



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 56: Night of Sense: The Biblical Desert, Part 2 (cont.)



Photo by Ron Barnett

*One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,  
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"  
Jesus replied: "The first is this:  
Hear, ... The Lord our God is Lord alone!  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.  
The second is this:  
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
There is no other commandment greater  
than these."  
- Mark 12:28-31*

Our God is a total God, asking for our love with *all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*. Not just the so-called good side, or the good deeds, the offerings, the works, even the sacrifices, nor the 10% tithe. Total. In the Session 55 video, Fr. Thomas states: "The spiritual journey is not a magic carpet to bliss, riches or fame. On the contrary, it's a very slow and plodding journey to the truth that involves the dismantling of all of that nonsense [ideas of happiness born of the ego and cultural conditioning, success in life as a sign of God's favor, etc]."

We are being guided through a process -- a process born of an immense love that is absolutely unconditional and determined to bring about divine transformation at all costs. A first experience on the spiritual journey can be a time in which we are experiencing a new world, manifested in daily life by a greater peace, a greater calm, sometimes joy, and a capacity to be more concerned for others.

And then, we'll be ready for the second experience: a time to confront the truth about ourselves and all the places of unlove, the mixed motivations, and the hidden darkness of our own unconscious. The dark nights have many faces. Some can include:

- no satisfaction with worldly things
- dryness, aridity in both prayer and daily life
- no felt affirmation or consolation
- the sense that one is going backwards in the spiritual journey
- disinclination to practice discursive meditation and prayer
- awareness of our mixed motivations and the dark side of our personality
- a questioning whether there is any meaning or purpose to one's life -- given the sometimes almost unbearable circumstances.

Herein is the active confrontation of ourselves, a passive purification through grace and struggle. And the greatest struggle is not to become discouraged, think something is wrong, confuse what is going on with depression, abandon the spiritual journey, or listen to voices -- within and without -- that resound with pious platitudes, or the contrary, expressions of doubt and confusion.

Remember again: This is a gift, born of the love of God, to bring us to God. But first, the values of the unconscious are confronted and purged. As Fr. Thomas mentions in his writings: God turns up the voltage in our interior world!

## **A Meditation**

"This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul,  
which purges it of its habitual ignorances  
and imperfections, natural and spiritual  
...God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it  
in the perfection of love  
without its doing anything  
or understanding  
how this happens.

...When you see your appetites darkened,  
your inclinations dry and constrained,  
your faculties incapacitated  
...do not be afflicted;

think of this as a grace,  
since God is freeing you  
from yourself."

- John of The Cross, *The Dark Night*

### **To Practice**

- "The Holy Grail – this great myth from the Middle Ages – What is it about? ...The Grail was a fascinating insight into the spiritual journey. The search for the Holy Grail is really the search for one's True Self. That's what it is. And to find the True Self you have to go through the death of the false self and the ego. Hence, there couldn't be greater difficulties. But once having done that, one is free to drink from the chalice, that is, to share the redemptive and eternal life of Christ."

- Thomas Keating, *unpublished*

- Can you take comfort in knowing that this journey of life is a grace, one in which God is leading us with intent to perfection in love?

### **Resources for Further Study:**

You may wish to read Chapter 11 – 14 in *Invitation to Love* (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition), Chapters 10 – 13 in older editions.

You also may wish to read *The Dark Night of the Soul* by Gerald May.

### **Notes and Reflections:**