

“Dear Mother, I entreat you, tell me, will Our Lord leave me much longer in this world? Will He not soon come to fetch me?” She smiled sweetly, and answered, “Yes, soon...very soon...I promise you.” “Dear Mother,” I asked again, “tell me if He does not want more from me than these poor little acts and desires that I offer Him. Is He pleased with me?” Then our Venerable Mother’s face shone with a new splendor, and her expression became still more gracious: “The Good God asks no more of you,” she said, “He is pleased, quite pleased,” and, taking my head between her hands, she kissed me so tenderly that it would be impossible to describe the joy I felt. My heart was overflowing with gladness, and, remembering my Sisters, I was about to beseech some favor for them, when, alas! I awoke. My happiness was too great for words. Many months have passed since I had this wonderful dream, and yet its memory is as fresh and delightful as ever. I can still picture the loving smiles of this holy Carmelite and feel her fond caresses. O Jesus! Thou didst command the winds and the storm, and there came a great calm. (cf. Mt 8:26-27)

On waking, I realized that Heaven does indeed exist, and that this Heaven is peopled with souls who cherish me as their child, and this impression still remains with me—all the sweeter, because, up to that time, I had but little devotion to the Venerable Mother Anne of Jesus. I had never sought her help, and but rarely heard her name. And now I know and understand how constantly I was in her thoughts, and the knowledge adds to my love for

Begin Here: ar ones in my Father’s Home.

O my Beloved! this was but the prelude of graces yet greater which Thou didst desire to heap upon me. Let me remind Thee of them to-day, and forgive my folly if I venture to tell Thee once more of my hopes, and my heart’s well nigh infinite longings—forgive me and grant my desire, that it may be well with my soul. To be Thy Spouse, O my Jesus, to be a daughter of Carmel, and by my union with Thee to be the mother of souls, should not all this content me? And yet other vocations make themselves felt—I feel called to the Priesthood and to the Apostolate—I would be a Martyr, a Doctor of the Church. I should like to accomplish the most heroic deeds—the spirit of the Crusader burns within me, and I long to die on the field of battle in defense of Holy Church.

The vocation of a Priest! With what love, my Jesus, would I bear Thee in my hand, when my words brought Thee down from Heaven! With what love would I give Thee to souls! And yet, while longing to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi, and am drawn to imitate him by refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood. How reconcile these opposite tendencies?³⁶

Like the Prophets and Doctors, I would be a light unto souls, I would travel to every land to preach Thy name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of Thy Cross. One mission alone would not satisfy my longings. I would spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, even to the most distant isles. I would be a Missionary, not for a few years only, but, were it possible, from the beginning of the world till the consummation of time. Above all, I thirst for the Martyr’s crown. It was the desire of my earliest days, and the desire has deepened with the years passed in the Carmel’s narrow cell. But this too is folly, since I do not sigh for one torment; I need them all to slake my thirst. Like Thee, O Adorable Spouse, I would be scourged, I would be crucified! I would be flayed like St.

³⁶ St. Francis of Assisi, out of humility, refused to accept the sublime dignity of the Priesthood, and remained a Deacon until his death.

Bartholomew, plunged into boiling oil like St. John, or, like St. Ignatius of Antioch, ground by the teeth of wild beasts into a bread worthy of God.³⁷

With St. Agnes and St. Cecilia I would offer my neck to the sword of the executioner, and like Joan of Arc I would murmur the name of Jesus at the stake.

My heart thrills at the thought of the frightful tortures Christians are to suffer at the time of Antichrist, and I long to undergo them all. Open, O Jesus, the Book of Life, in which are written the deeds of Thy Saints: all the deeds told in that book I long to have accomplished for Thee. To such folly as this what answer wilt Thou make? Is there on the face of this earth a soul more feeble than mine? And yet, precisely because I am feeble, it has delighted Thee to accede to my least and most child-like desires, and to-day it is Thy good pleasure to realize those other desires, more vast than the Universe. These aspirations becoming a true martyrdom, I opened, one day, the Epistles of St. Paul to seek relief in my sufferings. My eyes fell on the 12th and 13th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. I read that all cannot become Apostles, Prophets, and Doctors; that the Church is composed of different members; that the eye cannot also be the hand. The answer was clear, but it did not fulfill my desires, or give to me the peace I sought. "Their descending into the depths of my nothingness, I was so lifted up that I reached my aim."³⁸

Without being discouraged I read on, and found comfort in this counsel: "Be zealous for the better gifts. And I show unto you a yet more excellent way." (1 Cor 12:31). The Apostle then explains how all perfect gifts are nothing without Love, that Charity is the most excellent way of going surely to God. At last I had found rest.

Meditating on the mystical Body of Holy Church, I could not recognize myself among any of its members as described by St. Paul, or was it not rather that I wished to recognize myself in all? Charity provided me with the key to my vocation. I understood that since the Church is a body composed of different members, the noblest and most important of all the organs would not be wanting. I knew that the Church has a heart, that this heart burns with love, and that it is love alone which gives life to its members. I knew that if this love were extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, and the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love embraces all vocations, that it is all things, and that it reaches out through all the ages, and to the uttermost limits of the earth, because it is eternal.

Then, beside myself with joy, I cried out: "O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, Thou hast Thyself given to me: in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be LOVE!.... Thus I shall be all things: thus will my dream be realized..."

Why do I say I am beside myself with joy? This does not convey my thought. Rather is it peace which has become my portion—the calm peace of the sailor when he catches sight of the beacon which lights him to port. O luminous Beacon of Love! I know how to come even unto Thee, I have found the means of borrowing Thy Fires.

³⁷ An allusion to the beautiful words of the martyr St. Ignatius of Antioch, uttered when he heard the roar of the lions in the Roman arena, "I am the wheat of Christ; let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may become clean bread."

³⁸ St. John of the Cross

I am but a weak and helpless child, yet it is my very weakness which makes me dare to offer myself, O Jesus, as victim to Thy Love.

In olden days pure and spotless holocausts alone were acceptable to the Omnipotent God. Nor could His Justice be appeased, save by the most perfect sacrifices. But the law of fear has given place to the law of love, and Love has chosen me, a weak and imperfect creature, as its victim. Is not such a choice worthy of God's Love? Yea, for in order that Love may be fully satisfied, it must stoop even unto nothingness, and must transform that nothingness into fire. O my God, I know it—"Love is repaid by love alone."³⁹ Therefore I have sought, I have found, how to ease my heart, by rendering Thee love for love.

"Use the riches that make men unjust, to find you friends who may receive you into everlasting dwellings." (cf. Lk 16:9). This, O Lord, is the advice Thou gavest to Thy disciples after complaining that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." (cf. Lk 16:8).

Child of light, as I am, I understood that my desires to be all things, and to embrace all vocations, were riches that might well make me unjust; so I set to work to use them for the making of friends. Mindful of the prayer of Elijah when he asked the Prophet Elisha for his double spirit, I presented myself before the company of the Angels and Saints and addressed them thus: "I am the least of all creatures. I know my mean estate, but I know that noble and generous hearts love to do good. Therefore, O Blessed Inhabitants of the Celestial City, I entreat you to adopt me as your child. All the glory that you help me to acquire, will be yours; only deign to hear my prayer, and obtain for me a double portion of the love of God."

O my God! I cannot measure the extent of my request, I should fear to be crushed by the very weight of its audacity. My only excuse is my claim to childhood, and that children do not grasp the full meaning of their words. Yet if a father or mother were on the throne and possessed vast treasures, they would not hesitate to grant the desires of those little ones, more dear to them than life itself. To give them pleasure they will stoop even unto folly.

Well, I am a child of Holy Church, and the Church is a Queen, because she is now espoused to the Divine King of Kings. I ask not for riches or glory, not even the glory of Heaven—that belongs by right to my brothers the Angels and Saints, and my own glory shall be the radiance that streams from the queenly brow of my Mother, the Church. Nay, I ask for Love. To love Thee, Jesus, is now my only desire. Great deeds are not for me; I cannot preach the Gospel or shed my blood. No matter! My brothers work in my stead, and I, a little child, stay close to the throne, and love Thee for all who are in the strife.

But how shall I show my love, since love proves itself by deeds? Well! the little child will strew flowers . . . she will embalm the Divine Throne with their fragrance, she will sing Love's Canticle in silvery tones. Yea, my Beloved, it is thus my short life shall be spent in Thy sight. The only way I have of proving my love is to strew flowers before Thee—that is to say, I will let no tiny sacrifice pass, no look, no word. I wish to profit by the smallest actions, and to do them for Love. I wish to suffer for Love's sake, and for Love's sake even to rejoice: thus shall I strew flowers. Not one shall I find without scattering its petals before Thee . . . and I will sing . . . I will sing always, even if my roses must be gathered from amidst thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.

³⁹ St. John of the Cross

But of what avail to thee, my Jesus, are my flowers and my songs ? I know it well: this fragrant shower, these delicate petals of little price, these songs of love from a poor little heart like mine, will nevertheless be pleasing unto Thee. Trifles they are, but Thou wilt smile on them. The Church Triumphant, stooping towards her child, will gather up these scattered rose leaves, and, placing them in Thy Divine Hands, there to acquire an infinite value, will shower them on the Church Suffering to extinguish its flames, and on the Church Militant to obtain its victory.

O my Jesus, I love Thee! I love my Mother, the Church; I bear in mind that “the least act of pure love is of more value to her than all other works together.”⁴⁰

But is this pure love really in my heart? Are not my boundless desires but dreams—but foolishness? If this be so, I beseech Thee to enlighten me; Thou knowest I seek but the truth. If my desires be rash, then deliver me from them, and from this most grievous of all martyrdoms. And yet I confess, if I reach not those heights to which my soul aspires, this very martyrdom, this foolishness, will have been sweeter to me than eternal bliss will be, unless by a miracle Thou shouldst take from me all memory of the hopes I entertained upon earth. Jesus, Jesus! if the mere desire of Thy Love awakens such delight, what will it be to possess it, to enjoy it for ever?

How can a soul so imperfect as mine aspire to the plenitude of Love? What is the key of this mystery? O my only Friend, why dost Thou not reserve these infinite longings to lofty souls, to the eagles that soar in the heights? Alas! I am but a poor little unfledged bird. I am not an eagle, I have but the eagle’s eyes and heart! Yet, notwithstanding my exceeding littleness, I dare to gaze upon the Divine Sun of Love, and I burn to dart upwards unto Him! I would fly, I would imitate the eagles; but all that I can do is to lift up my little wings—it is beyond my feeble power to soar. What is to become of me? Must I die of sorrow because of my helplessness? Oh, no! I will not even grieve. With daring self-abandonment there will I remain until death, my gaze fixed upon that Divine Sun. Nothing shall affright me, nor wind nor rain. And should impenetrable clouds conceal the Orb of Love, and should I seem to believe that beyond this life there is darkness only, that would be the hour of perfect joy, the hour in which to push my confidence to its uttermost bounds. I should not dare to detach my gaze, well knowing that beyond the dark clouds the sweet Sun still shines.

So far, O my God, I understand Thy Love for me. But Thou knowest how often I forget this, my only care. I stray from Thy side, and my scarcely fledged wings become dragged in the muddy pools of earth; then I lament “like a young swallow,” (Isaiah 38:14) and my lament tells Thee all, and I remember, O Infinite Mercy! that “Thou didst not come to call the just, but sinners.” (Mt 9:13).

Yet shouldst Thou still be deaf to the plaintive cries of Thy feeble creature, shouldst Thou still be veiled, then I am content to remain benumbed with cold, my wings bedraggled, and once more I rejoice in this well-deserved suffering.

O Sun, my only Love, I am happy to feel myself so small, so frail in Thy sunshine, and I am in peace . . . I know that all the eagles of Thy Celestial Court have pity on me, they guard and defend me, they put to flight the vultures—the demons that fain would devour me. I

⁴⁰ St. John of the Cross

fear them not, these demons, I am not destined to be their prey, but the prey of the Divine Eagle.

O Eternal Word! O my Saviour! Thou art the Divine Eagle Whom I love—Who lurest me. Thou Who, descending to this land of exile, didst will to suffer and to die, in order to bear away the souls of men and plunge them into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity—Love's Eternal Home! Thou Who, re-ascending into inaccessible light, dost still remain concealed here in our vale of tears under the snow-white semblance of the Host, and this, to nourish me with Thine own substance! O Jesus! forgive me if I tell Thee that Thy Love reacheth even unto folly. And in face of this folly, what wilt Thou, but that my heart leap up to Thee? How could my trust have any limits?

I know that the Saints have made themselves as fools for Thy sake; being 'eagles,' they have done great things. I am too little for great things, and my folly it is to hope that Thy Love accepts me as victim; my folly it is to count on the aid of Angels and Saints, in order that I may fly unto Thee with Thine own wings, O my Divine Eagle! For as long a time as Thou willest I shall remain—my eyes fixed upon Thee. I long to be allured by Thy Divine Eyes; I would become Love's prey. I have the hope that Thou wilt one day swoop down upon me, and, bearing me away to the Source of all Love, Thou wilt plunge me at last into that glowing abyss, that I may become for ever its happy Victim.

O Jesus! would that I could tell all little souls of Thine ineffable condescension! I feel that if by any possibility Thou couldst find one weaker than my own, Thou wouldst take delight in loading her with still greater favors, provided that she abandoned herself with entire confidence to Thine Infinite Mercy. But, O my Spouse, why these desires of mine to make known the secrets of Thy Love? Is it not Thyself alone Who hast taught them to me, and canst Thou not unveil them to others? Yea! I know it, and this I implore Thee!

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End of the Autobiography