

Heavenly Wings

"Oh that I had wings like a dove!
for then would I fly away, and be at rest."
(Psalms 55:6)

This Davidic verse comes to mind on the occasion of the feast of St. John the Theologian, the disciple whom Jesus loved dearly. Let us ask the one who leaned on Jesus' breast and heard unspoken words; let us ask him how we too can attain the eagle's wings which carried him to the heaven of theology and lifted him up to the clouds of God's love. Tradition says that John the beloved went to heaven, and no wonder because love is above worldly things.

Who will give me wings to be at rest? As one of the righteous saints said, we are born with a desire to be with God and we will not be at rest except in Him. Who or What then will give us these wings for our heart to fly to God?

It is Love.

Man is a living being nourished by a mystical food, and this food is love. He does "not live by bread alone," but by love. Give man all the world and deprive him of love, he will die.

Man is like an eagle. If we put him in a cage and give him a lamb to eat, he will not eat it, but will die instead. For eagles do not live by meat alone, but by flying high and spreading out their wings in the sky.

Man lives by love. He seeks and desires to be loved. For man, love is the meaning of life. Life without love is hell. Living in isolation from love is death.

In searching for the depths of this life and the meaning of his existence, man uses two kinds of love. First, the kind that leads to death. This kind is lively, but it deceives because it is poisonous. In this age, it is very common to see people loving dogs or cats. How numerous are the families that prefer cats over children. And many people befriend dogs instead of people. Others love money, and the examples today are too numerous. Some love their own interests, and others run after passions and desires. Some love glory. For gluttony, a man kills his brother. For a piece of cloth, a man sells his friend.

Fewer are the people who love children, parents, friends and spouses.

Man is "a person of desires." He is always desiring something or somebody. Unfortunately, many times he desires the poison of life instead of its Manna. Love becomes mortal instead of life-giving. This kind of love does not carry us to heaven, but brings us down to the lowest parts of the earth. Modern man gives us many examples of this kind of love. The Holy Bible tells us about the first brother killed by jealousy and the mortal love for earthly glory.

What is the other kind of love? It is the new love that the Gospel talks about, the love that does not kill the neighbor, but kills the one who carries it! It kills him, but also enlivens him and raises him. As the Lord Jesus said in the Gospel, whoever sacrifices his life for His sake shall find it, and whoever loves himself (with a strong love) shall lose it. This is the new commandment that the Gospel announces to our world, that love is the heavenly wings which raise us to God and give us rest.

But the amazing question is, who will give us these wings, and who will make us love sacrificing ourselves? Who will change us from being initiated in mortal love and material passions into a new man passionate for the Cross, dying for the other? Who will lift up man from the philosophy of the existentialists that sees others as hell? Who will lift up man and put him in the path of St. Seraphim Sarov who called his neighbor "My joy" and found in him a paradise? Who makes us capable of loving till death? As the Song of Songs says, "I loved you as death?" (Songs of Songs 8:6)

This is divine love. As we heard at the end of today's epistle of St. John the Theologian, " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10) We love God because He first loved us. His wounds heal us. He loved us and was lifted up for us. He saved us. He said that, " If I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)

Our Lord died for our love, so we loved His Cross. We learned from Him this sacrificial love. The Lord died for neighbor, and we fell in love with the neighbor that the Lord died for.

Who will give us two wings to fly and be at rest?
It is Love. God's love makes us live even through the
Cross.

Love, after all, is not a Christian invention. All religions search for God's love to humans and search for ways to love God. Eventually, religions made up many philosophies about this.

In the Old Testament, love was in the first and second commandment. The first was love your God, and the second, love your neighbor. But the new commandment in Christianity is "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another." Jesus united the two commandments of the Old Testament into one.

As St. John the Theologian says in today's epistle, the new fact of the Christian love is that we cannot love God if we do not love our neighbor. No one has ever seen God. So you cannot love God whom you do not see if you do not love your neighbor whom you do see.

God is Love, and whoever wants to see God has to love. But love is not a poetic word.

By love we mean the work of love. Love does not exist without its works, as labor does not exist without having results. So love cannot exist without truthful loving actions. St. John the Theologian says that whoever abides in love (or in the works of love), abides also in God, and God in Him. Let this truth be clear to us. Let us see the explanations of the Fathers about the meaning of the two wings in the Davidic prayer.

The first wing is labor, and the other is theoria (vision, contemplation of God). What is meant by labor is the life of Christian virtue and the works of love. Love is

a word often misunderstood. We often misuse it in expressing feelings and emotions without incarnating these feelings in works and sacrifices. Love is work. "Do you love?" is equal to "What do you offer?" "Do you love?" means "What did you sacrifice?"

What is meant by theoria is the vision of God. Our Church chants for the Righteous Saint: "You have found by labors the way to theoria (Vision)." So by the works of love we get to know God and by these same works we abide in God and God abides in us.

Work then is for our neighbor, and theoria is about the contemplation of God.

The love of our neighbor and his service makes us contemplate and love God

The love of our neighbor is the way that lifts us up to the love and the knowledge of God.

The works of love are not offered to God in heaven but to our neighbor.

If we want to reach theoria and theologia (knowledge of God), then we have to love. If you are a Theologian and you hate, you deceive yourself. If you talk about God and you do not love your neighbor, you then talk about an idol, not about the living God, and God does not know you and will not abide in you.

Love and do whatever you desire, for love never falls and does not go wrong.

Give us wings to fly away and be at rest.

Amen.