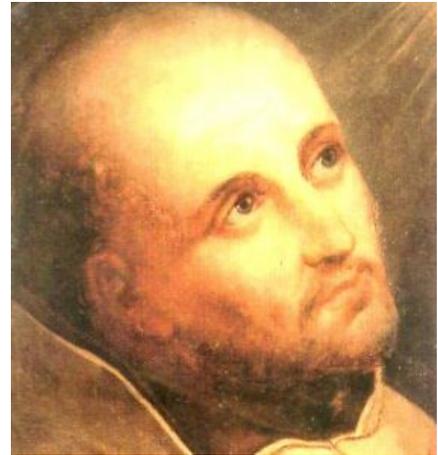


JOHN OF THE CROSS

Monk & Mystic, 1542-1591

Feast Day: 14 December

Collect: Judge eternal, throned in splendor, you gave John of the Cross strength of purpose and mystical faith that sustained him even through the dark night of the soul; Shed your light on all who love you, in unity with Jesus Christ our Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- One of the great mystics of the Christian Church
- Born in 1542 in Spain, his father died when he was only 3 years old, and his family fell into poverty
- Educated by the Jesuits and entered the Carmelite Order
- Ordained a priest in 1567 and recruited by Teresa of Avila to reform the Carmelite Order
- The Carmelites did not particularly want to be reformed, and he was captured by fellow monks and thrown in prison
- Lived for 9 months in incredible hardship, in a coffin-like cell that was often ankle deep in cold water
- Monks took him out and publicly whipped him weekly
- During this imprisonment, he composed the majority of his most important poetry and writings: *The Spiritual Canticle*, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Living Flame of Love*, and his most famous work, *The Dark Night of the Soul*
- Eventually escaped, recovered health, continued the reform
- John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila had one of the greatest male-female spiritual relationships and teaching partnerships of history (along with Francis and Clare)
- Asked on his deathbed to be taken to the monastery of an abbot who had always hated him, begged for his forgiveness—the abbot was astonished and wept with love and gratitude

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Was a fascinating mix of ascetic and deeply romantic spirituality, at times bordering on the erotic
- Dominant metaphor for the relationship of Christ to the Soul was the Lover and the Beloved (see Song of Solomon)
- Major example of apophatic theology (the path of darkness and unknowing) as opposed to kataphatic theology (the path of light and knowledge)
- John's ascetical teachings are often interpreted as a directive to give up all sensory pleasures, but what he is really saying is that, as Jim Finley puts it, your soul will settle for nothing less than infinite union with infinite Love. The problem is not enjoying life's pleasures, the problem is thinking you will find lasting satisfaction in them, or using them to shore up your identity, both of which can only be found in God
- Most people have heard of the Dark Night of the Soul as a concept, but there are 2 common misconceptions about the Dark Night: 1. That it is a one-time, linear event in one's life, or 2. It is a status symbol and only happens to special, super-spiritual people. Gerald May's interpretation of the Dark Night is excellent and posits that it is always functioning under the surface of our lives, and mostly consists of the work of God in our souls beneath conscious awareness

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- When have you experienced the Dark Night of the Soul? Did it come by circumstances? Out of nowhere? Was it connected to illness or depression? What did you learn from it?
- What is the value of the Dark Night? Does apophatic spirituality appeal to you? Why or why not?
- Why are we shy about romantic or even erotic implications to the relationship of the Soul to Christ? Why did the metaphor of the Lover and the Beloved speak to believers from the Song of Solomon in the Bible on down to medieval times?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

TERESA OF AVILA

Carmelite Nun & Mystic, 1515-1582

Feast Day: 15 October

Collect: O God, by your Holy Spirit you moved Teresa of Avila to manifest to your Church the way of perfection: Grant us, we pray, to be nourished by her excellent teaching, and enkindle within us a keen and unquenchable longing for true holiness; through Jesus Christ, the joy of loving hearts, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Author of *The Way of Perfection* and *Interior Castle*, one of 4 female Doctors of the Church
- Spiritual and ministry partner of John of the Cross—they shared contemplative spirituality (including romantic/erotic mysticism) and worked together for reform of the Carmelites
- Loved studying lives of the saints as a child
- Became what she called “quite worldly” following her mother’s death. Her father put her in an Augustinian convent, but she became so ill she had to end her studies
- Became a Carmelite against her father’s wishes
- Continued to suffer from poor health throughout her life
- Had many visions which she struggled to understand, and many bad spiritual directors, until she connected with John and was affirmed in her ministry and spirituality
- Set out to reform Carmelites by establishing a “Discalced” group, which means they would not wear shoes out of poverty and piety (although they could sometimes wear sandals)
- Established 17 convents of Reformed Carmelites
- Despite the demands of her administrative work, wrote numerous letters that let us see into her personality today

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Was inspired by and devoted to two great penitents: Mary Magdalene and Augustine of Hippo
- Described the Ascent of the Soul in 4 stages:
 - Devotion of Heart: mental prayer of devout concentration
 - Devotion of Peace: human will is surrendered to God
 - Devotion of Union: absorption in God
 - Devotion of Ecstasy: consciousness of being in a human body disappears
- Also used a metaphor of watering a garden for prayer. The water is the Holy Spirit, and the garden is the soul.
 - Draw the water in a bucket (mental prayer, personal effort)
 - Water from an aqueduct (channeled by familiar paths and doctrines, still requires human effort)
 - Stream of water (straight from the source, untouched by human hands)
 - Gentle rain (entire garden is saturated by presence of God, enduring union with God)

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What does it mean to conceive of prayer as progressing in stages of maturity and union with God? Have you experienced this? How has your prayer life changed over time?
- What is the relationship between your effort and God's initiation been in your spiritual journey?
- Teresa always felt unqualified to teach because she did not have as much formal education as John did, but John always encouraged her to trust her direct spiritual experience of God and how God taught her. You are an expert on your experience of God. How are you engaging others through it?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

JULIAN OF NORWICH

Anchoress & Mystic, 1342-1417

Feast Day: 8 May

Collect: Lord God, in your compassion you granted to the Lady Julian many revelations of your nurturing and sustaining love: Move our hearts, like hers, to seek you above all things, for in giving us yourself you give us all; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Author of *Revelations of Divine Love*, an account of the visions or “showings” as she called them that she had when she was gravely ill on what she thought was her deathbed at 30 years old
- Prayed for three wounds: the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion, and the wound of true longing for God
- Visions were primarily of the Passion of Christ
- Became an anchoress following her visions: walled up in a cell connected to a church, with one window into the church and one window into the world, but no door. Received food and Holy Communion from the outside, and served as a spiritual counselor to many, including both clergymen and lay people
- Did not write her *Revelations* until 20 years after she had them
- First spiritual text written by a woman in English
- A great deal of her theology was revolutionary for her time, especially what she understood as her revelations about the nature of sin, but she was brilliant at hiding her radical ideas in plain sight, always saying that she submitted all her ideas to the teaching of Holy Church—got herself through the ecclesiastical censorship so we could receive her work today in what is probably pretty close to her original thoughts

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Parable of the Lord and the Servant: sin is an accident and an injury to our souls that we incur from trying to do God's will, not a deliberate fault and enactment of evil on our part. Jesus takes on our human nature to rescue us from our injury and pain
- Calls Christ "our courteous Lord," which has many implications of love, equality, and tender devotion
- Famous for describing Christ as saying: "I can make all things well; I will make all things well; I shall make all things well; and thou canst see for thyself that all manner of things shall be well."
- Had an incredibly joyful and loving sense of the relationship between God and humanity in a time when wrath and suffering as punishment for sin were the dominant worldview
- Said that Jesus was her heaven
- Vision of something the size of a hazelnut that she held in her hand, and God said it was everything that was created: "In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it. But what is this to me? Truly, the Creator, the Keeper, the Lover. This little thing which is created seemed to me as if it could have fallen into nothing because of its littleness...God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him."

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- One of Julian's enduring qualities is her sense of the tenderness and affection of God toward humanity and creation. Do you sense tenderness and affection from God? Do you know that God delights in you? Do you know how much God hurts when you are hurt? How could you enter this space in prayer?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: