

**Commentary On The**  
**Book**  
**Song of Solomon**

**By**  
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Reverend Father Tadros Y. Malaty has kindly permitted that his books be published in the COeRL. He has requested that we convey that any suggestions or amendments regarding their translation are welcome, and should be forwarded to:  
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**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, King of Kings and  
Lord of lords**



**THE BEHOLDER OF GOD  
MARK THE EVANGELIST  
SAINT AND MARTYR**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*



**His Grace Bishop Daniel  
Bishop of Sydney and Affiliated Regions**

# Introduction

## ITS STATUS FOR THE JEWS

The Jewish Church has delivered the Christian Church that book among the books of the Old Testament. This book holds a special status among the other books because it carries a symbolic style declaring the mutual love between God and His church, or between God and the human soul as a member in the church.

The Hebrew edition of the Torah, which Ezra the scribe had gathered in the fifth century B.C., contained this book. It was translated to Greek, among the books of the Septuagint edition in the third century B.C. , without any doubt of its spiritual meanings.

During the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, Hakham Shemey tried to exclude this book from the Holy Bible, because of his desire to literally interpret it. However, the Jewish Traditional Helil School emphasized that the book is canonical, and the council at Jamnia <sup>1</sup>(95 – 100 A.D.) also confirmed that it is canonical.

In the year 135 A.D., Hakham Akiba emphasized the importance of this book. He said, "The book is all holy, however, the book of Song of Solomon is the most holy book.. The whole world did not give us a more important book than this one."

In the Jewish translation <sup>2</sup>: "The songs and chants which Solomon, the prophet and king of Israel, had uttered through the Holy Spirit before God, were ten, but this song was the best."

Midrash<sup>3</sup> Emphasized that: "The book of Song of Solomon is the best song presented to God, through the Holy Spirit. It is the song where God praises us and we praise Him!"

Perhaps some may wander: Why did the divine inspiration use this flirting style in expressing the mutual love between God and His church?

1. Through the divine inspiration, God used to talk to us with the same style which we use in our daily life. Moreover, He also uses the same expressions we use, so that the inspiration is not strange to us.

As an example, we mention that the Bible mentioned that the Lord was angry, or was sorrowful, or relented, although God does not become angry because He is full of love, does not relent because the future is in front of Him and nothing is hidden before Him, and does not become sad because He does not suffer. However, when the Bible talks about the wrath of God, He wants to declare to us that when we sin, we fall under God's judgment, and this is a natural fruit for our sins, because we are away from God's love.

In the same manner, the divine inspiration uses the human expressions when it was written, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and their ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (Ps. 34: 15,16) Does this mean that God has eyes and ears or face. But He talks about God's care for us with the same language we use!

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<sup>1</sup> James Hastings: Dictionary of the Bible, N.Y., p. 930.

<sup>2</sup> When the Jews came back from the Babylonian captivity, they were unable to understand the Hebrew language of their fathers. Therefore, some of the books of the Bible were orally translated into Aramaic, then the Aramaic was translated in writing and was called "El Targoom".

<sup>3</sup> Midrash are Jewish studies in the Holy Bible, like sermons, (Refer to our book: "Tradition and Orthodoxy", 1979, ch. 8, p. 29.)

Also, when the Holy Bible mentions God's chair or throne, does this mean that God has a limited throne to sit upon? All these were written so we may understand God's kingdom, His glory and splendor, according to our language and human expressions!

In the same manner, the divine inspiration talks to us about the deepest part of our spiritual life, which is our unity with God through the mystical spiritual love. Therefore, He uses our human language in expressing love between the bride and the groom, not because our relationship with Him is based on carnal love but as symbols carrying in their depth the secrets of the unutterable love.

This is not a strange matter, for all the Gentiles have used it when talking about the divine passion, when the soul is thrown in God's bosom to live alone with Him to satisfy all her depths.

2. This interpretation of the divine love as a spiritual marital love which binds the soul with God is not strange in the Bible, for the prophets of the Old Testament as well as disciples of the New Testament have used it. We shall see that when we talk about the "The Heavenly Banquet."

3. The expression of this book cannot be applied to the carnal love, and cannot agree with what some have said that it is a song which Solomon has sung it when marrying Pharaoh's daughter. We mention some examples:<sup>4</sup>

A. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine." (Song of Sol. 1:2) Thus the bride is communing with her Groom, but she asks for the kisses of someone else "his mouth". However, she declares to him that his love "your love" is better than wine. How can a bride ask that someone else beside her groom kiss her, while she is communing with her groom? This is impossible to be applied to the carnal love. But this is the communing of the church to her Bridegroom the Lord Jesus Christ, so she asks for the kisses of the Father, that is, His plan for salvation, which was fulfilled through the practical love of the Son, as the Bible said, "The Only Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18)

B. "Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore, the virgins love you." (Song of Sol. 1:3) The bride is praising the fragrance of her bridegroom and that his name is ointment poured forth, she declares that the virgins love him. How can a bride rejoice that the other virgins love her bridegroom? But the bride here represents the church, who wants all believers, that is all virgins, to love her bridegroom.

C. "Lead me away! We will run after you." (Song of Sol. 1:4) After she started talking in a singular form, she switched to the plural form. Is the speaker here singular or plural? If they were a group, then how can they meet and make love with only one? How can a bride ask her bridegroom to lead her, but take others with her to make love with him?

From these examples, we find out that this book was not meant to express physical love between a bride and her bridegroom, but rather it is a divine love binding God with His church.

## **THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK AND ITS TITLE:**

Solomon the Wise wrote this book, and he also wrote many songs. (1 Kings 4: 32)

This book was called "Song of Songs" to show that repeating the word "song" refers to its superiority over the other songs. This resembles the saying of "King of kings or Lord of lords, or holy of holies, or Sabbath of sabbaths, or heaven of heavens or vanity of vanities or slave of slaves."<sup>5</sup>...

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<sup>4</sup> Fr. Abdel Messih El Nekhely: "Lights on the Song of Solomon", p. 22,23.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 7:14, 19:16, I Tim. 6:15, Ecc. 1:2, Deut. 10:17, Gen. 9:35.

## ITS CHARACTERISTICS:

1. Since Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes realizing the reality of the earthly life that it is vanity of vanities, then he has experienced the heavenly life and found it "song of song."

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon the Wise declared that abundance of knowledge does not satisfy the soul. But in the book of Song of Songs, the soul is completely satisfied with the divine love and does not need anything beside Him.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon mentioned that there is nothing new under the sun, but in the book of Song of Songs, the soul, entering God's bosom, sees everything new.

2. The Jews understood this book that it symbolizes the relationship between God (the Bridegroom) with His people (the bride), until the coming of the Messiah. The Christians understood this book that it represents the relationship between the Messiah the Savior and His<sup>7</sup> church the bride. The Christians took three approaches in the symbolic interpretations of this book, and all these approaches compliment and supplement one another. These are:

A. Origen, St. Jerome, St. Augustine and others see that this book refers to the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, that is the community of believers.

B. St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, and Bernard of Clairvaux relate that this book expresses the relationship between the Lord Christ and the human soul, on a personal level. Origen took this approach in his interpretation<sup>6</sup>, along with the previous approach.

C. Some of the Catholics interpret this book as addressing the divine incarnation, and relate that the bride is the Virgin St. Mary, the Theotokos.

Truly, since the believer tastes the mutual love between God and the universal church, he sees it as a personal love touching his life personally. The relationship which binds God with His community confirms the relationship between God and the human soul, not as an individual relationship where one is isolated away from the community, but a personal relationship where one experiences as a member in the community. About St. Mary, she represents the universal church as a perfect member<sup>7</sup>. If some interpret this book as a love relationship between the Lord Jesus and St. Virgin Mary, this is due to the fact that she has enjoyed God's love as one of us, but at a different level!

3. Origen sees that the believer, when forsaking this world and entering the Heavenly Jerusalem, sings many songs. But when he settles in the bosom of the Eternal Bridegroom in the heavenly chamber, then he sings the song of songs. The songs which he had sung on the way are as follows:

A. The soul, crossing the Red Sea with the Israelites, says: "I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation..." (Ex. 15:1,2)

Origen comments on this song saying<sup>8</sup>: "If you are singing this first song, yet you have to know that the road is still long to reach the song of songs."

This is the first song, that one sings when entering the water of baptism. Then one realizes that "God" is the secret of her strength, salvation and victory over the devil and his army. Through baptism, she became His daughter under His care, and He is the One who grants her His Holy Spirit to accomplish her salvation.

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<sup>7</sup> By the author: St. Mary in the Orthodox concept, 1978, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Origen: On Cant..., hom. 1. (Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 26. P. 266)



That is why the church has put this song as a basic part in the daily praise, to remind her children, every day of their life, of the day of their baptism when they crossed the slavery of sin to enjoy the adoption to God. Then, they are assured of their victory over the powers of darkness and witness to their Lord and Savior!

B. Origen relates that we sing the second song, in this spiritual journey, at the well which the chiefs had dug <sup>9</sup> in the wilderness, when the Lord told Moses, " Gather the people together, and I will give them water." (Numbers 21:16) Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it, the well the leaders sank, dug by the nation's nobles, by the lawgiver, with their staves." (Numbers 21: 17,18)

This is the song of the soul who accepts from God Himself, through the church (leaders) the fountains of living water. The wells of the fathers or the leaders is a gift of God Himself, as the Lord's saying to Moses, "Give them water", however those who dig these wells are the leaders, that is, those working in the Lord's vine.

C. We sing the third song when we stand with Moses the prophet on the banks of the Jordan and hear him singing saying: "Give ear O heavens, and I will speak; and hear O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass... As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord led him and there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride in the heights of the earth that he may eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan and goats with the choicest wheat; and you drank wine, the blood of grapes." (Deut. 32: 1,2, 11-14)

This is the song of the one who has realized God's care in the wilderness. He accompanies her as a father accompanies his children in the road; He leads her and cares for all her material and spiritual needs. The soul sees Him as an eagle who hovers over its young children, stretching His wings to protect her. He is compassionate toward her and carries her over His shoulders, giving her all His care so she does not need anything beside Him. He satisfies her amidst the wilderness, so He can get honey from the rock and oil from the flinty rock, that is, He does the impossible!

D. Origen relates about the fourth song during the spiritual struggle saying <sup>10</sup>: "You have to struggle under the leadership of Joshua and reign over the holy land as an inheritance to you. Deborah becomes your judge, for "Deborah" means "bee", so that your lips may utter the praise that was mentioned in the book of Judges."

We sing this praise during our spiritual strife, so we may become like a bee, until we inherit the heaven saying, "I, even I, will sing to the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord...The mountains gushed before the Lord." (Judges 5:1,3) The Lord gushes the mountains during our spiritual strife and opens the door to heaven so we may enter with joy and inherit forever.

E. The fifth song is the one which David had uttered when he was escaping from his enemies, for he said, "The Lord is my strength, refuge, and salvation." Thus, the soul reigns with King David when she subdues all the powers of the devil by God, her refuge, power and salvation. As David inherited Saul, we also inherit and take the place of the devil before his fall, for he was the greatest heavenly host.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 267.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 267.

F. When one discovers the mysteries of the kingdom, one sings with the prophets the sixth song saying, "Now, let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard." (Is. 5:1)

Briefly, we can say that Origen saw the soul singing continuously seven songs: the first song when she comes out of the baptismal font to become adopted to God. The second song: she drinks from the fountains of God which is flowing in His church. The third song: she feels God's continuous care in the wilderness. The fourth song: she praises Him while struggling like a bee. The fifth song: she sings because of her victory over the devil and she reigns with the Lord. The sixth song: she sings with the prophets when she feels the mysteries of the eternal heavenly life. Finally, the seventh song is the song of songs which she utters when she enters in the presence of the Heavenly Bridegroom and stays with Him in His heavenly chamber face to face.

4. This book was read on the eighth day after the celebration of the Passover <sup>11</sup>, being the song of eternal love offered to God, or the song which binds God with the believers who enjoyed the salvation through the blood. The eighth day refers to the day after the seven days of the week, that is, to the new life, or to the life to come in Christ, our true Passover. This song carries a prophecy about the true Passover, who delivers us from death and enters us to His chamber "the heaven of heavens", a chaste virgin, eternally united with Him.

Truly, this book is an excellent symphony, which the soul sings, after leaving the captivity of this world and the dominion of the true pharaoh "the devil". She enters the Heavenly Jerusalem in the liberty of the glory of God's children, leaning on the bosom of her Lord. That is why this book does not mention any of the commandments or teachings, but it is all about the mystery of the eternal love and the life with the Heavenly Bridegroom. It is the symphony of the heart united with his Savior! It is a unique song in its kind and meaning. Anyone, sanctified with the blood of the Lamb, sings this song, entering with intimacy to the holy of holies, without any routine or formalities, until he rests in the bosom of the Father, above all material and physical though to the true spiritual thought. St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, said: "In this book, the Word commands us not to think of carnal matters, even if we are in the flesh, but to ascend to the spirit, so that all the love expressions are like pure offerings presented to the good Lord, who surpasses all understanding, and whom we find all sweetness, love and desire."

The book of "Song of songs" is the song of the divine love, recorded with flurting symbols, carrying deeper heavenly meanings, which are sung by those mature spiritually who have crossed from the cares of this world to live by the spirit. That is why Origen calls this book, "the book for the mature", for he said <sup>12</sup>:

"The solid food is for the mature, who can discern; however, the children in faith find their food in other books of the word of God."

It is very dangerous if the carnal people read this book! It is very risky for a carnal person to accept the language of love in purity. My advice, for those who are still in the darkness of the flesh, is not to read this book.

The Hebrew people were correct when they said that this book, and some parts from the Old Testament, are forbidden to be read by those who have not attained perfection."

When St. Gregory talked about this book, he said: <sup>13</sup>: "I talk about the mystery of the song of songs to you because you have been transferred to the divine matters."

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<sup>11</sup> J. Daniclou: The Bible & The Liturgy. The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible.

<sup>12</sup> Origen: Song of songs, translated by Dr. Ragheb Abdel Nour, El Keraza Magazine, year 1, issue 2.

<sup>13</sup> Comm. on Cant., Sermon 1.

Come and enter His undefiled marital chamber, you who have put on the white clothes of purity! Some do not put on the clothes of pure conscience befitting the divine bride, so they are occupied with their thoughts and degrade the pure words of the Bridegroom to their carnal desires, and it becomes a disgrace."

St. Befnotious, one of the desert fathers of Egypt, sees that there are three ascetic levels in the books of Solomon the wise, which lifts the person to the life of love and unity with the Lord. He said <sup>14</sup>: "The book of Proverbs corresponds to the first kind of ascetism, where one subdues the desires of the flesh and all the temporal sins. The second kind corresponds to the book of "Ecclesiastes" , where he declares that all what happens under the sun is vain. The third kind corresponds to the book of "Song of Solomon", where one is elevated above the visible matters and reflects on the heavenly matters, and is attached to the word of God.

## **THE BOOK OF THE HEAVENLY BANQUET:**

Talking about the "wedding", we should not be confined to the physical thoughts, for marriage is a deep mystical union which carries unlimited love beyond the carnal matters.

This is concerning the marital life between people, how about the spiritual marriage where one accepts her Lord as her Bridegroom, who embraces her to become one with Him!

In the Old Testament, the prophets understood the covenant between God and His people as a marital covenant. Isaiah the prophet said, "For the Lord delights in you... As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." Is. 62: 4,5) Hosea the prophet said, "And it shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you will call me 'My Husband', and no longer call Me 'My Master'... I will betroth you to Me forever; yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord." (Hos. 16-20) A similar statement was mentioned in the book of Exodus chapter 45, in the book of Jeremiah 2:2, and in the book of Ezekiel 16: 7-14.

This is the marital union, which the prophets have expressed and was a symbol for a more perfect union achieved by the "Divine Word" or "Logos" in the fullness of time.

The book of the "Song of Solomon" is the book of the heavenly marriage, where God's eternal will toward man was fulfilled. It is a prophecy of the sacrament of eternal matrimony, where the church, which extends from Adam to the end of ages, is a holy bride.

John the Baptist looked at this marriage saying: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom.." (John 3: 29) This is the purpose of the mission of the apostles, for St. Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. 11: 2) "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Eph. 5:32)

St. John said, "Then, I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2)

"Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine line..." (Rev. 19: 6-8)

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" (Rev. 22:17) <sup>15</sup>

In the book of "Song of Solomon", we can say that we cross to the eternity and practice the language of the heavenly love, for it carries a dialogue between the Messiah the Bridegroom

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<sup>14</sup> By the author: John Kasian, debate 3.

<sup>15</sup> Review Matt. 9:15, Jn. 3:29, Eph. 5:23-27.

and the His universal and apostolic church the bride, or between Him and between every soul united with Him as a living member in His church.

This dialogue reveals the mutual love between the two partners: God and man, and that each one seeks the other, and ends by the true rest in the shared ownership which each one presents to the other.

## **THE BOOK OF THE CHURCH SACRAMENTS:<sup>16</sup>**

This book carries a true prophecy about God's mystical holy work in His church. The early church Fathers interpreted it as a sacramental interpretation, through which we can understand the sacraments.

When mentioning entering "the chambers of the king", it is meant that the catechumen enters the baptismal font to be attached to the Heavenly Bridegroom, where he is buried with Him, and is risen carrying the new creation.

The sacrament of baptism is the sacrament of the spiritual matrimony with the Messiah, the Crucified and Risen from the dead, and is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit. St. Cyril of Jerusalem relates that the baptismal font is the "chambers of the Bridegroom".<sup>17</sup> St. Didymus the blind wrote, "The One, who created the soul, accepts her as a bride in the baptismal font."<sup>18</sup> St. Gregory tells those who are coming for baptism:

"I want to proclaim to you one thing: your condition after baptism before the great sanctuary is an example for the glory to come.

The praises, with which they welcome you, are preparations for the praises of heaven!

The torches which they light are the secret of enlightenment, with whom they welcome the Bridegroom!"<sup>19</sup>

When the soul enters the mystery of spiritual matrimony in baptism, the angels see her in the wedding garment and thus they sing: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, white?" (Song of Sol. 8:5, the Septuagint Version)

In this book, we find a divine calling to enjoy the sacrament of Eucharist, the wedding banquet. St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, "The Lord Christ grants His children to enjoy His body and blood."

In this book also, we can understand "the sacrament of Myroon", where the Bridegroom seals on the heart of His bride His seal, so she may be ready by the Holy Spirit for the eternal wedding.

## **THE BOOK OF VIRGINITY:**

Since this book is the book of the spiritual marriage which unites the Lord Christ the Virgin with His virgin church in a spiritual bond, therefore, some of the early fathers said that this book is the book of "The book of the secret of virginity", where the virgin soul is satisfied with the Virgin Bridegroom. She does not need anything beside Him, not even to the temporary marriage. She does not despise marriage, but she wants a different marriage, on a greater and eternal level!

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<sup>17</sup> By the author, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, topic 3:2.

<sup>18</sup> St. Didymus the Blind: On the Holy Trinity.

<sup>19</sup> St. Greg. Naz.: Oration on the Holy Baptism 46.

Many fathers used some of the statements in this book to praise virginity and the virgins. Here is an excerpt from the words of St. Jerome against Jovinianos, who despised virginity. The saint declared the honor of virginity, witnessing with the Holy Bible. When he came to the book of the "Song of Solomon", he saw it "the book of virginity", for he related the gospel with virginity, as well as the Mosaic Law with the chastity of marriage. In his opinion, this book declared that the season of winter has passed, that is, the time for the law which looked for chastity through the holy marriage, was fulfilled. The time for spring has come where the flowers of virginity, as a fruit of the gospel. He praised virginity saying:<sup>20</sup>

"I look at the book of "Song of Solomon". Our foe thought that this book discusses marriage, but I clarify how this book contained the secrets of virginity.

Let us hear what was said to the bride before the Bridegroom came to the earth, suffered and was risen: "We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver. While the king is at his table..." (Song of Sol. 1:11,12) Before the resurrection of the Lord and the light of the gospel, the church did not have the gold of (virginity) , but had a form of gold (chaste marriage)... She had many kinds of ornaments of silver: like the widows and chaste married couples.

The Bridegroom answered the bride that the shadows of the old law had passes away, and that the truth of the gospel had come. He said, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." (Song of Sol. 2:10-11)

Once more he talks about the gospel and virginity saying, "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come... The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes." (Song of Sol. 2:12,13) Isn't this clear that he wants to say that, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none." (1 Cor. 7:29) Very clearly, he declares purity by saying, "The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land." (Song of Sol. 2:12) The turtledove is purest of all birds, where she lives in high places, as a symbol of the Savior.

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely." (Song of Sol. 2:13,14) If you hide your face like Moses and put a veil of the law, I do not see your face nor hear your face. "Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear." (Is. 1:15) But now, look at my glory with an unveiled face, so you may hide in the clefts of the rock and in the secret places of the cliff. Hearing this, the bride reveals the secrets of purity by saying: "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." (Song of Sol. 2:16) The secret of her purity is that Shepherd who cares for the pure virgins.

He says, "I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh " (Song of Sol. 4: 5) that is to those who mortified their bodies, and "to the hill of frankincense" (Song of Sol. 4:5) that is to the pure virgins.

The Bridegroom continues his talk, "I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat O friends! Drink yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!" (Song of Sol. 5:1) It was said that the apostles were filled with new wine not old wine (Matt. 4:17). The new wine is put into new wineskins, for they served in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Rom. 7:6) This is the wine which when drunk, will make the youth become thirsty to virginity and be filled with the spirit of chastity.

"My beloved is white and red". He is white due to virginity, and red due to martyrdom.

Thus, the time is not enough to explain the book and clarify all the secrets of virginity, as mentioned in the book of "Song of Solomon".

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<sup>20</sup> Agaisnst Jovinianus 1: 30,31.

## **CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF "SONG OF SOLOMON":**

Studying this book, we do not stop at the letter, but go to the depth to meet God, the Word Himself. We see our Christ clearly, living and desiring to unite with us to live by Him and with Him forever.

St. Gregory said, "In the art of painting, one does not look merely at the colors, but looks deeply to the picture which the artist painted with these colors. In the same manner, when studying the Bible, we should not stop at just looking at the colors, but we should look to the form of the King which are expressed by the words. The colors here are the words carrying mysterious meanings like what was mentioned in this book as "the mouth, kisses, myrrh, wine, members of the body, the bed, the maids..." However, the forms, which these words expressed, are: perfection and virginity, unity with God, punishment for evil, reward for everything good."

## **THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK:**

The main characters in this book are:

1. The bridegroom: is the Lord Jesus Christ who betrothed the church a holy bride for Him. (Eph. 5:27)
2. The bride: is the universal church, or the believer as a living member in the church, and is called "Shulamite".
3. The virgins: According to Origen's opinion, they are the believers who have not yet attained the spiritual depth, but have achieved some progress on the road of salvation.
4. The daughters of Jerusalem: represent the Jewish nation, which should have preached the Messiah the Savior of the world.
5. The friends of the bridegroom: are the angels who attained the perfect man. (Eph. 4:13)
6. The young sister: represent the humanity who need the Lord Jesus Christ to serve and care for her.

## **THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:**

This book is the book of deep love, or the book of the heart which does not require any specific divisions, but carries the unity of the mutual love. But for the sake of making the study easy, the book is divided into six chapters.

**Chapter One:** The personalities of the bride and the bridegroom:

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|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1. The Suffering Messiah    | 1: 2 – 6   |
| 2. The Messiah the Shepherd | 1: 7 – 12  |
| 3. The Messiah the King     | 1: 12 – 16 |
| 4. The Beloved Messiah      | 2: 1 – 7   |

**Chapter Two:** The fiancée asks for his bride:

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|---|-----------------|
| 1. He Himself descends to her                       | 2: 8 – 14       |
| 2. He warns her from the deceivers                  | 2: 15           |
| 3. The wedding banquet (resurrection and the cross) | 2:16,17 & ch. 3 |

**Chapter Three:** The heavenly matrimony:

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|---|---------|
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# Song of Solomon

## Chapter One

### THE PERSONALITIES OF THE BRIDE

### AND

### THE BRIDEGROOM

#### **THE BRIDE DECLARES HER BRIDEGROOM'S PERSONALITY:**

During the engagement period, the bride gets to know her bridegroom. She discovers his personality, secrets, assures the fact of his love to her, and knows his capabilities so she may be attached to him as a bridegroom forever.

Since she tasted his love, the bridegroom absorbed all her thoughts, to the extent that he became the subject of her talk with her relatives and friends. Moreover, he became everything to her.

What did the church see in the Messiah , her Bridegroom? She saw Him:

1. The suffering Messiah
2. The Messiah the Shepherd
3. The Messiah the King
4. The Beloved Messiah



# The Suffering Messiah

## THE KISSES OF THE DIVINE MOUTH:

If this book were for the beginners, then it would have started by the flattering of God the bridegroom to his bride, declaring His love to her, so she may repent and unite with Him. However, this book is for the mature who have tasted His love and their hearts were inflamed with His love. They accepted His love which overflowed through the cross, so they desire to live all their life meditating in this divine love, saying on the mouth of the church:

**"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore, the virgins love you." (Song of Sol. 1: 1,2)**

This is the voice of the universal church which lifted her eyes toward the cross and tasted His sweet fragrance and saw His name shed for her. Thus, she found pleasure in His love and she started to flatter Him saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth". Here we notice the following:

1. She requests the kisses of the mouth of the father. Truly, God has accepted her with many kisses throughout the ages. He declared His love to her by creating the whole world for her. He found her from nothing and gave her His image and likeness. Briefly, she did not need anything. After the fall, He did not forsake her but promised her with the salvation. He granted her the law as a helper and sent her the prophets to assure her salvation. But all that did not satisfy the bride, for she desired Him to be close to her and to grant her Himself. She wanted all the kisses of his mouth directly! She is the bride who rejoices with the bridegroom who proposed to her and sent her all the expensive gifts. But these gifts will not satisfy her for she wants Him, Himself!

Origen said that the church in the Old Testament was like an immature child who did not enjoy the company of the bridegroom himself but enjoyed the company of his friends, the angels, the fathers, and the prophets. Through them, she accepted the kisses of God, which are the doctrines of the Old Testament and the commandments. On her way to grow, she walked toward maturity to see her Bridegroom coming to her on the mountains of the Law and the prophets. Her heart was inflamed with love saying, "May He come down from the cross to embrace me so I may be united with Him." This is what St. Paul said to the Hebrews: "God who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these days spoken to us by His Son ..." (Heb. 1:1,2) He talked to us directly with the kisses of the practical love.

2. She is not shy to ask the kisses of the father from the son, for whatever is for the Father is for the Son too, and whatever the Son has offered by his free will, He has offered as an obedience to the Father. Thus the Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son ..." (John 3:16) In the mean time, St. Paul said, "...who loved and gave His life for me." These are the kisses of the cross, which are signs of the love of the Father and the Son too!

We have mentioned earlier that this expression cannot be applied on any physical or temporal love, for the bride will never ask her bridegroom for the kisses of someone else. Here this expression is about the spiritual divine kisses which carry the hidden union so we may become one with the Father in His Son through the kisses of the cross.

3. The bride does not ask for one kiss or two kisses but all the kisses of his mouth. These are the feelings of the believer whose heart is kindled with God's love. He sees no one in life except God Himself and him, therefore he asks for all God's love to be directed to him.

4. The church does not ask for any kind of kisses but asks for a special kind of kisses, which are the kisses of his mouth, which expresses the unique marital relation.

The holy Bible has recorded for us different kinds of kisses, but they were not the satisfying kisses. Laban said farewell to his sons and daughter by kissing them (Gen. 31:55) Jacob welcomed his grandchildren, Joseph's sons, by kissing them (Gen. 48:1). Naomi said farewell to her daughters in law by kissing them (Ruth 1:9). Isaac asked his son Jacob to kiss him to get his blessing. (Gen. 27:26). Absalom, David's son, kissed the children of the people to win their love (2 Sam. 15:5). Jonathan kissed David as a sign of friendship and loyalty. (1 Sam. 20:41). The church at Ephesus said farewell to St. Paul by kissing him (Acts 20:37). These were all kisses based on the bond of friendship, blood, or as a sign of the bitterness of separation. However, these were temporary kisses, but the church asks for the kisses of the eternal love, the kisses of the mouth of God which do not cease.

## **LOVE BETTER THAN FRAGRANCE:**

The church communes with her crucified bridegroom saying: "Your love is better than wine." It is love which makes one forget all what is earthly to remember only God's love to her.

In the Septuagint Version, the word "love" was translated as "your breast". The believers find in the divine milk, flowing from the breast which satisfies the babies, power and effectiveness more than the wine which men use for warmth and strength. St. Gregory, bishop of Nesus, said, "Whatever is considered dignified in the eyes of the world becomes diminished before the doctrines of the divine word presented to children. Here, we find the divine breast better than the human wine."

When one repeats, "Your breast is better than wine", one goes back to the simplicity of the children. She looks at her bridegroom hung on the cross and she clings to Him, in simple faith, as a child lies on his mother's chest. She nurses from God's love, thus she forgets all the cares of life and is filled with consolation, as the psalmist says, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul." (Ps. 94:19)

"Your breast is better than wine": as if the wine presented to guests, especially in feasts, is a sign of joy,, and it was presented when offering sacrifices (Ex. 29:40), Lev. 23:13, Num. 15:5) The love of our Lord Jesus Christ is unique for He grants inexpressible joy which the world cannot take away!

In Egypt and Palestine, grapes were crushed by feet in a winepress (Neh. 13:15, Job 14:11). The juice of the red grapes like blood flows and the men go out with red clothes. Isaiah the prophet saw that the Lord Jesus, the beloved Bridegroom, has trodden the winepress alone with red clothe, for the salvation His bride.

"Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? I who speak in righteousness mighty to save. Why is your apparel red, and your garments like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me." (Is. 63:1-4)

This is the unique love which is better than wine (1)<sup>1</sup>, for the Lord has trodden the winepress by Himself, not to present us with earthly wine but to offer us His blood shed for us, the mystery of our life, power and salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jews misused the wine, thus God rebuked them and declared to them the bad consequences of indulging in wine (Gen. 9:20, Prov. 23:29-35, Is. 28:7, Hosea 4:11). Also the Law forbid the nazarine from drinking the wine (Num. 6:3, Judges 13:14), and did not allow the priest to drink it upon entering the holies. (Lev. 10:9)

No wonder that the Lord Jesus started His ministry in Cana of Galilee by transforming the water into wine, not that they may get drunk, but to make them sober. He gave them the new wine a sign of His love, granting them joy and power. St. John Chrysostom said: "God does not cease to change our shortcomings and weak will. There are people who are like water, very cold and weak. Let us bring such people to the presence of the Lord to change their will into wine, so they are no longer like water and become a source of joy for themselves and others." This is the love better than wine which takes our weak nature to the new life and carries the power of life.

Through this new wine or through the love of the Bridegroom which is better than wine, the believer smells the nice aroma of Christ and sees His name ointment poured forth as He has trodden the cross by Himself. She communes with Him saying:

**"Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, Your name is ointment poured forth;" (Song of Sol. 1: 3)**

## **ANOINTED WITH GOOD OINTMENTS:**

On the cross the Lord poured His perfect fragrance so the sweet aroma spread all over the world.

Thus the church realized that by His eye which was anointed with fragrance from the Father for our salvation, of whom the prophet witnessed saying, "You loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Ps. 44, Heb. 1:9) The Lord emphasized that when He entered the synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Lk. 4:17-21, Is. 61:1) Then the Lord said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears."

When the Jews revolted against the apostles, the church prayed saying, "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together.." (Acts 4:27)

In the Old Testament, Jacob anointed the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar in the house of the Lord (Gen. 28:18, 31:13) as a sign of the opening of heaven on earth, or as a meeting between God and man, or the dwelling of God among His people, or according to the Law, the priests used to be anointed (Ex. 40:15) as well as the kings (1 Sam.10:1) in this manner. Also the temple and the vessels inside it were all anointed with the holy ointment. This ointment whether to people or to objects, meant that they were devoted to the Lord, that is, those people do not work except in the ministry of the Lord, and the vessels were only used in the Lord's ministry. When we talk about the Lord's ministry, we mean "the Lord's ministry among His people", or man entering in the presence of the Lord. When we talk about the bridegroom "the Word of God" as anointed, we see in Him the anointment fulfilled, for He carried us and made us united with God. The Lord said, "For their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth." (John 17:19) He devotes His work for our sake.

The fragrance of this unique anointment has spread to the heaven, thus the Father has smelled the smell of satisfaction. It carried the fragrance of obedience of the Only Begotten Son, for He obeyed until death. We, on earth, smell it as a sweet fragrance for it kills the awful fragrance of our sins (Ps. 83:5), and makes us "sweet aroma" (2 Cor. 2:15). This is the effect of His anointment, for Christ can make, from the sinners, anointed people, his sweet aroma.

The church fathers have spoken about the effect of this holy anointment in our lives. St. Gregory saw that the baptized person has the characteristics of Christ, thus the sweet fragrance of Christ is in all his feelings. He said: "Let us be cured, also in the sense of smell, so that a sweet fragrance surrounds us. (Is. 5:24) Let us smell the anointment shed for our sake, may we accept Him spiritually, so we may be molded and transformed by Him, and others may smell the sweet fragrance in us."

St. Augustine related that the sweet fragrance is the heavenly fragrance of Christ, who, by His cross, draws the heart to heaven. He said: "Let us love Him and follow His example. Let us run after His ointments. He came and spread His sweet fragrance all over the world! From where did this sweet fragrance come? From heaven."

Let us proceed toward heaven, if we want to be truly answering when the priest says, "Lift up your hearts." Let us lift our thoughts, our love, our hope, so that they may not spoil on earth, because where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. (Matt. 6:21)

St. Augustine talks about the attractiveness of that sweet ointment saying: "Let us switch our senses from our bad fragrance to His sweet fragrance!"

## **THE NAME POURED FORTH:**

On the cross this sweet ointment was shed and entered the graves, so that all the dead smelled the sweet fragrance instead of the corruption they were in. By His resurrection, He offered the world this sweet ointment which was shed for us.

St. Ambrose said that this is what the believer experiences, as he is buried with Christ in baptism and rises up smelling the sweet fragrance of the Lord's clothes, and breathes His name shed on the cross, and takes from the aroma of His resurrection.

It is strange that the fragrance of this sweet name, which was shed on the cross, has spread all over the world. Thus, God's name was known not only among the Jews but among the Gentiles too. St. Ambrose said: "God was known in Judea and His name was great in Israel (Ps. 26:1), but when He was raised on the cross, His name became wonderful all over the world."

In other words, humanity has known His name "Jesus", the Savior of the world, and Emmanuel (God with us). Through the cross, we have realized His salvation and His reconciling us with God, therefore we call Him, "Your name is ointment poured forth".

## **THE LOVE OF THE VIRGINS TO HIM:**

Since the human race smelled the fragrance of His sweet name shed for their sake, they were drawn to Him with virginity. They do not want to be occupied with anyone else, and their thoughts are all directed toward Him. They do not want to think of all the cares of life, and all their emotions, feelings and inner energies are directed toward Him saying, "Therefore the virgins love You."

This attraction which the cross has created in our inner depths, made us seek the Bridegroom, so we do not run after Him alone but we attract others to Him saying:

**"Lead me away! We will run after you. The king has brought me into His chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you." (Song of Sol. 1: 4)**

She says, "Lead me" which means only myself, then she says, "We will run after You." Lead me, in singular, then we will run, in plural, and rejoice.

This is the secret of the cross and its effect, for it carries the power of the testimony and attraction, and the secret of joy!

Since the human soul rejoices in You and You dwell inside me through the cross, people know You and seek You through me, then our hearts are filled with joy so that even the heavenly creatures rejoice with us!

Zaccheus the publican was attracted to the Lord Jesus, then He invited all the sinners and publicans to meet the Lord and rejoice with Him. Also, when the Samaritan woman sat with Him, she called all the people in the city to meet the Lord Jesus and enjoy His attractive talk.

This is the secret of the church... the attractive power of the cross. But when the church forgets the cross and cares for the worldly things, then she cannot win others to Christ. She conquers the world by the cross, and through the cross only, people are drawn to the church through repentance. However, the enticing means of the world destroy the image of the church even in the eyes of the world itself.

## **THE DIVINE CHAMBER:**

**"The king has brought me into His chambers..." (v.4)**

The human soul asked the heavenly Bridegroom to lead her "Lead me", so that He may support her and takes her into His spiritual chamber in a joyous meeting.

Origen relates that the state of attraction of the human soul to enter the chamber of the Lord is a picture of the spiritual believers who were transformed from the literal interpretation of the word of God to the deep spiritual interpretation of the mysteries of the word and who discovered the mysteries of the kingdom. This is the divine chamber which satisfies the soul, not only in this world but also in the eternal life. As Origen said that this is the heavenly food of the soul.

Some fathers see that the "the divine chamber " is the mystery of baptism. In the baptismal font, the believer meets the Lord Jesus as his Bridegroom. He puts on the new man and enjoys the divine kingdom. One puts on Christ as a white robe for the wedding; one wears Him as her righteousness and the secret of her holiness. St. Paul said, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27)

## **BETWEEN BEING DARK AND LOVELY:**

Since the soul puts on Christ as righteousness and sanctification for her life, she compares her past with her present, thus telling the daughters of Jerusalem,

**I am dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon." (Song of Sol. 1: 5)**

She admits her weakness and declares her beauty which she has obtained by her unity with the Lord Jesus saying, "I am dark like the tents of Kedar, but in the same time lovely like the curtains of Solomon.

St. Augustine relates that the human soul, before her unity with Christ is as a black coal. But after her unity with Christ and becoming inflamed with His holy fire, she becomes hot in the spirit, like fire, and full of beauty. St. Augustine said about Saul of Tarsus, "Saul was earlier a persecutor and a blasphemer like a black coal, but then he became inflamed with fire from heaven and received mercy. The voice of the Lord Jesus kindled him with fire and removed all

darkness from him. He became inflamed with a fervent spirit until he inflamed others with him with the same fire"

St. Ambrose saw a picture of the condition of the church who has enjoyed her spiritual beauty by her immersion in the baptismal font through the grace of God. He said, "In the book of song of Solomon, the church says, "I am dark but lovely." I am dark with the human weakness, but perfect through the mystery of faith."

He also says, "The church is dark with her sins, but perfect with the grace of God. She is dark with the human nature, perfect with the salvation.... Dark with the dirt of strife but perfect when she is crowned with the clothes of victory!"

This statement is truly like a medicine for the believer, for when he feels his self righteousness and is tempted by pride, he screams saying, "I am dark". But when tempted by shortcomings and despair, he screams, "I am lovely." The feeling of both being dark and beautiful is not contradictory but complimenting one another. One feeling supports in some instances and the other feeling supports in different situations. Both feelings lead to a balance

Origen explains that by saying, "The church here does not direct her talk to the Bridegroom nor to the virgins who are seeking God's way, but to the daughters of Jerusalem who accused the bride, the church, with her darkness. The church responds to this accusation that she is truly dark.. May the daughters of Jerusalem realize the inner beauty of the church, for while she is dark from outside, yet she is beautiful from inside.

Though she is dark like the tents of Kedar yet she is lovely like the curtains of the house of King Solomon.

The church is for all the Gentiles. How can the church of the Gentiles brag before the daughters of the earthly Jerusalem, that is, the Jews? They are the ones who were angry at the church and her Bridegroom and despised the church because the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not go through her veins. In the eyes of the Jews, this is a great mistake that the church of Gentiles is not from the same genealogy of the Fathers. The church admits that and repeats the same accusation which the daughters of Jerusalem were accused of, "I am dark". This darkness is not due to the deprivation of the genealogy of the Fathers, but also for being deprived of the teachings of the Fathers and prophets.

The Bible called those who rejected the Law and were expelled from the tabernacle of Isaac the curtains of the house of King Solomon. The curtains of the king of peace were the curtains of the tabernacle, where God dwells with His people. Form outside, the tabernacle was covered with the ugly skin of goats, but from inside it contained the beauty of the curtains, besides the glory of God. The outer curtains of the tabernacle were made of the hair of the goats and the skin of the bulls, however from inside, it is covered with blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen thread.

Origen described some of the events of the Old Testament which prophesied about the call of the dark Gentiles into the unity with Christ as a beautiful and holy bride. These events were:

1. The marriage of Moses the prophet with the Ethiopian woman: which caused Miriam, his sister, to speak against him (Numbers 12). That is why she was hit with leprosy and cast outside the camp. This was a symbol of the unity of Christ with the church of the Gentiles, which stirred the Jews until they rejected the faith and reviled the Gentiles with their evil past.

Origen said on the mouth of the church of the Gentiles: "Truly I wonder how can the daughters of Jerusalem rebuke me for my darkness. Did you forget what was mentioned in your Law when Miriam talked against Moses because he married the Ethiopian woman? I am the

Ethiopian! Truly I am dark because of my roots, however, I am beautiful by repentance and faith. I accepted the Son of God. I accepted the Word who became flesh (John 1:14). I came to the One who is "the image of the invisible God and the first born over all creation." (Col. 1:15) , who is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His glory," (Heb. 1:3), then I became beautiful! Do you seek the glory of the Law while reviling Him?

The story of the Queen of Sheba who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10) was a symbol of the church of the Gentiles, who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. (1 Kings 10) The Lord Jesus rebuked the Jews saying, "The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here." (Matt.12:42)

The queen of Sheba came and talked with king Solomon and asked him questions (1 Kings 10:20), however, the true Solomon solved all her problems and declared to her the true knowledge of God, and declared the eternity of the soul and the last Judgment, matters which philosophers could not explain to the Gentiles.

The queen came to Jerusalem which means "the vision of peace" <sup>16</sup>, and the Lord Jesus in the week of passion announced to the church , "My peace I give to you."

When the queen saw all the wealth that Solomon had, there was no more spirit in her.(1 Kings 10:5). Likewise, when the church discovers the mysteries of her Christ, she is inflamed with love, and longs to be with Him.

She offered King Solomon 120 talents of gold (1 Kings 10:10), and this is the same figure which the Lord allowed for the age of man during the days of Noah. (Gen. 6:3). This was the age of Moses the prophet (Deut. 34:7) The church of the Gentiles wanted to offer all her life as golden talents, that is, carrying the heavenly nature.

She also offered many spices (1 Kings 10:10), which is the love which the Lord Jesus accepts from the repentant sinners.

3. In the book of Psalms, "Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hand to God. Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord." (Ps. 68:31,32) Thus the church of the Gentiles (black) stretched out her hands to God to become beautiful, and through her, the tongues of all the kingdoms of the earth praise God.

4. It was mentioned in the Book of Zephaniah, "Therefore, wait for Me, says the Lord. Until the day I rise up for plunder; my determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughters of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering." (Zeph. 3:8-10) Thus the pagan nations were transformed to pure praising lips, and they crossed the rivers of Ethiopia, that is, they forsook the darkness , through their worship to God and offering the sacrifice of praise.

5. When the Ethiopian eunuch delivered Jeremiah from the dungeon (Jer. 38:7-13), the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, "Go and speak to Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for adversity and not for good, and they shall be performed in that day before you. But I will deliver you in that day," says the Lord, "and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life

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<sup>16</sup> The ancestors see that the word "Jerusalem" means "vision of peace". Philo: De Somn 2: 250; St. Clem. Alex.: Strom. 1: 29: 4; Origen: In: Lib. Iesu Nav. 21: 2; Com. on Cant. 2: 1.

shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me," says the Lord.'" (Jer. 39:15-18) Thus, this Ethiopian eunuch was a symbol of the church of the Gentiles, which trusted in the Lord so He saved her.

Origen ended up his comparisons by saying, "As you see, there are many statements which testify that the dark and beautiful has dealt well with the daughters of Jerusalem. She confidently says, 'I am dark like the tents of Kedar but beautiful like the curtains of Solomon.'"

Origen also said: "Although the speaker here is singular, yet he mentioned the tents and the curtains in the plural form. Therefore, we have to know what is meant is a multitude of churches and many nations, as was mentioned that the kingdom of God is one, but there are many mansions in the Father's house. (John 14:2)

## **BETWEEN THE SUN OF TEMPTATIONS AND THE SUN OF JUSTICE:**

The bride presents a reason for her darkness by saying,

**"Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me." (Song of Sol. 1: 6)**

It was appropriate for the Jews to support the Gentiles and preach the cross, but instead of ministering to them, they reviled them by being dark because of paganism. The Gentiles answered that their darkness was not natural, but was due to what they went through, for the sun had tanned them. Origen commented by saying, "She became dark because she descended, but as soon as she ascended (coming up from the wilderness), she was supported by her nephew) who was born from the Jews), she became white and beautiful, her darkness was completely abolished and she was enlightened by the surrounding light. Thus the church of the Gentiles apologized to the daughters of Jerusalem saying, "O daughters of Jerusalem, do not think that the darkness on my face is natural, but this was because the Sun of righteousness has ignored me. The Sun of righteousness did not direct his rays toward me, because he found me not straight. I am from the Gentiles who did not look to the Sun of righteousness nor stood before the Lord. (Lk. 21:36) God has chosen you and you have received grace, while he ignored me and tanned me because of my disobedience and unbelief. But now, since you are rebellious and unbelieving, my hope is that the "Sun of righteousness" look to me so I may find grace!"

This illustrates what St. Paul said, "For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, " (Rom. 11:30) In the past, the Gentiles were burdened by the sun of temptation, deprived from the Sun of justice, then the opportunity was granted to Israel. They were chosen and given grace, but now since the Jews rejected the Sun of justice and fell under the sun of rebellion and unbelief, the church of the Gentiles enjoyed Christ, the Sun of justice. Her darkness was abolished by the shining of the Sun of justice, and the sun of sin could not overcome her, as the Psalmist said, "The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night." (Ps. 121:6)

## **THE INNER WAR:**

Since the church met her suffering Bridegroom, He attracted her and she entered his chamber and rejoiced with him. He gave her His infinite love, then the smell of his sweet fragrance spread everywhere, sanctifying all her feelings and depths, abolishing the darkness of sin and evil, reflecting His beauty on her. As a result, the power of darkness revolted against the bride.



The bride says,

**"My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." (Song of Sol. 1: 6)**

Who are her mother's sons? And what is the secret of their anger at her?

What is the vineyard which the bride protects and the vineyard which she did not keep?

1. Origen says that the true translation of the scripture is: "My mother's sons fought for me and not against me. Here the mother's sons are the apostles who are the Jews, for the Gentiles and the Jews are from one nation. Those apostles did not cease to stir a fierce war on the Gentiles until they destroy all the towers of vanities and the wrong pagan teachings and overcome all evil, thus create from all the pagan Gentiles "Keeper of the vine of the Lord" and keeper of the Law and prophets. However, she does not keep her own vine, that is her pagan teachings.

2. Origen has another opinion that the angels are the mother's sons. Human beings and the angels belong to one nation and all are members in the church of Christ. The angels support us and fight for us and with us, for God sent them to help us in the inner war against sin until one is able to care for the vine of the Lord, which is the heart, and gets rid of her ego or the works of the old man.

3. A third interpretation is that the mother's sons refer to the ego or the self, for "A man's foes will be those of his own household." (Matt. 10:36) The ego is an enemy against the work of Christ inside us. During this war, the believer cares for the vines of others and is occupied with the outer appearance of the ministry without caring for the inner vine or his inner life.

## **THE MESSIAH THE SHEPHERD**

When the church talked about her Bridegroom as "The Crucified Messiah", she saw in His sufferings big attraction and many were attracted to Him. However, the enemy was stirred against her, thus the church calls the Bridegroom saying that He is "The Good Shepherd" who cares for her life. She communes with Him saying,

**"Tell me, O whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon." (Song of Sol. 1: 7)**

Amidst the bitterness of the inner war of the enemy, one feels the sweetness of God's care toward her, so she calls Him, "whom I love". She says with St. Gregory, the bishop of Nesus, "This is the name whom I call You "the one whom I love", for your name is above all things, and it is beyond all the rational creatures. This name declares your goodness and attracts my soul to You; how can I not love You? You are the one who loved me while I am dark (Song of Solomon 1:4), so You sacrificed Your life for the sake the flock, who are the subject of your care.

## **THE SUBJECT OF CARE:**

She asks the Shepherd whom she loved from all her heart and soul about his resting place. She asks him for the way so she may not walk according to her personal desires.

In the past, when the sun of trials was fierce on David the prophet, he sought the house of God, being the place where the Lord shepherds at noon. He said, "When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise should rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

For in the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing yes, I will sing praises to the Lord." (Ps.27:2-6)

We are in dire need for the Shepherd to hold our hands and enter us in His church, the place of His rest, the pasture of his salvation. There we meet the Lord Jesus, the secret of our peace and happiness, and we are granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit who comforts us. In his house, we find the adoption to God through baptism, and we accept the Holy Spirit to dwell inside us, through the sacrament of confirmation. In his house, we find forgiveness of our sins and we partake of His living sacrifice, the body of Son of God and His blood shed for us. In His house, we sit under the shadow of His cross, the secret of our reconciliation with God and our inner peace. When the enemy stirs a fierce war against us and sin is aroused inside us, we run to His house repenting with tears, then we find the Shepherd Himself looking for us, and His Holy Spirit desiring to sanctify us.

## **AT NOON:**

Why did the bride wish to meet her Bridegroom at noon, saying, "Where you make it rest at noon?"

Since we meet the good Shepherd in His one church extending across the ages, we see Him transfigured as the midday (noon) sun, so that his members do not know darkness nor shade, but they live in the light of their Shepherd, getting enlightened through Him, and they become light in the world. The wise Solomon said, "But the path of the sun is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness..." (Prov. 4:18,19)

St. Gregory, the bishop of Nesus <sup>2</sup>said: "You make rest at noon, means the light which does not know shade, for there is no shade at noon where the sun is horizontal."

No one deserves the rest at noon unless he becomes a son of the light and day.

The bride says, "Show me how to rest? Show me the way of rest at noon lest I fall astray away from your faithful guidance and I become ignorant, which happens to the flock who is against you!"

St. Augustine said, "What does noon mean? Great heat and light! I know that your wise people are fervent in the spirit and enlightened in the teachings."

Origen related that noon is a symbol of the perfect glory of God. The bride desires to cleave to the Lord, for she communes with Him saying, "I want to seek You at noon, not at night or in the morning or at sunset, but at noon because You will be in the fullness of the light, in the light of Your greatness!

Origen had another explanation for the word "noon", which is the perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the word of God. He said, "What you call noon refers to the place of the inner heart where one follows the trace of the light of the knowledge of the word of God more clearly, because noon is the time when the sun is at its peak. Thus, the Lord Jesus, the Sun of justice, reveals the mysteries of the great power of his church by knowing the places of his rest at noon. The church, when learning the beginning matters, accepts the rays of the inner knowledge. David

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<sup>2</sup> Sermon 2

the prophet said, "God shall help her, just at the break of dawn." (Ps. 46:6) However, now she seeks better things and desires higher standards, thus she is looking for knowledge at noon."

## **MEETING WITH THE SHEPHERD AT NOON:**

The church wants to meet her Bridegroom at noon, for this time has many memories in her life. We mention a few of these:

1. At noon, the Lord appeared to Abraham with two angels and promised him a son who will be a blessing to many nations (Gen. 18) He can create a new life from the deadness of Sarah's womb, and that is what the church requires from her Shepherd at noon.

With the angels, she enters into the fellowship of the heavenly glory to grant her "new life". We were under the judgment of death, fruitless, but as Abraham and Sarah experienced the "power of the resurrection", for the Lord had granted them life from death, likewise we ask our Shepherd that we experience the power of the resurrection inside us.

As Abraham, the father of fathers, met the Lord at noon outside the tent, likewise the children of Abraham should do the works of Abraham (John 8:39) They should go outside the limits of the temporary tent expelling every carnal thought and lust by the Holy Spirit until they enjoy seeing Him and His care.

2. At noon, Joseph met his younger brother Benjamin, and he had compassion on him and entered the inner room and wept (Gen. 43). This is the picture of the union which we desire where the True Shepherd our Lord Jesus Christ meets us his younger brothers, then He is compassionate towards us and calls us "Benjamin" or "sons of the right."

3. At noon, Elijah mocked the priests of the baal saying, "Cry aloud for he is a god; either he is meditating or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping, and must be awakened." (I Kings 18:27) Thus, the church wants to be close to her Shepherd at noon, to see Him the true Elijah, that is, "My Lord," who mocks Satan and all his soldiers. This was fulfilled when the Messiah was lifted up on the cross at noon to crush Satan and all his soldiers, granting us the authority to crush him under our feet.

4. At noon, the true Shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted the church (Acts 22:9). But then, he discovered the truth of the living Immortal Shepherd, and his life was changed to a chosen vessel who witnessed to the name of the Lord Jesus among the Gentiles. This is the Messiah's concern to transform the persecutors to witnesses and ministers to the word of the God.

5. The statement of the bride, "Where do you make it rest at noon." " reminds us of the prophecy of our Father Jacob to Judah saying, "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." (Gen. 49: 9,10) This prophecy was fulfilled when the Lion coming out of the tribe of Judah died on the cross at the sixth hour, not to rest, but to love all the human race offering His blood a ransom and salvation.

## **MARVELOUS PASTURES:**

The church asks her Shepherd,

**"Where do you feed your flock? Where do you make it rest at noon? For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?" (Song of Sol 1: 7)**

Origen comments, "She longs to learn the way which he wants her to walk through, lest because of her ignorance of its direction, she turns to the flocks of his companions, then others may see her; as if she says: I do not want anyone to see me except you. I desire to know the way which brings me to you and no one should be in between us."

She wants to know the true way so she may enjoy the care of Christ, lest she becomes veiled, shaken by the winds of strange teachings and she falls under the shepherds who work for their private interests and not for the interest of the Lord Christ. Thus, she becomes veiled, and her face is hidden behind the veil instead of meeting with her Shepherd with an unveiled face, that is, she is deprived from being the bride united with her Bridegroom without any obstacle between them.

St. Jerome says that the veil refers to the veil of the old Law. At noon, when the bride meets her Shepherd at the cross, she does not put on a veil, for the veil was abolished, and we have entered into a new covenant where one meets God with an uncovered face, that is, with the spirit of love, whether the fatherly love or the marital love. We do not need any more a veil to put on our face like Moses, but we enter into the mysteries of God and be in His presence united with Him.

## **THE WAY OF SHEPHERDING:**

The Shepherd loves His church:

**"If you do not know, O fairest, among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents." (Song of Sol. 1: 8)**

Since the bride asked Him about the special way so she may not become veiled, deviating to the flocks of his companions, the Shepherd clarified the direction of the way in three steps:

1. First, she has to know herself and realize the new nature which was granted to her during His care.
2. She is no more introvert or self centered, but rather following the footsteps of the Fathers the saints.
3. She gives her testimony for the Shepherd before the goats so they may enter into the place of His rest.

1. First the good Shepherd asks her to know herself, that is, she starts with her inner life to realize that God has created her in His own image and likeness without any guile, and has decorated her with unique beauty "fairest among women". He has paid the price of caring for her through the cross.

Thus the Shepherd drives his children to the spirit of hope, and emphasizes that even if she does not know herself, He knows that she is "the fairest among women.", for she became a dwelling for His Holy Spirit and has put on Christ and became His eternal bride.

The believer has to examine himself to realize the new nature which was granted to him in baptism, and to know , in the eyes of the Heavenly Shepherd, he is fair among all the creation.

2. He commands her to go out, for she cannot become "the fairest among women" unless she goes out with her Shepherd outside the camp carrying His reproach (Heb. 13:13). Let her get out of her ego and not to be self centered, and let her be crucified with her Bridegroom so she may live in Him and by Him. He advises her, but commands her, to go to His cross, if she really wants His shepherding.

When she goes out, she goes out with the Head Himself, the crucified Shepherd, and with the rest of the members of the body, "in the footsteps of the flock" whether with the earlier

fathers or those who are struggling. The apostle is advising us to "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." (Heb. 13:7) If we fear the cross, let us look how our fathers the saints loved the cross and they were sanctified and beautified.

3. Realizing that one's soul is a beautiful bride following the footsteps of the fathers, carrying the reproach of the cross outside the camp, that is outside the human nature, she has to witness to the Shepherd before the goats. She does not live in a negative style, but her hearts burns within her for the sinners as the Psalmist said, "I was bitter for the sinners who forsook your Law." She wants them to enter into "the shepherds' tents", that is, to the church of Christ where the shepherds dwell.

## **A CALL FOR LABOR AND STRIFE:**

Carrying the responsibility of witnessing the salvation, the church carries the goat to the sheepfold so they become His sheep. He asks her to work with the spirit of power which does know fear and the spirit of unity without division. He tells her:

**"I have compared you my love, to my filly<sup>8</sup> among Pharaoh's chariot." (Song of Sol 1: 9)**

1. Here, we notice Him calling her "my filly", in the plural form, because when one carries the responsibility of witnessing to His cross, one is obligated to work with the spirit of unity with the rest of the horses. In her spiritual struggle, as well as her witnessing, she is united with all the members of the body of Christ, following the footsteps of the early fathers (follow the footsteps of the flock), and caring for the future generations (feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents). She joins those who are struggling, as one of the fillies, in the procession of the Lord Jesus Christ. The secret of strength in the life of the believer is his unity with the Head of the church. He works with the rest of the members in one spirit, and he is attached with the church which extends from generation to generation.

2. Calling her "my filly, declares that the Lord Jesus owns the church; He has bought her with His own blood. He leads her by Himself and she works to extend His kingdom on earth. In the Revelation, St. John saw the church as a white horse. "He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." (Rev. 6:2) Every victory for us is by His name and for Him.

Because the Lord loves His church whom He leads, He was called, "Him who sat on the horse." (Rev. 19:19)

3. Horses are known for their strength and their power to hastily enter battles without fear. It was written, "Have you given the horse strength? Have you clothed his neck with thunder? Can you frighten him like a locust? His majestic snorting strikes terror. He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength; he gallops into the clash of arms." (Job 39: 19-21) Zechariah the prophet talks about the power of the house of Judah by saying, "... For the Lord of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle." (Zech. 10:3) St. Paul also wrote, "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57)

4. Horses refer to the heavenly power of God, for in the book of Habakkuk, the prophet wrote, "... His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like

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<sup>8</sup> The Septuagint Version

the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden. O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers, was Your anger against the rivers, was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?" (Hab. 3: 3, 8) When Elisha's servant saw the army surrounding the city, he was troubled. But Elisha asked the Lord to open his eyes, "Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:8)

Saying "Pharaoh's chariots" means that the believers are like chariots but they still live on earth, that is, Egypt; and Egypt was known for the beauty of its horses.(1 Kings 1:28, 29)

Origen said that saying "Pharaoh's chariots", he declared that she deserves to be drowned in the Red Sea. But going through the water of baptism, she comes out holy and sanctified, so she becomes a white horse!

## **THE FRUITS OF SHEPHERDING:**

Since the Shepherd has met His church and declared to her that she is "fairest among women", and asked her to struggle as one of the horses in the chariot of salvation, He declared to her the fruits of that work in her life by saying:

**"Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver. While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance." (Song of Sol. 1: 10-12)**

We can summarize the fruits of shepherding by the following:

1. She has lovely cheeks with ornaments, that is, she carries the spirit of humility with chastity.
  2. Her neck is decorated with the spirit of obedience and serving others.
  3. She is decorated with gold and silver, that is, with the Law and the commandments, so she may enjoy the gold, that is, "the gospel of grace" or "the heavenly life."
1. Lovely cheeks with ornaments: the cheeks of the church were decorated with jewels, that is she carried inside her the Holy Spirit who fills her inner life. This was reflected on her face, so she carried the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self control. (Gal.5:22)

In the Septuagint Version, it was written, "Your cheeks are beautiful like a dove," meaning that the secret of the beauty of the church is in her enjoyment of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who appears in the form of a dove.

Origen comments on this statement by saying, "He did not say "How beautiful are your cheeks", but he said, "Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments". He wanted to clarify that they were not beautiful before, but his beauty came after she (the church) accepted the kisses of the Bridegroom, and after the One who was spoken of by the prophets came. He cleansed the church in the baptismal font, and made her without any guile, and made her know herself. Thus her cheeks became beautiful, for chastity, virtue and virginity, which earlier she did not have, were spread in her by special beauty through the cheeks of the church."

The cheeks of the dove refer to the meekness and purity. Regarding meekness, the Lord commands us by saying, "Be simple as the dove." (Matt. 10:16) He means not to carry any craftiness of the world. Regarding the purity of this kind of turtle doves, Origen said that they have a peculiar nature, which is, if any of the mates dies, the other partner does not accept anyone else.

Origen commented: "The turtle dove symbolizes the church because the church does not unite with anyone else beside Christ, and the turtle dove symbolizes chastity and meekness."

## 2. The neck with chains of gold:

Usually man's neck, without any ornaments, refers to the fierceness of the human nature. However, when it is decorated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the symbol of spiritual beauty and endurance... these are the church ornaments! Our necks carried shame and disgrace because of our disobedience and pride; however, now we carry the yoke of Christ and accept His obedience, thus we carry this surpassing spiritual beauty.

## 3. Gold and Silver:

In the Septuagint Version, it is written, "We make you like gold with ornaments from silver, as long as the king is on his table." In the Old Testament, the church did not have any gold, but things similar to gold and silver; however, since the king sat on his table, his bride had "the gold."

When the Lord the King was lifted on the cross, we had "the gold", that is, "the heavenly life." Earlier we lived in the shadows of the heavenly matters "shadows of gold", that is, through symbols and shadows. (Gal. 3:19, Heb. 10:1, 1 Cor. 10:11)

Some fathers see that the church of the Old Testament enjoyed the shadows of gold with ornaments of silver, that is, she enjoyed the Law and the prophets, where the chastity of marriage and widowhood was the constitution of life. However, when the King the Virgin came, He gave the members of His body the capability of "the life of virginity", which is "the law of heaven", where they do not marry nor get married.

### 3. THE MESSIAH THE KING

Since the Bridegroom compared His church with a horse in the chariots of salvation, whom He leads and guides to His kingdom, the church looks at Him as a King who fought for her and was united with her to make her a queen to sit at his right hand.

**"While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance." (Song of Sol. 1: 12)**

When the Lord Jesus reigned on the cross and sacrificed His life for us, the queen came to give Him back her love as a spikenard, which its aroma has spread wherever the Gospel is preached.

On the Lord's table or on His altar, the King meets the queen, then the queen offers the sacrifice of the king himself as an acceptable fragrance before the Father, and considers his sacrifice as her sacrifice and the fragrance of her spikenard! Therefore, He gave the queen, that is the church, to offer the same sacrifice as a fragrance of the king's love to the queen, and the love of the queen to the king.

St. Augustine looks at the sacrifice of the king and sees it as the same sacrifice of the queen. He said: <sup>1</sup>"You are above the table! You are inside the chalice! This is what the church offers through the mystery of the altar! Offering the oblations to God, she offers herself as an oblation!"

"This great awesome sacrifice is ourselves!"

He also said: <sup>2</sup>"As long as the church is the body of the Head, then she learns to offer herself through Him."

Thus, as long as the King is sitting on His table, the queen comes to Him, then the fragrance of His knowledge appears in her (2 Cor. 2:15). She offers the spikenard of her love to Him, sacrificing herself for His sake, as He sacrificed His life for her. She goes with him to the myrrh saying:

**"A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts." (Song of Sol. 1: 13)**

Since He suffered for her and died on the cross, she comes to Him with myrrh, which is used in ointments and spices. She enters with him to the tomb carrying the myrrh to embalm His body.

The queen realized that her Bridegroom is the king "The Conqueror of death". The doors of Hades and the grave cannot prevail against Him. She knew Him as "the resurrection" who grants life, so she prepared for Him myrrh so he may enter in her heart, which becomes like a new tomb. There between her breasts, He sleeps to enter His holy tomb, where He does not smell the aroma of death, but spikenard and myrrh, and the grave is transformed into a holy temple where God dwells.

In this call of the queen to the king, we notice the following:

1. The queen does not present the myrrh in any way, but she wraps it as "a bundle of myrrh". Origen said<sup>3</sup>: Henceforth, the fragrance of the myrrh is not scattered outside, but remains inside, becoming stronger and better. Then the king dwells in her heart and in her bosom.

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<sup>1</sup> Christ in the Eucharist by the author, 1972, p. 105,107.

<sup>2</sup> City of God 10 ; 20.

<sup>3</sup> (3) Com. On Cant. 2:10



2. The queen used the expression "a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me" because according to the Law, everything which is not wrapped is defiled. (Num. 19:15) The soul which touches what is defiled becomes defiled. However, the Lord Christ has no guile in Him, but everything in Him is pure, and coming close to Him, one is sanctified.

Origen said that the bundle of myrrh refers to the teachings of the church pertaining to the divine incarnation, the teachings which bundle up to the truth, henceforth, no heresies can penetrate to those teachings. But the one who is affected by the heresies, that is the teachings not bundled up, becomes defiled.

3. Origen said that "the bundle of a drop of myrrh" refers to God the unlimited Word, who through His incarnation became "as a drop", emptying Himself carrying our nature.

4. Origen also said that the word "beloved" means my nephew. The church of the gentiles is telling that the community of the gentiles is like her older sister in her knowledge of God. The Lord Christ came from the Jews according to the flesh. The queen says: "The bundle of myrrh is my nephew to me" refers to the birth of the Lord Christ according to the flesh.

5. The queen did not say that He dwells in my house, but between my breasts. This statement is taken from an old custom where the wife used to hang a small picture of her husband on her breast.<sup>4</sup>

As the king has two breasts "the old testament and the new testament", also the queen has two breasts. God's book is the book of the church, where God rejoices when He finds that His church offers, to the world, His word as food to the souls. St. Jerome wrote to St. Pamachius the monk encouraging him to study the Holy Bible saying, "Give him your breasts to nurse from your bosom and to rest in his inheritance." (Ps. 68: 13)

6. At last, she calls him to sleep between her breasts, as if she is telling him with Hosea the prophet, "...Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts." (Hosea 2:2) O Holy Lord, may You find a dwelling place in my heart so You may rest the whole night. As long as I am in this temporal earth, I badly need You. May You enter in my life until the light of the eternity shines. May You sleep between my breasts, so I may hide You inside me. I will never forsake You, for I have none beside You!

## **A CLUSTER OF HENNA BLOOMS:**

**"My beloved is to me cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi." (Song of Sol. 1: 14)**

A cluster of henna blooms is a bundle of the fruit of henna, which the bride dyes her hand the night preceding her wedding so she may become all red with a nice aroma ready for her bridegroom. En Gedi was known for the good quality of its henna.

The King holding on to the cross as the scepter of his kingdom, and the queen is holding her Bridegroom with her hand, then His characteristics and the sign of his kingdom are printed on her, that is, carrying the red color. She will not become a queen until she carries signs of the cross and sacrificing herself to the point of shedding blood like her Bridegroom. This is the secret of her strength and her beauty; therefore, the King communes with her saying:

**"Beloved, you are fair, my love! Beloved, you are fair! You have dove's eyes." (Song of Sol. 1: 15)**

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<sup>4</sup> Father Abdel Messih El Nekhiely: Lights on the book of the song of Solomon, p. 58,59.

## **THE SECRET OF HER BEAUTY:**

For the second time, the Bridegroom, the King, communicates with his bride. The first time, He urged her to know herself that she is "fairest among women" (v.8). But now, He communes with her emphasizing that she is "Beloved, you are fair, my love! Beloved, you are fair!" Here, the word "my love" means my neighbor. He is telling her that the secret of her beauty is to be close to him, after he came close to her and descended to her. On Christmas Eve, St. Mar Efram El Syrian said, "This is a beautiful night, the Beautiful One came and made everything beautiful." The king, repeating "Beloved, you are fair," confirms his admiration to her. Here the king mixes the kingdom with the wedding feast, the strife with the beauty, appreciation and respect with love.

### **The dove's eyes:**

1. The king the Lord Jesus Christ sees special beauty in the church. The secret of that beauty is the dove's eyes. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came upon her and enlightened her.

Origen said <sup>9</sup>: "Her eyes are compared to the doves because now she understands the holy books according to the spirit and not according to the letter. She understands the spiritual mysteries in the holy books, for the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When we understand the Law and the prophets in a spiritual manner, then our eyes become like the doves. In the book of the Psalms, the human soul longed to have wings like the dove (Ps. 67:14) so she may fly to understand the spiritual mysteries and get settled in the courts of wisdom."

Once more, Origen summarizes this expression by saying: "Your eyes are like the doves, which can look and comprehend in a spiritual manner."

For the third time, Origen emphasized that the eyes of the dove refer to the pure, chaste heart who can understand the word of God in a spiritual manner. He said, "Who has the eyes of a dove sees the truth and deserves mercy." "The righteous see it and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth." (Ps. 107:42) Who sees the truth except the one with the chaste pure outlook? This matter does not apply to the physical eyes but to the eyes of the heart. May you go in the deep and seek, with your spirit, eyes which receive their light from the commandments of God, for the commandment of God enlightens the eyes. (Ps. 118:9) The one who has the simple eye can understand the Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove."

St. Gregory, the bishop of Nices, said: "When the pupil of the eye is pure, you can see the eyes of those looking at you. Thus, the beauty of the eyes of the bride is praised because of the picture of the dove (the Holy Spirit) which appears in them. A person who does not look at the flesh and the blood, but rather looks at the spiritual life; hence he lives according to the spirit and mortifies the works of the flesh, is no longer a natural or a carnal man but spiritual. The bridegroom praises the one who is liberated from the lust of the flesh by saying that the picture of the dove appears in her eyes, that is, the reflections of the spiritual life enlightens the inner soul."

2. The dove's eyes refer to the simple soul who quickly confesses her sins and comes to God with a pure repentance, as Ezekiel the prophet said, "Those who survive will escape and be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each for his iniquity." (Ezek. 7:16)

3. The simple eyes refer to the simple heart in dealing with others, as the Lord Jesus said, "Be simple as doves." St. Augustine Commented, "Notice how the doves preserve the life of love, for even if they fight, yet in simplicity, they cannot separate from each other."

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<sup>9</sup> Com. on Cant. 3:1

4. St. Ambrose said that the Lord Jesus always sees his church as a dove, for in baptism, He sees her wearing white clothes, without any defilement, conquering the darkness of water. Her eyes become like doves, for the Holy Spirit descends from heaven in the form of a dove.

5. In baptism, the eyes of the believer become like the dove's eyes, moreover, all his life becomes like a dove. "... If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." (Matt. 6:22,23) Hence, the whole body is enlightened, and man becomes like a dove, flying with the Holy Spirit inside the ark, to be continuously in the bosom of the true Noah!

## **THE SECRET OF THE UNITY:**

Since the soul had the dove's eyes, she looks at the mysteries of the word of God with the Holy Spirit, and realizes the beauty of her Bridegroom and enters in deep unity communing with Him:

**"Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also, our bed is green. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir." (Song of Sol. 1: 16, 17)**

Through the Holy Spirit, the church has looked at her Bridegroom the King and has seen that He is truly handsome and His love is sweet. She realized that He takes the credit for every beauty in her. Origen said, "It seems that the bride has seen the beauty of her Bridegroom more closely, and with her dove's eyes, she realized the beauty and sweetness of the word of God. Truly, no one can realize how awesome the word of God is unless he has the eyes of a dove, that is, through the spiritual enlightenment."

**"Our bed is green" (v. 16)**

What is this bed which is related to the king and queen (our bed)? This bed is the body in which the soul rests and which accepts the dwelling of God. Our body is no more a burden on the soul nor does it reject the work of God, but it is sanctified to become a temple of God in which the soul rests and by whom God rejoices. In the body, one meets God, and through the body, we enjoy the fellowship with God and we have the fruit of the spirit. Therefore, the bed is called green because it is fruitful.

Origen said: "In spite of the soul being in the body, yet she deserves to be in the company of the word of God. She receives divine power to grant goodness to the body and plants in it the grace of purity, chastity and other good deeds."

The queen does not say "my bed", but "our bed". Her body does not only belong to her, but to the Bridegroom the King. Therefore, St. Paul calls our bodies the members of Christ. (1 Cor. 6:15) Our bodies reflect the inner unity between the divine word and the soul.

The green bed also declares "the mystery of incarnation", for it is the body of the King. The divine Word took our human nature and carried us in Him; thus, we look at His body as a bed to us, for we find rest in Him and we are united with Him! The body of the Lord became obedient to the Father instead of our disobedience. He became pure instead of our defilement, and gave us victory over the devil!"

## **WORKERS IN THE ROYAL PALACE:**

After the queen talked about the fruit of her unity with the King, she declared the responsibility of the workers in the royal palace for the sake of this unity. She said:

**"The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir." (v. 17)**

Origen relates that the rafters, which are the slanted roofs which protect the houses from the heat of the sun, rain and storms, are the bishops who work with the Spirit of Christ to keep the believers in the faith. The beams, which bind the whole palace, are the priests who serve for the edification of the children of God. He said: "When the bishops perform their daily work in the church, they are like the rafters which protect the whole building from rain, heat of the sun. Next to them come the priests who are like beams."

The bishop has to be from the fir tree for the following reasons:

1. Fir trees are known for their great power and beautiful aroma. Origen said: "This indicates that the bishop has to have good deeds and carries the aroma of the grace of teaching." This means that he has two functions, to carry the Christian spiritual conduct and to spread the sweet aroma of Christ. He serves with his life and with his teaching!
2. Fir trees are characterized with their power and greatness. (2 Kings 19:23) The branches moving with the wind are like the shaking of the spears during wars. (Nahum 2:3) The bishop as a shepherd has to be strong in his spirit, his faith, and carries inner authority by the Holy Spirit and through his holy life. If he weakens, then the whole flock will stumble too.
3. During the building of Solomon's temple, the whole floor was covered with planks of cypress. (1 Kings 6:15) The bishop, appointed by the Spirit to be a leader and a shepherd, has to be humble (covered on the floor of the house). He sits at his children's feet washing their feet, with the spirit of love and humility! The congregation offers him as a head representing the Lord Christ. In his heart, he sees himself the last of all, helping the weak and the despised. He has to serve every one and not to be served from them.
4. The wood of fir trees is used in building ships (Ezek. 27:5), which cross the sea of this world to the heavenly port. Also, fir wood is used in making musical instruments. (2 Sam. 6:5), to instill in the people the spirit of joy and hope in Christ Jesus!
5. Fir wood is used in making spears (Nahum 2:3). The bishop has to preserve the faith against all heresies.
6. Due to the height of the fir trees, the bird builds its nest in it. (Ps. 104:7) Everyone, even unbelievers, sees in the spiritual bishop the heart elevated toward the heavenly matters and the mind occupied with the eternity.

This also applies to the priest. Origen said: "The beams were made of cedar, and cedar is known for its straight forwardness and nice aroma; in the same manner, the priests are filled with the aroma of the knowledge of Christ."

Cedar was used to build masts of ships (Ezek. 27:5). An analogy for that, the priest leads his people to the divine port. Cedar was used to build musical instruments; in the same manner, priests stir the spirit of joy in their children. Cedar was used in building the inner part of the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:20), as well as the altar (1 Kings 6:18). The message of the priest is to build the inner house of the heart, so he does not care about the outside appearance or is occupied with any other job. He represents the altar, whose main function is to offer to his people the slain Christ and offer prayers for them. He testifies to the cross and does not cease to pray for them until they all enter the eternal life.

# Chapter Two

## THE BELOVED MESSIAH

Since the soul has talked with her relatives about the Lord Christ as her Bridegroom, praising His love, next she meets Him as the good shepherd, also she gets acquainted with Him as the King, who makes her as a queen sitting beside Him. Now, she meets Him in the garden, in an informal manner to commune with Him.

He tells her, "If the world has attracted you with all its temptations and you have requested its pleasures, I descend to the world in the valleys so we may get to know each other."

**"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." (Song of Sol. 2: 1)**

Sharon is a valley in Judea, a fertile region where there is plenty of water. However, there was no plantation in it because it was in a narrow land which was used as a road between Egypt and Syria.. Sharon is of superior quality valley, where there is plantation without anyone tiring himself in planting. In the same manner, our Beloved appears in our land; He came to us with His grace and not because of our righteousness.

In the middle of the barren valleys, the Lord appears as a lily. St. Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, described the lily as a straight flower rising to the heights, and its bloom is away from the earth. Hence, the Lord came to our barren valleys to lift us above so that we may have the heavenly blooms.

This expression came in the Septuagint like that: "I am the flower of the field (plains) and the lily of the valleys." Origen commented: "The field is a piece of land where the farmers plant. But the valleys are usually stony land which was never planted. Thus, we understand that the field or plain represents the people whom the prophets and the Law have cultivated, and the stony valleys represent the Gentiles. The Bridegroom appears as a lily among the people, because the Law could not make anyone attain perfection. (Heb. 7:19) In the Old Testament, the word of God could not lead the people to progress toward perfection. In the valleys, which represent the Gentiles, He became like a lily.

The Lord Jesus is the flower of the Jewish nation; for He led the Law to Christ, who is the lily of the Gentiles when they accepted him as the Savior. He is the Christ of the whole world, whether Jews or Gentiles.

St. Jerome said that the flower of the field or the lily of the valley is the Messiah, who blossomed in Aaron's rod, the blossom who brought forth St. Virgin Mary. The blossom itself does not carry life but carried "the Life Himself."<sup>2</sup>

He also said, "Saying that He came from the wilderness<sup>3</sup> refers to the virgin who presented to us God incarnate, without any marital relations. Let us sing with the Psalmist, "... In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water, so I have looked for You in the sanctuary." (Ps. 63:1,2)

St. Ambrose said (4)<sup>4</sup>: "St. Mary is the rod and Christ is the blossom of St. Mary who spreads the sweet aroma of faith in the whole world, for He appeared as blossom in the virgin's womb, for He said about Himself, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." (v.1)

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<sup>2</sup> (2) Epist. 22: 18 to Eustachim

<sup>3</sup> (3) Epist. 75: 1 to Theodora.

<sup>4</sup> (4) On the Holy Spirit 38,39

When you pluck a flower, it keeps its smell, and when it is crushed, it has more smell. When it is cut in pieces, it does not lose its nice aroma. In the same manner, the Lord Jesus was hung on the cross, did not fail when bruised and did not weaken when being torn. When pierced with the spear, He became more handsome with the blood shed from Him. He carried new beauty; He cannot die spiritually, but He grants the dead the gift of eternal life. The Holy Spirit has descended on the this rose which blossomed in the royal rod."

This is our Beloved, and we are his bride. With His sufferings, He carried the sweet aroma which those in the plain smell, that is the Jews, and those in the valley smell, that is the Gentiles. What are we in relation to Him?

**"Like a lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters." (Song of Sol. 2:2)**

Origen said: "Since He became the lily of the valleys, He wants His beloved to become also a lily to follow His example, meaning that every soul who gets close to Him and follows His example becomes a lily."

St. Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, says that the soul is like a lily ascending up toward the Messiah, her true vine-dresser. She rises up above the cares of this life and the thorns of sin which choke the soul (Mark. 4:18), and is elevated above the dirt of this life so she may not get defiled.

The believer, in the eyes of God, is like a lily, a gorgeous flower, which even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. She is beautiful, not due to her self-righteousness, but due to the grace of the blood which flows inside her.

Since man accepted the thorns of sin, however, God sees him as a lily. He descends to him and passes through the thorns and carries the curse from him!

In the communing of the Beloved: "Like a lily among the thorns", this is an indication that if she wants to be adorned with virtues, she has to endure the sufferings of the thorns very cautiously. St. Ambrose said, "Virtues are surrounded with the thorns of spiritual evil, and no one can gather the fruits unless he comes with caution."

Origen sees a true beautiful picture of the church when surrounded by heresies and heretics who want to destroy the church.

St. Augustine relates that those who are doing good are minority among the world, "Like a lily among the thorns", until the harvest comes and the lilies and the thorns are sorted.

## **THE NEED FOR THE BELOVED:**

Since the human soul becomes a lily among the thorns, however, she is not occupied with the thorns surrounding her, but with the Bridegroom who satisfies her, quenches her thirst, and grants her rest. She sees Him approaching her ascending on the cross until she rests within His eternal love. He offers her the fruit of the cross as sweetness in her taste. Hence, she communes with Him saying:

**"Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down in His shade with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." (Song of Sol. 2:3)**

Since she is living among the thorns and cannot rise to Him, He descends to her and becomes like an apple tree (symbol of the incarnation). He dwelled among us, we the fruitless trees, and became like one of us, but not without fruits like us, but as the beautiful apple tree with

a nice aroma. Its fruit is eaten and its juice is drunk... it is the tree of life which we pluck instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Truly, the earth has dried up for we ate from the tree of disobedience, but the Beloved "the obedient Son" came among the thorns, passed through our sufferings, carried the curse of the thorns, so that we may sit at His feet and be shaded under the cross of His love among the tribulations of this world.

In the world, there are many unfruitful trees, but there is only one true, which is the tree of the spiritual apple, full of satisfaction.

Since "the apple tree" refers to the divine incarnation, then the unfruitful trees refer to the heresies and strange doctrines. There is no rest for us except in the Word Incarnate, away from all heresies. Origen said: "The bride desires to sit under the shade of the apple tree, meaning that the church becomes under the refuge of the Son of God, or meaning that the soul flees from all strange doctrines to cleave only to the Word of God, then she finds his fruit sweet to her taste, through continuous meditation in God's Law, digesting his words as a clean animal does."

In the old times, the Gentiles sat under the shades of death (Is. 9:2, Matt. 4:16), for they sat under the tree of disobedience, but now they enjoy the shade of the Grantor of life by their sitting under the cross of obedience.

In the Old Testament, the Jews sat under the Law, through the literal understanding, but now it is granted to us to enter under the shade of Christ by tasting the spiritual understanding of the Law which edifies us. Here is a comparison between the shade of the Law and the shade of Christ by Origen: "It is apparent that every soul in this present life needs to be under a shade, because of the heat of the sun which withers the seeds with no roots. The shade of the Law provided some protection against the heat, however the shade of Christ, under whom the Gentiles live, that is faith in the incarnation, provides perfect protection from the heat, and moreover, it removes the heat completely. Satan, who used to burn those who were under the shade of the Law, was seen falling like lightning, during the time of Christ. But this shade will be completed at the end of ages, for as we said that at the end of all ages, we no longer see Christ dimly in a mirror but face to face."<sup>9</sup>

St. Mary, representing the church, as a perfect member, sat under the shade of the Almighty, through the divine incarnation, as the angel told her, "The power of the highest shall overshadow you, and the Holy One born of you is called the Son of God." Hence, the believer was able to sit under the shade of the Lord and to eat His sweet fruit, after his mouth was bitter because of sin. It was mentioned that "his throat is an open tomb" (Ps. 5:9). She opened her mouth not as a tomb carrying the death of sin, but rather eating the Body of the Grantor of life and tasting the sweetness of his fruits. She also says, "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for your commandments." (Ps. 119:131)

Origen said: "His fruit is sweet to my taste applies to the soul who has no defilement in her mouth, and does not follow those whom was said, "Their throat are open tombs". Those mouths which utter words of death and destruction are called tombs. These utter words against the true faith and against purity, justice and dignity.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

## IN THE HOUSE OF PERFECT LOVE:

The soul sitting with her Beloved under the cross, tasting his infinite love, asks Him to go in the deep to be quenched from the springs of His deep love. She says:

**"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick." (Song of Sol. 2: 4,5)**

The banqueting house is the house of "the new life", which is granted to us through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The banqueting house symbolizes "the house of banquet and wisdom", where one receives the teachings of the truth in the divine wisdom and is revived everyday, for one gets acquainted with the mysteries of God as if they are new every day.

Origen said: "The wine which is extracted from the true vine, the Lord Jesus, is continuously new. The understanding of the students is continuously renewed, that is why the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "But I say to you, I will not drink the fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matt. 26:29) Understanding the hidden mysteries and declaring the mysteries is continuously renewed through the wisdom of God, not only to human beings but also to angels and the heavenly hosts.

When the Lord enters with the believer to the house of banqueting and reveals to him the mysteries of the new wisdom, then "love" is understood as a sign of victory of her Beloved and King. The believer, then, raises the banner of love. The Lord has completely ruled over the believer, for in the Septuagint, this statement was written like this: "Put in me the virtue of love." (v.4)

When the soul enters the house of her Beloved, she is obligated to abide by the rule of His house, which is, love. However, because she does not know how to apply it, she asks him to plan the life of love, that is, to receive from God, "the true love", the rule of his love, so she learns how to love God, parents and brothers.

One is obligated to love God from all the heart, the soul, and strength, that is, to have unlimited and unconditional love, and to love his neighbor as himself. (Mark 12:30, Deut. 6:4) If one prefers his love for himself (his salvation) more than his love to his brothers, then his love is not in the right track.. One has to love his parents through his honoring them in the Lord. The husband has to love his wife in a different way than the love of children to their parents and different from the love of the shepherd to his people. Truly, in the house of love, we receive the nature of the true love from its source "God Himself"; therefore, we have to know the law of practical love.<sup>13</sup>

Then, one cries declaring her need to "love" saying:

**"Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick." (Song of Sol. 2: 5)**

Entering the banqueting house and accepting the true love, she declares that she became lovesick. It is impossible that this sickness pertains to physical love, for according to Eastern traditions, a female cannot say that she is lovesick, but only the male. On the other side, how can a beloved tell someone beside her beloved to refresh her and sustain her? Can the cakes of raisins and apples cure the wounds of her love or heal her sickness?

These are the cries of one inside the church (the banqueting house), for she asks from the servants of Christ to pour the love of Christ inside her and to let his sweet aroma spread. She

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<sup>13</sup> Origen and St. Gregory, the bishop of Neoces, explain true love according to the divine commandment.



asks for the apple, which is a symbol of the holy Body, this is the secret of her spiritual revival! He alone can satisfy her heart with love.

The secret of the lovesickness, as Origen<sup>15</sup> said is Christ Himself, for He is the living word of God, sharper than a two edged sword, which enters into the depths of the soul and wounds it with the divine love. These are some of the comments of the Fathers:

St. Augustine said: "Let the sick be wounded, for when they are wounded, they become well!"

St. Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, said: "The Holy Bible teaches that God is love (1 John 4:8). He has pointed His Only Son "the chosen arrow" (Is. 49:2) toward the chosen ones. The head of the arrow is the faith which binds those who shoot the arrow with those who are hit, as if the soul rises up with divine elevations and sees inside her the arrow of sweet love. It is a nice wound and sweet suffering where "life" hits the soul, for through the tears of "the arrow", the soul opens the door which is her inner self."

When one is inflamed with true love to the word of God, one accepts to be wounded with "the chosen arrow", as the prophet calls it. When one longs and pants for Him day and night, to the extent that he cannot talk except about Him, cannot listen except to Him, cannot think except about Him, and does not have other desire except to be with Him, and does not have any hope except in Him, then one can say that she is lovesick. It was said about Him, "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and make Me a polished shaft: in His quiver He has hidden Me." (Is. 49:2)

God can wound our souls with these shafts and arrows. He can hit us with these healing wounds.

As long as God is "love", then they say about themselves: "I am lovesick". Truly, this is love dramatized, for one says, "I have accepted the wounds of love!"

Origen said: "When one pants toward the wisdom of God, that is, when one is able to look at the beauty of His wisdom, one says, "I am lovesick with His wisdom". The one who is dazzled with the power of His word and His might, can say, "I am lovesick with His might." This is the same soul who said, "The Lord is my light and salvation whom shall I fear, the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1) When one is inflamed with the love of God's justice and meditates on His care, one says "I am lovesick with His justice." The one who is overwhelmed with His compassionate love, says the same things. All that is the sickness of love, which the bride declares saying, 'I am lovesick'."

These are the sicknesses of love when one is hit with this "polished shaft" the Lord Jesus, who puts His left hand under our heads to direct us away from the temporal matters, and with His right hand, He draws us toward the heavenly matters; therefore one calls Him"

**"His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me." (Song of Sol 2: 6)**

This means that He chastises us with His left hand, then all temporal and carnal matters seem trifle before us. And with His right hand, He pities us and opens our heart to desire the heavenly matters. In any case, the Lord puts His chastening under our heads, for without them, our heads would not be stable. He also surrounds us with His right hand so our hearts are filled with hope in Him! These are the sicknesses of the true, healing, and divine love.

When one enters the banqueting house and is pierced with the chosen shaft, one feels His infinite love, whether in His chastisement or His compassion. In both cases, one feels that her head is laying on His left hand and surrounded by His right hand. Thus, one becomes embodied

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<sup>15</sup> Com. on John 36

in His divine bosom, and is face to face with Him, so she can receive all the kisses of His divine mouth. She is cautious that no one interrupts this deep relationship. She says:

**"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." (Song of Sol. 2: 7)**

She carried the same feeling that St. Peter had on the mountain of transfiguration when he said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." (Matt. 17:4)

This statement cannot apply to carnal love, for how can a girl ask her friends not to wake her beloved ? Is this her job? However, this is a marvelous picture of the mother church who asks her children (the daughters of Jerusalem), to remain in the divine bosom and not to trouble the Lord resting in their hearts, by committing sin or evil! This is the voice of the mother church to every believer who is called "daughter of Jerusalem" to remain in the divine bosom, and not to trouble the Lord who wants to rest in their hearts! This is the voice of the mother church to every believer who is called "daughter of Jerusalem", looking toward the heavenly Jerusalem as her mother, charging her by the gazelles of the fields which the Lord has blessed (Gen. 27:27), for she is the field of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:9) to remain embraced to the divine love living inside her. (19)<sup>18</sup>

This is the voice of the church directed to the Jews, the daughters of Jerusalem who saw the Messiah on the cross, buried in a tomb. He appeared in weakness, but rose on the third day by His own free will. He said, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10:18) Unfortunately, the Jews have rejected to accept the Crucified Christ, waiting for a Christ according to their desires.

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<sup>18</sup> St. Gregory, bishop of Neocesarea, sees that the bride addresses the souls under her direction, asking them to pass through this world (field) not giving attention to the outside temporary forces, but to concentrate on the inner purity by sacrificing themselves. (sermon 4 in the commentary for Song of Solomon)

# Chapter 2

## THE FIANCÉE SEEKING HIS BELOVED

### HE HIMSELF DESCENDS TO HER

**"The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. (Song of Sol. 2:8,9)**

The church of the Gentiles is gently rebuking the Jewish nation by saying, "I became acquainted with the word of God or the voice of the Beloved, who came incarnate through the Jews (nephew). I have known Him through the Law and the shadows of prophecies. He came leaping joyfully through the Law. But in the fullness of time, He came like a gazelle, carrying our nature, hiding in it, standing behind our wall, talking directly with us.

She accepted the message of His incarnation through the Law and the prophets. She was able to recognize His voice. (John 10:3,4)

St. Gregory, bishop of Nices, said: "The majesty of the "Word" has gone to the church first through the prophets. Finally, through the declaration of the Gospel, all the shadows of the symbols were abolished, the middle wall was destroyed, and the atmosphere of the inner house was connected to the heavenly light. There was no more need for the window lights as long as the true light has lighted the inside with the light of the Gospel."

### MEETING ON THE MOUNTAIN

Since the church knew the Word Incarnate through the Law of the New Testament and the prophecies, then here is a calling to everyone to rise up on the mountain of the holy Bible to meet the Fiancée who is coming to propose to his bride. The Psalmist says: "His foundation is in the holy mountain." (Ps. 87:P1) "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help?" (Ps. 121:1)

Origen states that the one who wants to meet the "Word of God" on the mountains and on the hills, has to meet Him first on the mountains of the books of the New Testament and the hills of the books of the Old Testament, which were hidden for long time.

In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord sends fishermen and hunters to hunt people from every mountain and every hill. (Jer. 16:16) This is a prophecy about the missionary work of the church where she fishes for the souls through the Holy Bible so they may enjoy the blessings of salvation.

On these holy mountains, the souls meet the word of God, and she sees Him the Fiancée who proposes for her. There she hears the voice of His call to her, then she experiences His love and discovers His divine mysteries and sees His glory.

The soul rises with Moses on Mount Horeb and sees the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) and realizes the mystery of the incarnation. She sees St. Mary (the bush) carrying the coal of fire without burning.

She rises with Moses on the mountain to receive the ten commandments, not printed on two tablets of stone, but to have the word of God Himself in her heart!

She sits with the multitudes to see the Lord Christ rising on the mountain, opening His mouth and talking directly with her without any boundaries. (Matt. 5:1) She may rise with Him on Mount Tabor where she sees Him transfigured and she realizes the majesty of His divinity and hears Him talk with Moses and Elijah about the salvation. She may climb with the "word of God", on the mountain of temptation to see Him tempted by the devil and conquered him for her sake!

The believer realizes why the Lord Jesus was called a stone cut which became a great mountain. (Dan. 2:34) The church is called Mount Zion because it refers to God's dwelling among His people. She listens to what the two angels said to Lot: "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains lest you be destroyed." (Gen. 19:17)

## **COMPARISON WITH THE GAZELLE AND THE YOUNG STAG:**

**What does the bride compare her fiancée to?**

**"My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice." (Song of Sol 2: 9)**

1. The Lord Jesus is compared to the gazelle (deer). The word gazelle in Hebrew means "beauty". The Lord Jesus proposed to the human soul who has defiled her inner nature and spiritual beauty by sin. He pours His beauty on her . He summarized this act of salvation in a sweet conversation with her. He said, "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God. Then, I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus, you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You are pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty." (Ezek. 16:6-14)

What a beautiful conversation from the Lord Savior toward the church. He passed by her and found her naked and struggling in her own blood. He completely sanctified her, spread His wing over her, that is, He made her His bride, clothed her nakedness with His blood, washed her in the baptismal water, anointed her with the Mayroon oil, put on His life on her, gave her His Gospel, the secret of her salvation, adorned her with the works of the Holy Spirit, put His holy yoke around her neck, made her His sweet aroma, sanctified her ears, beautified her by hearing the divine promises and the heavenly praises, satisfied her with the heavenly bread. In brief, He made her "exceedingly beautiful" , and she became worthy to become a queen reflecting the splendor of the Savior on her life.

St. John Chrysostom said<sup>2</sup>: "The Great and Strong One desires an adulterous. I speak of the human nature. If one desires an adulterous, he is condemned; so how come God desires an

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<sup>2</sup> St. John Chrysostom: The church loves you, two sermons for Eutrobas, 1966, p. 53,54.

adulterous to become His bridegroom? He did not send one of His servants, nor an angel, nor an arch angel, nor a cherubim, nor a seraphim, but He Himself who loved her came down to her. He does not lead her, as an adulterous, to the heavens, but He Himself descended to her. As long as she cannot go up to heaven, He descended on earth for her. He came to the adulterous, and was not ashamed to hold her while she was drunk..."

In other words, the Lord came to us as "a gazelle" to make us a beautiful perfect gazelle who can live up in the highest, that is, in the heavenly matters, as the Psalmist said, "He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on high places." (Ps. 18:33)

2. St. Augustine said: <sup>3</sup> "He made my love perfect, so that I may ascend above the world full of thorns and darkness. He lifts me above the high hills and direct my goal toward the heavenly home, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:19)

3. Origen sees that the word "gazelle" in Greek, means his eyes are very sharp. He comments on that, (4): <sup>4</sup> "Who can see as Christ sees? He is the only One who sees the Father and knows Him. It was written that the pure in heart shall see God; this is through the revelation of Christ to them. (John 6:6) The nature of the gazelle is not only to see very sharp, but also grants others to see. Therefore, Christ is compared to the gazelle and the deer, not only because He sees the Father, but also because He makes Him seen to those whom He heals. We should not consider "Seeing the Father", with any physical understanding or think that God can be seen, for God cannot be seen with a physical eyesight, but with spiritual. Then, He grants those whom He gives the power to see the spirit of knowledge and wisdom, so that they may see God. He told His disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father also..." (John 14:9)

4. The gazelle or the deer is known for the swiftness of walking (2 Sam. 2:18) The Word Incarnate, who came in the fullness of time, that is many years after the fall of man, was not slow in our salvation. He came to prepare the salvation; in the fullness of time, He descended to us before we even sought Him.

5. St. Augustine said that the deer are not only swift in motion, but also in running toward the brooks of water. On the way, he kills the serpents, then he is more thirsty for the water brooks. David the Psalmist said, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, O God." (Ps. 42:1)

All the believers assemble with one spirit panting for the love of God, as a deer panting for the water brooks. The Son of God came as a deer thirsty for our "love", and on the way of salvation because of His love to us, He destroyed the old serpent, that is, Satan.

6. One of the habits of the deer is jumping over the rocks. (2 Sam. 22:34), Habak. 3:19) The bridegroom did not ask for the easy road but swiftly accepted suffering joyfully for our sake. St. Paul said, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Heb. 12:2)

7. According to the Mosaic Law, the deer or the gazelle was considered from the clean animals, and eating such animal was lawful. (Deut. 12:22, 14:5) Therefore, the comparison was to the deer and the gazelle, for the fiance when proposing to the bride, He offers His Body and Blood as a dowry for her; and this is the secret of her sanctification and eternity!

8. As the fiancée was compared to the deer or gazelle, in the same manner, his bride who carried his marks, was compared also to the gazelle. In the book of Psalms, "The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth..." (Ps. 29:9) In God's speech with Job in the storm, He said, "Do you know the time when the wild mountain goats bear young? Or can you mark when the deer

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<sup>3</sup> On Pslams 18 (17): 34

<sup>4</sup> Origen: Com. on. Cant. 3: 12

gives birth? Can you number the months that they fulfill? Or do you know the time when they bear young? They bow down, they bring forth their young, they deliver their offspring. Their young ones are healthy, they grow strong with grain; they depart and do not return to them." (Job 39:1-4) <sup>6</sup>

Origen commented on the previous two statements saying that he means, here, the spiritual gazelles. The voice of the Lord, who is Christ the Word of God, grants the gazelles the life of perfection (Ps. 29:9). He is the secret of her perfection. Regarding the Lord's talk with Job about the gazelles, the Lord wanted to emphasize His personal care with all the believers. He cares for them spiritually, and when they beget virtues, He nurtures them, as if the Lord, who is in the book of the Song of Solomon, is compared to the gazelle. And He, in turn, compares us to gazelles and our inner life and our virtues, that is our behavior in Christ Jesus.

In the book of Proverbs, the wife is compared to the gazelle and her children to the doe, being the image of the church, the true bride, the loving wife to her Bridegroom, full of grace. Therefore, it was said, "As a loving deer and a graceful doe..." (Prov. 5:19)

9. Comparing Him with the small gazelle, confirms His incarnation, for the unlimited God, became an infant, emptying Himself for our sake.

10. His comparison with the gazelle reminds us with the title of Psalm 22 "To the chief musician. Set to the deer of the dawn." This is the psalm which describes the detailed events of the crucifixion, the resurrection. What does he mean by "the deer of the dawn", except the new life which the Savior has offered us by His resurrection on Sunday morning?

He came leaping on the mountains, jumping on the hills to make us enter to the power of His resurrection, that is, to accept the new life which became in Christ Jesus. St. Paul said, "And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:6)

11. At last, mentioning "mountains of Bethel" refers to the holy books for the house of God (El), that is the church. We cannot experience the beauty of the house of God and cannot accept His incarnation, resurrection and His work in us unless through the work of the church (the house of God).

## **HIS STANDING BEHIND OUR WALL:**

1. Since the Savior descended to us and proposed to us, He came even to the wall which we have built because of our disobedience to God. He came to the veil which has separated us from the holy of holies, and stood struggling even to the blood. He conquered it and opened a heavenly road through which we should walk.

We are the ones who built this veil, hence we became unable to ascend to Him. Therefore, He descended to us, and on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn so that He may appear with His resurrection through the windows which He has made.

2. The wall refers to our human nature, for He descended to us hiding behind our nature, so that we do not fear Him, but accept Him, love Him and unite with Him.

## **THE CALL TO THE RESURRECTION:**

The fiancé descended to the house of his bride, knowing that many traps are laid for her making her unable to go outside alone and ascend to his house. He Himself whom the traps of

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sin cannot hold nor death cannot trap. conquered sin under His feet, and by His death, He trampled over death. He is now asking His fiancée to go out with Him without fear to experience "the resurrected life" or the new life, which became hers through the resurrection. He told her, "Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away." (v. 10) Do not fear, be of good cheer, for I have overcome all the evils of the world and the dominion of death.

Origen commented on the call of the Lord Jesus to His fiancée saying, "He tells her that so that she may despise the windows which Satan has opened in front of her, and not fear all the traps."

He called her, with authority to cleave to Him and become His meek dove carrying the fruits of the resurrection in her life. He said, "

**"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!" (Song of Sol. 2: 10-13)**

This is a call to the first resurrection, the resurrection of the human soul from the death of sin, and its release over the carnal lusts to live according to the spirit and not according to the flesh.

Origen said, "The Word of God talks to the beautiful soul and appears to her through the readings of the Holy Bible and listening to the teachings, as though from the windows. He appears as a tall great Person talking with the previous words, bowing to her and asking her to go out of the carnal lusts, so she may deserve to listen to the voice saying, "You are not in the flesh but in the spirit..." (Rom. 8:9)

The Word of God could not call her His relative nor be united with her (1 Cor. 6:17), and call her beautiful unless He sees her picture renewed every day. (2 Cor. 4:16) He would not have seen her capable of accepting the Holy Spirit, who ascended on the Lord Jesus in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:6), nor have called her "His dove" unless she has realized the love of the Word of God and desired to be released with him saying, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest." (Ps. 55:6) I fly with my emotions, with my spiritual understanding, and rest when I realize the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)

Those who mortify their earthly desires become partakers in the likeness of His death (Col. 3:5, Rom. 6:5). Those who accept the power of the Holy Spirit and are sanctified and filled by the Holy Spirit become doves like Him, for He appeared in the form of a dove. They rise with the wings of the Holy Spirit and fly from the earthly to the heavenly places.

In order for the appropriate time to come, he interferes in a logical way saying, "**For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.**" (v. 11) The human soul does not unite with the Word of God until all the winter of her worries and the storm of her vice are over. She is no more shaken by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). When the storms of the lusts are over, then the flowers of the virtues start blossoming. Then the voice of the dove is heard, which refers to the wisdom uttered by "the Word", the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery. (1 Cor. 2:6)

Mentioning "the turtle-dove" refers to this truth: this bird spends his time in the hidden and far places away from the multitudes. He loves the mountainous deserts or the hidden regions in the forests, and he is always away from the multitudes.

What fits this age and its luxuries?

He says, "The fig tree puts forth her green figs". The spiritual person, to whom the fig tree refers, does not carry yet the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, etc... (Gal. 5:22), but carries the green figs.

The different kinds of trees are symbolized to the souls of the believers, for it is written, "Every plant which my Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted." (Matt. 15:13) Also, St. Paul called himself "working with God" in His vine (1 Cor. 3:9) He said, "I planted and Apollos watered." (1 Cor. 3:6) The Lord Jesus said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit." (Matt. 12:33) The different varieties of trees symbolize the different virtues of the souls.

Hence, in the soul, there is the fig tree which produces green figs and the vine which produces tender grapes giving a good smell, but the vinedresser is the Heavenly Father who prunes the vineyard until it brings forth more fruit. (John 15:1)

It is strange that He calls her to experience the resurrection by saying, "Rise up... the time of singing has come." This means the time of pruning has come which refers to the cross and the crucifixion, where the deeds of the old man and the carnal lusts are removed until they carry more spiritual fruits with heavenly traits! He takes her to the sufferings and the cross so she may carry the fruits of the resurrection. He separates her from the coldness of the spirit to enter the spring of the new life, resurrected in Christ Jesus.

This invitation to the resurrection is directed to the whole world, to both the Jews and the Gentiles The fig tree refers to the Law, for through the descent of the Word to the world, the law was not interpreted through the letter but through the spirit. The Jews who accepted the Lord Christ carried the fruits of the spirit, and their heart was wide open with love to the whole world. The Law was no more a subject for bragging over the Gentiles as they were before. He says, "The fig tree has brought forth green figs. He also says, "The time of singing has come," that is, the time of pruning the vine. Since the vine refers to the Old Testament, to the Jewish nation, therefore, it is essential to prune its proud branches until they accept the membership of the Gentiles, then the nice aroma of Christ will fill the whole world. It is important to prune the vine from the earthly temporal concepts until it comprehends the spiritual heavenly meanings.

## **THE RESURRECTION: GOING OUT FROM THE COLDNESS TO THE WARMTH**<sup>8</sup>

St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, relates that the spring where the flowers appeared and the smell of the figs and vine spread, were God's creation. David the Psalmist said, "You have made summer and winter." (Ps. 73:17) The cold winter season is over and the warm spring has come. In the winter, man was in the coldness of paganism. His changing nature has changed to evil solid nature like the nature of the gods which they worshipped. "Those who look to the true God accept the marks of the divine nature inside them, in the same manner, those who look to the pagan gods are changed to the same things that they look at, thus they become like stones not human beings. By worshiping the idols, they become stagnant rocks unable to progress. "The Sun of righteousness" shone amidst the cold bitter winter and the spring has appeared. The wind of the south has abolished that stagnation, and by the appearance of the rays of the sun, the warmth spread to all those on whom the rays have fallen."

Since the cold winter of paganism has changed man into stone, but the divine word "the Sun of righteousness" has shone transforming the cold stones into warm water, as David the



Psalmist said, " " (no reference). "God is able to raise children of Abraham from these stones." (Matt. 3:9)

In this spring which the Lord has done by His resurrection, the Divine Word calls His bride to rise saying, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." V. 10) This call is directed to the bride, to rise and proceed toward the road of perfection. The Lord said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house." (Matt. 9:6) "The Word did not ask him only to carry his bed, but also to go to his house. By going to his house, he meant to grow and progress toward the road of perfection." He also commands his bride, "Rise up and come away." This order carries power which the Groom offers to His bride by rising and proceeding toward the road of perfection.

His calling, "My love, my fair one" are arranged in a precise manner. St. Gregory said, "Notice the order of the words, how each word is associated with the previous word. All the words are interrelated as if in a chain. The bride listens to the commandment, carrying power to implement it. She rises then she comes away, then she cleaves to Him and becomes beautiful and is called a dove. How can you see a beautiful picture in a mirror unless this mirror accept the reflections of a beautiful form? In the same manner, the mirror of the human nature cannot be beautiful unless the Beautiful (God) approaches her, and is formed in her through the image of the divine beauty. When the human nature fell and obeyed the serpent, it carried its form. But now, when the human nature rises and gives its back to sin, she carries the image of the good for she looks at the true Beauty, that is the dove. When she approaches the light, she carries image of the light. Through this light, she carries the form of the beloved dove. The dove symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit."

This is the secret of being fruitful in the spring. Through His resurrection, He came close to us, so we came close to Him and carried His beauty (my fair one), so we became His dove (for the Holy Spirit dwelled in our inner life.)

## **REPETITION OF THE RESURRECTION CALL:**

The Lord repeats his call to his fiancée saying:

**"Rise up my love, my fair one and come away! O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely." (Song of Sol. 2: 13,14)**

Why does He repeat calling his fiancée to rise? St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, said: He calls the risen bride to rise again, for it is appropriate for her to go from glory to glory. (2 Cor. 3:18) She looks at herself and finds that she is less than her expectation. Although she is a dove because she is perfect in Christ, yet He calls her to become " a dove", that is, to become more than perfect. When she rises, he calls her to rise giving her strength for continual progress.

The first time He calls her to rise up and come away: "Rise up and come away." Now He calls her to come in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff. Since winter has gone where she was enclosed inside herself, yet she has to come out of the lusts of the flesh and of the entire world. He calls her to meet Him inside the eternal invisible forts!

Since St. Paul the apostle saw in the rock the Person of the Lord Jesus Himself (1 Cor. 10:4), yet here the Groom asks his bride to come out from the visible world, moreover, to see Christ Himself, the true Rock, so she can live with Him without veil but to see His glory with an unveiled face, (2 Cor. 3:18) and talk with Him.

Her entrance to the Rock to meet the Groom refers to her security. There, the old serpent could not find any way, for it is written in the book of Proverbs, "There are three things which are too wonderful for me. Yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock.... (Prov. 30:18) Origen commented: "There is no way for a serpent on a rock, that is, there is no trace for sin on the rock which is Christ, for He alone is without sin. Since the souls get refuge inside the Rock, then they go peacefully to the place of the forts, that is, they meditate on the spiritual eternal matters.

David talked about the Rock in an analogy by writing in the Psalms, "He put my feet on the rock..." (Ps. 40:3) (wrong reference). Do not marvel, to David, the rock is like the land or foundation on which the soul walks toward God, and to Solomon, it is like the cover which covers the soul to enjoy the inner mysteries of wisdom. The Lord Jesus Himself was called "the way" (John 14:6), where the believers walk through, and another time, He was called "the forerunner", as St. Paul wrote, "Where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus..." (Heb. 6:20)

In the same manner, God told Moses, "... I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back..." (Exod. 33:22,23) This rock is Christ, not completely closed but has a cleft. In the mean time, God reveals Himself to people from this cleft in the rock, for no one knows the Father except the Son. (Matt. 11:27) No one can see what is behind God, that is, the events of the Last Day, until one enters the cleft in the rock, that is, through the revelation of the Lord Jesus Himself.

The Lord's call for the resurrection is a call for entry to meet the Lord Jesus with an unveiled face. ..."Let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice."

This saying does not mean that her face is hidden from Him or her voice is not heard, but He wants her to be united with Him, so she appears before Him in intimacy as a bride appearing without a veil and talking with Him very frankly!

Origen commented on this call: <sup>11</sup>

"Under the cover of the rock, the word of God calls the soul which became his relative, to enter the fort, which means reflecting on the invisible eternal matters. Here, He says, "Let me see your countenance". Definitely, there is no trace for the old mask which was covering her face, but she was able to reflect on God's glory without fear saying: "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

She deserved to hear what was said about Moses, "Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice." (Exod. 19:19) His saying "Let me hear your voice," is fulfilled in her. Truly, she enjoys such a great praise when God tells her, "Your voice is sweet"! David the Psalmist said, "May my meditations be sweet to Him." (Ps. 104:34) The voice is sweet when it utters the word of God and interprets the faith and the teachings of the truth and reveals God's judgments. However, when the voice utters silly talks or inappropriate humor or trifles or idle words, which one has to give an account of in the day of judgment, (Matt. 12:36) then the voice is no longer sweet. Christ does not listen to such a voice! A perfect soul sets a guard over his mouth and keeps watching over the door of his lips, so that whatever she utters is seasoned with salt and gives grace to the hearers. (Col. 4:6) Then the Word of God says, "Your voice is sweet."

He also says, "Your countenance is beautiful." We can realize what kind of countenance which the Lord has described as beautiful, when we comprehend what St. Paul meant by face: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall

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<sup>11</sup> Origen: Comm. on Cant. 3: 14.

know just as I also am known." (1 Cor. 13:12) No doubt, this kind of face is renewed every day, (2 Cor. 4:16) according to the image of his Creator (Col. 3:10), with no guile, but sanctified like the church with no spot or wrinkle, so that He might present it to Himself (Eph. 5:27). In other words, what is meant here are the souls who attain perfection, who form the body of the church. This body appears beautiful, when the souls are persistent to attain the beauty of perfection. When the soul is troubled, the face is marred; however, when the soul is calm, the face is peaceful and gentle. In the same manner, the face of the church becomes beautiful or miserable according to the traits of the believers and their ambitions. It was written, "The mark of a happy heart is a cheerful face." (Sirach 13:26) Also, in the book of Proverbs, "A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart, the spirit is broken." (Prov. 15:13) A heart, filled with the Spirit of God, is happy because the fruits of the Spirit are love and joy. (Gal. 5:22) There are also worldly sayings which say that the wise is beautiful and the evil is ugly.

This is a detailed illustration about the "secret places of the cliff". This means there is a gate in front of gate. Isaiah expressed this by saying, "... God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks." (Is. 26:1) The wall refers to the city, and the other wall surrounding it refers to stronger shields. The Word of God calls the soul to be detached from the carnal cares to learn the mysteries of the life to come. She is sheltered and puts her hope in the eternities and is not worried by temptations.

The Lord's call to the church or to the human soul to experience the resurrection is a call to be released from the ego and the carnal matters to cross to the heavenly new life. This is an entrance to the "secret places of the cliff", that is, to the bosom of the Heavenly Father in which the church takes refuge as the dove for Christ. Christ risen from the dead wants to enter His believers to the bosom of the Father and declares to them the divine mysteries. He said, "No one has seen God at any time. The Only Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18) In another place He said, "... All things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) Also, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me, will be with Me where I am, that they behold My glory." (John 17:24)

He calls her to be united with Him (the True Rock) and to enter to the bosom of the Father, "the secret place of the cliff," to be with Him forever. These are the eternal refuges which impart beauty on the church, so her voice is sweet and her countenance is beautiful!

In the same manner, the fiance calls his bride to rise from the carnal thoughts to the spiritual ones, so she is no more a silly dove. (Hosea 7:11) He sees us pure and meek, longing for our prayers and cleaving to Him. He continually sees her face and hears her voice.

## **HE WARNS HER FROM THE SLANDERERS**

Since "The Word of God" descended to man, stretching forth His hand to him and man has accepted Him, yet He is warning him from the slanderers, who want to destroy the union between God and man:

**"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." (Song of Sol. 2: 15)**

Repeating the word "foxes" is a warning, for they quietly crawl from the small holes to spoil the vine, at the beginning of its growth. Thus, they spoil large quantities of the coming fruits. Although they are small, they ruin man's growth and his maturity.

## WHAT ARE THESE LITTLE FOXES?

1. This warning from the Lord Jesus is directed to the believer or to the soul who wants to be attached to Christ. These little foxes are sins which we may consider as small like a white lie or improper joking, or some cute friends, or specific books or places. Henceforth, we have to keep our inner doors closed from any little fox, abstaining from every form of evil. (1 Thess. 5:22)

Origen said, "These little foxes are the evil powers of Satan which destroy the flowers of virtues and ruin the fruits of faith through evil thoughts and misconceptions. (1)<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>He also said, "Definitely, at the moment of sin, an evil spirit works in the heart of man. We welcome him to enter in our lives by our evil motives<sup>2</sup>.

St. Mark the ascetic said, "Satan tempts us with small sins, as if they are trifle, but then they will lead us to bigger sins."<sup>3</sup>

2. This warning is directed from the Lord Jesus to the church. Origen said, "These words are directed to the teachers in the church, and the orders are given to them by removing the foxes that ruin the vines. We mean by the foxes the teachers who teach heretic teachings, those who mislead the hearts of the simple and ruin the vine of the Lord, and do not produce the flower of the Orthodox faith. Therefore, the orders are given to the church teachers to rebuke those foxes and to let those who attack the word of truth, while still young and beginning, to submit to the truth and reveal it."<sup>4</sup>

## THE LITTLE FOXES IN THE HOLY BIBLE<sup>5</sup>

It is written in the Psalms, "But those who seek my life to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals." (Ps. 63:9,10) Those are the evil teachers who like to deceive people, so they say idle works for destruction. They use the temporary earthly wisdom to drive the righteous souls down to the pit instead of lifting them up toward the heavenly and eternal matters. Instead of becoming the portion of the Lord, they become a portion of the foxes (evil and Satanic teachings). To those, He says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matt. 8:20) The Lord has no place to rest in such hearts, but the devils (foxes) rest and their souls are changed to holes for the foxes.

Herod became a deceiver and the Lord Jesus called him a fox. (Luke 13:31)

In the book of Judges, Samson held three hundred foxes and took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. Then he set the torches on fire, and let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. (Judges 15:3-5) This represents the true and faithful teacher who knows how to collect all the heresies and tie their tails, showing how the heresies contradict one another. When the fire of the truth is inflamed, then the fields of evil and heresies are burnt.

In the book of Nehemiah, Tobiah the Ammonite mocked Nehemiah saying, "Whatever they built, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall." (Neh. 4:3) This is a symbolic picture to what the world does when the Gospel is spread, and the believers, the living

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<sup>2</sup> Origen: Comm. on Cant. 3: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. Num. 4: 3

<sup>3</sup> Two topics about the spiritual Law 94 Philokalia 1966, p. 126

<sup>4</sup> Origen: Comm. on Cant. 3: 15

stones, are released from the captivity of sin to become walls and temples on a heavenly level. The world mocks the Gospel saying that it was not built on philosophical basis, considering that any fox, or any earthly excuse, is able to destroy it.

The Holy Bible warned us from the little foxes, but we should not fear them, because God have authority to trample on serpents, scorpions and every power of the enemy. (Luke 10:19) In Christ Jesus, we say, "Happy shall he who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock." (Ps. 137:9) We struggle to conquer evil, since its inception, and bury it under the feet of the Lord Jesus, our Rock.

### **THE HUNTERS OF THE LITTLE FOXES:**

St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa<sup>4</sup>, wrote that the hunters of the little foxes are the angelic hosts or the saintly apostles:

1. Perhaps they are the angelic hosts who accompany God in His descent to the earth and work for His kingdom. It was said, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." (Ps. 24:8)

2. They may represent the apostles who were sent to catch these wild animals from the hearts of men to give the Son of Man a place to put His head.

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon 5

## Chapter Three

# THE WEDDING BANQUET

Through the incarnation, the fiancé descended to propose to His bride, and through His resurrection, He called her to rise and do not fear death nor the dominion of sin, but He warned her to beware of the little foxes which ruin the vine. The bride accepted the fiancé's repeated call: "Rise ... come", so she entered the wedding banquet which is His crucifixion and resurrection to enjoy uniting with Him. She communed with Him:

**"My Beloved is mine, and I am His. He feeds His flock among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether."** (Song of Sol. 2:16,17)

### THE JOINT CONTRACT:

The Coptic Church calls the sacrament of matrimony "contract and marriage". In this sacrament, each partner offers himself to be in possession of the other, as St. Paul said, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." (1 Cor. 7:4) Each one does not ask for what is his, but what pleases the other partner, forsaking one's desires for the sake of the other, and each one offers all what he has for the other.

The church or the human soul sees this sacrament completely fulfilled on the cross, for the Lord offered His blood as a dowry so each one is in the possession of the other. Then the bride says, **"My Beloved is mine, and I am His."**

She saw Him hung on the cross, so she truly realized the meaning of the heavenly matrimony. He bought her with all His love, He offered His life as a ransom for her life. Hence, she had to offer her life joyfully to Him, so that in the eternal life, she sings, "For you were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Rev. 5:9)

The apostles have realized the mystery of the matrimonial unity through the blood shed on the cross. St. Peter said, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Pet. 1:18,19) St. Paul asked us to present our lives to our Savior not to people; he said, "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." (1 Cor. 7:23) He also said, "... You are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19,20) St. John wrote that the secret of our following Him in eternal life is that price. He said, "... These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb." (Rev. 14:4,5)

St. Augustine tasted the wedding banquet which was fulfilled on the cross. He saw as if God does not care for anyone else except himself (My Beloved is for me.). He said:<sup>1</sup>

"My Lord...While reflecting on my conscience, I see You looking only at me, and with great concern caring for me night and day, as if no one exists in heaven and on earth except me."

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<sup>1</sup> By the author: The Divine Love, P. 15,16,17.

"You watch over me, as if you have forgotten the whole creation!"

"You grant me your gifts, as if I, only, am the subject of your love!"

The saint, feeling that God does not care about anyone else except him, wanted to be occupied only with God and to be only with Him, as if saying with the bride, "I am for my Beloved." He said:<sup>2</sup>

"I supplicate you: where are You?"

"Where can I meet You so I can see all of You and am found in You!"

"I desire death so I can see You; I do not want to live so I can be with You!"

"Possess me, so I may cleave to You."

Through the cross, the soul communes her eternal Groom saying, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." As if she is telling Him, "You have offered all Your life to me, how can I repay You?" You do not need my slavery nor my ministry nor my praise, but You desire all my life!"

### **THE SHEPHERD AMONG THE LILIES:**

Since the Groom has called Himself the "Lily of the valleys" (2:1), then the church wants to rejoice and call Him "The Shepherd among the lilies". She is telling him, "You are the suffering Lily, the tree of your cross became fruitful and produced unity, so it made out of us lilies according to Your likeness. May You rejoice, for Your church has carried Your marks and shared even Your name!"

St. Jerome wrote that the lily refers to virginity, as if the Lord the Virgin became Shepherd to the virgins who did not defile their clothes. The Virgin united with us so all what is inside us became virgin. We had the virgin thought, the virgin heart and the virgin senses, etc...

### **THE BANQUET OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE ETERNAL BANQUET:**

Since the soul entered the banquet of the divine matrimony and tasted the resurrection of the Lord in her life, that is she experienced the first resurrection, the resurrection of the soul from the death of sin, she desired the second resurrection, or the resurrection of the bodies in the Second Coming of the Lord. She pleaded with the Groom saying, "Come back, my Beloved", as if she is telling Him, "In Your first coming, You were behind our walls and I did not know You and I did not wait for You. But now, I know You as a gazelle <sup>4</sup>, and I have experience with You. I say, "Yes, Come O Lord Jesus, I want to meet You to live with You forever."

She pleads with Him so He comes to her, but not like the first time behind the walls, but this time on the clouds, apparent to everyone on the New Day, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away."

By His first coming and enjoying the fellowship of His suffering and resurrection, the night has changed to daylight, as St. Peter said, "We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2 Pet. 1:19)

When the Lord risen from the dead dwells in the heart, His light shines upon us, and the day dawns inside us, and the Lord remains "working in the day in the temple, that is inside the

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to the interpretation Song of Sol. 2:8

heart." (Luke 21:37) He continuously makes us "sons of light and sons of daytime, not of night nor of darkness." (1 Thess. 5:5) The Psalmist said, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me, even the night shall be light about me; indeed the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You." (Ps. 139: 11,12) Let us say with St. Paul, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the day..." (Rom. 13: 12,13)

Entering the banquet of resurrection, we hear God repeating, "I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people." Is. 65:2) Seeing the Father stretching out His hands with love, through the cross of the Son, He wants to embrace even the rebellious people. God remains working as long as it is daytime, that is, He works inside us as long as His light is shining inside us, until we also walk in the day and do not stumble. (John 11:9)

By the first resurrection, we enter into the new day; however, when we lift our eyes to the second resurrection and the Second Coming the Lord, we see our life as if it is in a shadow waiting for the eternal day, then we cry, admitting our weaknesses saying, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away." (2:17) We see Him coming upon the mountains which are full of troubles, to overcome the shadows of time and make us enter into the day, where there is no night at all, whom St. John described as follows: "And there shall be no night there. They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever." (Rev. 22:5) "Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)." (Rev. 21:25)

## **KNOWING THE RISEN FROM THE DEAD:**

After the bride praised the effect of the cross in her life declaring that the banquet of the resurrection is the banquet of the wedding, where she is united with the Bridegroom and longs for His Second Coming, in a symbolic way, she remembered the events of the resurrection. She said:

**"By night, I sought the one I love; I sought him but I did not find him. I will rise now," I said, "And go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.' I sought him but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me. To whom I said, 'Have you seen the one I love?'" Scarcely had I passed by them. When I found the one I love, I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." (Song of Sol. 3: 1-5)**

There are two interpretations to this talk: either a talk of the universal church to Christ her Bridegroom, or a talk of the soul being a member in the church, to Christ.

## **1. THE FIRST INTERPRETATION: THE TALK OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH:**

This symbolic talk carries a living picture of the events of the resurrection, for she sought Him three times and could not find Him except at the third time.

A. The first time, she sought Him "at night", and this refers to the darkness which covered the earth during His crucifixion, for the Bible says, "Now from the sixth hour until the



ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice...Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth quaked and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised." (Matt. 27:45-52)

The morning became night, and darkness prevailed over all the earth, and not even the disciples were able to realize, at that time, the mystery of salvation, for they had not been enlightened yet. They sought Him while they were lying in bed, but they could not find Him. They called Him but He did not hear them. They sought Him in bed, while in the darkness of carnal thoughts, unable to struggle with Him or to realize the mysteries of the Spirit, but they could not find Him. Perhaps they were wandering, "Is this the Messiah?" Or perhaps they were wandering like the disciples of Emmaus, "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." (Lk. 24:21) Or perhaps they were hoping that He may escape from those who were crucifying Him and revenge for Himself and establish a kingdom. However, none of these had happened!

B. In the second time, the bride sought Him at night, but this time not on her bed. She said, "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares I will seek the One I love." This was the case of the disciples after the Lord was buried and they entered the upper room very frightened. Their time changed to darkness and they sought the Lord while being frightened and the doors were locked. They attempted to seek Him in the city, in the markets, and in the streets, but it was the Sabbath and they could not taste any rest. Their upper room changed into a city and their thoughts and talks changed into markets and streets. Each one was wandering and asking the other, "What is the end of this matter?" They sought Him and they had no peace at all!

C. In the third time, they sought Him at the empty tomb. At the dawn of Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene was not afraid to walk in the streets, while it was still dark, until she reached the tomb. She was the only one who went, instead of the sad church, and asked the angel while crying about the One whom she loves. A moment later, she saw the Lord and cleaved to Him.<sup>7</sup> She held Him first, and while she wanted to remain holding Him, He told her to go and tell the disciples to meet Him at Galilee, as if she made Him enter into the church, the house of her mother, into the chamber of her who conceived her.

The talk of the church, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." (3:5) This is a talk of rebuke, but full of love. It is directed from the Christian church to the Jewish community. They mocked the Bridegroom on the cross saying, "You who destroy the temple and built it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40) The chief priests, with the scribes and Pharisees, also mocked Him saying, "He save others. Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." (Matt. 27:41,42) After the resurrection, the church is telling the daughters of Jerusalem, "Why do you hasten the Bridegroom to rise? I charge you, by the prophets, that is, "the gazelles and the does of the field", to leave Him to rise on the third day, as He wishes! If He died on the cross, go back to the prophecies and remember how He will rise whenever He wants! Now I know the mystery of His death and burial, for He died out of power not of weakness, and He rose to raise us up with Him!

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to Fr. Tadros Book: sermon 14: 12,13 of St. Cyril of Jerusalem.

## 2. THE SECOND INTERPRETATION: THE TALK OF THE HUMAN SOUL:

Since the church sought Him three times, once on the cross, once in the tomb, and the last one at the empty tomb after His resurrection, and she found Him on the third day. The human soul may seek Him by her personal effort, or through the servants, or trusting in God's work, without ignoring her strife nor the ministry of those who work in His vine.

(A) Seeking Him with our personal effort: The human soul started her talk by "By night on my bed..." Perhaps during her weakness, she dreamt that she had lost her Groom, so she went out to seek Him, by her personal effort, but she could not meet Him unless He draws her to Him.

"By night", this may mean that she was in the darkness of negligence, seeking Him while lying on bed, in laziness without any spiritual struggle. Hence, she sought Him but could not find Him. She did not rest on the bed, which she had described earlier as "our bed is green" (1:16), but she wanted to rest on her human bed.

"Our bed is green" refers to the unity of God the Word with our human nature, so He carried our body. However, mentioning "my bed" refers to "my body", or "my human nature", in its self righteousness. St. Augustine sought God while lying on bed, in great pride, so he could not find Him. He said (8): I locked the door of my Lord, and when I wanted to knock so He may open to me, I used to let him close it again, for I dared to seek Him, whom no one can know except the humble. While I was perishing, I thought that I could fly, but I fell before I was able. But the God of mercy lifted me, so people would not trample over me and put me back in the nest."<sup>8</sup>

St. Gregory, bishop of Nices, said that she calls the One whom I love, without giving Him a name. When she sought Him by name, she could not find Him. She asked the innumerable angelic hosts and they could not answer. In their silence, she realized her sins, and now she does not call Him by a certain name.

(B) In the second time, she goes out of her self, for she comes out of her bed saying, "I will rise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares." She entered the city looking for her Bridegroom in the streets and in the squares.

St. Augustine went into the markets, seeking God in the books of the philosophers, and went into the streets seeking Him in the nature, however, he did not find Him. In his foolishness, he sought God outside himself, however, God was inside Him, in the inner depth of his soul.

The city, here, refers to the Holy Bible, so the soul entered into the streets and markets of the Bible, that is, its symbols and prophecies, but still she could not meet her Bridegroom because she did not ask God's help in drawing her to Him. That is what the chief priests and the scribes did when they investigated the books, and knew that the Messiah will be born in Judea (Matt. 2:4-6), and they told Herod the king without them meeting their Lord Christ!

(C) In the third stage, she looked for Him through the "guards", who are the ministers of the Divine word. In this time, she could not meet her Bridegroom until she passed them. The workers in the vine support the soul until she enters into the Bridegroom, but they cannot take her into Him unless He works through her, for He alone can attract the heart to Him.

Truly, the priests are obliged to guard; however, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." (Ps. 127:1) Since they perform the acts of priesthood, then it is through the Bridegroom Himself, "The Priest forever on the order of Melchizedec".

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<sup>8</sup> Sermons about certain chapters from the New Testament 1: 6

St. Paul realized that his people should ignore him and his companions, for he assured this to the Corinthians, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos... ? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." (1 Cor. 3:5,6)

Through Christ Jesus, the soul experiences the unity with God. In the inner heart, she communes with Him, away from everyone, and in intimacy, they reveal their secrets to one another!

She asks the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, her close friends, to leave her with her Bridegroom in the life of solitude and secret prayers. She wishes that nothing in the world would occupy her life than staying in the bosom of the Bridegroom, the Life- Giver.

## **THE RISEN BRIDE:**

The scary dream is over and darkness has been abolished by the resurrection of the Lord. We enjoyed uniting with the Lord and we had the mark of "His resurrection". That is why the angels stood as friends of the Bridegroom, who is risen from the dead, singing and praising the Bride risen with her Bridegroom:

**"Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?" (Song of Sol. 3: 6)**

It is obvious that this talk cannot be applied to physical love, or else there would have been a relation between it and the previous talk. At the beginning of the chapter, we find the bride lying in bed asking for her Groom but cannot find him. Then after some effort, she found him and made him enter into her mother's house. Now, all of a sudden we find her coming out of the wilderness perfumed with myrrh, frankincense, and all the fragrant powders bought from the merchant. Does she go to her mother's house and leave him, while she goes out with perfumes and ornaments? This is a marvelous spiritual talk, for when the bride met her Bridegroom, risen from the dead and ascending up to heaven, she put him inside her heart. As a consequence to that act, she ascended with Him to the heaven. St. Paul said, "He raised us up and placed us in the heavens..." When He entered into her depths, He raised her above the wilderness of this world, so she communed with Him, "...Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. 1:23)

Probably the words "Who is this...? Are said by the Bridegroom Himself who supports her and encourages her, ascertaining that He sees her ascending to heaven, in spite of her existence on earth. Though she is still in the flesh, she becomes like smoke, carrying the nice aroma of prayer. These are the words of the heavenly creatures who look to the earthly creatures and seeing the door of Paradise open before them, they ascend to the heavenly matters, with Christ living inside them. These also are the words of the daughters of Jerusalem who earlier were mocking the church because it was black and not related to the prophets and the Fathers. Although she is from the Gentile, yet, through her unity with Christ, she is beautiful ascending from glory to glory!

### **Ascension from the wilderness**

The Israelites were lost in the wilderness for forty years, were bitten by the killing serpents because of their disobedience and complaint. The Gentiles were associated with the wilderness of this world and were defiled with evil. However, now the believers are united with the Messiah, who is the Only One able to deliver them from the world to the liberty of the heavenly kingdom. The Lord Himself said, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." (John 3:13) St. John Chrysostom

said, "We who do not deserve even the earthly glory, ascend to the kingdom of heaven, and enter the heaven and receive our status before the divine throne."

## **PILLARS OF PERFUMED SMOKE:**

In the Old Testament, God appeared on Mount Sinai, and smoke would appear as a sign of His awesome glory and power. (Ex. 19:18, 20:18, Ps. 104:32, Ps.144:5) When His glory descended on His house, whether in the tabernacle or in the temple, the place was filled with smoke. (Is. 6:4, Rev. 15:8) When the believer's heart is opened to the Lord, his life glorifies God, and it becomes like smoke ascending to the heavens from the wilderness of this world.

Smoke refers to the dwelling of God and His presence, also to giving promises to his beloved people, as He did with Abram when he cut the bloody sacrifices in two, down in the middle. The Lord made a covenant with him, "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold there was a smoking over and a burning torch that passed between those pieces." (Gen. 15:17) However, now, God dwells in the hearts of His people and releases them as smoke, not only to hear His promises, but to enjoy God Himself, their portion and inheritance.

Smoke also refers to the presence of God to sanctify His people, as Isaiah the prophet said, "When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night." (Is. 4:4,5) Now since the church is sanctified by the blood of Christ and is cleansed in the baptismal water, the Holy Spirit inflames the church, and she becomes holy smoke ascending where Christ is sitting.

Smoke refers also to the life of prayer, as St. John said, "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." (Rev. 8:4) That is why it was mentioned in the book of Song of Solomon "Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense," for frankincense is a symbol to the life of prayer.

Anyway, it is not smoke which chokes, as a sign of God's wrath (Deut. 29:20, Is. 34:10, Rev. 9:20, 14:11, 18:9, 18, 19:3), like what had happened in Sodom and Gomorrah, where the smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace. (Gen. 19:28). Also, it does not mean weakness nor death, as Isaiah the prophet said, "For the heavens will vanish away like smoke." (Is. 51:6) David the Psalmist said, "For my days are consumed like smoke." (Ps. 102:3) It is not a sign of evil nor laziness which ruin the inner perception, as Solomon the wise said, "... smoke to the eyes , so is the sluggard to those who send him." (Prov. 10:26)

This smoke chokes the soul and spoils the eyes. However, the bride is like pillars of perfumes which gladdens the heavens. The ingredients are:

1. Myrrh: for she was buried with Christ Jesus who was embalmed with myrrh and spices. If you are not buried with Him, you cannot enjoy the new life, the risen life. St. Paul said, "Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4). We are buried in baptism, and our old man is mortified, and we are born again a spiritual one, until we are elevated to our Heavenly Father, through the Holy Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom said, "Not through father, nor mother, nor through labor pain, we are born again, but from the Holy Spirit and in the water, we are formed and are born in a mysterious way. The ovary needs some time to form the body, but through water and spirit the

new life is formed in a twinkle of an eye. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6)

He also says, <sup>12</sup> "When the head is dipped under water, like in a tomb, the old man is buried, then we come out a new man. As it is easy to sink and float, in the same manner, it is easy for God to bury our old man and put on the new man."

2. Frankincense: The aroma of her prayers rise up to the Lord, and she says with the Psalmist, "I am prayer." In her union with the Risen from the dead, she gets to know the life of the true worship or of "continuous prayer".

3. All the merchant's fragrant powders: these are tools for beauty which the soul buys from Christ Himself (the Merchant), who alone can adorn the soul and beautify her, to make her His bride.

Hence, the soul needs to be perfumed with baptism and to rely on the Holy Spirit, lives a life of continuous prayer, and casts herself in the bosom of her Bridegroom to adorn her. Thus, she deserves to be bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

## **THE TIME OF WEDDING BANQUET:**

**"Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night. Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the king made himself a palanquin: he made its pillars of silver, its support of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem." (Song of Sol. 3: 7-10)**

The cross of the Lord and His resurrection are the secret of the wedding banquet. The Bridegroom risen from the dead raises His bride who suffered with Him. He dwells within her heart, then she ascends with Him to heaven, perfumed and adorned with all spiritual beauty. We may wonder: when is that and when is the time for the banquet?

The answer is twofold: one temporary and the other eternal. We enter into the procession of the Bridegroom and His banquet in our sojourn, to fight the fears of the night, struggling until we shed the blood, then enjoy His eternal procession during the day which has no end, sitting at His right hand, sharing His glory. Therefore, the Bridegroom appears in two processions, one at night where He dwells among His struggling children, and the other at daytime where He sits at His eternal couch.

1. The temporary procession: in this procession, the Bridegroom appears surrounded by sixty valiant soldiers, carrying swords and struggling at night. This is the same procession where the church lives struggling around Christ her Bridegroom.

Here the Bridegroom appears to have established a "couch" in the midst of the church, but it is not like the couch of the bride, where she laid down at night (3:1), seeking her Bridegroom, but she could not find Him, and calling Him and He did not hear her! This couch is not like the beds where the frogs went upon, as a sign of God's wrath on Pharaoh, and not like the beds where people breath their last (Gen. 49:33, 2 Kings 1:4z), and not like the bed which David the Psalmist has wet by his tears every night. (Ps. 6:6). But it is a unique bed on which "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey my son, you have gone up. He bows down, He lies down as a lion." (Gen. 49:9). It is the cross of the Lord, which produced peace on the church, where the heaven and earth were reconciled, and gave victory to the church over the evil powers.

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<sup>12</sup> The previous reference pg. 853

Solomon has declared that the cross is the secret of the peace of the church and a sign of her rest. St. Peter rested on it inside the prison and slept without worrying until the angel woke him up and told him to leave. (Acts 12:6-10) He gives sleep to those who love Him, that is, His peace!

The True Solomon raised up a bed among his people, so he may rest inside the ship of our life. (Matt. 8:24, Mark 4:38), so we may not perish, even when a great tempest arises in the sea.

To demonstrate that it is the bed of spiritual rest and inner peace, without laziness, the Book of Song of Solomon shows that He is surrounded by sixty valiant men, holding swords and knowing the techniques of war. The church gathers around the cross, as valiant men who fight and conquer as He conquered. Every believer carries his sword, which is the word of God, on his thigh because of the dreary night. The struggling church gathers around the cross, as men of war, and as He won, they win, too, with Him. Every believer carries on his thigh his sword, which is the word of God, so he may win, as written in the book of Revelation, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." (Rev. 12:11)

Who are the sixty valiant men surrounding Him? They are the sons of the kingdom, the new spiritual Israel, the chosen ones who accepted the cross and entered with God into a new covenant. They came to the banquet, with intimacy, and were equipped with the sword of the spirit and the helmet of salvation, struggling against sin, to the point of shedding blood. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. 6:10-17)

Why number sixty? We know that the number 12 refers to the kingdom of God on earth. St. Augustine said, "The Holy (3) reigns over the four corners of the earth (4)." So, the kingdom of God on earth means  $3 \times 4 = 12$ . The tribes of Israel were 12, and the disciples of the New Testament were 12, and the number of doors of the Heavenly Jerusalem are 12. St. Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, said that each one of them carried five swords, which symbolize sanctifying the five senses,  $12 \times 5 = 60$ . The senses of all those who are members in His kingdom are sanctified by perfection in Christ Jesus.

St. Gregory said that the sword of the eye is to continuously look at the Lord and not to be defiled by anything in the world. The sword of hearing is to listen to spiritual matters and not to vanities. In the same manner, the senses of taste, touch, and smell are all sanctified by the sword of self control and being in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and smelling His sweet aroma. Man can fight the darkness of sin by these weapons.

2. The eternal procession: In the temporary procession, the Bridegroom appeared on His bed to give His people security because He is the secret of their rest and peace amidst their struggle in the world, in this transient life. However, in the eternal procession, there is no war nor struggle,

thus He appears carried on a couch, on His eternal throne carried by the four incorporeal creatures. (Rev. 4)

What is this couch except the church where the Lord dwells inside forever. Her features are:

She was united with the cross of the Lord and became one with Him, that is why she was called that she was made of wood. Her sufferings and crucifixion with the Lord are the secret of her life and eternal glory. St. Paul said, "If we suffer with Him, we are glorified with Him." (Rom. 8:17)

She is made of wood from Lebanon, because Lebanon is known for its cedar who is famous for its straight forwardness and its good smell. The church of Christ, in her sojourn, lived without faltering between two ways: God's way and the world, and she always carried the aroma of Christ her Bridegroom.

Her pillars are from silver, made by Solomon himself; and the silver refers to the Holy Bible, to the word of God strained seven times. The shepherds of the church and her ministers became pillars because they mingled with the word of God.

The golden rule refers to the people carrying the Lord Jesus in their daily life, thus becoming heavenly (gold). They live on earth as the angels of God, or as St. Paul said, "...even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it..." (1 Cor. 7:29-31)

Its seat of purple refers to the nature of the church as a queen united with the eternal King.

Its interior is paved with love for the sake of the daughters of Jerusalem, for the church carried the mark of her Bridegroom, who is love for the salvation of the human race.

#### **Call to the banquet:**

**"Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, the day of the gladness of his heart." (Song of Sol. 3:11)**

The church is calling the whole world to enjoy the banquet of the cross. She asks the human race to deny the ego. "Go forth..." , so they can enjoy seeing the true king "The New Solomon", where his mother, the Jews, have crowned him with the crown of thorns.

Through the spiritual enlightenment, the believers see the hidden crown for the Crucified, which is "forgiveness of sins and abolishing the curse "

This is the day of His marriage and the joy of his heart, for He offered His blood as a dowry for His bride.

# Chapter Three

## THE HEAVENLY MATRIMONY

### THE RISEN BRIDE:

Through the divine incarnation, the Word of God descended to make us His bride, through His crucifixion, He performed the wedding ceremony, and through His resurrection, He justified us so we became the risen bride without blemish. Therefore, the Bridegroom sees her very beautiful and He praises her saying:

**"Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! (Song of Sol. 4:1)**

The resurrection granted the church all spiritual beauty and power. St. Peter said, "... His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:3,4) The features of that beauty are the following:

**"You have dove's eyes behind your veil." (Song of Sol. 4:1)**

St. Abdosios said: "The eyes are beautiful like a dove's eyes, because it resembles the dove of the Holy Spirit who descended from heaven. Earlier, we saw that the Lord resembles His church to a dove's eyes. The church, looking continuously at the Holy Spirit, has spiritual enlightenment because the image of the Holy Spirit is reflected upon her. She is simple, seeking only God, loves as doves, and does not rest except in the bosom of the true Noah, as the dove did from the ark.

Her eyes being behind the veil, is because only the church can comprehend the mysteries of the Spirit, but to the world, the eyes are behind the veil.

The literal translation is "in your silence". The church, being enlightened to behold the mysteries of God's love, stands in silence reflecting on God's majestic works. St. John Saba said: "Whoever wants to talk about God's love, proves his ignorance because it is impossible to describe this divine love."

How amazing God's love is! It is the language of the angels, and it is hard to translate it. Who are we to talk about Him, but You, O Lord, speak inside us as You wish."

Describing the eyes as behind the veil means that no matter how much we enjoy spiritual enlightenment in this world, yet it appears as though it is behind the veil, when compared with what we actually see in the eternal life. "For we know in part and prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." (1 Cor. 13:9-12)

**2. "Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead." (Song of Sol. 4:1)**

If the Lord Christ is the head of the church, then the church is the hair surrounding the head. Without the Head, the hair is nothing.

This is the congregation of Christ; they are like the sheep grazing on Mount Gilead, the high mountain of the word of God which releases the hearts of the children of God toward heaven.



The higher the sheep rise on the mountain, the more that one will see from afar, and cannot distinguish one sheep from the other. In the same manner, when we resurrect with the Lord and rise through the word of salvation and enjoy the care of the church to live abiding in heavenly spirit, then the spirit of schism, fighting, seeking temporary glory, and the love of the world all vanish.

When we rise with the Lord on Mount Gilead as the flock who gathers on the peaks of mountains, then the hair appears as black with no grey color at all, for the Lord renews our youth as an eagle.

Describing the flock as going from from Mount Gilead means that the flock is resting on the word of God, without any hurry, but taking refuge in God's care.

He chose Mount Gilead for the following reasons:

A. On Mount Gilead, the Lord appeared to Laban and warned him saying, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." (Gen. 31:24) Hence, the believer feels secure and that no one can touch him.

B. The slopes of Mount Gilead were known for their plentiful pastures, thus they became an example to the life of satisfaction and fullness. In the Old Testament, when the Lord promised to save his people from wicked Babylon and make them enter to a life of fullness. He said, "But I will bring back Israel to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan; his soul shall be satisfied on Mount Ephraim and Gilead." (Jer. 50:19) In the Book of Micah, it is written, "...Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in days of old." (Micah 7:14)

C. In the Old Testament, the balm was planted in Gilead. The balm is known for its nice aroma, which the poets and historians have praised and was used by doctors in healing wounds and diseases. It was written in the book of Jeremiah, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?" (Jer. 8:22) On Mount Gilead, the true physician, the Lord Jesus Christ, binds the wounds of his people and heals their diseases by the balm of His blood shed on the cross.

D. When Gideon was fighting the Midianites, 32,000 men came to war. But the Lord said to Gideon, "Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead." (Judges 7:3) The Lord does not care about the quantity but He wants true struggling believers who do not fear! This is the true church of Christ, who has authority to trample on serpents, scorpions, and every power of the enemy, and she lives in complete trust in God, without any fear.

### **3. "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing." (Song of Sol. 4:2)**

The church has matured and now it is befitting to have teeth, for she has grown and is no longer satisfied with the milk for babies, but she wants His fatness which she can chew and digest in her life.

St. Augustine said that the teeth of the church are her ministers, who chew the food and then offer it as milk to the babies. There are different kinds of teeth like the molars, but they all work for the same purpose and the same spirit, for edification.

With these teeth, the Lord asked St. Peter to kill the animals and eat it, and not to say that anything is defiled. The church, through her ministers, presents the word of salvation to everyone. She kills the defilement of evil, chews the pagans, and tear their wicked mistakes until they become members in His body.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: On Ps. 95 (94): 7,3, (4): 7: On Christian Doctrine 2: 6

The minister is like a shorn sheep who cuts her wool, that is, cuts all carnal thoughts and deeds through the Holy Spirit granted to him in the baptismal font. Wool, in the Holy Bible, refers to the carnal life; that is why the priests, in the Old Testament, were forbidden to enter the holy of holies with clothes made of wool. Their clothes had to be made of linen, a sign of the righteousness of Christ, as the Mosaic Law ascertained, "You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together." (Deut. 22:11) "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15)

#### **4. "Each one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them." (Song of Sol. 4:2)**

When a baby starts teething, he usually gets his teeth in pairs. Also, the Lord sent His disciples two by two for missionary work, so when one starts talking about the word of God, the other prays for him so that the word becomes anointed with the divine grace.

When St. Pachomius was asked, "Why monks live two by two?" He answered, "So if one falls, the other lifts him up."

St. Augustine said that the statement "bears twins" refers to the two commandments: loving God and loving the neighbor. "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:40) St. Cyril of Jerusalem relates that this refers to the dual grace, that is, man is perfected through the water and the spirit, or through the graces of the two testaments: the old and the new.

St. Jerome commented on this statement: <sup>8</sup>: "Since they are not barren, then they have to be full of milk for nursing, as St. Paul said, "My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you." (Gal. 4:19) "I fed you with milk and not with solid food..." (1 Cor. 3:2)

Finally, we can say that whoever has enjoyed the word of salvation, through the pure teeth of the church that is her true ministers, has to be not barren, but gives birth to more than one, to abundant fruits. This is like the Samaritan woman, when she met the Lord Jesus and heard His voice, she went and called all the town of Samaria to meet the Lord. Also, Levi, after meeting with the Lord Jesus, called all his friends to enjoy the Savior like him.

#### **5. "Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely." (Song of Sol. 4:3)**

The believer has to witness to the Savior by His lips and mouth. What are the features of these lips and the mouth?

A. In the Old Testament, Rahab the adulterous, tied a red rope, a proof of her faith in the Savior and being protected in His blood for forgiveness of sins. She and all her household were saved from destruction. This is a true picture of a believer who binds all what comes out of his mouth with the precious blood, witnessing to the Lord with his words as well as his deeds, until everyone is saved and enters the house of God.

B. When the soldiers mocked the Lord Jesus, they put on Him a scarlet robe as a sign of His kingdom. Now the church, united with the king, her lips became like a strand of scarlet, where no inappropriate word comes out of it, befitting for a queen or a bride for the Heavenly King.

C. The lips of the bride are like a thin strand which makes her mouth lovely. No insult, no deceit, no hypocrisy come out of the mouth, but it is full of love and compassion.

#### **6. "Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate." (Song of Sol. 4:3)**

In the Old Testament, the robe of the high priest was adorned with embroidered pomegranate (Ex. 28:33,34, 39:24-26) Also, the temple was adorned with carvings like the shape

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<sup>8</sup> Epist. 69: 6

of the pomegranate (1 Kings 7:18) Pomegranate refers to adornment, in which the church adorns herself as the robe of the Lord Jesus Christ and the temple where His Holy Spirit dwells.

The temples are compared to the pomegranate, for the temples refer to the features of man, where signs of joy or sorrow or trouble appear. The features of the church are peaceful and full of joy.

He did not say your temples are like pomegranate, but like a piece of pomegranate. Why? To show the inside which is full of seeds that are full of red juice, and does not know dryness at all!

Your temples are like a piece of pomegranate, full of redness. The secret of her beauty is the blood of Christ who sanctifies her. Also this redness refers to being shy and decent, and not proud or haughty like the children of this world.

Her temples, being under the veil, reveals that her true glory is from inside. (Ps. 45)

**7. "Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men." (Song of Sol. 4:4)**

Often the Lord associates the beauty of the church with her strife, so that the believers understand that the secret of their beauty in Christ Jesus is their lawful spiritual strife. The temples of the church are not beautiful like a piece of pomegranate without the neck stretched out like the tower of David built for an armory, that is, without the living Orthodox faith associated with the strife.

Through the neck, which is faith, the face of the church is lifted up to heaven, then the Lord shines upon her with His light and makes her live a straight life, and not like the woman with the spirit of infirmity who was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. (Lk. 13:11-16) She sees in God the secret of her power and strife and hears Him saying, "I am your Shield." (Gen. 15:1) Through Him, she is protected from all the arrows of the enemy which are inflamed with fire. (Eph. 6:16)

He compares her neck with the tower of David, for David represents the man of faith who fought Goliath the giant and conquered him saying, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you with the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." (1 Sam. 17:45) In his psalms, David the prophet declared that God is his refuge and strength of his life, and in the mean time, he does not cease struggling.

The leaders used to hang their shields on the tower, to remember their great victories and to show their heroism. In the same manner, the believers use this spiritual tower, which is the working faith, as a center for their triumph in Christ Jesus and their victory over the wicked enemy.

Mentioning the number of bucklers as thousand, refers to the nature of these swords, for number 1000 is a symbol of the heavenly life. He says that the weapons of the church are heavenly and spiritual, as St. Paul said, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:4)

**8. "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." (Song of Sol. 4: 5,6)**

Since the Lord Jesus Christ is girded about the chest with a golden band (Rev. 1:13), He offers to the church both the Old and New Testaments as two breasts to nurse the church. The church of Christ has both testaments as two breasts to feed her children.

The word of God appears in both testaments as twins of a gazelle, born from one mother, which symbolizes that the two testaments compliment one another, without any partiality, for the Old Testament prophesied about the New Testament, which in turn, clarified the Old Testament.

The lilies refer to the group of believers who resemble the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, "the Lily of the valleys." (2:1) They also refer to the inner emotions and capabilities which become as food for the living word of God!

The Bridegroom is praising the bride for her inner perception, her strife in the oneness of the spirit, her mission work, her gentleness, faith and abiding in the word of God. Dazzled by all His praises, the bride declares to her Bridegroom that the secret of all her beauty lies in the cross of the Groom and His resurrection. Therefore, she promises to go with Him to the mountain of myrrh, that is, to enter with Him the life of suffering. She is buried with Him and goes to the hills of frankincense, so she may live all her sojourn in continuous prayer until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

The Bridegroom answers, **"You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you."** (Song of Sol. 4: 7)

He concludes His speech by saying that it takes Him a long time to describe the beauty of the one who shared with Him His suffering and lived in continuous prayer and fellowship. He sees in her all beauty because His love hides all her weaknesses, and His blood covers all her sins, showing all the adornment of her beauty, thus He sees no spot in her.

St. Jerome commented on the Bridegroom's talk, <sup>9</sup>: "What is more honorable than one to be called the daughter of God, (Ps. 45:10), who does not ask for outward adorning (1 Pet. 3:3). She believes in Christ; and granting His Spirit to her, she leads her way toward Him, her Bridegroom and Lord, with great hope."

## **CALL FOR LABOR AND STRIFE:**

**"Come with me <sup>10</sup> from Libanon <sup>11</sup>, my spouse, with me from Libanon. Look from the top of Amana <sup>12</sup>, from the top of Senir and Hermon <sup>13</sup>, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."** (Song of Sol. 4: 8)

When the bride first meets the Bridegroom, she feels comforted and rested; however, she knows that she has to accompany Him to lawful spiritual strife. In this call which the Lord repeats, we notice the following:

1. This is a call for going out with the Bridegroom, for the spiritual war is for the Lord and in His name. When the soul goes out feeling secure in Him, then she wins, for without Him, there is nothing except defeat.

The call here is directed toward the soul to go out with her spiritual Bridegroom from Libanus, as mentioned in the Septuagint. This means that she is called to go out from the life of prayer (for Libanus is derived from frankincense) to be ready to meet the lions and leopards. Christian life is not mere comfort in the prayer room, but rather it is a fierce war against the evil

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<sup>9</sup> St. Jerome: Epistl.to Furia 54.

<sup>10</sup> The Septuagint Libanus taken from frankincense or incense.

<sup>11</sup> Not found in the Septuagint

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew origin "Amana" means faith, and it is the top of a mountain in Libanon.

<sup>13</sup> Hermon means "El Moharem" which is a mountain in Libanon, its peak is 9232 feet, and has three peaks, which the Sidianites call "Sirion", while the Emerites call "Shenir" or Senir. From the top of these peaks, one can see Libanon and the valley surrounding Damascus, Carmel, Galilee. This mountain is called now "the mountain of Sheikh."

powers, against Satan and sin. It is true that St. Peter desired to remain with the Lord on the Mount of transfiguration saying, "It is good for us to be here," but the Lord compelled him to go down to encounter the events of the cross.

The call is directed to leave Lebanon, which is a tourist country known for luxury. The heavenly Bridegroom calls the human soul to accompany Him. He calls her to leave the easy life, the life of physical rest, to go and face the battle against darkness, while accompanying her Bridegroom, the Conqueror of lions and leopards.

The signs of leaving are to go out from the top of faith (Amana), and through faith, she can enter the top of Hemon, to the life of deprivation and voluntary forsaking everything. She practices the cross in her life by emptying herself from the lust of the flesh to live a life of satisfaction with the Lord Jesus only. She says in faith with St. Paul, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1 Tim. 6:8) He also said, "I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:12,13) Through this living inner life in Christ Jesus, the soul enters into a war to win the lions and leopards by the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the essence of the victorious life where one crosses, with the victorious Lord, from a fierce war to a spiritual triumph and reaching eternity.

St. Augustine commented on this call, declaring that the call here is not crossing with Christ, but rather it is crossing to Him, that is, uniting with Him to practice the spiritual marital life saying <sup>14</sup>: "Cross to me from the beginning of faith, for faith is the beginning of matrimony."

St. Augustine relates that it is the bride crossing to the Heavenly Father, through her unity with Christ the Bridegroom. He says, "She comes as a chariot of God carrying thousands of joyful men, walking successfully, crossing this world to the Father, for her Bridegroom Himself crosses the world and takes her to the Father: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am..." (John 17:24). Hence, they go through the beginning of faith."

St. Gregory relates that these statements declare the bride's unlimited thirst to follow the Bridegroom. He said <sup>15</sup>: "The one who walks toward God continuously experiences a yearning toward continuous progress." He explains the Bridegroom saying, "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse..." by the following:

"He meant: you did well when you came with me to the mountain of incense. You were buried with me in baptism, and you were raised and ascended to heaven.... Now arise to two other tops so you may grow through knowledge. As long as you have reached that height, do not cease climbing. This frankincense is the beginning of your faith, which is the start of your progress, to attain greater gifts. Cross and come from the beginning, that is the faith, and you will attain. Do not cease to keep crossing and rising forward."

The saint relates that the Bridegroom calling her to cross with Him "from the lions' dens and from the mountains of the leopards", this means that sin is a wild beast like a lion or a leopard. Man has been transformed from this sinful nature, but the Bridegroom fears lest His bride goes back to sin; therefore, he calls her to put off the old man. This is a call for continuous struggle in the life of faith.

Anyway, since the Bridegroom calls the bride to cross with Him, through the life of faith and continuous strife against the spiritual beasts, the bride, sometimes, feels the bitterness of this conflict, so she lifts up her inner eyes asking for help. She hears Him answering like that:

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<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine: Sermons of N. T. Lessons 55: 6

<sup>15</sup> Sermon 8

**"You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace." (Song of Sol. 4: 9)**

At the beginning of the relationship with God, He takes her to Lebanon, like when a bridegroom takes his bride to a tourist place away from the cares of life. There they get to know each other. However, the marital life will not remain like that, but they have to leave Lebanon to start labor and strife. Hence, the Lord called her to go with Him from Lebanon to face the lions and leopards in their dens, or to go with Him from the mountain of frankincense to a life of struggle against the deeds of the old man, which are like the wild beasts.

Amidst the bitter struggle, she weeps and groans in her heart, but He cannot stand her tears, so He is drawn to her and is captivated by her inner crying.

St. Gregory noticed that the Bridegroom here says, "with one look of your eyes." Man has two kinds of vision: the outer vision where he sees the visible matters, and the inner vision, which is the heart, where he sees God. The tears of his inner vision are what captivates God's heart.

He is the Heavenly Bridegroom who understands his bride's heart. He cares for her through her strife and suffering and does not require any talking. He understands the language of her inner eyes. When Peter denied the Lord Jesus, he did not apologize with words, but the Lord knew what inside his heart, from his tears. When the adulterous woman entered the house of Simon the leper, she did not talk, but the Lord, who examines the heart, said, "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much." (Lk. 7:47)

The church taught us to talk with the Lord with this language, the language of tears. During vespers of every day, we pray saying, "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us! Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud." (Ps. 123)

The Lord answers: "I cannot endure your contempt and humiliation. You have ravished my heart and all my love. I do not call you servants but friends. You are my brothers, my bride."

St. Jerome sent this letter to a blind priest in Baetica in Spain talking about the eye which ravishes God's heart saying <sup>16</sup>: "You should not be sad because you were deprived from the physical eyes, which the ants, flies, reptiles and human beings have, but rather rejoice because you have the eye, which was mentioned in the book of Song of Solomon, as "You have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes." This eye can see God; and Moses referred to this eye when he said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight..." (Ex. 3:3) We heard about philosophers from this world who ruined their eyes so their thoughts may completely turn to their deep pure minds.

God's heart is ravished by the language of the contrite eyes before Him, and by the language of obedience and sacrifice. He says, "You have ravished my heart ... with one link of your necklace." What is this necklace which adorns the inner neck of the soul except carrying the yoke and obeying the divine commandment. It was written in the book of Proverbs: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother, for they will be graceful ornaments on your head, and chains about your neck." (Prov. 1:8,9) The bride adorns herself by accepting her father's chastening with joy and keeping the commandments of her mother, "the church", that is, she carries, on her neck, the yoke of obedience, which is Christ easy yoke.

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<sup>16</sup> Epist. To Abigaus 2.

## **NOW, WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THE SUFFERINGS OF STRIFE?**

Amidst sufferings, we feel our weaknesses, thus, we lift our inner eyes with contrition, toward God who is inside us, then we draw His heart and ravish His love by our broken hearts. Then, He declares our position that we are powerful and not weak, and we live in glory and not reproach. We groan feeling our weakness, but He ascertains the hidden truth, that our strife, in spite of all this weaknesses, declares the sweetness of our love and a sweet aroma spreads out of it. He says:

**"How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!" (Song of Sol. 4: 10)**

The words of the Bridegroom corresponds to the words of the bride in her praise to Him, but in a stronger version. The words of the bride: "For your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments..." (1:2,3) The words of the Bridegroom: "How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse. How much better than wine is your love..." "We commune saying, "The fragrance of your good ointments", and He says, "How much better is the scent of your perfumes!"

Amazing are the Lord's praises to us, although all what we carry from love to Him is a reflection of His love in us, and all what we carry from the sweet fragrance are the fruits of His fragrance working in us! It is astonishing that He gives us all what He has, and He gives us the credit for it, praises us, and rewards us for it!

St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, relates how honorable the church of the New Testament, through the fragrance coming from her, for "it is much better than all the scent of perfumes." It surpassed the scent of all the previous kinds of worship. He said <sup>18</sup>:

"The mystery of the truth which was fulfilled through the message of the Gospel is considered very sweet to God and better than all the scents of the Law. It is no more hidden behind symbols and shadows, but its fragrance is spread by openly declaring the truth. Since one of the earlier scents pleased the Lord as a sweet aroma, then the secret of her acceptance is not due to the honorable material used in worship, but the meaning which was revealed through this kind of worship. This is very clear from the saying of the prophet: "I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps. 50: 9,13)

Now, we have no more the animal sacrifices, but the unique Sacrifice which the Father smells as a sweet aroma. Through this Sacrifice, God smells all our worship and spiritual strife as a sweet aroma "much better than all spices".

Henceforth, through our bitterness because of the feeling of our weakness, the Lord praises us without hypocrisy, and continues to say about the blessings of sharing suffering with Him or struggling for His sake. He said:

**"Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon." Song of Sol. 4:11)**

What does the Lord see in His struggling and suffering bride? He sees her like a bee, for "The bee is small among flying creatures, but her product is the best of sweet things." (Sirach 11:3) St. Gregory of Nyssa commented and said, "The bee is popular, and everyone praises her and appreciates her. In spite of her weakness, yet she carries wisdom from above and always seeks the life of perfection." This is the secret of the honeycomb dripping from the bride's lips

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<sup>18</sup> The Greek translation Libanus is excerpted from frankincense and not from Lebanon.

and the honey under her tongue. That is why the saint said, " It is appropriate for us to fly above the inspired teachings and gather from them wisdom to store inside us. In the same manner, honey is formed inside us, as if it is that sweet crop which is stored in our hearts like inside the bee cell. Through these various teachings, storage of sweet things is formed in our memories like the imperishable wax cells. We have to be like the bee for its honey is sweet and its sting does not harm. We have to be occupied with doing virtues and transforming the labors of this life into eternal blessings and offering her strife to improve nations. Likewise, the bride is drawn to the Bridegroom and is admired by the angels who perfect her strength through the honored wisdom."<sup>20</sup>

What else does the Lord see in His struggling and suffering bride? He sees her like the holy land flowing with honey and milk. (Ex. 3:8,17)

The Lord presented His struggling and suffering bride in a very beautiful picture. Since the Lord had promised his people with land flowing with milk and honey as a place for physical rest and satisfaction and a center for worship, then his bride, in turn, becomes a place for rest for the Lord, where the Holy Trinity dwells inside her and overflows from the fruit of the spirit milk and honey which the angels desire to have and by which the saints rejoice. This milk and honey flows over even to unbelievers.

Amidst the afflictions of the believer, the Lord sees his lips dripping honeycomb and his tongue hiding honey and his bosom full of spiritual milk.

The honeycomb which drips from his lips refer to the words of grace which proceed from the mouth of the believer. They are few dripping but they are sweet and delicious! They give the listener blessing and inner satisfaction!

Honey is like the hidden treasure (under the tongue) presented to others by the believer, without any showing off, but as treasure and nourishment for the mature!

This hidden honey is the "Word of God" who is called the heavenly Manna. In the Old Testament, God sent them manna which tasted like the wafers made with honey. (Ex. 16:31) Ezekiel the prophet ate the word of God and said, "It was in my mouth like honey in sweetness." (Ezek. 3:3) David the Psalmist described it as, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." (Ps. 119:103) "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (Ps. 19:9,10) Also, Solomon the wise asked us to enjoy eating the good word of God. He said, "My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste." (Prov. 24:13) "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." (Prov. 16:24)

Anyway, when the Lord speaks about caring for His people, He emphasizes that He offers them honey referring to the sweetness of His gift, or the sweetness of His words in their mouths. He said, "You ate pastry of fine flour, honey and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty." (Ezek. 16:13) "And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you." (Ps. 81:16) "...He made him to draw honey from the rock..." (Deut. 32:13) The honey of the word of God is the secret of the beauty of his people until they are good to become a queen. Whoever nourishes his people with honey finds his work hiding under the tongue of his bride, then he rejoices with her!

The Lord presents his honey through the tongue of his bride to satisfy the mature people, and also He nurses the babies with undefiled milk. St. Gregory of Nyssa said <sup>21</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup> Sermon 9

<sup>21</sup> Sermon 9



"The one, who has honey and milk under his tongue, is the one who knows how to talk with different kinds of people according to their abilities and at the appropriate time."

During our afflictions, we become disinterested in our clothes. However, during the afflictions of the bride, the Bridegroom smells the fragrance of the bride's clothes as a pure aroma of prayer (frankincense). He hears her groaning and supplications while she is suffering! He listens to her and answers her prayers because she asks with a broken heart! In the spiritual strife, the believer takes off his earthly clothes, and by the Holy Spirit, he puts on the imperishable heavenly clothes: love, joy, peace... (Gal. 5:22) This is the work of the Spirit in the life of the suffering bride!

Finally, during tribulations, one often looks at himself and finds himself as though he is in a wilderness and barren, but the Lord sees the opposite of that. He says:

**"A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."  
(Song of Sol. 4: 12)**

He tells her: remember all the hidden capabilities inside you; you are a garden, a spring, and a fountain. These are the capabilities of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside you. These cannot be declared to you unless you accept the sufferings and you bend your back to the cross.

Why was the bride called a garden enclosed, a spring, and a fountain?

1. St. Gregory of Nyssa<sup>22</sup> relates that the garden contains different kinds of trees. The fruits of the trees may be bitter at the beginning, but later at due time, they will ripe and become delicious and sweet to all the senses. In the same manner, in the spiritual life, the Lord plants the soul and gives her water, yet she carries sufferings and bitterness of labor, but in due time, she bears fruits which bring joy to the soul.

2. The saint talks about the reason of her being enclosed. He said, "Our garden is enclosed from all sides by the fence of the commandments, so that no thief nor a wild beast may penetrate in. The garden is enclosed by the commandments so that not even a pig may approach her."

3. Since the garden needs a spring or a fountain, the spring has to be closed and the fountain sealed. Solomon the wise said, "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed.." (Prov. 5:15-18) Hence, the divine inspiration commands us not to waste the water of our fountain outside in the streets with strangers. St. Gregory said that when our thoughts deviate toward sin (strange), then we become weak offering our water to strangers.

St. Ambrose<sup>23</sup> relates that the sealed fountain is the baptism, which remains closed and sealed until it is manifested by words and deeds. By baptism, we became a paradise which has the capability of life and bringing fruits, yet it is a closed paradise; and a spring which can burst pure water to quench many, yet it is closed; and a sealed fountain, when opened, it will burst into fountains of living water!

We may think that we are empty, however, the Lord sees in us a paradise, a spring and a fountain, which cannot be opened except for Him. He is the only Bridegroom of the soul, who has the right to enter the paradise of the heart and drink living fountains! In other words, the soul as a bride has to remain virgin yearning for the Heavenly Bridegroom only. She opens her heart, her feelings, her emotions, and all her energy, being a chaste virgin waiting for her Bridegroom (Matt. 25), as a member in the church of the firstfruits.

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<sup>22</sup> Sermon 9.

<sup>23</sup> St. Ambrose: De Myster 55.

St. Ambrose has a nice comment. He said<sup>24</sup>, "The Lord says that to the church, whom He wants to be chaste virgin without guile nor blemish. The fertilized garden is virginity which carries many fruits with nice aroma. It is a closed garden surrounded by a fence of purity. It is a sealed fountain for virginity is the fountain of chastity and its origin. It keeps the seal of purity, where God's image is reflected, and where the purity of simplicity with the holiness of the body are combined."

St. Ambrose made a correlation between this seal and the Eucharist. The Lord the Bridegroom gave His church, His bride, who is nourished by His holy Body and precious Blood, a commandment to keep this sacrament sealed in her life, which cannot be unbind by evil deeds nor losing purity.<sup>25</sup>

St. Augustine relates that this closed garden is the church, for he said:<sup>26</sup>

"The Paradise is the church as was called in the book of Song of Solomon. The four rivers of the Paradise are the four gospels, the fruitful trees are the saints, the fruits are their deeds, the tree of life is the holy of holies, that is Christ, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the free will. When someone despises God's will, he destroys himself then he can distinguish between sanctifying himself for doing good and between behaving according to his personal will."

Many of the church fathers saw in Virgin St. Mary "the enclosed garden", for she represents the virgin church, who was sanctified for the Lord only. St. Augustine said:<sup>27</sup>

"Christ Himself is a virgin, and His mother is a virgin. Yes, although she is His mother, yet she remains a virgin, for the Lord Jesus entered through the locked doors. (Jn. 20:19) He laid in His new tomb, where no one has laid in it before (Jn. 19:41). St. Mary is "a garden enclosed... and a sealed fountain". Joel said (Joel 2:18) that, from this fountain, overflows the river which waters the valley from the thorns, the thorns of sins which we have committed. (Prov. 5:22)

The enclosed garden or the shut up spring or the sealed fountain refers to the life which no one enters except the Lord Jesus Himself, who has the key of David "He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens." (Rev. 3:7) This life bears the precious heavenly fruits of the Holy Spirit, for He says:

**"Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices, a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." (Song of Sol. 4: 13-15)**

What does the Lord find inside us? He finds various kinds of fruits for eating like pomegranate, fragrant spices, and frankincense, and other elements used as ointments and living water for drinking.

Christ's bride appears to be rich in everything: She has food to satisfy her, water to quench her thirst, precious spices for beautification, medicines for treatment... Her Bridegroom and His friends rejoice for her. We notice that the word "all" is repeated several times, because she is not deficient in anything. This is the same expression which St. Paul used in describing the believers. He said, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having **all** sufficiency in **all** things, have an abundance for every good word." (2 Cor. 9:8) "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you

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<sup>24</sup> Epist. 63:63.

<sup>25</sup> St. Ambrose: De Myster 55.

<sup>26</sup> City of God 13: 21

<sup>27</sup> Epistl. 48: 21

may be filled with the knowledge of His will in **all** wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good word and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with **all** might, according to His glorious power, for **all** patience and longsuffering with joy." (Col. 1:9-11)

The following are some examples of the fruits which the soul has bore:

1. Orchard of pomegranates<sup>28</sup>: The temple of the bride is like a piece of red pomegranate, a sign of the spiritual beauty through the blood of Christ, as well as the sign of shyness in meekness and calmness. She carries the beauty of God's love and meekness.

St. Gregory said about the tree of pomegranate<sup>29</sup>: "The tree of pomegranate is very hard to be robbed, for its branches are full of thorns and its fruit is covered with a harsh bitter skin. But when it ripens and the skin is peeled, then one will find a sweet fruit, delicious like honey and has a taste of wine. In the same manner, we should be serious in our strife and we should not love the luxuries of life. We choose the road of a strict chaste life, henceforth, the robbers cannot come near the fruit of virtue, for it is covered with the cover of self control and surrounded by the road of a strict life, like thorns which pierce anyone who wants to rob the fruits, but in due time, one enjoys the various fruits of the pomegranate."

2. Fragrant henna<sup>30</sup>: was discussed earlier. The bride uses it for adornment the night before her wedding. She dyes her hands and feet red and prepares herself for the Bridegroom with sweet fragrance.

3. Spikenard: is extracted from a small plant from the Hamalaya Mountain, about 1100 – 1700 feet above sea level. It is very expensive and is used in business. Mary, Lazarus' sister anointed the Lord Jesus' feet with spikenard (Jn. 12:13), and she poured it on His head before the Passover with six days (Mk. 14:3) as a sign of her love and gratitude to Him.

4. Saffron: its flower is purple with red veins, however, the color of saffron is yellow. It is grind and is mixed with olive oil, and is used as spices in the food, as well as in medicine.

6. Calamus: has a sweet aroma, and oil is extracted from it to be used in matters concerning the sacrifice. (Is. 43:24, Jer. 6:20)

6. Cinnamon: is a kind of wood with a sweet fragrance, and is used instead of tea by some Middle East people. It was used as one of the ingredients of the holy oil which was used to sanctify Aaron and his sons. (Ex. 20:22) It is still used as one of the elements of Myroon oil when it is cooked. It is also used as a kind of medicine.

7. Finally, the Bridegroom communes with her saying, "**A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.**" (4:15) Carrying the Lord Jesus, the living fountain who waters her vines inside the enclosed garden, He pours on her water and draws all her attention toward eternity.

## **THE BRIDE COMMUNICATES WITH HER BRIDEGROOM:**

**"Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits." (Song of Sol. 4: 16)**

In the wedding banquet, the Bridegroom praised His bride and called her to go out with Him outside the camp, sharing His suffering and crucifixion, and to be anointed with myrrh and

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to the commentary Song of Sol. 4:3

<sup>29</sup> Sermon 9

<sup>30</sup> Refer to the commentary Song of Sol. 1:14

be buried with Him and risen, carrying many branches. This is an act of His resurrection inside her. She drips her ointment, and her Bridegroom descends to her and enjoys His fruits inside her. The bride asks for the cold north wind and the warm south wind to blow on her. What does the bride mean by the north wind and the south wind?

1. In Greek, the word "wind" means the same as "spirit". The bride is asking her Bridegroom to send her His Holy Spirit so she may have abundant fruits.

2. Calling the wind refers to calling the Beloved Himself, being the quiet gentle Spirit who penetrates the heart and dwells in it and thus Christ works in us.

3. Perhaps what was meant by the wind was outer circumstances, for the soul, being an enclosed garden, devoted to God, does not fear any outer circumstances, "For all things work together for good to those who love God." (Rom. 8:28) St. Paul was given honor which led to the progress of the gospel, and even when he was imprisoned, his chains led to more progress (Phil. 1:12). He also said about himself, "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or death." (Phil. 1:20)

4. Wind also refers to temptations: Whether temptations from the left side, that is sin, erupt on the soul, or temptations from the right side, that is self-righteousness. The Lord protects her from temptations, and moreover, brings forth fruits which gladden the Bridegroom! He is like Samson who out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet!

Notice that the soul calls her heart "my garden", that is, it belongs to her. But soon she calls her Bridegroom, "Let my Beloved come to his garden." She is His vine, the work of His hands, and under His care, and He is in her midst and cannot be shaken. The soul cannot drip her spices amidst afflictions unless she submits herself to become His garden. He takes care of her and eats her fruit which is "His fruit."

She calls Him to descend to her, for the heart is His, and the fruit is related to Him. St. Ambrose sees that the call here is directed to the Bridegroom so He may descend to the soul in the baptismal font to receive His garden. He works in her with His Holy Spirit and she becomes fruitful.

"Let my Beloved come to His garden and eat from the apple tree which is His." Truly, it is a beautiful tree full of fruits, and its roots extend to the baptismal water, the holy fountain! He descended to her through the incarnation, through His crucifixion and laying in the tomb. And He descends to her when she is baptized in the holy fountain. She still asks Him to descend to her, and come on the clouds to take her with Him, for she has carried His fruits inside her!

# Chapter Four

## THE MARITAL LIFE

### THE BEGINNING OF MARITAL LIFE

As soon as the church called her Bridegroom to come to her and eat from the garden inside her, which is full of the Holy Spirit and which is watered from the fountain of the holy baptism, He immediately answered her call, without any hesitation. He said:

**"I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb (bread) <sup>1</sup>with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!." (Song of Sol. 5: 1)**

Without any hesitation, He descended to His garden, in which He always desired to be, for the call here corresponded to His will. Since eternity, God was preparing the events of salvation, which became the subject of His delight, in spite of all the sufferings, the shame, and the death. St. Paul said, "...Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Heb. 12:2) His bride calls Him to come to His garden, which He had entered on the night before His crucifixion, and to the garden in which His tomb was. She calls Him to fill up in her flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24) , that is, she shares with Him His sufferings, crucifixion and burial. Henceforth, she does not hesitate in telling Him, "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice", as if the events of the salvation are living and extend to the lives of His children!

Father Rufinos <sup>2</sup> relates that the garden is the place where the Lord was crucified, where Solomon the Wise declares that the Bridegroom drinks wine mingled with myrrh, which was offered to the Lord at His crucifixion.

The Lord, immediately, accepted the call, for He found that all what belongs to the bride pertains to Him. He addressed her as His garden, sister and bride, and inside her, there is myrrh, spices, honeycomb, honey, wine and milk. He found the fruits of His Holy Spirit inside her, so He ran to her. He did not find any wage of sin nor wage of an adulterous, or any evil matter which He detests, for He said, "You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God." (Deut. 23:18)

Before explaining what is inside the garden, St. Gregory questioned: "Who is the one whom she is calling to the banquet that she had prepared?"

He is the One, who is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Col. 1:17). He is the One who gives the portion in due season (Lk. 12:42), and the One who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every human being (Ps. 145:16). He is the Heavenly Bread (Jn. 6:14) granting life to the world.

He is the One for whom the bride has prepared her table. The table is the enclosed garden and living trees. The trees are us, and the fruit which we offer is our soul. He said, ""My food is to do the will of the Father. (John 4:34) The goal of His divine will is that everyone is saved. "He desires that all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth ." (1 Tim. 2:4)

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<sup>1</sup> The Septuagint

<sup>2</sup> Rufinus: A. Com. on the Apost. Creed, 26.

The food prepared is our salvation, and the fruit is our free will which presents to God "our souls" as fruit from the branch.

Let us reflect on what the bride had enjoyed earlier which is the fruit of the apple. She said, "His fruit was sweet to my taste." (Song of Sol. 2:3) However, now, she herself became sweet; she became a mature fruit.

"Let my beloved descend" corresponds to what we say in the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed by Thy name" and "Your will be done". In the same manner, the bride prays: "Let my beloved come" declaring to God the fruit of her perfection.

His descent requires the labor of His divine love, for we cannot ascend to the Almighty God unless He lifts up the meek and the humble. (Ps. 146,147:6) In order for us to ascend to heaven, we have to ask the help of God the Almighty, pleading with Him to descend from His majesty and be united with us.

The reply came through the prophet saying, "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry and He will say, 'Here I am.'" (Is. 58:9) Moreover, before even the bride prays, He hears her petition and listens to the readiness of her heart. (Ps. 10:17)

He comes to his garden... and plucks her ointments full of the fruit of her virtues. Then he talks about enjoying the banquet saying to his bride, "I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse..." St. Gregory, bishop of Neses<sup>3</sup>

He descends to the heart and dwells in it and rests in it. He plucks its myrrh with the spices, that is, he harvests the fruits of the cross (myrrh) with the blessings of his holy tomb (spices). He sees the cup of our bitterness as His cup, and the spices which we are buried in are like the spices of His burial... He sees us carrying His cross and buried with Him.

He eats His honeycomb and honey, as if he has entered the promised land which overflows with milk and honey. He eats the two kinds of food: "the honeycomb and the honey", which He had eaten with His disciples after His resurrection, proving, with many signs, that He is living and active in His church.

He finds everything in our hearts sweet and delicious like the honey and the honeycomb.

He also drinks His wine, that is, His love, of which He has poured in us by His Holy Spirit, with His undefiled milk, that is, purity and holiness.

Then, He calls His friends to enter with Him to His private garden to be filled and rejoice with His bride. Who are those friends? They are the heavenly creatures who rejoice over one sinner who repents more than ninety-nine righteous who do not need repentance. (Lk. 15:7) These enter the heart with the Lord, not to reign, but as the soldiers of the Heavenly King, friends of the Bridegroom, saying with John the Baptist, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." (John 3:29)

These are some of the sayings of the Fathers about those friends and their work in the heart:

St. Makarios the Great said: <sup>4</sup>

"The heart is Christ's palace, where the king enters to rest; and with Him go the angels, the spirits of the saints. There He dwells and brings His kingdom!"

St. Ambrose said:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sermon 10

<sup>4</sup> Sermons related to St. Makarios 15

<sup>5</sup> On the Faith 4: 2:20.

"He does not stand by Himself but the angels go before Him saying, "Lift up your heads O you gates!" (Ps. 24:7) Which gates are these? These are the gates of which David the Psalmist said, "Open to me the gates of righteousness" Open the gates to Christ so He may enter. Open the gates of purity, the gates of courage, the gates of wisdom. Trust the message of the angels: "Be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the king of glory shall come in." (Ps. 24:7)

Then let us open our hearts to God and His angels, so that we may have heavenly joy.

## **SHADOWS IN THE MARITAL LIFE**

**"I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my Beloved! He knocks saying, 'Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.'" (Song of Sol. 5: 2,3)**

What a precise picture for the relationship between God and man! Long time ago, man was slothful and neglecting his salvation, in spite of all the potentials that God has given him to be watchful. God wanted him to be a child of the light, however, man was determined to spend all his life in the night, even if his heart was awake.

God gave the human race the natural Law to awaken their hearts so they have no excuse. But "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds and four footed beasts and creeping things." (Rom. 1:21-23)

He gave them the written Law, but when they sinned against the Law, they fell under the condemnation of the Law. "For not the hearers of the Law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." (Rom. 2:13) The holy Law or the just and good commandment revealed sin to me, then sin lived and I died. (Rom. 7)

God sent His prophets, but what did the human race do to them? The Lord Himself said, "O Jerusalem Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23: 37)

Finally, "the voice of my beloved is knocking." Finally, "The Word of God" Himself descended to knock at the heart of man. He stands begging the human soul to open for Him. The Sun of righteousness descended and entered our life, which we made into darkness, so He may shine on those who are in darkness and shadows of death, so we may rise from our sleep!

The conversation here is directed to the soul who called the Messiah her Bridegroom, but after a while, she became lukewarm in His love. She was overcome by sleep and she could not stay awake on the night of His suffering, although her heart is a dwelling for the Holy Spirit. Although she was lukewarm in her love to Him, yet God the lover of mankind, looks at her heart and does not cease to descend to her door calling her, "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one."

The voice of the Beloved is gently rebuking her, so He does not hurt her feelings, but encourages her and calls her "sister, love, dove, perfect one", although she is asleep! He does not rebuke her, but gives her hope and encouragement.

Repeating his request: "Open, open for me..." clarifies the repeated call to the human race in both testaments, the old and the new. God does not change and His call does not change, for He asks the heart to open for Him and accept Him!

Repeating the call is a declaration of the perfect freedom of the soul, for He is the Creator, the Lord and the King, but He does not force Himself on us, but begs us to open for

Him. In the book of Revelation, He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20) Even when He went to His disciples walking on the sea amidst the storm, He did not force Himself on them, but the Evangelist said, "Then they willingly received Him into the boat." (John 6:20)

St. Athanasius used this friendly talk of the Lord Jesus toward the human soul in his book "The history of the Arians", to refute their violence saying: <sup>6</sup> "The Lord comes to everyone, but He does not force anyone to open, for He knocks the door saying: "Open to me, my sister..." If one opens to Him, He will enter, but if one is late in responding, He will leave. He uses the method of persuasion and advice, and not violence and force.

He convinces the soul to open for him by love, for she became his sister and He is her older brother who can help her. He became the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29) He conquered death and became the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:20) Let us open our hearts to the One who opened the door of life!

Due to the strong friendship between them, He continues and begs her to open for him for He calls her "His friend". This is the same title by whom He called Abraham, the father of believers (2 Chron. 20:7), Is. 41:8) Since God has said to Abraham, His friend, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" (Gen. 18:17) , it is more appropriate for the believer, being a friend of God, to completely open his heart for God.

He attracts her to open the door of her heart by calling her "my dove", for she carried the Holy Spirit who came in the form of a dove inside her, thus she had the capability to open her heart.

Finally, He encourages her by being "the perfect one" without any guile, thus she cannot close the door in front of his face.

In the same manner, God deals with us and He declares His love to us, not through commandments, but through His friendship and He reveals the potentials of His Holy Spirit working in us and encouraging us to reach our goal!

Finally, He pleads with us being "The One carrying our sufferings and pains" for our sake. He said:

"For my head is covered with dew and my locks with the drops of the night." (5:2)

Since our life is all darkness and sleep, yet through love, He will penetrate through darkness to carry the pains of the night. The Lord Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemani at night, and His disciples slept and could not be watchful for one hour. (Matt. 26:40) He entered in the deep and received the cup of suffering to drink for the sake of all the human race. In the garden, He was sorrowful and deeply distressed. He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death." (Matt. 26:38) His sweat was dripping like drops of blood!

He communes with her and pleads with her to open for Him for the sake of what He had endured for her. His head was covered with dew and His locks with the drops of the night. He carried the divine wrath in His body and as Isaiah the prophet said, "Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Is. 53: 4,5)

In spite of all that love, she presented inappropriate human excuses, and she did not call Him my lord nor even called Him by His name, but said:

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<sup>6</sup> History of the Arians . 33



**"I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?" (Song of Sol. 5: 3)**

All these are excuses for not opening the heart to the One who truly loves her, because she is lukewarm. This is a picture of the one who does not want to weary himself to meet the Lord Jesus who greatly suffered for him!

How easy it is to put on a robe and shoes on her feet, but she was occupied with the comfort of her body than enjoying her Bridegroom. She resembled those who gave excuses for not attending the wedding feast. (Matt. 22:5)

If she has taken off her clothes, the Lord Jesus Himself is the eternal robe who covers us, as St. Paul said, "You have put on Christ." Gal. 3:27) This is the best robe whom the Heavenly Father put on his son returning to him. (Lk. 15:22) This is the robe presented from God's hand, as Zechariah said, "I will clothe you with rich robes." (Zech. 3:4)

If she has taken off her robe, He will give her His Holy Spirit to put on, as the secret of life in her. He ascertained to His disciples, "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Lk. 24:49)

If she has washed her feet, let us realize that the One who knocks at her door is her Lord who washed His bride's feet. (Jn. 13:5) She washed her feet with her self-righteousness, to relieve her conscious; however, when the Lord's hands extend to wash her feet, she may have rest in His eternal kingdom. That is why the Lord Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." (Jn. 13:8) Let us rise from our "ego" and proceed to our Bridegroom who covers us with His blood and puts on us His Holy Spirit, as well as washing our inner life so we live sanctified for Him.

## **THROUGH THE CROSS, THE MARITAL LOVE IS RESTORED:**

Since the soul cannot listen to the voice of the One who greatly loves her, then He has to extend His wounded hand on the cross, in her mind, so she may see the scars of the wounds of His love which He had endured for her. Then she yearns for Him saying:

**"My Beloved put His hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for Him. I arose to open for my Beloved and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the lock." (Song of Sol. 5: 4,5)**

After the resurrection, the disciples were scared and locked the doors and did not know that the locked doors did not prevent the Lord from coming to them to show them His hands and side so they may rejoice. (Jn. 20:20) He opened an inner latch inside their hearts so they may touch the wounds of His love. In the same manner, the Lord extends His wounded hand through the latch, to reveal the mystery of His love to His believers, so they may yearn for Him. This latch is nothing except the Lord's side and His wounds. Through it, the Lord extends the hand of His love to reveal His inner bowels inflamed with love, so we may yearn too for Him. He first loved us, therefore, we have to love Him back.

The latch has special memories, mentioned in the Old Testament, which are symbolic to the Lord's act of salvation in the life of His bride. We mention some:

1. Through the latch (window), Abimelech realized that Rebecca is Isaac's wife and not his sister. (Gen. 26:8) In the same manner, through the Lord's wounds, the church is declared as the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Through the window, the two spies descended at Rahab's house. (Josh. 2:15) Through the window, David descended escaping from Saul and his messengers and was delivered. (1 Sam.

19:21) Through the window, we descend from the pride of this world to cross its gates and be delivered from all the wiles of the devil.

3. A scarlet cord was tied to the window (Josh. 2:18), through which Rahab and all her household were saved, was a symbol of the blood of the Lord Jesus who saved all people.

4. As the window was a symbol of salvation, it also symbolized the destruction of evil. When Isabel, the evil queen, decorated herself with the ornaments of the world, she was thrown from the window and the dogs licked her blood. (2 Kings 9) When Ahaziah, the evil king who depended on Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, and not on God fell from the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, (2 Kings 1:2) he became sick and died. Also, in Deborah's praise, she requested from the mother of King Sisera to look through the window (Judges 5:28), to find out why the chariots of her son were late and why the clatter of his chariots were tarried. He and his chariots were destroyed.

5. Through this latch, the believers yearn for God's redeeming love, while the unbelievers mock these wounds, resembling Michal, King Saul's daughter. When she looked through the window and saw King David dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart. (2 Sam. 6:16 & 1 Chron. 15:29)

The bride who enjoyed the Lord's hand in her midst and realized the mystery of His cross, went to open for her Beloved. She cried with the younger son saying, "I rise and go to my Father" (Lk. 15) She declared her yearning to the One who loved her, through true repentance and bitter tears; that is why she said, "My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh."

St. Gregory<sup>7</sup> said: "The myrrh resembles the death which Christ has died for us. We have touched Him, through repentance, and have accepted to die with Him, so He may open for us the everlasting doors."

**"I opened for my Beloved, but My Beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart went out to him when he spoke. I sought him but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer. The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick! What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us? "** (Song of Sol. 5: 6 - 9)

After a long sleep, she went to open for her Bridegroom. However, her Bridegroom had left her. Why did He do that? He chastens a man when he is late in responding. In His chastisement, He seems as though He has left us for a while, but this shows His concern for us. Father Daniel<sup>10</sup> gave two reasons for forsaking us:

1. God may forsake us for a little while so we may remember our weaknesses, and we may realize that our pure heart is a free gift from God.

2. When He forsakes us, our inner goal is revealed and we look for the Holy Spirit. This becomes like a test in perseverance, strong determination and true zeal. When we have our spiritual happiness and purity, we become very cautious in preserving these matters. We are not cautious in preserving what we have if they are easily attained.

Father Daniel said: David the prophet relates that when God temporarily forsakes us, this is for our own good. That is why he asked God not to permanently forsake him. He said, "Do not forsake me utterly!" (Ps. 119:8) In other words, he said, "I know that you may forsake your saints

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon 12

<sup>10</sup> By the author: John Kasian about Spiritual Lukewarmness, p. 110.

for their own good and for testing them. So I do not ask that you do not forsake me, for it is good that I feel my weakness. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." (Ps. 119: 71) It is not good for me that there is no opportunity for battle. The devil cannot dare to fight me unless I am depending on His protection. I ask that you forsake me for a little while, but not for long; for when you forsake me for a little while, that is for testing my love."

Father Daniel talked about the spiritual lukewarmness because of God forsaking us temporarily to test our faith and to purify us. Truly, this is not forsaking but it is considered divine concern . St. John Chrysostom described God's position like a nurse who holds her baby's hand. She walks with him for a while, then she lifts her hand and let him walk by himself. She still looks at him with her heart, her thought and eyes; and her hands are ready to support him.

The human soul said: "I requested Him but did not find Him", although He is standing beside her, but rather inside her. He waits to see her struggle for Him, to say with Jacob: I will not forsake you until you bless me."

" I called Him but he did not answer me," although He is busy arranging everything for my salvation.

The soul wandered in the world seeking the One she loves, although He is inside her. St. Augustine said that foolishly he went to seek Him outside himself, in the nature and books, although God was inside him, in his inner depth.

**Who are those guards who went about the city, found her, struck her, wounded her, and took her veil away from her?**

1. If the speaker here is the believer in the church of the New Testament, then he is rebuking the Jews and their leaders, who represent the watchmen in the city of Jerusalem and those who are responsible for keeping the word of God. They were the ones who ought to preach the Messiah, however, they attack the church and wound her.

In front of all these insults, the believer does not deviate from looking toward his Bridegroom, but on the contrary, he ascertains that he is wounded with the love of the Heavenly Bridegroom, saying, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick." (5: 8)

This is the fifth time that the church of the Gentiles rebuked the Jews:

A. In the first time (1:5): the church of the Gentiles rebuked the Jews because they said that she was black like the tents of Kedar, and that she had no roots and did not receive the Law, nor did the prophets come from her. She answered that although she was black because of her pagan origin, yet she is in the bosom of the Father, who embraced her and beautified her through His Son Jesus Christ and made her like the curtains of Solomon.

B. In the second time (2:7): Starting to unite with the Lord who put His left hand under her head and His right hand embraced her, the Jews attempted to ruin this unity and destroy it. However, she declared that the day will come when she Lord will be revealed and declare the reality of this unity.

C. In the third time (3:5): Since the Bridegroom entered the tomb, the Jews mocked Him saying, "Get out of the tomb, so we may believe in You." However, the church replied saying, "Do not think that He died and His mission is abolished, but He is living; He has risen from the dead and raised me with Him and ascended me from the wilderness, as white as pillars of smoke scented with myrrh and frankincense. Through Him, I ascend to the Father!

D. In the fourth time (3:11): The church made it clear to the Jews that although they crown Him with the crown of thorns to mock Him, yet He is crowned as the Bridegroom to the whole creation , on the day of His wedding.

E. In the fifth time (5:8): The church declares to the Jews that though her children may go through periods of lukewarmness and though it may seem that the Lord has forsaken them, yet the church is living and full of love. She struggles until the Lord removes their lukewarmness.

2. The watchmen who went about the city refer to the ministers of the church, the city of God; and the keepers of the walls refer to the preachers of the word. All those ministers have to hide behind the word of God when preaching those who became lukewarm. Those lukewarm souls feel that they have been chastised and wounded by the ministers of the word of God, because the word of God is like a sword which kills evil and expel it from their souls. Also, it is like the mirror which reveals the weakness of man. The wounds and the chastisement were not to annoy those souls nor to mock them, but they were the wounds of love which lead to repentance. As St. Paul said, "For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?" (2 Cor. 2:2)

In any case, when the soul is no more lukewarm, she returns to the Fatherly bosom in Christ Jesus, and she witnesses to the power of this act before, even, unbelievers who question:

**"What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?"**

You are beautiful and you lack nothing; then who is this Beloved with whom you are occupied? Who is this Beloved whom you charge for being united with Him?

Perhaps this question is a prophecy about the Jews accepting the Lord Jesus at the end of days. A day will come when the Jews will realize that they were wrong in asking for an earthly kingdom and temporal gains. They will realize that they need eternal salvation and to taste the heavenly love of God.

# Chapter Five

## THE MUTUAL MARITAL LOVE

### THE BRIDE PRAISES HER BRIDEGROOM

When the world discovers the bride's love to her Bridegroom and realizes the effect of this love in her inner life, the world may wonder who this unique Bridegroom is. Here, the bride testifies to her Bridegroom, not by mere words but by her life. She knows Him and touches Him uniting with Him, and enters into the knowledge of the Unseen God. She carries a true and practical testimony, saying:

**"My Beloved is white and ruddy." (5:10)**

How sweet is the Savior, the Bridegroom; in Him are the two colors: the white and the red, and each one compliments the other! He is white, but not the pale white, lifeless, like Ananias the high priest, about whom St. Paul said: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the Law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the Law?" (Acts 23:3) By disobeying the commandment and the Law, he became under the judgment of death, without life. He lost his blood, the sign of life, and became pale like the dead. However, the Savior of the church, is white and pure, yet carries redness, the sign of life, vitality and strength! He does not carry redness, away from the white, or else this may be a sign of murder and shedding blood, as was mentioned in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 6:4) Sin was described as scarlet and crimson (Is. 1:18). But He is "Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, the One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength... I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." (Is. 63:1)

The word "white" means "splendor", for He is the Sun of righteousness who shone on us, who are sitting in the darkness, to make us enter, through His Holy Spirit, to the perfect light of the knowledge of the Father. Through the worthiness of His blood (red), He carried us in His splendor to be in the bosom of the Father. Thus, His splendor is mingled with His redeeming act, that is his whiteness with his redness, until we carry the reflection of His splendor inside us, so we may enter to His Father.

In the book of Daniel, His clothes were white like snow (7:2). In the transfiguration, "His clothes became white as the light." (Matt. 17:2) His clothes are His church; He dwells inside her. All the white and splendor He carries, He reflects on His church, like the heavenly creatures who are continuously in His presence. (Mark 16:5 & Acts 1:10) We will appear in heaven with white clothes (Rev. 3:4 & 7:9) We are also commanded to have white garments: "Let your garments always be white." (Ecc. 9:8)

The Holy Bible mentioned many appearances of angels, but did not describe their clothes. However, in the events of the resurrection and ascension, the Bible confirmed that the angels appeared with white clothes. For our sakes, they appeared to show us, that through the resurrection of the Lord and His ascension, we are washed and became whiter than snow. (Ps. 50) Our sins which are like scarlet, are buried in the tomb, then the Lord raises us like snow. (Is. 1:18). That is why Daniel the prophet said: "purge them and make them white." (Dan. 11:35)

Thus, the church sees her Bridegroom and she rejoices with His splendor and blood. However, the devil is scared before the splendor of the Savior and the blood of His cross. That is why the church says:

2. **"Chief among ten thousand." (Song of Sol. 5: 10)**

He became known among people and the devil.. The church knows Him as "Banner to the people." (Is. 11:10) He was lifted on the cross, and He drew everyone to Him, to pour His splendor on them and to sanctify them with the blood, so that the devils cry, "Come down from the cross", because He has destroyed their kingdom and "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." (Col. 2:15)

**3. "His head is like the finest gold; His locks are wavy, and black as a raven." (Song of Sol. 5: 11)**

Since gold refers to the heavenly life, then the finest gold refers to His divinity, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. 2:9) The Father appointed Him the Head of the church "From whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments." (Col. 2:19) He is the Son of God and His Word, who can let the whole body enter the heavens. Since the Head is heavenly, then the body cannot live except on a heavenly level as long as it is connected to the Head. This is the secret of her love to her Bridegroom. He takes her to the heaven, that is to the bosom of the Father, through uniting with her.

His hair surrounding the church is the community of saints, who are like the hair of the Lord, whom one hair cannot fall without the Father's permission. They live by Him, thus none of his hair become white, but his hair is dark black as the crow. The believer does not get old, but his youth is renewed like the eagle. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who grants fellowship between the Head and the members, so that all the members stay strong by abiding in the Head who never weakens.

The Lord Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8). Also, His church is above the limits of time, so she never gets old nor is affected by earthly events!

**4. "His eyes are like doves, by the rivers of water, washed with milk and fitly set." <sup>1</sup> (Song of Sol. 5: 12)**

He is the fearful King who scares the enemies; his eyes are like flames of fire, (Rev. 1:14) which examines the hidden matters. However, when He appears to His believers, they see His eyes like simple dove full of innocence.<sup>2</sup> His eyes are like the dove's eyes "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil." (Hab. 1:13)

Father Victorianus, the bishop of Pateu, from the third century, sees that the water refers to many nations which returned to God, through baptism. <sup>2</sup> Thus, mentioning His eyes are like doves on the water, refers to the incarnation of the Lord and declaring a new holy generation through baptism.

Being washed in milk refers to God's concern to present the undefiled faith as food to their souls. St. Ambrose said, "The Lord is baptized in milk, meaning that He is baptized in sincerity, and those who are baptized in milk are those who have the undefiled faith."

Being fitly sit, that is being settled in their places, refers to God's care for His church and children. He looks at every member and keeps His eyes on each one until He brings each member to have fellowship in His glory.

We can also say that the eyes of Christ are His priests and ministers, who guides all the human race toward Christ. They have the spiritual look opened by the Holy Spirit, like " a dove" to make everyone enter into the baptismal water, where they wash their sins and are granted the undefiled faith like milk. They are fitly sit, that is, they have a place in the Head "Christ", so that

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<sup>1</sup> The Septugint

<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory, bishop of Noces, sermon 14

<sup>2</sup> (A. N. Frs., vol. 7.

through Him, they can care for the salvation of the souls. Comparing them to the eyes of Christ, is a literal comparison, for in the Old Testament, the prophet was known as "seer" (Amos 7:12), for the prophet, with the spirit of prophecy, can see what the people cannot see. Sometimes, he was called "a watchman" (Ezek. 3:17 & 33:7), who can stand on a tower to warn the people whether the enemies are coming or not.

**5. His cheeks are like a bed of spices, like banks of scented herbs." (Song of Sol. 5:13)**

The cheeks of the Lord Jesus were mocked and smitten as mentioned by the prophet Isaiah: "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard." (Is. 50:6) This face, whom the Lord did not hide from the shame of spitting (Matt. 27:3), is considered a proof of His sacrificial love, thus the church compares it to a bed of spices, that is, some plants which have a nice aroma, and with banks of scented herbs which bring a fragrance of life.

**6. " His lips are lilies dripping liquid myrrh." (Song of Sol. 5: 13)**

We mentioned earlier that the Bridegroom is the lily of the valleys, and by uniting with Him, the believers become lilies too. However, here, the cheeks of the Bridegroom are compared to the lily. What does that mean?

The lily refers to the royal glory, for the Lord talked about it saying, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt. 28,29) The lips of the Lord Jesus declare glorious teachings, or in other words, they present the word of life able to let the believer enter into the glorious eternal life. David the Psalmist said, "...Grace is poured upon Your lips.." (Ps. 45:2)

These lips carry a scented aroma and drips with myrrh. All the evangelists described the words coming out of His lips by: "No man ever spoke like this Man." (John 7:46) Everyone witnessed and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" (Lk. 4:22)

Dripping liquid myrrh means that His words are mingled with the bitterness of His suffering and burial, for He was embalmed with myrrh. Whoever hears Him desires to enter in the fellowship of His suffering and dying with Him. St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa <sup>5</sup> said: "Myrrh flows from His body and fills the souls of those who accepted Him. This is a clear symbol of mortifying the body."

St. Gregory said that the lips overflow with lilies and myrrh, which represent the apostles, who are the Lord's mouth, witnessing to the word of His Gospel, which is the lily. They enter with the believers to the liquid myrrh, which is mortifying the self, that is baptism and burial to be granted the power of the resurrection. St. Peter overflowed with lilies, which is the word of God, in the house of Cornelius, filling the souls of those who heard him with myrrh, for they were buried with Christ in baptism and died to the world.

**7. " His hands are rods of gold set with beryl." (Song of Sol. 5: 14)**

The rods or circles refer to eternity, for it has no beginning nor end. His hands are eternal which satisfy both the soul and the body forever. Being made of gold refers to their heavenly feature. He holds his bride and puts her hand in His heavenly hand to pour His work on her, so she may carry His power and heavenly capabilities to cross with Him to heaven.

The beryl was mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Ezek. 1:16, Dan. 10:6) to refer to the power of putting the foundation, for the works of His hands are faithfulness and truth, which build His bride on steadfast faith and truth.

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<sup>5</sup> Sermon 14

### **8 "His body is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires." (Song of Sol. 5: 14)**

The belly refers to God's deep feelings full of love and compassion, as was mentioned in Jeremiah: "My heart yearns for him, I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." (Jer. 31:20) This compassion is like carved ivory, for ivory is extracted from the elephant through suffering. Being inlaid with sapphires refers to his love being heavenly and eternal, for sapphire is a heavenly color.

### **9. "His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold." (Song of Sol. 5: 15)**

The legs refer to the ability of walking steadfastly, and the fine gold refers to the heavenly nature. The one who unites with the Bridegroom can walk steadfastly toward heaven and crush all the powers of the devil, conquering death and sin.

St. Ambrose commented: "His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold, for Christ walks inside the souls and makes His ways in the minds of His saints, as if they are golden bases and foundation of precious stones, which have the traces of the footsteps of the Word of God."

### **10. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. (Song of Sol. 5: 15)**

Lebanon is a tourist place with excellent weather, where the newly weds go for their honeymoon. In the same manner, the kind and smiling countenance of the Lord Jesus makes the soul, who wants to live a spiritual marital life with the Lord, rejoice. David the Psalmist said, "You are fairer than the sons of men." (Ps. 45:2) Also, in the record which Pilate sent to Herod about the Lord Jesus, it was written that "He had desired for a long time to see Him." (Lk. 23:8)

The secret of His beauty lies in Him being "youth like cedar", which is known by its length, straightness, and sweet smell. In the same manner, the Lord Jesus appears to the soul as a youth who never gets old.

It is amazing that the Lord Jesus, in His humility, carried our human nature, sharing with us all the stages of our growth, except being old. He became a fetus, then an infant, then a child, then a youth, then a man, but He ascended before getting old, for it is not befitting that He becomes old, so that His church does not carry the spirit of spiritually growing old. It is written in the divine inspiration, "Your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Ps. 103:5) In the church rites, it was written that the church and St. Mary are like "the vine that does not grow old."

A Christian does not grow old at all, but as the days pass by, his youth abounds more. "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." (2 Cor. 4:16) Also, St. Paul wrote, "And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." (Col. 3:10) Truly the body may weaken and may get old, but the spirit remains strong and active. (Matt. 26:41 & Mk. 14:38).

### **11. "His mouth is most sweet, yes, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. (Song of Sol. 5: 16)**

David the Psalmist said, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." (Ps. 119:103) Thus, the believer finds in the words of Christ special sweetness, because His words are spirit and life. Whoever eats of these words comes back to the Lord hungry for Him and whoever drinks from Him is more thirsty for Him.

When one listens to the words of the Lord Jesus, his heart yearns for knowing the divine mysteries, and he remains sitting at the Lord's feet, without leaving Him, saying, "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad." (Ps. 119: 96 )

The secret of the sweetness of His words lies in its power and authority, so He does not give mere commandments or warnings, or advises, but gives power to implement the words.



Then the commandment lifts man to enter into the knowledge of the mysteries of heaven, and the soul is elevated from glory to glory, continuously carrying the mystery of an endless new power.

Finally, when the bride feels unable to describe her Bridegroom, she says, "He is altogether lovely." This is her true Beloved whom she seeks; He satisfies her, and in Him, she finds all her love and desires!

# Chapter Six

## Conversation in the Garden

Since the soul witnessed to her Bridegroom, the unbelievers started to question:

**"Where has your Beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your Beloved turned aside that we may seek Him with you?" (Song of Sol. 6: 1)**

The testimony of the soul for her Bridegroom reflected His glory on her life and accepting Him calling her "the fairest among women." Her spiritual beauty created special attraction, not for herself, but for the Bridegroom, who is the secret of her beauty!

The unbelievers were very eager to see Him and at the same time very perplexed. They questioned, "Where has your Beloved gone? Where has your Beloved turned aside? Where did He hide? We want to know Him with you." The unbelievers realized that they can never know the Bridegroom outside the church. So they have to be inside the church, for He is the Bridegroom of the whole church, and He is her Head. Without the church, the world does not know Christ, and outside Christ, there is no church.

The reply of the church was:

**"My Beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies." (Song of Sol. 6: 2,3)**

This book emphasizes the existence of the Bridegroom inside the church, and inside the soul whom He bought with His blood. He enters the stony heart and changes it to a garden for Him (Song of Sol. 4: 12,16, 5:1) Moreover, He changes it to many gardens where He gathers the lilies which carry the marks of the Bridegroom Himself, who is also called the Lily. (Song of Sol. 2:1)

The bride is warning from wasting time in looking for the Bridegroom outside; for, through His humility, He descended to the church and entered the hearts of His people. St. Paul said, "Do not say in your heart, 'who will ascend into heaven?' (that is to bring Christ down from above), ...The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart..." (Rom. 10:7,8)

The bride's response clarifies to the outsiders the secret of the relationship between God and the soul. God entered into His garden to gather the lilies, but He does that, not as one who takes advantage of His creation nor as One who likes to be authoritative, but He entered because of a love call from His bride, for she tells Him, "I am my Beloved's." In other words, she tells Him, "All what is mine is yours. May You enter my heart and take all the inner feelings and energies, for all what I own is yours. This call is a mere response to the act of love which I show to Him, for "My Beloved is mine." He offered His life to me and I am repaying Him for all what He did for me! I love Him with my own free will, for He loves me, with His own free will, too.

Her saying "He descended" means that the Bridegroom descending to her heart is not because He needs her, but this is due to His humility to accept her call to enter her life and raise her up to His heaven. He takes all of her, as He gave Himself to her.

He descended to my heart... What do I ask of Him? I cannot ask except to take Him, and nothing will satisfy me except Himself. No gifts nor human reward can quench my thirst, but I seek Him. "My Beloved is for me."

The conversation of the Bridegroom with His bride in the garden:

**"O, my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners!" (Song of Sol. 6: 4)**

When the bride unites with her Bridegroom, each one communes with the other. Witnessing to the unbelievers that the Bridegroom is inside her, the bride asks that they should not seek Him outside. The Bridegroom praises her for that, using some phrases (Song of Sol. 4), and reveals a deeper beauty, which is a deeper union.

Here, He sees her as "beautiful as Tirzah". In Hebrew, Tirzah means "joy", and this is the name of the youngest daughter of Zelophehad (Num. 26:33). Their father had died and they had no brother. They stood before Moses and Eliazer the priest and all the elders in the tabernacle, and asked that they inherit their father with their father's brothers. God gave them this right and this became a statute of judgment. (Num. 27:1-11) They also received their share of inheritance when Joshua divided the land. (Josh. 17:3-6) In this book, Solomon is comparing the bride with Tirzah, who asked for her right before Moses and Joshua, and it was granted to her from the Lord to receive a share in the inheritance. This is the beauty of the person who is united with the Lord Jesus. He asks without fear for his inheritance, that is, to live as a living member in the holy congregation. This inheritance is the Lord Himself, whom the soul accepts inside her, the secret of her glory and richness.

Probably, by Tirzah, he means the beautiful city which was originally for the Cananites, but Joshua conquered it, (Josh. 12:24) and gave it to the tribes of Israel. It was the capital of the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel for about fifty years (1 Kings 14;17 &15:21, 33 & 16:6, 23) The secret of its beauty was that it was earlier a gentile and pagan worshiper, but when Joshua conquered it, it became the Lord's possession.

Tirzah is also beautiful as Jerusalem; the secret of its beauty is that it resembles Jerusalem, the city of the king, that is, the church represents the heavenly holies and the capital of His kingdom, where everything in it is beautiful and splendid.

The beauty of Tirzah was mingled with power, for it was awesome like an army with banners. It was awesome before the enemies, for the Lord her Conqueror, protects it. It is like a heavenly army carrying banners of victory and triumph. It does not know defeat nor despair, but has the spirit of power and victory. According to the Greek translation, it is like an army led by the Lord Himself.

In other words, a Christian carries power with beauty. He is beautiful by His meekness and gentleness, yet powerful by his courage and strictness. He is beautiful by his inner quietness, yet strong in his struggle against sin until shedding blood. The secret of his power and victory is "his tears", which he pours before the Lord, with a contrite heart, which captivates the divine love, for He says:

**"Turn your eyes away from Me, for they have overcome me." (Song of Sol. 6: 5)**

confession of the right thief. God cannot endure to see man's tears and his contrition. The best example for that is the example of the evil King Ahab who murdered and took possession (1

Kings 21:19), and whom the Bible wrote that, "But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. And he behaved very abominably in following idols..." (1 Kings 21:25, 26). Upon hearing God's punishment by Elijah the prophet, Ahab tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. The Lord could not endure that sight and told Elijah the prophet, "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days..." (1 Kings 21:29)

**2. Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them. Like a piece of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil." (Song of Sol. 6: 5-7)**

Earlier, in chapter four, the Lord praised her with the same features, and we have discussed that in details. The secret of its repetition is to emphasize a certain truth, which is, that God's love to man will never change. In spite of the lukewarmness which the soul went through, as was mentioned in chapter five, yet when she returns with the tears of repentance, she found Him praising her with the same traits, and His outlook toward her has not changed. Moreover, His love to her has increased; and this may remind us of what God did with St. Peter after he had denied Him. The Lord assured him three times that He accepted him in the apostolic work, by saying, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? Feed My sheep." God's love never changes; however our love to Him may change. His divine arms are still opened with love to everyone.

**3. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines, and they praised her." (Song of Sol. 6: 8,9)**

Through the language of numbers, He praises her. What does he mean by sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins without number? These vary according to their stature; however, his church, whom He has bought with His own blood and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, became the one bride, the perfect dove. This is the secret of her beauty, power and being perfect. She became the one body of the Lord, although she is made up of many members, for "He would gather together in one the children of God..." (John 11:52) "He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him." (Eph. 1:10)

The secret of her being one does not depend on the members being in one place or uniting in one language or one culture, but on the following factors:

A. She is his dove: Since the Holy Spirit is one, yet He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son together. He granted His church this divine Spirit so that the believers may become one dove, having fellowship with God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who grants fellowship to the believers with God and with one another. Through the Holy Spirit and the worthiness of the blood of the Son, we are reconciled with the Father. And in baptism, we receive the spirit of adoption, through which we cry "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15) Through this reconciliation, we see ourselves members for one another.

Some of the sayings of the Fathers: <sup>3</sup>

At. Augustine said: <sup>4</sup>"The Holy Spirit who gathers God's people into one, expels the evil spirit who is divided against himself."

"One of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit is the fellowship, through which we become one body to the Son of God, for it is written, "Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy." (Phil. 2:1)

"When the Almighty descended and babbled the tongues, the gentiles were divided. But when He divided the tongues of fire, He called everyone to unity. Hence, with one accord, we glorify the Spirit full of holiness." Hymn of Kontakon of Pentecost. <sup>5</sup> (in the Greek Orthodox Church).

B. She is perfect: When the church puts on Christ, who is perfect, she becomes perfect. Her unity is based on entering "the perfect new life", which we have in Christ Jesus. In this new life, we do not submit to the law of schism or the spirit of enmity, but rather to the spirit of love, who grants the inner unity. Thus our unity becomes established through our sanctification by uniting with the Holy One, so we resemble the unity of the Holy Trinity. This is very obvious in the Lord's farewell prayer on the night of His suffering. He said, "Holy Father, keep through your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are....That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us... I in them and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." (John 17:11,21,23)

St. Kebrianos the martyr said <sup>6</sup>: {This is what He desired for us: that we may live according to the unity between the Father and the Son, being One.}

St. Cyril of Alexandria said <sup>7</sup>: { He desires for us a unity with each other, like the unity of the Holy Trinity. This should be reflected on the unity of the believers. }

C. She is the only one, the only one of her mother: Who is this mother who looks at the church as the only one? She is the Heavenly Jerusalem, who has no work except to wait for this one bride, whom the Lord Jesus has betrothed her to be His partner in eternal glory. The secret of the union stems from the believers entering into eternity, that is they are released from the limitations of time. Since our temporal life creates the spirit of division and jealousy, then our enjoying the deposit of the heavens grants us love toward all the human race and eagerness on an eternal level, for the law of heaven is peace, unity, and its language is love.

The Bridegroom said: "The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines and they praised her." The heavenly creatures praise her, for they see her submitting to their law and talking their language and becoming one of them and not a stranger.

Second: From the language of the symbolic numbers, we can understand that these are manifestations of the secret of the beauty and power of the church.

A. Sixty queens: resemble the church, for the number 12 represents the kingdom of God on earth, for the Holy Trinity reigns over the four corners of the earth, that is  $4 \times 3 = 12$ . When God reigns over the five senses of the believers, that is  $12 \times 5 = 60$ , then the number 60 becomes a symbol of God's reign over one's life, or the life of the church, which extends from one end of

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<sup>3</sup> To understand the concept of the unity of the church with the perspective of the Fathers, refer to book "Introductions in the science of Patrology", 1974, p. 119-141.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine: sermons on the New Testament, sermon 21.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Archbishop Ilarion: Christianity or Church?

<sup>6</sup> On the Lord's Prayer/

<sup>7</sup> On St. John. Book 2, ch.2

the earth to the other. Hence, the church becomes sixty queens, where the King of kings rules inside us, then our lives are no more in bondage, but we are elevated to carry the royal glory.

B. Eighty concubines: The first number showed the church as queen, through God's reign over her feelings; however here she appears as concubine, that is, she lives in a secret spiritual life with the Bridegroom. Number eighty refers to the church being characterized by the life to come, while she is still on earth. Number ten refers to the temporal life, thus the ten commandments in the Old Testament were a divine law which we have to obey on earth. Number eight refers to the life to come, because it exceeds number seven which refers to the week of our life. That is why circumcision was done on the eighth day, and the Lord Jesus rose on the first day of the new week, that is on the eighth day of the old week. Also, Noah's household were eight and they were saved in the ark. These all refer to the new heavenly life, for the church, though living on earth (10), yet she lives a new heavenly life (8).

C. Virgins without number: The infinite number here refers to the virginity of life, which is wholly devoted to the Lord. Thus the believer presents a virgin heart, and does not accept another Bridegroom beside the Lord, and a virgin thought which does not think except in the Lord, and virgin feelings. That is why the Lord compared the kingdom of God to virgins who went to meet the bridegroom.

D. The only one: The oneness of the church is a basic feature of the life of the church, for we declare in the creed, "We believe in one holy catholic apostolic church." Earlier, we saw the secret of this oneness, which is our adoption to God, the one Father, by uniting with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

St. Ercanus saw that the secret of this oneness is "the one faith". He said <sup>8</sup>: "The true church, which is truly old, is one church. The early universal church is the one who works for the unity of faith."

In Father Rufinus' talk about the creed, he mentioned this phrase (Song. of Sol. 6:9), clarifying that the secret of this union is the one faith. He said <sup>9</sup>: "Whoever accepts this faith in the church, let him not seek the evil counsel nor participate with the oppressors."

3. We may interpret "My dove, my perfect one, is the only one" to be St. Virgin Mary, for she has surpassed all who preceded her, in honor. In the Sunday Theotokia, it was mentioned, "Hail to you, O Mary, the perfect dove, who bore for us the Logos."

This verse can be applied to St. Mary too,

**"Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners." (Song of Sol. 6:10)**

St. Mary is bright as the morning, for the Sun of righteousness was incarnate from her, and He shone on those who were living in darkness. She is beautiful as the moon, which gets her beauty from the light of her Son.. She is clear as the sun for the Holy Spirit descended on her and sanctified her and prepared her for the divine incarnation. She is awesome as an army with banners for she carried inside her the Lord of hosts, the leader of the battle against sin and Satan's kingdom.

There is another interpretation for this verse. He calls every person, who meets the Lord and carries His Holy Spirit and puts on Christ, by his name. He also shines by His light so he becomes without any darkness, beautiful like the moon, through His blood, and conqueror through His cross.

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<sup>8</sup> Against Heres. 3: 3: 1.

<sup>9</sup> Rufinus: A Com. on the Apostles' Creed, 39.

### **The Bride's Diligence at work:**

**"I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded and the pomegranates had bloomed. Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people. Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you! What would you see in the Shulamite as it were, the dance of the two camps?" (6: 11-13)**

Since the Lord praised His bride, she cannot but go down to her inner valley to work, to the garden of nuts, to reveal that the nuts have budded, in a priestly manner. Aaron's rod has budded, blossomed and yielded ripe walnuts. (Numbers 17:8)

Walnuts represent the word of God which perpetually occupies the priest's heart. God presents the word of God as a delicious meal so that his people may eat, be filled and be fruitful. When the Lord's word came to Jeremiah, He said, "Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, 'I see a branch of an almond tree.' Then the Lord said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.'" (Jer. 1:11,12)

Origen justified using the word "walnut" as a symbol for the word of God, because the walnut contains a bitter outer cover, which is the skin which dries up and falls. Then there is a thick inner cover which when broken, one eats the sweet inner fruit. Origen wrote that the word of God has the bitter literal interpretation, which the Jews have used. However, the word of God has another interpretation, which is the behavioral, which is like the thick cover which drives one to mortify himself, struggling until shedding the blood, so one may enter the sweet spiritual interpretation which nourishes the soul, not only in this world, but also in the world to come.

The soul descended to her inner depth, as in a garden of the word of God, where she sees the fruits of the valley. There in the heart, she realizes the spiritual meanings of the word which satisfies her soul. She tells the Bridegroom: "I do not take credit for all your praises to me, but this a fruit of your divine work implanted in me by your divine hand.

It is amazing that the Lord praising the faithful soul, does not drive her to pride, but rather pushes her to work. So she descends to see the Lord's vine inside her, and the trees which His hand had planted: did the vine bud? Did the pomegranate bloom?

Abiding in the Lord's garden and feeling His work inside her, she rejoices with the fruit, although it is still in the beginning. She communes with her Bridegroom saying: "There I give You my breasts."<sup>12</sup> As if she is telling Him, "I render my love for your love. You offered me your breasts, which are the Old and the New Testaments. And now Your word became fruitful in me, so I render back your possession: I render my breasts, that is the two testaments, for your book became my book! But how does she offer Him her two breasts? She, practically, testifies to the word of God, before others; and when she gives to His brothers, it is like giving to the Bridegroom Himself, for He said, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt. 25:40)

Although she does not see in the vine except a bud and in the pomegranate a bloom, yet she realizes that the Lord has made her like the chariots of noble people, or "Amminadab", for this word means "my noble nation". By the power of the word, she became God's noble nation, who struggles, till shedding the blood, against sin.

Looking at herself as being chariots of Amminadab carried other interpretations; some of which are the following:

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<sup>12</sup> The Septugint

1. Amminadab, father of Nahshon (Ruth 4:20 & Ex. 6:23), from the tribe of Judah, whom the Lord Jesus came from His descendants. The secret of being noble is being related to the Lord Christ, the leader of the true chariots, by whom we conquer the world.
2. Amminadab, the son of Uzziel, a Levi, (1 Chron. 15:3, 10), was one of the chiefs whom David chose to carry the ark of the covenant. In the New Testament, the soul carries the Lord Jesus Himself inside her; this is the secret of her sanctification and being fruitful.
3. Amminadab, the son of Kohath, (1 Chron. 6:24), was also one of the Levites whom David chose to sing and praise the Lord in the temple after the ark was settled there. (1 Chron. 6:31) In the same manner, the work of the soul united with Christ, her Bridegroom, is to continuously praise Him.

The church, or the soul as a member in the church, struggles under the guidance of the Bridegroom, by whom she is sanctified, and she continuously praises Him and thank Him!

In this atmosphere full of strife, joy and praise, the Bridegroom calls His bride saying:

**"Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you!" (Song of Sol. 6: 13)**

He called her "Shulamite", which is the feminine of "Shalem, or Salem, or Solomon"; as if the Lord Jesus, who is the true Solomon, calls her by His name. She carried His person inside her, and His name is called upon her.

He looks at her, while in that state of struggle and calls her "Shulamite", that is, the one carrying peace! The secret of her peace is her continuous return to the Lord, and the Holy Trinity cares for her and never forgets her... "Return, return, that we may look upon you."

He returns and looks at those surrounding him saying:

**"What would you see in the Shulamite, as it were, the dance of the double camp?" (Song of Sol. 6: 13)**

The Lord Jesus loves his church, or the soul who is a member in the church, for He sees her carrying His peace, as if she were an organized army ready for the spiritual war!

In the Hebrew translation, the word double camp, means two armies. The Lord is declaring that His church carried the dance of the two armies, as a sign of victory and triumph. This reminds us of the dances of joy which Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, did with the rest of the women, while they were praising God who delivered them from Pharaoh and his army. (Ex. 15:20) Also, when David killed Goliath the giant, the women came out singing and dancing. (1 Sam. 18:6)



# Chapter Seven

## His Description of the bride "The Shulamite"

The bride and the bridegroom entered the garden and were in mutual love, through their eternal spiritual union. Then the Bridegroom describes his bride, the church, in a different manner than the previous one, for He communes with her saying:

### 1. "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter!" (Song of Sol. 7: 1)

He calls her "Prince's daughter", for she is related to Him. She is born from water and spirit, as a daughter to the Heavenly King, therefore, she is called in the psalm, "The royal daughter" (Ps. 45:13). After her fall, she became abject, but through her relation to God, she became of a royal descent.

Earlier, the bride praised her Bridegroom (Song of Sol. 5:11-15), so she described Him, starting from the head to the feet, for she was fascinated by His glory and majesty. She talked about the head which represents His person, then praised His feet. However, the Bridegroom, when praising the bride, He starts with the feet, or her footsteps, then describes the head. There are two reasons for that: first, He wanted to emphasize that the secret of her beauty or her walk in the royal path is her repentance and return to the Bridegroom, the secret of her life. The second reason is that He wanted to give greater honor to the parts which seem less honorable. (1 Cor. 12:23,24)

His talk about the sandals refer to the church, as a community or as members, having shod her feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). The Bridegroom first concentrated in describing her footsteps toward the gospel of peace. She followed the same path of the Bridegroom, practicing her righteous life full of peace. This is the secret of her spiritual beauty, she knew the way and entered through it! Thus, she carried the testimony to her Bridegroom, as St. Paul said, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15) Also Isaiah the prophet said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who bring good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Is. 52:7) Also, Nahum the prophet said, "Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, perform your vows, for the wicked one shall no more pass through you; He is utterly cut off." (Nahum 1:15)

Having the word of God, one has the secret of the inner peace and the secret of the peace for others, so one preaches the word of salvation and the kingdom of God which was declared on the cross. One pours joy in the hearts of believers, thus they receive the spirit of victory and triumph over Satan.

### 2. The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman. (Song of Sol. 7: 1)

The thighs carry the whole body and help him to move. The curves of the thighs refer to the unity of the whole church in Christ Jesus, through love. St. Paul said, "From the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by

which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:16) Through this love, the body grows and is strengthened, Col. 2:19), then the message of the church is achieved.

This unity is like chains which bind the human race together, in spite of the different languages, races, and cultures. It also binds the generations, then the church carries the universal spirit in the whole world, among all generations, and this is the handiwork of the great Creator, who is the Holy Spirit, who grants fellowship.

### **3. "Your navel is a rounded goblet which lacks no blended beverage. (Song of Sol. 7: 2)**

The navel is anointed with the "Mayroon oil" in the sacrament of confirmation, for the Holy Spirit sanctifies the apparent members, as well as the inner parts, so that one belongs to the Lord.

When the Lord talked with Ezekiel about the abomination of the sins they have committed, He said, "As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut," (Ezek. 16:4) Before the fetus comes out to life, the navel cord has to be cut, so he becomes independent from his mother, who does not need any more to be nourished from his mother's blood. In the same manner, when the bride and the bridegroom start their new life, they have to be cut from their parents' houses and practice their mature love in unity of the spirit. Likewise, the Lord Jesus sees His church on a heavenly level, her navel cord being cut and her navel like a rounded goblet, that is, she carried the heavenly nature (a circle has no beginning nor end). She does not need any blended beverage, for she does not seek the worldly pleasure, but she is in a true satisfaction with the Heavenly Bridegroom.

### **4. "Your waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies." (Song of Sol. 7: 2)**

The church contains storage of spiritual food (wheat) the living bread coming down from heaven (John 6:51) , which satisfies the soul, in whom the Lord dwells. From outside, the church may seem poor and hungry, but inside, she is stored with abundant blessings. St. Paul said, "... As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Cor. 6:10)

These blessings are surrounded with nice smelling lilies, as if the fruits of the church are satisfying and attracting the souls.

### **5. "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle." (Song of Sol. 7: 3)**

We previously have explained that in chapter 4: 5. Refer to it.

### **6. "Your neck is like an ivory tower." (Song of Sol. 7: 4)**

Earlier, He described her, "Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory," (4:4) as being strong able to withstand all the wiles of the enemy. But now he describes her neck as an ivory tower. Earlier, we mentioned that the ivory refers to accepting suffering to the point of death, like the elephant, when extracting the ivory from him, he suffers until he dies. Since the faith of the church is very high like a tower, the church has accepted all kinds of suffering until the point of death, so she may remain faithful in her faith, and steadfast, not deviating toward any strange doctrine or heresy to preserve her priceless, apostolic faith!

Her faith is like ivory, very white, with no impurities and very precious!

Also, her neck refers to the purity of the church, for her head is continuously elevated, which no sin can humiliate her in the dust.

### **7. "Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim." (Song of Sol. 7: 4)**

Earlier, He described her eyes as the dove's eyes, where the Holy Spirit is apparent and sanctifies her inner life. Now, He describes her eyes as fish pools in Heshbon, which means that she is far sighted like the pools opened toward heaven. This openness toward heaven created openness toward all the human race; that is why he called her "fish pools". Whoever looks at her, finds all the fish inside her (fish refers to the community of believers). She is concerned for the interests of others.

He does not describe her by fountains, lest she carries bubbles of air (referring to an empty life), nor by the sea, for she does not carry any worries, but in simplicity of faith, she lives by a quiet spiritual outlook toward life.

Choosing the city of Heshbon was for the following reasons:

A. Heshbon means account. The simple far sighted vision does not mean that one lives without accountability nor without being circumspect, but with wisdom he counts the cost.

B. The city of Heshbon, now, is called "Hesyan", which is the remnants of a city on a hill, about 16 miles east of Jordan and 9 miles north of Madaba, which is between Arnok and Gabok. Simon, the king of the Amorites, took this city as a capital to his kingdom, and Moses the prophet gave it to the children of Reuben. It is on the boundaries of the possessions of Ruben and Gad (Numbers 32:37 & Josh. 13:26). It is one of the six shelter cities, out of 48 cities given to the Levites (Josh. 21:37) & 1 Chron. 6:66). The eyes of the church, or the spiritual vision of the believer, are like quiet pools or a shelter city, to which people go to enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Shelter.<sup>3</sup>

C. The city of Heshbon was at the main crossroads where many multitudes pass by. This refers to the openness of the believer's heart to enjoy the Lord Jesus, "The eternal Shelter". That is why the Bridegroom continues His talk: "By the gate of Bath Rabbin". The bath is a unit of measure, used by the Jews, to measure liquids. Rabbin means "the daughter of the multitudes", as if the believer becoming a son to the multitudes, or the believer enjoying the spiritual vision and calling everyone to share with him this vision.

### **8. "Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus." (Song of Sol. 7: 4)**

This statement means that the church is brave in witnessing to the truth, and not fearful of the evil. Although she is meek and humble, yet in the mean time, she is strong and mighty.

The nose refers to the sense of smell, to discern between the nice aroma of Christ and the vain temporal aroma of the world. The true believer has a nose like a tower, who can discern between an enemy and a friend, between what is for edification and what is for destruction. His looking toward Damascus, the commercial city caring for the temporal affairs, refers to the strength of the church in attacking all temptations.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to the cities of the shelter and their symbols to the Lord Jesus in the "Book of Numbers", by St. George Church of Alexandria, p. 45, by the author.

Since the believer has to have such a nose, how much more the shepherd should not have a marred face (Lev. 21:18). Pope Gregory the Great said <sup>4</sup>: "The one with a marred face is the one who is unable to discern. With the sense of smell, we can discern between sweet aroma and bad aroma. This sense can refer to the sense of discerning between virtue and vice. That is why in praising the church, the bride, it was mentioned "Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon." The holy church can discern between different temptations, and knows in advance, from its tower, the battles of evil about to take place.

**9. "Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; the king is held captive by its tresses. <sup>5</sup>" (7:5)**

The head of the church is elevated like Mount Carmel, the mountain which is 2000 feet high, not in human pride, but in the power of victory over the love of the world and all its storms.

Carmel means "the land of the garden", which is characterized by lush green and plentiful fruits and forests <sup>6</sup>. Hence, the head of the church is not empty but fruitful, where no vain thoughts can stay, but carries glorious deeds and presents fruits which fill many.

Mount Carmel was in the south of Brook Shihor (Josh. 19:26), which carried glorious memories. There, Elijah the prophet stood against all the priests of the Baal and told them not to falter between two opinions, either to follow the Lord God or the Baal! There, he killed all the priests of the Baal (1 Kings 18: 17-40). Thus, when the church rises toward the heavenly matters, she does not know how to falter between the love of God and the love of the world, but she mortifies every deviation and leads everyone toward the truth.

On top of Mount Carmel, Elijah the prophet bowed down on the ground and worshiped God asking for rain (1 Kings 18: 42-46). Likewise, in the church, the believers worship with contrite hearts, so that God may rain the waters of His grace in their hearts, until they repent and bring forth fruits.

His disciple, Elisha the prophet, visited Mount Carmel, (2 Kings 2:25) when the widow met him and he raised her only son. (2 Kings 4:25)

These are some of the memories about Mount Carmel, to which the head of the church was compared (Ps. 27:6). However, the hair refers to the community of believers. It is like purple, which is the attire of kings, as well as it is a symbol of the blood of Christ when we unite with the Bridegroom the King. All the members carry the royal marks, through the sanctification with the precious blood.

Before this righteous, wonderful scene, the Bridegroom said, "The king is held captive by its tresses," as if He does not want to forsake her. This is what the Psalmist David ascertained when he said, "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation; This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it." (Ps. 132: 13,14)

**10. "How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights! This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters. I said, 'I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches.' Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and the roof of your mouth like the best wine. The**

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<sup>4</sup> The author: The Shepherd's Love, 1965 Ed., p. 657, 658.

<sup>5</sup> The Septuagint

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Isaiah 33:9, 35:2, Amos 1:2, Nahum 1:4

**wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of sleepers." (Song of Sol. 7: 6-9)**

At the end of His description, He communes with her saying, "How fair and how pleasant you are!" According to the origin of this statement, He said, "How beautiful you are!" The beauty of the Bridegroom was reflected on her, and by living inside her, she had a special beauty! This beauty was mingled with the fruit, for which He asks and finds inside her. He looked at her and found her resembling the palm tree and her breasts like the clusters.

The stature of the church is like a palm tree and she is straight forward. She advances to reach "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13. David the Psalmist said, "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (Ps. 92:12) The seventy apostles were symbolized with the seventy palm trees. (Ex. 15:27 & Numb. 33:9). Also, the temple of God was decorated with palm trees. (1 Kings 6:29, Ex. 40:22, 41:18). In eternity, the believers carry palm branches as a sign of victory (Rev. 7). A palm tree, with its hidden deep roots, meets the fountains of living water and presents its fruits apparent to many especially in poor regions. Its branches are used in welcoming kings, whom they wave as a sign of victory and triumph. In this analogy of the church and the palm tree, the Heavenly Bridegroom sees in His church the hidden deep union with Him, and the fruits presented to the hungry world and the victorious royal life!

The Bridegroom rejoices with His fruitful bride, so He rises to the palm tree to reap its fruits. He does not send any of the servants to reap its fruits, but He Himself rises to pluck the fruits with His hands. Here, He declares the honor and greatness of the human soul; for her sake, He descended to the world to be united with her, and now He arises above her. She rose after she fell, and by her rising with her Bridegroom to share His glory in heaven, He sees Himself ascending on His palm tree to pluck her fruits, which is the work of His Holy Spirit!

He holds her high branches, as if her victory is His victory and in her rising, she glorifies His act of salvation. We hold the branches, for we conquer with the Lord's help. He holds our victory, for it is for the glory of His holy name. He rejoices for every triumph we achieve!

The kinds of fruits are:

- A. He sees her breasts like clusters of vine. Earlier, we mentioned that the breasts of the church are the Old and New Testaments, for they stir the spirit of joy in the lives of believers.
- B. He sees her nose as apples. Apples symbolize the divine incarnation, as if she continuously smells the aroma of the Incarnate God.
- C. The roof of her mouth like the best wine refers to the words of continuous joy, which makes the Bridegroom Himself rejoice for her joy, then the signs of joy appear on His lips and teeth.

Hearing the praise of the Bridegroom to His bride, the bride responds, "All the good qualities with which you have described me, are from You and for You, O My Beloved."

**"I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." (Song of Sol. 7: 10)**

In the second chapter, when the bride looked at the Crucified, she realized His love when He offered Himself on the cross, so she presented her life to Him, saying, "My Beloved is mine and I am His, He feeds His flock among the lilies." (Song of Sol. 2:16) In the fifth chapter, she asks Him to enter His garden, that is her heart, to accept her love and receive her life, with all its inner energies, as a love response for His work for her, saying, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine. He feeds His flock among the lilies." (Song of Sol. 6:3) However, here she is

elevated to the eternity, not to offer her life as a love response, but to reveal His desire toward her, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." (Song of Sol. 7:10) She is telling Him that she knew the secret of Him praising her, and that He seeks her to be with Him and to be the subject of His yearning forever!

This time, she does not tell Him, "My Beloved is mine," but she is astonished in front of His joy and yearning for her. "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation." (Ps. 132:13)

In front of this great love of the Bridegroom toward her, she calls Him saying,

**"Come, my Beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love." (Song of Sol. 7: 11,12)**

Realizing His love for her, the bride asks Him to go out with her alone to the field and lodge in the village, away from the hustle of the city, where they can pluck the fruits.

#### **The field:**

Which field is this, where she invited her Bridegroom to go out with her? This is the vast field of divine work, which the Lord Jesus has said, "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest." (John 4:35) The Lord Himself calls us for work ; however, we cannot go out without Him, but with Him, for He is the owner of the vineyard, and He grants it growth. St. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

Cain went out to the field by himself, but the Lord was not with him, and there he could not endure Abel the righteous, so he killed him. When the Lord rebuked him, he answered, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). Then He cursed the land and said, "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." (Gen. 4:11,12) The bride refuses to go out to the field unless she is accompanied by the Bridegroom, then her heart will be widened with love to her brother and she feels the responsibility toward him, then the land will be blessed because of her.

The field reminds us of the meeting, full of love, between Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw Rebecca, his bride, on the camel. When she saw him, she dismounted from the camel and met him. The bride desires to go out with him in the field of meditations, where the Heavenly Bridegroom reveals His divine mysteries. Then, she realizes His unutterable glories. He accepts her to be His bride forever, and she lives in His eternal bosom.

Also, the field can mean "the life of continuous strife". In the book of Proverbs, it is mentioned, "He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread.." (Prov. 12:11) One cannot struggle to be satisfied unless the Lord works with him and in him.

#### **Let us go forth:**

The bride says: "let us go forth..."

In the Lord's talk to his bride, she discovered a fact which she had not realized before, which is that God is not isolated in heaven, as Aristotle said that God moved the world but stopped to control it. On the contrary, God is dynamic, and continuously in motion with dealing with man. God is love, not isolated; He came for us, forsaking His glories, so we may not fear Him, but love Him and accept Him. He came to us and dwelled among us, and for our sake, He became a slave! He came outside the camp carrying our reproach on His shoulders! He reveals in us beauty, which is a reflection of His beauty on us and the fruit of His love which surrounds us. Now the soul seeks Him saying, "Let us go forth ..."; she realizes that without Him, she loves herself and becomes captive to her "ego". She pleads with her Bridegroom to release her from her ego, so she may live with Him in the field of love, seeking what is for others.

This is a living picture of a true marital love, where each partner does not captivate the other partner inside him, but rather he opens the heart for the other partner and appreciates him as an independent person. Sometimes, we see that one partner seeks what is for himself, and does not share with the other partner, but rather exploits him to satisfy his own psychological, social, and biological needs. It is a selfish love where one partner chokes the will of the other partner and his freedom, thinking that he loves him!

When the bride opens her heart to the bridegroom, she does not want to exploit him, as St. John Chrysostom said, and to shape him the way she wants, where he fulfills all her requests, fills all her needs, and solves her problems. But she goes out of herself seeking him and submitting to his will. If she asks him to solve her problem or to bless her work, this becomes as a result of their meeting together and not as the purpose of that meeting, in other words, God becomes priority in her life; she loves Him for Himself and not just for His gifts!

### **"Let us lodge in the villages":**

What are these villages, where she wants to lodge there with her bridegroom?

1. She means her inner life with its various aspects. She tells him to get away from the outward signs of the city, and to enter her heart, thought, emotion, and inner energies. She asks him to lodge in the village, so both of them may reveal the fruits of the Holy Spirit inside her, where the vine has budded, the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom.
2. This may also be a call to serve in the villages, for many may like to serve in rich cities; however, here the bride, which is the church, is obligated to minister in the villages where the poor and the simple live.
3. Here the call is to lodge in different villages, that is, to accompany him from one village to another. Her heart does not rest in the city or in a certain village, but rather she unites with her Bridegroom while ministering in every place. Hence, the believer does not find his complete rest until he preaches to all the human race. In the first chapter (1:6), the soul rebuked the daughters of Jerusalem that they made her a keeper of the vineyards, but now she asks to rise early to go to the various vineyards. She went out of her selfishness to rise early to the vineyards, to work with the True Vinedresser. It is amazing that she not only wants to serve others, but she hastens to serve them, "get up early". She realized that the time is short and the days are evil. (Eph. 5:16)

Finally, the bride says, "There I will give you my love." There, in the field of ministry, in the field of the Lord, in the villages, in the vineyards, she presents her unity with Christ, that is her love to the Lord. She presents her breasts (the two testaments), that is the word of God, being the food which satisfies the soul.

Finally, she tells him,

**"The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my Beloved." (Song of Sol. 7: 13)**

The mandrakes are one of the most beautiful flowers which refer to the unity between the husband and the wife. Because of the mandrakes, Rachel and Leah had a fight. (Gen. 30:14).

The bride concludes her talk by saying that the fragrance of the marital love is apparent, between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the bride, and the time has come to perfect this unity.

This unity with a nice fragrance carries pleasant fruits. It comes new every day and is old with deep roots. These are the fruits of the word of God, working in the souls of the believers. The precious fruits appear at the doors of the believers, who are members in the holy bride.

This is what the bride, the mother, presents to Christ, the eternal Bridegroom. She presents the fruits of her members through the Holy Spirit!



# Chapter Eight

## The Working Bride

St. Ambrose said that when the intimacy between the bride and her Bridegroom was ascertained, the bride started negotiating to take care of her younger sister <sup>1</sup>, which represents her unbelieving human race. In the mean time, the bride was yearning to be united with her Bridegroom. Thus, the conclusion of this song is to let the believer serve others, besides his yearning to the Paradise. These two desires may seem contradictory, but in truth, they compliment one another and go side by side. The believer lives with an inflamed heart to preach to every soul who has not experienced the salvation, and in the mean time, has the desire to depart to be with Christ face to face.

At the beginning of the song, the bride insisted to be in fellowship with Him, wishing to be alone with Him, one time in the wilderness, a second time in the garden, a third time in the field and in the village, and a fourth time in her mother's house to let him drink from the wine of her love, as He has quenched her thirst from His eternal love.

**"Oh, that you were like my brother, who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised, I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother <sup>2</sup>. She <sup>3</sup>who used to instruct me <sup>4</sup>, I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate." ( Song of Sol. 8: 1,2)**

This chapter is a talk about the ministry, for the basis of the ministry is the servant's enjoyment with the Bridegroom of the church, so when he meets his brothers, they smell in him the fragrance of "the life", and accept membership in the church, the body of the living Christ.

We also notice the following:

1. She wants to accept him as a brother, the one who nurses from her mother's breasts. According to the old Eastern traditions, no one was allowed to kiss another publicly, even a husband and a wife. The only exception was relatives from the first degree, like parents and brothers and sisters. That is why she wants him as a brother who nurses from her mother's breasts, so she can take him in her arms and appear with him publicly and kiss him publicly, and no one can blame her.
2. The secret of wishing that he is her brother "Oh, that you were like my brother", declares the desire of the church of the Old Testament, who looked at God as if He were outside, "If I should find you outside." She asks that He descends to the level of the human race, so He becomes the Older Brother who shares our nature and dwells among us. Then, we get to know Him and kiss Him publicly and enter Him in our inner life.
3. This is the talk of the New Testament Church. In the New Testament, the believers who realize that Christ is their Lord, their Older Brother and Bridegroom, accept Him and kiss Him with the kisses of the true worship. They make Him enter in the house of their mother, the Heavenly Jerusalem, to live with Him, face to face, in His Fatherly bosom.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible: The Jesuit edition, Beirut

<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint version

<sup>3</sup> The Jesuit edition

<sup>4</sup> Not in the Septuagint version

4. "She who used to instruct me" reveals the nature of the true Christian and the faithful servant who always wants to learn. The soul who meets her Bridegroom and lives with Him in the house of her mother, the church or the Heavenly Jerusalem, and there she lets Him drink of her spiced wine and the juice of pomegranate, is always humble and wanting to learn. She needs Him to teach her His heavenly mysteries, so in eternity, she sees Him new in her eyes. In eternity, there is no time, and there she may learn something new about His divine mysteries.

The true servant continuously stays in the church, the house of his mother, at the feet of the Savior, desiring to learn, even if he is called "teacher" or "father" to many! St. Ambrose said<sup>5</sup>: "I desire to struggle to learn so I may be able to teach, for there is One Master (God) who alone does not learn what He teaches to others. However, all people should first learn before they can teach, and receive from God what they teach to others." St. Ercanus said, "The one who desires to learn deserves to be praised, even though he does not have a teacher."<sup>6</sup>

5. Learning in the church, the mother's house, is not mere mental knowledge or by rote doctrines, but in essence, it is practicing "the life with Christ. That is why the bride says, "I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, or the juice of my pomegranate." This is what I want to learn, to repay Your love.

6. When one accompanies the Lord in the church and sits to learn at the feet of the Savior, he presents spiced wine mingled with the juice of pomegranate. What does that mean? Wine is a symbol of a life of joy and happiness. The church is the joyful house, which receives the repentant sinners, where God gives them inner joy, which all the temporal events cannot remove. Pomegranate refers to the life of strife. Pomegranate trees are full of thorns and the skin is bitter, and inside are many seeds, but its juice is delicious and sweet. Likewise, in Christianity, joy is mingled with labor and spiritual strife until the end.

Finally, the bride is ascertaining her unity with the Bridegroom and her close attachment to Him, so she says,

**"His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." (Song of Sol. 8: 3,4)**

These are the same words which she uttered when she declared that she was lovesick. "For I am lovesick" (Song of Sol. 2: 5), and we previously have explained that.<sup>7</sup>

She wanted to emphasize that although she offers all her life to serve Him, yet this cannot hinder her being occupied with Him and being in continuous fellowship with Him. She assures that she cannot permit anyone to hinder her unity with Him. True ministry does not occupy the servant to the extent that he neglects his Christ, but on the contrary, he goes into deep fellowship with Him.

### **The Testimony of the world about Him:**

The world, looking at the church, who is the body of Christ who witnesses to Him, says:

**"Who is this coming up from the wilderness<sup>8</sup>, leaning upon her Beloved? (8: 5)**

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<sup>5</sup> By the author, "The Pastoral Love", p. 700.

<sup>6</sup> The precious reference, p. 701.

<sup>7</sup> Look explanation of Song of Sol. 2: 5,6,7.

Previously, the daughters of Jerusalem has uttered similar words in chapter 3: 6, when they saw the amazing change in the life of the believers. Baptism has granted them a white heavenly garment and they enjoyed true dependence on the Beloved who lifted them up from the wilderness of this world to enter His heavens. Now the world is amazed about the testimony of the bride working before them. She does not marvel because of the multitude of the work but rather because of the fruits in her life. The servant, appearing with the white clothes of baptism, is the best testimony of the Bridegroom.

St. Augustine commented on that by saying <sup>9</sup>: "She was not white from the beginning, but she became white, for it is written, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" (Is. 1:18) He also said <sup>10</sup>: "Who is this white coming up in the splendor of that light and not in a vain color?" St. Ambrose also said <sup>11</sup>: "She was previously black; how come she became white all of a sudden? This is through baptism."

St. Augustine justifies the secret of her continuing white by <sup>12</sup>: "This who became white behaves nicely, for she is depending on the One who makes her white, for she is trusting the Lord Jesus, for He said to His disciples, "... For without Me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

The world was not the only one amazed, but also the heavenly creatures were amazed, seeing what man has achieved through uniting with Christ in the baptismal font. St. Cyril of Jerusalem described man in baptism by saying <sup>13</sup>: "The angels dance around you, while saying, 'Who is this coming up white, leaning upon her Beloved?' The Lord adopted the soul who was a slave and made her His beloved." The heavenly creatures repeat the following statement:

**"I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth; there she who bore you brought you forth." (Song of Sol. 8: 5)**

This is the secret of her rising from the wilderness, all white leaning upon her Beloved. Her mother has bore her under the apple tree.

Previously, we have seen that "the apple tree" refers to the divine incarnation, for the Lord appeared "like an apple tree among the trees of the woods." (Song of Sol. 2:3) Through the divine incarnation, the church, the mother, was able to bear children in baptism, who are able to rise toward the heavenly matters, through God Incarnate. This is the new birth and its effect in the life of the believer.

Here, he binds between the divine incarnation and our spiritual birth, for the Lord was born physically, so we may be born spiritually. This was the secret of celebrating Christmas and Epiphany on one day in the early church, for the two feasts are related in the mind of the church.

### **Not being occupied in the service on the expense of the Bridegroom:**

The working bride assures her cleaving to her Bridegroom, although she is occupied with serving her relatives. She said:

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<sup>8</sup> The Septuagint Version.

<sup>9</sup> On Ps. 45: 24.

<sup>10</sup> Sermon on the N. T. Lesson 45: 5.

<sup>11</sup> On Myst. 1: 36.

<sup>12</sup> On Grace & Freewill 13.

<sup>13</sup> Lect. 3: 16.

**"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave<sup>15</sup>; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised." (Song of Sol. 8: 6,7)**

Since the soul has enjoyed the new birth in the sacrament of baptism, and in the sacrament of confirmation, she is sealed with the seal of the Holy Spirit and she belongs to the Bridegroom carrying His seal and marks, then she dearly appreciates that seal which is on all the sides of her life. This new life has inflamed her love toward Him, so she asks Him not only to accept her in His arms nor take her in His eternal bosom, but she desires to cleave to Him as the seal on His heart and on His arm. Nothing separates her from Him, even death!

She asks to be a seal on the heart of the Bridegroom, not only to take a place in his heart, but to occupy the whole heart, as if God is not occupied except by her. She desires not only that her name is carved on His heart, but that all her life is sealed on Him, so no one can erase her name from God's face.

In the book of Isaiah, the Lord says, "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands." (Is. 49:16). However, here the bride desires to be a seal on His arm.

Hence, the bride rests in God's heart, "the center of emotion and love", and upon His arm, "the center of labor". She rests forever on the throne of His love and power! This is the kind of intimacy that the church has with her Bridegroom!

The secret of this strong intimacy is the love which God has poured in our hearts toward Him. Therefore, she says, "Love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave." She tells him, "Death is easy, and it cannot separate me from my love to you. Plenty of water and all the rivers cannot quench love. As St. Paul said, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is to in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:35-39)

St. Augustine said<sup>16</sup>: "The storms of the world or the trials cannot quench the flames of love, that is why it is written, "Love is as strong as death." When death comes, no one can resist it, even by medicine nor by any art; in the same manner, the world cannot stand against love.

"Death is strong in destruction, but love is strong in rescuing (salvation)."

"Through love, many died to the world to live for God."

Amidst the world, the bride presented to her Bridegroom what the world cannot resist; she presented her heart to the One who finds His delight in her. She did not only present her service, struggle and vigil, but first presented her heart, that is "all her love", to whom it is written, "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised." She is repeating what St. Paul said, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." (1 Cor. 13:3)

She is not like the wife who thinks that she is well serving her husband, but her heart is not with him! First, she has to present her heart, then she can not but continuously serve him!

### **Her love to her Bridegroom inflames her love to her brothers:**

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<sup>15</sup> The Septuagint Version.

<sup>16</sup> On Ps. 48: 13.

When she presented all her love to the Lord, her heart widened to serve her brothers, so she said,

**"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who found peace." (Song of Sol. 8: 8-10)**

These simple expressions carry a constitution to the life of the ministry which can be summarized as follows:

1. To the church, unbelievers represent "the little sister". She is not only her sister, but rather a sister to the Bridegroom, too. Through this outlook, the church does not deal with unbelievers, or even the attackers or atheists, as a teacher deals with his students, but rather as an older brother who is compassionate to the younger. The younger sister may err, but the older sister will endure her because she is the older, and she will give her an excuse because the younger sister does not have breasts, that is, she does not know yet the truth in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.
2. The reason for the weakness of the younger sister is that the younger sister does not have breasts. So the older sister has to present the word of God, that is both the Old and New Testaments, to the younger sister so she may taste the word of God and like it. This is the work of the evangelist church, presenting the living word of God to every person.
3. What does the church do to the younger sister who has no breasts, to whom the Bridegroom has proposed? She will treat her very affectionately and compassionately. She will not reproach her nor hurt her feelings, but offers her all the help needed. If she is a wall, she will build upon her a silver tower; and if she is a door, she will enclose her with boards of cedar. She supports her with positive reinforcement.

The older sister offers her life to the younger sister, as if telling her, "If you need a wall to surround you and two towers to lift you up, I can serve you. I can be your wall and my breasts are like two towers. Accept the Lord Jesus living inside you as a wall to you and the Holy Bible as two breasts who can fill you."

4. It is not enough that the older sister treats the younger sister, but she has to build upon her a silver tower and surround her with boards of cedar, which means, she has to support her until she becomes a servant in the Lord's vine. The church's duty is to enter the unbeliever to the faith and to drive him to a practical testimony to the word of God. He, then becomes like a silver tower (silver refers to the word of God, strained like silver) and the tower refers to the public testimony.

In the eyes of everyone, the church finds true peace in the life of the human race.

### **Final Conversation:**

**"Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand, and those who keep its fruit two hundred. You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice, let me hear it! Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices." (Song of Sol. 8: 11-14)**

1. The church, introducing her Bridegroom to the world and calling everyone to enjoy the Lord, clarifies an important concept in the ministry: the vine is the Lord's vineyard, and He is the One who works in it through the lives of the keepers. He says, "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon." The vine is not hers but belongs to "The True Solomon".

St. Augustine said <sup>17</sup>: The Lord cultivates us, his vine. The crops are the work in our hearts, and He does not do it with human hands but He is the One who works in us, as the farmer works in his field. What does the Bible say? "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5) "I am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser." (John 15:1) What does the vinedresser do? He cultivates his field. The Father, the Vinedresser has a field which He cultivates, and expects fruits from it. The Lord Jesus said, "A certain man planted a vineyard and leased it to vinedressers.." (Luke 20:9) These are obligated to present fruits in due season.

St. John Chrysostom <sup>18</sup>, commenting on St. Paul's words, "We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building," (1 Cor. 3: 9) said: "The field does not belong to the one who plants in it, but to its owner."

2. The word "Baal" means "lord or king", and the word "Hamon" means "multitudes" <sup>19</sup>. The Lord's vine, the King of peace, are the multitudes of the human race. He becomes their king to enter them in His heavens.

3. The Lord leased this vine to keepers. "He leased the vineyards to keepers." (Song of Sol. 8: 11) Still, He cannot stop but to care for his vineyard affectionately. He said, "My own vineyard is before me." (Song of Sol. 8:12) He says, "I keep it night and day.." (Is. 27:3) He, generously, gives it everything, for He says, "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done it?" (Is. 5:4)

4. What are the fruits that the King of peace requests? "Everyone has to bring for his fruit a thousand pieces of silver." (Song of Sol. 8:11) He asks that each keeper presents a thousand pieces of silver, for thousand symbolizes heaven and the heavenly matters <sup>20</sup>. God does not request from his servants except the heavenly and spiritual fruits. This is the work of the church and the message of God's ministers, to enter those whom they serve into the heavenly life.

5. Since the fruits are presented to the Lord's favor, what, then, is the servant's reward? "You, O Solomon may have a thousand, and those who keep its fruit two hundred." Probably, he meant by two hundred, that one hundred is the men of the Old Testament and one hundred is for the men of the New Testament. Ministers in both testaments enjoy the plentiful fruits, that is why St. Paul said to his people, "my joy and crown." (Phil. 4:1)

6. Since the church works in the Lord's vine and all the workers work for the glory of God, who has the thousand, and for themselves, who have the two hundred. they become like those who are sitting in gardens. The difficult road and the narrow way change to an easy yoke and a light burden. While on earth, they live as if they are in joyful gardens. Hence, the Lord communes with His bride by saying, "You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice, let me hear it!" "The voice of your love is no more suppressed, but those who dwell on earth as well as in heaven, rejoice when they hear it. Now come to me so I may hear your practical and joyful voice. Come, so you may inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world."

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<sup>17</sup> By the author: The Pastoral Love, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> The previous reference, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> By the author, Book of Rev., 1979, p. 92.

These are the words of the Bridegroom who brings joy to His bride's heart, and assures her that whatever she does, will receive its fruits in eternity!

Joyfully, she answers Him, "Make haste, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices." (Song of Sol. 8:14) Previously, we have explained why the church compares her Bridegroom with a gazelle or a young stag. Here, she responds to His call, "Make haste, and come quickly for I am longing to You. "Since you call me to meet You so you can hear My voice, I also need to meet You."

His haste coming on the mountains of spices reminds us of the spices with which the Lord Jesus was buried. He meets with her when she is buried with Him, for every day she dies with Him so she may live forever with Him.

This is the conclusion of the song. She is repeating what the bride said in the book of Revelation, "Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)