

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

Homily for Solemn Professions

Teresianum, 14 December 2009

We have a double celebration this evening: the liturgical feast that brings St. John of the Cross, our father and spiritual master, into our thoughts and the decision of our three brothers, Samuel Bijoy, Rajendaprasad and Joemon to consecrate their lives forever in the Discalced Carmelite family. Our first instinctive reaction to these two events is to rejoice. Yes, I know: there are so many problems in our world and in our Church today, while religious life itself and, of course, our own Order, experience their own particular difficulties. But none of this should take from the reassuring conviction of the good that God our Father, rich in his mercy, continues to pour out on us. His love and his fidelity are truly eternal; he never forgets us, even when we are forgetful of him.

We want to accept these gifts and the first way of doing so is to contemplate them with love and the understanding of our faith. What is God saying to us now through our father John of the Cross and through our three brothers here? I feel that the first and fundamental message is that John's experience is a way open to others and that the Lord is still calling others to follow in his footsteps. These others are ourselves, dear brothers, and I deliberately address all us Discalced Carmelites, sons and brothers of John of the Cross. Do we remember this way? Are we able to describe the travel and the scenery, the ascents and descents, the lights and the shadows, the tiredness and moments of repose, the solitude and the meetings of this journey? Perhaps we cannot do so with the poetically inspired nuances with which John's particular gifts helped him express it, uniting the humble simplicity of a friar with the extraordinary delicacy of a renowned writer and poet. But have we too got a journey to recount, in our own way and in our own language? Have we searched for and do we continue to seek what John sought until his dying breath?

Have you noticed, particularly since the 2nd Vatican Council, how we like to depict both St. Teresa and St. John as travellers on a journey, with staff in hand? This is obviously the aspect that strikes us most today and that is easiest with which to identify. As well as that, both the lives of Teresa and John and their writings (even the titles *Way*, *Ascent*) are full of sustained dynamism, sometimes expressed externally but more often than not, realised interiorly. I don't think we can consider ourselves children of these parents if we are not interiorly disposed to journeying. This evening our three brothers, promising chastity, poverty and obedience, are doing nothing other than freeing themselves from anything that can slow them down on their journey. They are ready for departure, prepared for the change.

In his spiritual wisdom, John knew and taught very forcibly, that every soul's journey is guided by the Spirit. We cannot confine the freedom of the Spirit to any set scheme. Ironically enough in the past, John's own experience and teaching had been constricted in scholastic doctrine that was far removed from the unforeseeable flexibility of human lives. The important thing is that there be a journey and that it is not halted, that our inner transformation continue to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. The most frequent temptation is to stop. It is easy to say, like Elijah: that's enough, I'm tired, I don't want anymore, I'm afraid to go any further. It is never enough. The meaning of the life and the vocation that has been given to us is precisely to allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit towards a goal that completely exceeds our human capacity, not only in its realization but even in its conception. When we try, we cannot even express it beyond a few stuttering words.

The goal is what Jesus calls “the truth” in John’s gospel: “consecrate them in the truth”. Pilate asked Jesus: “what is truth” but he did not get an answer. Jesus gives the answer to the disciple, to the one who sets out to follow him. The truth is a unifying reality in which everything converges: mind and heart, body and soul, individual and community, flesh and spirit. The only truth that can be definitive is that which simultaneously enlightens the mind, frees the spirit, warms the heart, nourishes the body and unites the lover and the loved one as a single entity. This is what we seek, knowing that we alone cannot ever find it, but awaiting that it be gifted to our hunger, our thirst, our urgent need.

If we experience this urgency, then Carmel is our home and here we should never feel alone. We are accompanied by brothers and sisters who seek the same thing, or better, the same person who has escaped after wounding us, who has planted in our hearts an irrepressible need to attain Him, and nothing else can ever satisfy that need. In this way we, and in particular today you three, Brothers Samuel Bejoy, Ragendaprasad and Joemon, shall be “consecrated in the truth”, not the truth of a possession, but the truth of a love that seeks anxiously the presence of the Loved One.