

DIVINE LOVE 1

GOD *IS* **MY PARADISE**

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What Am I Saying?!

As I ventured to talk about “Divine Love,” I found myself speaking about God Himself, for God is Love (1 John 4:8).

Thus I found myself writing about matters which were hard to express. I felt my inadequacy as I sought to examine the deep thoughts of God! No human being could do that. In fact no one could except the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-11).

Let the Spirit of God lead us to be in touch with Him within the inner depths of our hearts and eyes. Through Him alone can we perceive this infinite divine love.

Such infinite divine love cannot be expressed or measured by words. The heart itself gets drunken and oblivious of its own existence as it experiences its vastness. St. Paul the Apostle prays, “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width, length, depth, and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19).

- + He who wants to speak about “God’s love” demonstrates his own ignorance, for this is entirely impossible.

St. John Saba

- + What am I doing? I am a mere human being. I talk with the human tongue and articulate with an earthly language; hence I beg God to pardon me. It is not that I use language carelessly yet it is too poor to express spiritual matters. That is due to my weakness and the nature of the human tongue.

Be merciful to me, O God, for I do not pronounce these words out of impertinence but out of inadequacy. Even though I am dissatisfied with my words, I dream of soaring loftily upon the wings of my understanding.

St. John Chrysostom

- + How wondrous is this love too?! It is the language of angels and as such, it is hard to put into words. Love is the name of God, the Beneficent... who can examine or define it?!

- + O God, we are unworthy to speak out of our own resources about what is truly Yours! May You speak within us about Yourself, and about all that is Yours according to Your pleasure...

O God, enlighten them with Your wisdom to enable those whom You embrace to see and learn that they have a shelter in You...

- + O God, show me the land of love so that I may speak about it within the limits of my weakness!

O God, mercifully release Your grace upon me to enable me to speak about this land of love!

Inflame the hearts of those who love You so that they will venture to seek it!

St. John Saba

- + A brother told me, “If the Fatherly mercy - the divine love - shines on me, and my senses are stunned by its divine attention, I believe my mind will dive into the sea of life as it swims among the waves of light. It will dive then arise to breathe the smell of life and be decked with spiritual glory... and rejoice... beyond words.

- + How beautiful it is to speak about the sweetness of God that embellishes and fills the soul of the pure!

How fragrant is the scent that springs from here as it changes the spirit and body too!

Have you experienced the divine flame that invades the heart and spreads to all the body and soul? It ignites the heart... making it rise and take flight by its burning power so that even the earth below it catches fire!... Can I describe to you the pleasure that exceeds understanding?!

St. John Saba

- + My God... where can I find adequate language to express the glory that You deserve and whereby to express Your wonderful blessing?!

You have created me for I did not exist. You have created me by Your will, and even before I came into being, You possessed all the glory due to Your greatness.

My God... You Yourself are the real glory hence I need not call upon Your creation to speak about Your greatness.

The heart is too limited to contain Your greatness, and language is too inadequate to define it, while the ear cannot comprehend It...

All these perish, but Your greatness is eternal...

Thought has a beginning and an end and sounds soon lose their echo which the ear hears and then is gone... but Your greatness is eternal...

O eternal glory! O God, my Lord... You are the source of all steadfast glory! Without You I fail to glorify You, for there is nothing but false glory outside Your presence...

Therefore, come to me quickly that I might glorify You! Truly, I do not deserve to praise Your name! I am nothing but dust and ashes... a rotten dog, a small worm, a lifeless body subject to decay...

Yes... who am I to glorify You, O Lord, Most High, and eternal King?!... The breath of Your mouth is one thousand times more worthy than all earthly creatures!

Is it for the darkness to glorify the Light, or for death to worship Life?!...

O God, my Lord, be glorified according to Your divine power and infinite wisdom. By Your great compassion be glorified in Your true mercy, Your infinite kindness, eternal perfection and great divinity.

Be glorified through the greatness of Your power, and Your tender love which prompted You to create us, O Lord, the life of my heart!

St. Augustine

- + Study and observe with me the wisdom of St. Paul the Apostle, as he searches for words to clarify God's goodness! He did not merely use the word "grace" or "richness," but rather said, "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us" (Eph. 2:6-7). Even so, nothing can ever really convey God's greatness. It is like an attempt to catch with many hands a slick body that keeps escaping. Similarly, we are unable to grasp the measure of tender divine love, however well we try to capture it... the greatness of His exceeding tenderness confounds our linguistic power.

This is what Paul personally experienced as he was faced by his failure to describe in words the greatness of God's tenderness... He, therefore, simply said, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). He realized that the mind and language could not explain God's benevolent concern for us. In another

place, St. Paul says, “and the peace of God Which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 4:7).

St. John Chrysostom

Thus when St. John Saba was asked why he did not write about the hidden mysteries, he replied that he resembled a Youngster who goes into his father’s house and receives every precious thing. However, when he leaves to meet his friends, the other children, his father sends with him simpler gifts to offer to them.

Therefore, my brother, do not expect me to give you the joy of God’s deep love to you and me through this book. This cannot be done unless you enter your room and turn the words of this book into a prayer... then you will enter with me into the house of our good Father and discover for yourself the mystery of the riches of His love which I can never bring out to you... for no one can understand or enjoy these mysteries except those who enter into a relationship with Him.

I repeat and entreat you with St. John Chrysostom not to be hindered by my inadequate words... but rather pray for both of us that we may overcome the general or literary meaning; and perceive by the power of the Holy Spirit the real spiritual meanings conveyed by every word written about divine love. Such implications will touch the heart and be comprehended by the soul while the new person will enjoy its sweetness.

This love which we experience in all God’s dealings with us is clear in His creation of ourselves, His plan for our redemption and the sanctification of our souls to Him.

Let us now ask God’s blessings as we turn to discuss divine love revisited in the “creation of man” or, in other words, “God’s love and Paradise.”

Chapter One

ADAM *and* PARADISE

ADAM AND DIVINE LOVE

God is Love.. and through his love He created the soul from His breath. This soul is capable of love due to its attachment to God and not due to its own nature.

It is the picture of the Triad and like Him the soul is attracted to God, seeks Him and is filled by Him.

The relationship between God and man does not end as between a master and a slave, or a statue and its maker, or a rigid object and a powerful God. It is far deeper as it is a relationship of mutual love... or, in other words, one between lovers, one is a picture or a shadow while the other is the origin.

There is a difference between man and other creatures. God has not created man like other earthly creatures whose role is complete submission and obedience. The latter worship Him according to an absolute and natural law which they have no choice to accept or reject and from which they cannot deviate. However, God and man have relationship of gravitation that attracts the picture to the Origin. It is the worship inspired by mutual love in which the Source and Origin rejoices in the picture and adopts it. The picture or image receives and revels in the joy of the Origin willingly.

God has created man not because He needed him or his worship. God does not even need angels or hosts of heavenly ranks that yearn to serve Him joyfully for ever!

Indeed, God has created man in His image and likeness. He finds in man pleasure as man reflects God's nature before man ruined it.

God loves man, and man receives His love...

God grants, and man accepts the gifts. God is concerned, and man understands His concern...

How ignorant are those who perceive God as a powerful tyrant who sits upon a high throne, completely detached from people and their affairs, and oblivious of their pleasures or sufferings... they see Him in terms of Aristotle who described God as One who moved the world and created it then is no longer related to it. For it has been said that "Aristotle considered God as a commander who stands as a statue divested with honor, while around Him are wooden soldiers communicating with Him as best as they can, and finally a real army is formed."

God has not created man with the purpose of standing by and watching him. Neither with the purpose of frightening or terrorizing him. Nor with the purpose of demanding him to offer sacrifices or oblations pleasing to Him under the threat of anger, as some might suspect, but God is love and He adorns His lovers...

And now, what has Love offered the loved ones?

- + He has offered them a Paradise to satisfy the needs of the body, and He has given them Himself as a Paradise to the soul, besides granting man all honor

Moreover, He has granted men the commandment of love.

When they fell, He planned their redemption!!

- + The majority say, What do you think? Does God think of me now and does He know what I do in my home? Does God care about what I want to do as I lay on my bed?

"Understand you brutish among people, and you fools, when will you be wise" (Ps. 94:8). For you should know as a man, all the happenings in your home, and all the words and actions of your servants must be known to you. Therefore, would not God have a similar task to watch over you?!

St. Augustine

+ O God, Your eyes are drawn to man's footsteps...

For You are interested in all Your creatures and do not deprive any of Your great love!

You Yourself watch over my steps and paths day and night, You stand vigil to take care of me and guard my ways. You do not cease caring for me and I can therefore say, You forget the heavens and the earth and all that is in them as You focus Your interest on me, and so You seem to care for no other creations besides me!!

You embrace my being with Your complete and perfect care. You enfold me constantly and it seems as though there is none other but me!

You keep vigil as though You had forgotten the rest of Your creation!

You grant me Your blessings, as though I were the sole object of Your love!

Through the goodness of Your presence constantly and every where, You rush to sustain me always and wherever You find me worthy to receive Your help...

O God... Whenever I go, I find You before me, for You are present everywhere. By the grace of Your presence I need You that I might not perish, for without You I cannot exist.

Consequently, I confess to You that whatever I do and whatever it's nature, it is all revealed before You. Yes, You know more about my acts than my ownself and know the doer too.

There is nothing You do not know...my thoughts, my intentions, my joys, my deeds... nothing of all of these is not laid out before Your eternal attention.

O God, You know my thoughts in their deepest perplexity.

O God, You do not ignore any aspect of my spirit.

You know the aim of my endeavors, and what passes through my mind, as well as the nature of my joy...Your eyes watch all these, and Your ears are attuned to them.

St. Augustine

GOD CREATED ALL FOR ME

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). From the beginning God reached for man before man ever thought of seeking God, God sought him. God, as the Bible presents Him to us, is the One who initiates love. He is Love Himself, He loves for love’s sake. He loves us in Him, for He sees us in His image who are His own creation. Hence, He offers all the possible resources on the sole premise of love itself.

How can I express God’s concern for man? Let us contemplate the universe with all that is within and upon it; the sun and moon and the innumerable galaxy; the earth with all its resources that never dry up, the sea and its wonders... All have been created by God for the sake of man! Let us look at the heavens and earth for they have all been founded to serve us!

He who sees all what God has done for him is stunned by the blessings surrounding him on every side. He realizes that God has turned all His attention to man alone and seemingly ignored all other concerns. Indeed He has focused on every person individually.

When Potiphar’s wife asked Joseph to betray her husband and give in to her, he refused and said, “Behold my master committed all that he had in my hands. There is none greater in this house than I; he never kept anything from me but you because you are his wife” (Gen. 39:8-9). As Potiphar had entrusted Joseph with all what he owned, Joseph could not fail to love him and to manage his possessions without wanting to own them. As for man, God gave him authority over all the creatures He had created for his sake, He gave man dominion over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, and over the animals in the wilderness, and the earth’s treasures (Gen. 1:26-28). Today, man fears the lion, the dinosaurs, the scorpions, the snakes, the birds of prey, as well as the terrors of the sea and the earthquakes... all these were one day subject to him... and still are... although sin has weakened man’s dominion over all these. The Lord wishes me to love Him so He opens my hand and fills it with everything that I might not forsake His love.

Solid rock eventually breaks as a result of constant blows, how much more likely is it for a human heart to yield before God’s constant goodness and blessing! Irrational animals can be tamed through constant kindness, how much more likely it would be for rational man to surrender before God’s infinite gifts!

If we wish to soften the heart of an enemy, we accumulate coals of loving fire on his head, we feed him if he hungers, and offer water when he thirsts (Rom 12:20), how much do we respond when the Beloved offers us freely all our physical needs?

On account of His love and longing for our love, He tends the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea. In His divine words, He says, “Behold the fowl of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? Wherefore, if God does so to the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not clothe you, O you of little faith!” (Matt 6:26-30)

Everyday, God confirms His love and interest in us. indeed He is concerned over every hair in our heads, for He says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, yet one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are numbered” (Matt. 10: 29-30).

He loves, and in His love He never stops working for His loved ones. The Only-Begotten Son says, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too,

am working” (John 5:17). The Psalmist also says, “The eyes of all wait upon You and You give them their meat in due season. You open Your hands and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Ps. 145: 15-16; see also Ps. 104: 27-28).

+ Holy, Holy are You O Lord, Holy in every way, and most exclusively in the light of Your essence. The power of Your wisdom cannot be described, and no words can convey the depth of Your love to mankind.

As a lover of mankind, You have created me. You did not need my worship but rather I am the one who needs Your godliness.

You have created me due to Your abundant kindness, for I did not exist. You have formed the heavens as a roof over my head and established the earth that I might walk upon it.

For my sake, You have tamed the sea, and for my sake You have revealed the nature of animals. You have subordinated all things at my feet. You have left me in need of nothing due to Your generosity.

You are He who has created me, You have placed upon me and invested me with authority. You have provided me with the gift of speech, and opened Paradise that I might luxuriate.

You have granted me the wisdom to know You, You have revealed to me the Tree of Life, and have taught me the thorn of death.

St. Gregory the Theologian

+ O Lord... You have put everything under the feet of mankind (Ps. 8), so that he might be wholly consecrated to You. Consequently, You have not set over him any other god but You. Indeed, You have set him master over all Your creations.

You have created everything for the sake of his body, and You have created his body for the sake of his soul, and You have created his soul for You!

Hence it is proper to focus our thoughts on You, and pour all our love to You. In this way, we will realize our goal which is to rejoice with You who are the source of our goodness. Moreover, we need to use all inferior creatures to us only to serve You.

Will You offer our souls anything other than Your provisions to our bodies?!

On account of our eyes, You have sent light from heaven to shine upon the earth, You have created the sun and the moon as tireless servants... the first provides light to Your children during the day, and the second provides light at night.

On account of his breath, You have surrounded him with pure air.

On account of his sense of smell, You have provided odorous perfumes.

On account of his sense of taste, You have provided the most delicious foods.

On account of the sense of touch, You have created matter surrounding him.

And to help man in all his work, You have provided the animals that serve him, as well as the fowl in the air, and the fruit of the earth.

This earth sends medicines to heal the sickness of our bodies for there is no ailment without remedy!

How great is Your goodness, O Lord! How Tender!

You know my body thoroughly, for You have shaped it, and we depend on You just as a pitcher does on the Potter

St. Augustine

+ The world is preserved by divine Providence, for there is no place hidden from His care! Divine Providence is the fulfillment of the promises in God’s Word which

gives shapes to matter from which this worked is made. He is the Architect and the Artist of all this!

St. Anthony the Great

+ Why was man created?

To glorify God. Man sees God through the creations which He has brought into being for His sake.

+ The most dangerous disease of the soul and the most wicked catastrophe are ignorance of God. He the Creator of all things made for the sake of man. He has given man a mind and an articulate tongue whereby he may soar and have a relationship with God as he contemplates and glorifies Him.

St. Anthony the Great

Chapter Two

GOD, THE PARADISE OF THE SOUL

THE NEED FOR JUST ONE

Even though God created Paradise to accommodate the soul, the body cannot be happy unless the soul which lives within is happy too! The soul, on the other hand, is a breath from the Almighty and she can only find pleasure in just one, her Creator.

The soul looks around at the earth and all its riches, at the sky and all there is in it, yet nothing satisfies her except her Creator!

If she loves something, it is only because it comes from the hands of the Good Father, and she will not be fulfilled but by the Father Himself.

The soul is like the bride that sees the gifts from the Bridegroom and is happy and joyful. This is not on account of the gifts in themselves, but because they come from the Bridegroom who loves her while she loves Him too, indeed she declines any gifts. However precious, if she did not have Him!

The soul considers God her Paradise, she enjoys Him even if she does not attain any worldly matters! To be separated from God, even if she lived in Paradise, would be equivalent to being in hell!

These are the feelings of Adam in Paradise, for from time to time, he would hear the voice of the Lord, his Lover, walking in Paradise, then his soul would be in ecstasy as she swooned in His love. Hence he forgot all his surroundings and even his own self. It was as though nothing else existed but God! Yet, once Adam sinned, his soul turned into a well of anxiety burdened by Paradise. Indeed burdened by its own self, she wanted to be set free and escape from God, but where to? In Paradise, the soul found no rest, and outside she found no rest. With Eve, she found no rest and without her there was no rest. If he was given children, or deprived of them, the soul found no rest, he seeks and keeps on the search wishing to find rest and happiness, but the need is for just One who alone is able to satisfy his soul!

THE NEED FOR JUST ONE

No wonder then that most modern philosophy confirms that man is an anxious animal. It seems that anxiety is an essential quality that coexists with the human soul, and according to Peguy "man is a well of anxiety." He craves for money, or for vainglory, and the more he accesses his cravings, the more his anxiety increases as the gap widens between his desires and his achievements and possessions.

He is incapable of discovering the reality of his problem, the need of his soul for its real Paradise, God the Infinite!

Napoleon achieved victory over many countries of the world without achieving any sense of fulfillment. If he had conquered the rest of the world, his soul would still have been dissatisfied. He would have asked for the moon and planets and even if he had obtained them, his thirst would not have been quenched.

As much as modern sciences have offered us with a wide range of knowledge, indeed more than man ever dreamed of, yet man has discovered his immense ignorance and his need of knowing much more.

Similarly, modern industries have offered so much to satisfy man's physical needs, yet the cases of psychological sickness arising from worry, boredom, and fear have increased to a frightful degree.

By that, I do not mean to depreciate the accomplishments of scientists, or claim that God requires man to be careless or lax at work or in his pursuit of

knowledge and discovery. What I wish to say is that the immortal soul can only be satisfied by the eternal God. The soul yearns for the infinite in everything. She wishes to possess the Eternal, Perfect, and the Ultimate, that explains why an atheist wishes to live on, even if he possessed the earth, he would ask for the sky; and if he gets the sky too, his soul would not rest if she did not find God.

Hence, St. Augustine says, “My God...You have created us looking toward You, consequently our hearts will find no rest unless they rest in You.”

That is what prompted the Son to become incarnate among us, and to announce Himself to us. He offered Himself a Paradise to those who were deprived of Him.

Our God, Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, came to proclaim on every occasion, “I am He...” these are the words of a loving God offering Himself to souls who do not know Him. Had anyone else pronounced these words, he would be accused of vanity; someone trying to offer himself to the human soul to usurp the place of God the Creator and Nourisher of the souls of His creation.

This is the essence of Christianity; the proclamation of the Person of Jesus Christ, our God, the sacrificial Love, and acceptance of Him as the Paradise of the soul. That is why He preached, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink,” and “he who wants, let him come and he who thirsts let him receive the water of life.”

Thus if the soul needs to know the way, she walks through the strong currents of the world and the deceiving lusts of the body and sees her Lover. She sees Him as He offers Himself as a ladder by which she can ascend and attain heaven. This is her eternal land where her Lover courts her by his words, “I am the Way and the Truth”

When the soul needs nourishment, He sustains her, she grows and lives as she finds in her Lover the source of her life and fulfillment. She yearns to eat Him and live through Him as He confirms to her “I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me, will never thirst.”

When the soul experiences the pleasures, joys, burdens, or worries of the world, the lust of the body and its reactions, the wars waged by the devil and his tricks, her Lover proclaims, “I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live.”

When the soul feels the need for a leader to support and protect her, He reveals to her, “I am the Good Shepherd, the Good shepherd sacrifices his life for his sheep”

When the soul feels empty within her depths and needs a sincere, long-suffering, and trustworthy friend whom she can woo in return for his courting, Someone who offers Himself as the Friend of sinners and tax-gatherers and a Bridegroom to those who believe in Him.

This is the Paradise that never dries up, that flows infinitely and gives as much fulfillment as You can desire. He begs everyone to accept Him, pleading “I stand at the door and knock, if anyone opens the door, I will come in and will dine with him...” and if he does not open, I will repeat again and again hoping that his heart will soften and open to me. Truly He has become incarnate to restore joy to the soul and fill her so that anxiety is torn out. O my poor soul, what else do You seek?!

If you need wisdom, you will find Christ the source of wisdom and its spring; indeed He is Wisdom Itself!

If you pray for power and might, He is the Almighty.!

If you seek pleasure and happiness, he is the Spring of true joy!

If you yearn to get drunk, His love intoxicates the soul.

If you hunger for bread, He is the Bread of life!

If you are enthralled by riches, He is the Creator of all things!
If you seek rest, you will find in Him only your comfort!
Accept Him for you will find no other to satisfy you!

First: God is the Essence of the Soul

St. Paul the Apostle, spoke to the Athenians about God, saying, “God who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, Nor is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed... needed any thing, since it is He who gives to all life, breath, and all things...” (Acts 17: 22, 28)

He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we have our soul, indeed He is her center!

Even though heaven and earth cannot sufficiently contain Him, yet He accept the human soul to be his throne... for He has created her in His image and likeness... and she too is filled and comforted by Him!

He desires the heart (Prov. 23:26), and the soul offers it to the Lord who considers it a small bed (Song of Songs 3:1). The Lord enlarges it, (Isa. 57:8) but He cannot tolerate sharing it with another bridegroom...

Peace of heart can be found only in the Lord, its fulfillment rests in Him. This is because the heart is heavenly and can be filled only by what is heavenly...

Just as a ring made specially as a setting for a triangular shaped diamond cannot be filled with any other, so is the soul that cannot rejoice but by the Holy Spirit.

That is why we say if sin has not entered our life, then we would not have needed the commandment of love. For the soul, by its very nature, is attracted to God, just as a heavy stone is attracted to the ground naturally and due to the earth’s gravity.

However, now that sin has come into the world, the need has arisen to purify the soul through the blood of Jesus Christ, the sanctification of the spirit... and the commandment of love.

Now, there is the need for man to know that God is the essence of his life and happiness. In Him is the soul’s fulfillment and rest. Adam had no need to hear about such matters, for he knew them instinctively. However now, after the fall, God constantly rebukes us as He proclaims the truth, saying, “for my people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and dug themselves cisterns, - broken cisterns that can hold no waters. (Jer. 2:13).

The Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, calls us saying, “Come unto Me, all You that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give You rest” (Matt. 11:28).

GOD IS MY WHOLE LIFE!

+ O God... I wish I knew You, You who knows me profoundly... I wish I knew You O strength of my soul!

Reveal Yourself to me, O comforter of my soul! I wish that I could see You, O light of my eyes!

Hurry, O joy of my soul, that I may contemplate You, O delight of my heart!... Inspire me, for in You is my true happiness. in You is the sweet repose... in You is my life in You is my perfect glory!!

I wish that I could find You, O desire of my heart!

I wish I could possess You, O my lover!

Do not abandon my embrace, O Heavenly Bridegroom, for by Your coming, my whole being is seized by an ultimate and heavenly ecstasy inwardly and outwardly!

Grant me Yourself, O Eternal King, so that I might enjoy You, O Blessed Life, O Incomprehensible Joy of my soul!

“I will love You, O Lord, my strength” (Ps 18: 1) “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.”

True, I mean to love You, for You are my God and my Defender. You are my stronghold, my sweet comfort in the middle of all my Troubles.

Let me cling to You, for You are the only Good, and without You goodness does not exist! May You be all my happiness, You who are wholly good!

Open the depth of my ears that I may hear You the Divine Word, You who pierces my soul as a double-edged sword!

O my God! Thunder in the skies with Your Powerful voice!! Let the sea roar and all its waves, let the earth shake and all things on it tremble. Bring lightning upon them so that all doubt may disappear. Finally uncover the depths of the sea and the foundations of the earth to my ears (Ps. 18:15).

O Imperceivable Light, grant me eyes that can behold You! O smell of Divine Life, grant me a new sense of smell that would attract me to the perfume of Your sweet robes!

O God..purify my sense of taste that I may enjoy and get to know You and discover the stored sweetness offered to all who sip Your sweet Love!

Grant me a heart that throbs only by Your Love, a soul that adores You, a spirit that is faithful to Your name, thoughts that comprehend Your mysterious depths, and a mind that finds rest in its unity with Your Living Wisdom. A mind that knows how to love You in holiness, O Love who is the Treasure of all Infinite Wisdom!!

O Life, all creatures live to glorify You, You have granted me life and in You is my life, through You I live; and without You I die!...

Through You, I rise and without You, I perish. Through You, I am filled with joy, and without You I die of sadness!

You are Life, the Source of Life, yet there is nothing to parallel Your humility and beauty! I plead, tell me where You are? Where can I meet You, to hide in You totally and cannot be anywhere but in You!

O! Hurry and make my soul Your dwelling and my heart Your resting place.

Come...for I am sick with love, and my distance away from You is death to me, but Your name brings life to my soul!

Your odor restores my strength, Your remembrance relieves my pain, and Your presence satisfies me, (Ps 17:10)!

O Life of my soul.. my heart runs after You and melts at the remembrance of Your gifts. When will the time come for me to travel to Your kingdom? When will I have the chance to contemplate Your beauty O Life, O Happiness of my soul!

Why do You hide Your face from me, O, only pleasure of my soul?

Where do You hide, O God of beauty, O ultimate goal of all my ambitions.

Your odor, which I breathe, intoxicates me with Life and I am stunned! Even though I have not seen You as yet, this happens to me for it is written, “No man sees me and lives” (Exod. 33).

Well, if I follow this warning, I will not see You. Yet, let me die, O God, and see You. Let me see You before I die. For when I wish to live, I wish to die,’... having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better (Phil. 1:23).

I desire death that I might see You.

I do not wish to live any longer that I might live through You!

O Lord Jesus Christ... receive my life for You are my life!
Attract my heart, for You are my joy!
O Nourishing food, be my appeaser!
O Divine Leader, my strength!
O True light that enlightens my eyes, illumine me!
O Sweet Melody, thrill my whole soul!
O Heavenly Odor, refresh me by Your presence!
O Word of God, establish me in You.

Gladden the soul of Your servant...come into my soul, O true Joy, that I may rejoice in You! Come into her, O infinite sweetness, cast Your beams upon her, O eternal Light, that she may know You and attain and love You!

Why does she not love You? She is indifferent towards You only as she does not know You? Her ignorance arises from lack of awareness, and all her failure arises from her rejection of Your Light. "If the Light shines in the darkness, the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:5)

O Light that enlightens the soul, O Divine Truth, O true Glory shining bright, O You who enlightens every being brought into the world. You have come to the world, and the world did not love You!

O Lord dispel the thick darkness which covers my soul, so that she may see You when she conceives You; that she may know You when she meets You, and that she may love You when she gets to know You. Everyone who knows You, loves You! Forgets himself! Loves You more than himself! Abandons his soul and is attracted to You where his joy is fulfilled through his union with You!

My Lord... if I have not loved You as I should, this is due to my incomplete knowledge of You; this shortage has made me indifferent and the pleasure I enjoy is weak!

Alas! Through slavery to outward temptation, I was preoccupied from You, O potential Joy laying within me...I have been deprived of You and gone to be attached with unclean ties and transient pleasures of the world! This is my misery, the heart that this Yours alone, Yours to reign over in all its emotions, senses, and sacrifices- I gave to false matters... I have become false through my love for what is false! On that account, You are no longer my joy...for I have abandoned You and run after that love of the outer world! In spite of that, You find no rest except in the depths of my soul!

I wish to enjoy the motions of the body, while You wish to enjoy my spirit!

I fill my heart with the concerns of my body and engage my mind with them and make them the revolving point of my conversation. While You, O Lord, live in the imperceptible and immortal soul!

You reign in heaven and I creep on earth...

You adore the heights, and I ask for debasement...

You are occupied by heavenly matters, and I am drowned in the earthly ones!

I wonder when such contradictory tendencies meet?

St. Augustine

- + O Lord, You have empowered my soul to contain Your infinite glory so that nothing else could ever satisfy her other than You!
- + O Lord the human soul is the creation of Your hands...You have made her into a reasoning, spiritual, immortal, and ever active being.

When she can no longer find happiness in the Beauty of Your countenance (because of her sinful state), You consecrated her through Baptism so as, to contain Your glory...and none could satisfy her but You!

When she attains You, all her dreams are fulfilled, and no external mother can satisfy her desires!!

Are You not the ultimate Goodness, and all goodness springs from You?

A heart that does not seek You, seeks what? Does it seek wealth which fills the world by created objects...and what do such demands present other than constant hunger? He who attains these matters remains hungry because the heart cannot be satisfied by any other but You, O my Lord, for You have created it in Your image..

O Lord God... O Most Might... I now know the place of Your pleasure, it is the soul created in Your image and likeness. It is the soul that needs and yearns for none but You!

St. Augustine

THE SOUL THIRSTS FOR HIM

+ “My soul thirsts for You, My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. ” (Ps. 73)

The soul and flesh thirst for the Lord...and He provides her with the Breath that is the Word of Truth, and He grants the body its needs, for God has created them both!

St. Augustine

+ I thirst for the Water of Life and I have not yet run to the Source of Life!

He has called me with my brothers saying, “Who thirsts, let him come and drink.”

Hear the prophet as he rebukes me in his words and as his voice dries up due to shouting, “All You who are thirsty come to the Living Water, for those who drink from it with fullness, rivers of living water will run from their hearts.”

St. John Saba

+ Do You not seek to be filled? And how can this be done?

The body yearns to be appeased, but hunger strikes again as soon as the food is digested. This explains the Lord’s words, “All who drink of this water, shall thirst again.” (John 3:13)

Therefore let us hunger and thirst for Righteousness, that we may be filled by Him.

O that our inner man would thirst and hunger for food and drink appropriate for him the Lord has said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.”(John 6:4) This is the Bread of the hungry!

I wish we yearned to drink as the thirsty too. “For You have the fountain of Life.” (Ps 36:9)

+ O! I will not be filled unless Your glory shines before me!

Yes, O Lord, for You alone can restore my happy life.

I confess to You my misery, it was the end of the day in which I was immersed in the various falsehoods of the world, I was deprived of You, You who are my only Love. On that day my physical yearnings were dispersed among false pleasures. Such pleasures are so many... and within them, they bear countless suffering? They seemed to promise nothing but poverty. I moved from one to the

other hoping that one would satisfy me; but all failed, my soul could not live by any other except You!!

Truly in You is beauty, O You who alone is Immortal, Beautiful, and Perfect always!

He who follows You will never get lost!

He who attains You will never be desperate!

He who possesses You will find fulfillment!

But O, how terrible is my misery!! Woe to me, O Lord, my heart tends to flee from You, to flee from true richness and joy just to follow the world in which there is nothing but sadness and pain.

St. Augustine

+ When we find joy in prayer, when our thoughts find peace in the true Light rather than in worldly possessions...then our souls rejoice in God and are not removed from Him, for it is said, "For in Him we live and move and have our being"(Acts 17:28), and "as though He had been my friend or brother." (Ps. 35:14)

+ All You who are weary and heavily burdened, lay Your head now upon the knee of Your Lord!

Rest and lean on His chest!

Inhale the Odor of Life that it may invade your being!

Lean on Him who is your Table from whom You get nourished!

Clean your heritage or in other words, your bed and the Holy Triad will appear to you surely!

Believe that in your heart, and you will feel that God lives in you! You are the image of God, O Man!

St. John Saba

THE PLEASURE OF THE SOUL AND HER JOY IN GOD

+ I wanted to write, yet I could not! The inspiration I had was gone! The talent I had, had fled! When I continued to try by other means and attempted to depict it, I failed!

I tried to hold in the lines and illustrate it on paper so as to offer it as food for my people, but I failed!...

There is nothing like it in the outside world, while it is in the inner depths where no one knows about it!!

In our world, His likeness cannot be found, and in the world of spiritual ones no one can find a representative?!

I do not know how to calm the flame in my heart which is boiling and burning...

Words cannot express it, signs cannot depict it, nor motions of the conscience can make it perceptible!

I have been totally conquered by it! I have been overcome as though I did not recognize it!

I kept quiet as one who is insensitive to it!

I turned away from it as something indescribable!

I kept my silence as someone incompetent!

How very sad I am for failing to describe this flame or find its analogy!

Since it cannot be paralleled, seek it my colleagues. Seek it. Seek that it might be incorporated with You.

Praise its bliss above all other praises, for nothing resembles its pleasure!

This is its interpretation, for it is said, ".as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us." (John 17:21)

Blessed are those who have tasted this pronouncement!

Blessed is he whose soul has experienced this together with his bones and flesh, this inexplicable pleasure that is like the coolness of the body in concert with her lover.. integrating with the soul and body of his Lover and who conveys the mystery to every soul that prays for it, Amen!

St. John Saba

+ Blessed is he who bears Your remembrance in his heart at all times, for then his soul is constantly intoxicated by Your sweetness!

Blessed is he who seeks You inwardly every hour, for from Him, life flows and fills him with bliss!

Blessed is he who preserves Your presence within him constantly, for his heart is enlightened and mysteries are revealed to him!

Blessed is he who seeks You to appear in him, For his heart is aflame with Your light and his flesh and bones burn with a pure fire.

Blessed is he whose thoughts rest in You, My Lord, for in them he finds the source of the water of Life. This is the pleasure and the delight of those who thirst to see You!

Blessed are those whose cheeks are burned by tears flowing out of love for You! These tears soften the hardness resulting from the fire of hypocrisy. The fruit of these tears are joy and those who shed them do not die!

Blessed are those who intermix their sleep with Your love, for by its thunder, unclean devils who tarnish the lazy are dispersed!

Blessed is he who fervently fills his bed with the wonder of Your mysteries for from him arises the odor of life. This gladdens the keen hearts responding to Your Holy Spirit!

Blessed is he who has forgotten worldly conversation due to his preoccupation with speaking to You, for from You all his needs are answered, You are his food and drink!

You are his home and the dwelling wherein is his comfort. He comes to You at all times for shelter!

You are his sun and his day, by Your light he perceives mysteries!

You are the Father, his Parent!

You have granted him the Spirit of Your Son to be in his heart, and the Spirit instructed him to request all that is Yours just as a son does of his father! At all times, he speaks with You, for he knows no other Father but You!

St. John Saba

+ If You feel sad when praying to Him, You will rejoice at His presence!

If You are in pain, looking to Him with tears and frustration, He will reveal his beauty within You, and thus You will forget Your affliction!

Do not seek Him outside Your own self, for He is the One whose dwelling and resting place is within You! Have You ever seen a wise man seeking his own bliss outside himself?

How would you find life if you don't have It?

Whom do you serve? To whom do you pray?

Before whom do you plead?

Whom do you call saying, "Father, hurry to my aid?" Before whom do you shed tears? Isn't all this done before Him by whom you live and move?

But how is it that you do not feel blissful within your soul? Is it not because you do not question your actions with Him?

If you sit, watch His rays united with you... If you stand, you are purified with the mist of His glory..

If you walk, draw your sight away from the earth; and make your way in the light of the Lord, as a sacred place...

If you sleep, you are covered by streams of His light.

As you drink, mix in the vision of everyone's Beloved...

Soar with the birds in the atmosphere of His purity, and swim with the fish in the depths of His might. From the fire in the furnace, learn the mystery of his union with fire. With the breath of your mouth, your soul inhales her Beloved. With the spiritual, sanctify the heavens within you and there find His dwelling!

St. John Saba

+ O, how wonderful are Your depths O God... and how great are those who trust in them.

I drifted away with the songs of the saints although I am not one of them.

I struggle to reach out for God, the most Holy, but He cannot be attained...

I describe Him but this is impossible,

I seem satisfied, but then I feel empty; and when I seem to have attained Him, He is not there.

When I live in Him, He lives in me.

When He is hidden from me, I am hidden in Him.

When I need to call Him, I find Him within me at any place... and at any time, He does not leave me.

When I listen to Him, He speaks to me.

When I touch Him, He does not move...

All praise is due to You, You who are hidden from every one though You constantly shine upon those who love You!

All praise is due to You, and may we receive mercy forever, Amen.

St. John Saba

+ O God, I love You and my dream is that my love would always increase, Truly You are sweeter than honey, better than milk, and brighter than all light, gold, silver, and precious stones cannot compete with Your place within my heart...

All the pleasures of this world do not appeal to me but seem to be distasteful and offensive... for I have tasted Your sweetness once, and have seen the beauty of Your dwelling place.

O divine fire whose flame is never quenched but burns constantly.

O love eternally warm and never indifferent.

O divine love, embrace me...

Possess me entirely that I may cling to You completely.

Let me love You, O God, for You have loved me first.

St. Augustine

Second: Enjoying God, the Source of Beauty

Man naturally enjoys the beauty of nature. No one ever stops seeking nature to spend moments of rest outdoors, even those who are immersed in laboratory research and studies. In doing so, our souls enjoy the beauty of nature.

If the beauty of nature, which has been created, entices the mind and attracts the will and relieves man of physical fatigue, how much more would the effect be of Beauty Himself, the Creator, whose beauty cannot be measured?

It is true that the hearts of those who meet God and realize the profoundness of His Beauty are fascinated by the source of all beauty. They speak about those preoccupied by worldly beauty and have thereby neglected the source Himself, and say what the book of Solomon says, "As they admired her beauty, let them confess how her Lord is better than her, as the One who has created her is the principle of all beauty" (Wisdom 3:13).

O my God, how can I dare compare Your beauty,

O True Love, with the beauty of Your creation?!

Her beauty is named "beauty" as it is the product of Your hands.

Her beauty is transient, it is here today as the flowers of the grass which quickly withers and dries. As for You, Your beauty is eternal and everlasting.

Her beauty is good because You have blessed her by Your attention and judgment that all You have made is "good."

We may compare man with his shadow, but who would dare compare Your creation? the beauty of Your creation fascinates our minds and entices our souls, how much more should our souls be inspired to love You and sing: "You are more beautiful than mankind." (Ps. 45:1)

"You are sweet and beautiful my Love." (Songs 1:16)

"My Beloved is white and red..."

"His mouth is sweet and full of desire

"This is my Beloved and my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Songs 5: 10, 16).

"Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

LET US BE PREOCCUPIED BY LOVE ITSELF

If nature were a book recording God's work and revealing His Beauty, let us close this book, lest after reading some of it we lose sight of its goal due to our preoccupation with it.

Let us feel, through nature, glimpses of God's nature and sweetness. Let our souls enter into a deep relationship with Him, and let us have a pure heart, that would allow her to see for herself His beauty!. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Let the heart be purified completely so that it may contemplate nothing else but God, the only true Love, the eternal Beauty; and hear His words. "My son, give me your heart," (Prov. 23:26), and "Love the Lord, your God, with all Your heart."

We need to see "Jesus alone" (Matt. 17:8).

Forget the mountain and what is on it as we are confounded by the beauty of the Lord only, and let us say with Peter, "It is good, O Lord, to be here." That is how we should pray at all times that we may enjoy Jesus, our Lord, who has captured our hearts.

+ O Lord, my God, my right hand has failed to write out Your mysteries in images, yet as a wise man I proceed to write...

I come before You now and indulge! We climb Your holy mountain to admire Your glorious beauty, Your light is perfect and shining tremendously, strangely good and impressing the beholders.

They call You a "Sea" and the "Source of the whole world." Your might encompasses all the deep depths.

They compare You to fire, for fire gives without diminishing, it purifies without getting stained.

+ A person recounts that when he is at the start or at the end of his prayers he loses himself and all what he has as he wonders and enjoys the beauty of his Creator.

He who understands let him do so, and may the Lord grant understanding to all those who do not.

St. John Saba

+ A song I sang and its melody I enjoyed...

My beloved heard it and awoke from his sleep...

He listened to it and liked it more than anything, He jumped out of bed and remained forever standing by me. He smilingly said, "Sing more, thrill me with Your tune! Open Your doors and let us enter Your chambers!"

+ How I desire You and love You, O Child Jesus, desiring You captures the soul...

My soul has gone out after You, for in You she finds her depths and Beauty shines upon her.

You are Good...

You are Beloved as the Father...

Your are sweet and delicious, Your flavor is known only by those who have tasted You.

I have inhaled Your good odor and my heart delighted in it, but here is none who can explain.

+ Close your door, O Jerusalem, and may the Groom, your God, stand within. Wear your glory O Zion (my soul) so that your fragrant perfumes are revealed.

St. John Saba

+ Blessed is he who finds You integrated with his drink, for he will drink and his heart will rejoice by Your love.

Blessed are those who come to You, and see Your wondrous presence, and wonder at Your bright Glory that springs within them.

My heart came into conflict with the pen, I almost broke it, for it could not portray the amazing glory that I perceived, rivers of the water of life running from the fountain of the Blessed...

Every mind converses a great deal, and when it comes into this "land," it is stunned by the mysteries all around...

It is here where God reveals His beauty to His beloved...

It is here that the soul sees herself and Christ shining within her and she is delighted upon seeing Him.

Here the holy Trinity is seen in a mysterious way.

+ The pen is consumed by the heat of Your fire, O Jesus Christ, My right hand has ceased to write, My eyes are lit by the light of Your beauty and the earth and all that is upon it has vanished.

My mind is stunned by the wonders it discovers in You.

My bones have caught fire and rivers have cut their way through me to water my body lest I get burned.

+ Praise be to You, O how wonderful You are... How wonderful are Your mysteries... Blessed are Your beloved who shine by Your light that is in them every hour.

+ Before I leave this body, give me, O Lord, the beauty of Your Person for food, and Your mysteries, hidden in Your bosom and essence, for cheerful drink.

+ Blessed are those who have become intoxicated by Your love, O Lord, for, being drunken by You, they have enjoyed Your beauty, Taste, O brother, and see the sweetness of our good Father... and its extent.

+ As for those who have not tried the pleasure of being intoxicated by God and the joy He gives, they are miserable and pitiful...

God has granted His love as a blessing to be enjoyed and reveled in, He also finds pleasure in doing so and is greatly gladdened.

He is the Bridegroom and Source of love. His beloved ones find Him within themselves and are joyful.

He shines in those in whom He lives and they are astonished by His beauty.

+ Love is a fire that burns in the heart and its owner serves her joyfully.

I have often heard one of my brothers speak under the intoxication of Christ's love. He could not control his soul, set on fire by the divine flame, his heart alight from the joy in his heart, and flowing with praises to God... he was shouting and saying, "O Your love O God has set me on fire, my life is taken up by Your love, O Lord, and I can wait no more."

He also often screamed and said, "Blessed are those who are intoxicated by Your love, O Lord

O how inexpressible is Your beauty, O God, the Father!"

+ O man of God, until when will You be comforted only by wearing black clothes. You were all burning and You burned all those around You to find the beauty (of God) hidden within You.

Call in a soft and calm voice, and say, "O You who are hidden and intangible within me, reveal Your hidden mystery in me."

Reveal Your beauty that is within me...

O You who have made me a temple for Your dwelling, cover me, as within Your altar, with the cloud of Your love...

St. John Saba

Third: God is the Light of the Soul

God said, "Let there be light, and there was light; and God saw that it was good and God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:3). These are the first things God did for man's sake.

God is the Light of lights, but man has created light whereby to see and realize as well as enjoy what divine love has offered him.

This fabricated light is enjoyed by the material eye as it helps to see material objects.

However, the heart of man is heavenly and seeks to see heavenly sights. It needs a light that enables it to see God, and what can this light be but God himself, "By Your light O Lord we see light"? Through You alone, O Light of lights, we can see the true Light; Your light is reflected in all those who meet You for You have granted Yourself to all without exception, but no one can be illumined by You unless he accepts You within him and believes in "the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9).

Angels are alight, and they shine wherever they appear, (Acts 2:7), and this is just because they are constantly standing in the presence of the Lord, the Light of lights.

Human beings, too, by the grace of God, can enjoy the light of God if they stand constantly in His presence.

For example, in the Old Testament, although people could not receive the true light within them, yet it was enough for them to stand in God's presence. Thus "the skin of Moses' face shone" for he was "with the Lord forty days and forty nights" (Exod. 28:28, 29,34). It shone to such an extent that Aaron and all the people feared to approach; so he put a veil on his face when he came out to speak to them and he would lift it when he went before the Lord to speak with Him...

Father Abraham, the father of fathers, obeyed God's commandment "to walk before (Him) and be perfect," and this was the secret of Abraham's greatness. He stood before God and God's perfection and light were reflected on him. Here, the necessity of being "perfect" is underlined when walking before the Lord.

Young Joseph had no holy book, or priest, or place of worship. He learned nothing else but how to stand in the presence of the Light of lights. That explains why his heart burned with fire and he was illumined with a wonderful light. It was enough to burn the thorns of Photiphar's wife and to dissipate the power of darkness filling her heart, as well as her devices and tricks and threats.

Elijah, the prophet, also shone with this light and his secret was that when he stood before the king and the people he proclaimed, "... the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 18:15).

Nehemiah's heart was filled with light and so was enabled to overcome the darkness in evil men. He was trained to lift his heart at all times to the Light of lights, wherever he was and at all times, and as he explains to the king, "for I have prayed to God who is in heaven and said..." This indicates that all that preoccupies him even while in the king's presence, is to pray for grace before the Light of the lights.

These are examples from the Old Testament of people who have been able to use up the light even before the reconciliation through the cross was fulfilled. Thus all darkness around them was dissipated for darkness cannot conquer the true Light.

As much as the true Light is reflected upon you so will truth strengthen and encourage you, you will worship without fear or shame and witness for Christ without

embarrassment and you will join Micah, the prophet, and say, "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise, when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me, I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him. Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me; He will bring me forth to the light, and I will see His righteousness. Then she who is my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the Lord Your God?" (Micah 7: 7-9)

Such is the men of prayer, before them all darkness is dissipated, the darkness and power of the devil, the darkness and deceptive pleasure of sin, the darkness inherent in people's words, and the darkness of physical lust...

Examples also abound, in the New Testament, of God's Light, For the Word of God became incarnate in the fullness of time and proclaimed, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). The true Light came "clothed" with Light as "with a garment" (Ps. 104:2). He came, He in whom "is no darkness at all" (I John 5). He came so that His light would shine in the darkness (Isa. 58:10), and to invite us out of darkness and into the light (I Peter 2:9). He wishes us to walk in the Light and become children of Light and of the day (I Thess. 5:5). Indeed, He wishes us to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14).

In this way, the words of the prophet would be fulfilled, "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light..." (Isa. 60:19).

We have been granted the gift of God which we can embrace in our hearts. Hence, He will reveal, by His Spirit, the truth, the unspoken mysteries of God. Our hearts will realize the infinite love of God and discover truth, "I am the Way, the Truth, and Life." At this moment neither darkness, nor storms can invade the inner part of the heart. Indeed, it is raised on a high mountain, far above the world with its attractions and pains; and far above the lust of the body, human vanity, praise or criticism... the heart will walk in the company of Peter, James and John to where the Lord Jesus Christ will reveal Himself. The heart will see Him clothed with light, and His face shining as the sun, His clothes white as light. At that moment Peter cried, "It is good Lord for us to be here," (Matt. 17,4).

He who rises with the Lord discovers through Him the deep mysteries, he realizes the depths of his soul and gets into contact with the depths of God's love. He perceives the enigma of life and other mysteries of the creation are revealed to him. His faith and hope in God become steadfast, then he can speak wisely among the perfect. However, this wisdom will not arise out of this age, or out of the great ones of this generation, but out of God's wisdom, the mysterious wisdom stored by God and designated for our glory before the world ever was. None of the present age has conceived such wisdom, indeed it is written, "What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit, for the Spirit search all things... the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:17). These are matters pertaining to God, and no one else knows them except the Holy Spirit.

Nathaniel saw God incarnate, but he needed the Lord to reveal to him other mysteries, "You will see greater things than these" (John 1:50). He needs to realize who is the Incarnate Word and to perceive Him in the depths of his heart. He needs to sit with Mary, the sister of Lazarus at the feet of the true Light and enjoy the good inheritance that cannot be torn away from him, His friend, the Lord Jesus Christ,

would reveal to him His mysteries just as a Bridegroom opens His heart up to His bride. This is necessary as “no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and few are those to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11: 27). That is how the true Bridegroom reveals the secrets of wisdom to His bride (Job 11:6).

+ O hidden Light!...

O Brightness hidden to other brightness!

You are the Light before whom all other created lights disappear!

You are the brightness before whom all external brightness is turned off!

You are the “Light,” the source of all light; and the “Brightness” from whom all brightness springs.

You are the “Light” and the “Brightness,” before You all lights are as darkness and all luminescence in relation to You is nothing but darkness!

You are the Brightness that turns darkness to light, through You the darkness sparkles and shines!

You are the ultimate Light, no cloud can conceal You, nor steam can impede You...

The night cannot cover You with its darkness, neither can an obstacle impede You, nor can the shadows drown You!

Finally, You are the Light that eternally enlightens the inward parts, consume me in the abyss of Your glory so that I might contemplate Your depths. The power of Your divinity and the impact of its reflection upon me will initiate me!

Do not abandon me ever lest my ignorance and wickedness multiply, without You I became void and miserable!...

Without You none can be good, for You are the sole Truth and the ultimate Goodness...

This is what I believe and profess, O God my God, wherever I may be without You, I find myself miserable - inwards and outwards - for all richness without my God is nothing but utter poverty.

+ Send Your Light and Truth for they will guide me to Your holy mountain and dwelling (Ps. 43:3).

“Light” and “truth” are actually names that indicate just one (God) for what is divine “light” but divine “truth” and divine “truth” but divine “light”?! The Person of Christ embraces both...

He says, “I am the light of the world, he who follows Me does not walk in darkness” (John 14:6).

He Himself is the “Light” and the “Truth”... therefore may he come to lead us...

His “holy mountain” to which the Lord will come is the holy Church. It is the mountain that is, according to Daniel (2:35); the stone that... became a great mountain and filled the whole earth... and struck the huge image.

St. Augustine

+ O my God... You are my light. Open my eyes that they may see Your glory and that I may be able to walk without stumbling into the traps of the enemy!

Indeed, I cannot avoid his traps if I do not see them?!

And how can I see them if I do not have Your light to guide me?!

For in the middle of darkness (the father of darkness) sets these traps so that he might catch all those who live in darkness, that enemy desires all his sons to be deprived of Your perfect light and peace.

If anyone walks in the light, he does not stumble, he sees the light of this world. Whereas if he walks in darkness, he stumbles as the light is not in him, (John 11).

What is this light but You, O my God! You are the Light for the children of Light!

Your days know no end and Your light enlightens Your children so that they do not stumble!

As for those living away from You, they walk and live in darkness!

Let us, therefore, cling to You, O You who are the light of the world!

Why do we need to try, daily, to live without You? All who distance themselves from You, O true Light, wade into sin, and darkness surrounds them so that they cannot distinguish the snares set to catch them all along the way!

O that we did not move away from You... In this way, we would not be entrapped by the deadly enemy.

What is even worse and harder is to fall unknowingly, we think we are upright and do not do any effort to stand.

O my Lord and God... O light of my soul... do not stop from illuminating my path so that I may be able to discover the danger and avoid it, this will keep me from falling and end the devil's malice.

He tries his best to kill me, but may all Your enemies vanish from before You just as wax melts before fire!

I am speaking about that thief who dared to usurp Your children.

Due to his vanity, he jumped into the void that he himself had dug!

You have thrown him out of Your holy mountain and removed him from before Your throne. You have torn him out of the center of Your stars that shine more brightly in the heavens!

And how O my Lord and life, ever since his fall, the enemy is solely preoccupied with chasing Your children!

The hatred that the devil harbors towards You, O great King, motivates him to spoil Your creation which You have created in Your image!...

O my Lord and strength, banish him from before our sight, for we are Your sheep, Illuminate us greatly with Your light so that we may be able to avoid his deceptive traps and come to You rejoicing!

O my God... You know about all these matters much more than I do!

You know how greedy and willful that one has become who pursues our souls!

You do not need to be informed by anyone for nothing is hidden from You.

But hear my complaint, O eternal Judge, for I bring it at the feet of Your Majesty.

Indict him, O God, and save Your children for You are Almighty!

The evil one is sly and tricky; and we cannot, on our own, and without Your light, perceive his devious ways or know his various shapes for at times he is here; at other times he is elsewhere!

At times, he appears as a lamb, and at others as a wolf!

At times, he appears as light, and at others as darkness!

He knows how to change his shape and his plans according to the conditions and schedules of man... thus to deceive the weary, he mourns with them!

In order to draw rejoicing hearts, he pollutes the environment of their celebrations!

In order to kill the fervent in spirit, he appears to them in the form of an angel of light!

In order to strip away the arms of the spiritually strong, he comes to them as a lamb!

To devour the timid, he turns into a wolf!

In all his wiles, he frightens some with nightly apprehensions; while he sends his darts at others during the day. The first, he draws into the evil of darkness; the latter, he fights boldly in the heat of the day (Ps. 91)!

Hence it is so hard to distinguish his grievous and deceptive ways!

Who can count his terrifying teeth?!

His arrows are hidden away, and he holds his snares until the right moment comes for operating them!

O my God... You are my hope... without Your light... by which we can see everything, it is so hard to discover the maneuvers and wiles of the devil...

St. Augustine

+ I behold only one lamp, and by its glow I am illuminated. I am now in a state of wonder and spiritual joy due to the spring of life within me, this is He who is the ultimate goal of the intangible world!

+ Carry the yoke of your Lord within your heart and the wonder of His greatness in your mind always. Thus the glorious light of your Lord will flow into you and illuminate your heart!

St. John Saba

+ Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us" (Ps. 4:6). This is the true and perfect light and righteousness that man needs, this is the Light he sees with the heart rather than with the eye.

The gospel says, "He shone upon us;" or, in other words, was imprinted upon us - just as the king's picture is imprinted on a coin - for man was created in God's likeness and image (Gen. 1:26). This condition was destroyed by sin and therefore it became necessary to set the seal of the eternal and righteous One (the light) on man through a second birth, i.e. baptism.

Probably that was what the Lord meant when He saw the minted coin for Caesar and said, "Give to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21)!

God's minted coin rebounds to Him due to the illumination of the soul by God and its being imprinted by the light of His face (Ps. 4:6).

St. Augustine

+ "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eph. 5:14).

Was the apostle awakening a person who was physically asleep? No! Indeed, he was calling a soul that was sleeping so that it might walk and shine through the Lord, In the same way, the psalmist says, "O God... early will I seek You" (Ps. 63:1)... for Christ illuminates the soul and awakens her; whereas she sleeps if He withdraws His light.

That explains the words of another psalm that says, “lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Ps. 13: 3).

St. Augustine

Fourth: The Spring of Goodness is God

“... none is good, save one, that is, God, “ (Luke 18:19). God alone is All-good and he is capable of reflecting His goodness upon His creation, making it good. “Be holy as I am holy.”

O my soul, learn this truth and submerge in the fullness of this goodness, enter into this true and constant goodness.

May my inner parts be fiery coals whose flames rise to meet God's goodness!... He has granted you the potentials of goodness, by creating you in His likeness, so that you may be attracted to Him and be filled accordingly. However, you have fallen into sin, and although Satan could not tear away your love for goodness, yet he tricks your understanding to misinterpret the meaning of Goodness, thus you came to see what is not good as good and what is good as evil!...

You have become as a fish that sees the bait as being good as it does not perceive what lurks within it, that is how you have judged honor and praise, wealth and its vanishing glory, and lust... You thought all these to be good!

Now, you are in need of wisdom whereby you can become complete and perfect... Pray God who gives generously and without reproach (James 1:4).

God has commanded you, “... walk before Him, in His presence,” (See Gen. 17:1), and cling to Him, and you will definitely become perfect.

+ If there is something good in me, then You are its source... for the goodness in me is Your goodness, O Good one, it is from You that I have received it.

Who helps me to stand, but You, O Lord?!

What makes me fail other than dependence on myself?!

I will remain drowned in the filth if You do not pull me out!

I will remain blind if You do not open my eyes!

I will remain fallen, unable to stand at all, if Your hand does not help me!...

I will be totally destroyed if Your providence does not protect me!

St. Augustine

+ How miserable I am?!

My God... when will this corrupted nature fall away from me, and Your perfect power fill me effectively?!

O God... solitude, stillness, truth, and purity are so sweet, these are all found in You!

As for me... I am distracted by noise, uproar, falsehoods, and sin!

What more shall I say? You are the true Bestower, merciful, holy, and just... whereas I am evil, selfish, a sinner, and unjust!...

You are the Light, whereas I am darkness!

You are Life, whereas I am death!

You are the Physician, whereas I am the patient!

You are Joy, whereas I am sadness!

You are sincere Truth, whereas I am utter lies!

I am similar to other human beings on earth!

With what language do You want me to speak to You, O my Creator?!

I beg You to graciously listen to me...

I am the product of Your hands and my destruction is fearsome!

I am Your creation, and You hear me rolling down towards the void! If I have any existence, You are the One who brought me into being...” Your hands have molded me and fashioned me...” (Ps. 119: 73).

Your hands, that were nailed to the cross, have fashioned me, therefore let them grant me peace... for could You despise the work of Your hands?!

O, I look at Your deep wounds, my name has been engraved on Your hands! Read my name and deliver me!

My soul, that groans before You, is the work of Your hands... turn me into a new creature for this is Your work, therefore my soul does not stop crying and asking for You, "O life, resurrect me anew!"

My soul is the creation of Your hands, and she embraces You and begs You to restore to her her first beauty!...

Forgive me O my God, but You have allowed me to talk with You... yet who is man that he could talk with the Lord, his Creator?!

Yes... forgive me! Forgive my boldness! Forgive Your slave who dares to raise his voice before His Master!

Necessity knows no laws! Thus pain compels me to talk with You! The catastrophe that has come upon me obliges me to call the Physician, for I am sick! I beg for the Light for I am blind! I look for Life, for I am dead! And who is that Physician, Life, and Light but You?!

O Jesus Christ of Nazareth, have mercy on me!

O Son of David, have mercy on me!

O Source of mercy, hear the cries of the sick one!

O Light, falling on the road, stop the blind and hold his hand so that he might approach You!

Let him see the light through Your light,

O Lord, and let him live by You!

I plead that You command the dead to come out of the grave!

O my God! I will shout for Your help before I perish... or at least that I might not perish... so that I may be worthy to live in You!

You suffer when I tell You of my misery and confess unashamedly that I am nothing!

Hurry and help me, You are my power, my help, my goodness, and my fortress!

Hurry, O Light, without You I cannot see!

Strengthen me, O eternal Glory, O my Joy! Reveal Yourself to me, O my God, that I may live!

St. Augustine

Glory be to God. Amen.