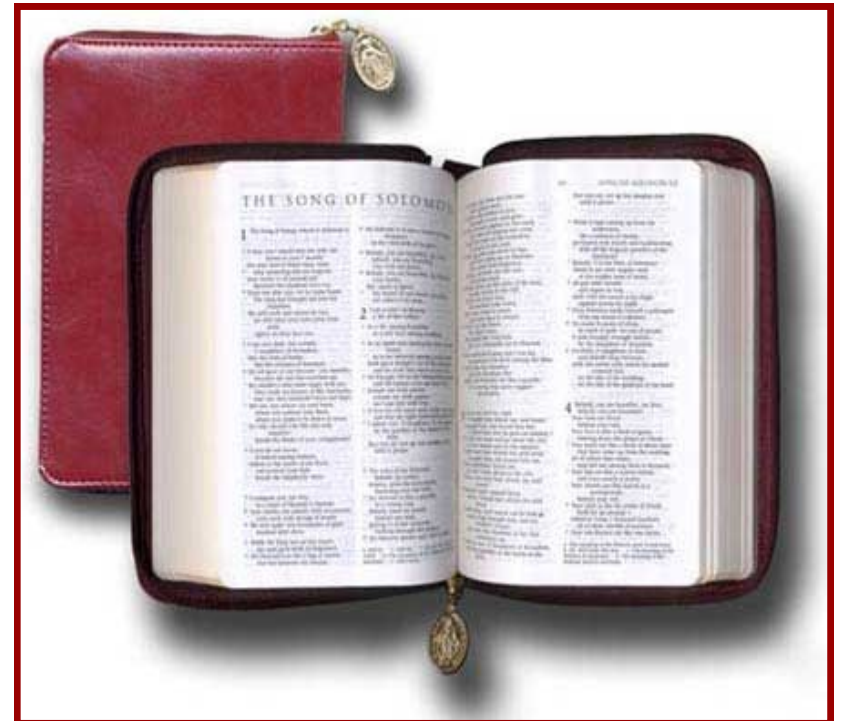




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## ***SONG OF SONGS—77***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***THROUGH THE STREETS AND SQUARES  
I WILL SEEK HIM  
WHOM MY SOUL LOVES***

*The Song of Songs is the story of the love between God and the soul. God is deeply in love with us, and wills our love in return. This love between the soul and God, which is the most intimate love possible, is expressed in the analogy of the bride (the Church) and the bridegroom (Jesus), where the intimacy of love is especially expressed. Commentary on the Song of Songs is presented by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and takes the form of sermons on the meaning of the various allegories used in the psalms and are presented in the order Saint Bernard composed the commentaries. Introductory comments are made by the Early Church Fathers.*

### **Through the Streets and Squares I Will Seek Him Whom My Soul Loves**

'Through the streets and squares I will seek him whom my soul loves.' She still has the understanding of a child, and, I suppose, she imagines that when he had come forth from the tomb he would appear openly and continue to teach the people and heal the sick as before, and reveal his glory in Israel, so that those who promised to accept him if he came down from the cross might perhaps do so when he rose from the dead. But he had finished the work which the Father had given him to do, and the Bride should have understood this from the cry which he uttered on the cross when he was at the point of death: 'It is finished.' He had no need to put himself again at the mercy of the people, who would not be likely to believe in him even then. He was returning with haste to his Father, who would say to him, 'Sit at my right hand until I set your enemies beneath your feet.' For being now lifted up above the earth he would draw all men to him with the greater strength of divine power. But she, desiring to enjoy him, yet not understanding the mystery, thought that he should be sought through the streets and squares. So she is again disappointed in her search and says, 'I sought him but did not find him,' so fulfilling the words he spoke, 'Because I go to the Father, and you shall see me no more.'

2. But perhaps she will say, 'How then will they believe in one whom they do not see?' -It is as though faith depends on sight and does not rather come by hearing. Is there any difficulty in believing what one sees? Is there any merit in trusting the evidence of one's eyes? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait in patience, and patience brings merit. 'Blessed are they who have not seen, yet have believed.' So, giving room for virtue, he withdraws himself from her sight, that she may not be robbed of the merit of faith. Moreover, it is now time for him to return to his own place. 'What is his own place?' you ask. It is at the right hand of the Father. For he did not think it robbery to be equal with God, since he is in the form of God. Let the place of the only-begotten Son be where all outrage and malice is banished and is no more seen. Let his seat then be beside his Father, not below, so that all men may honor the Son as he honors the Father; thus it shall be seen that he is equal to the Father in majesty; he will not be considered inferior or subordinate. But in the meantime the Bride has no such thoughts, but runs hither and thither, as though besotted with love, seeking with her eyes for him who can now be discerned not by sight, but by faith. She does not think that Christ should enter into his glory before the glory of his resurrection is known throughout the world, so that all wickedness may be checked, the righteous rejoice, the disciples exult, and the heathen be converted. And when the truth of his words has been clearly shown by this risen presence, he will be glorified by all. You are wrong, O Bride. These things must indeed be done, but in their own time.

10. But I want to speak a little more fully about these things for the benefit of those who, in their immoderate desire for honors, rashly take upon themselves burdens too heavy for them, and expose themselves to danger. I want them to know what it is they are coming for; as the Scriptures say: 'Friend, why have you come here?' If I am not mistaken, a man needs to be strong, spiritual, and loyal merely to guard the city; he must be strong to repulse the attacks of enemies, spiritual to detect their ambushes, and loyal so that he may not serve his own interests. And it is quite undeniable that for the training and direction of souls, which is what is meant by the adorning of the Bride, there must be a considerable measure of discipline and great diligence. Everyone, therefore, who is called to this work, must burn with the same zeal as that conspicuous lover of the Lord's Bride who said, 'I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' Then, how can an ignorant shepherd lead the Lord's flock into the pastures of the oracles of God? And if he has learning without goodness it is to be feared that he would not so much nourish them with the richness of his teaching as harm them with the barrenness of his life. Therefore it is sheer temerity for anyone to undertake this task unless he has the necessary knowledge and lives an exemplary life. But see, I must make an end though this is not the end of what I have to say. I am summoned to attend to another matter, and one which is of lesser importance. I am torn in pieces, and I do not know which is harder to bear, to be dragged away from the one or pulled to the other. But I suppose it would be even worse to suffer both together. O the bondage of necessity! What I do is not what I choose, but what I detest. But take note where I have left off, so that we may take it up again quickly as soon as we are free to do so, in the name of the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus Christ Our Lord, who is God above all, blessed for ever. Amen.

***END OF SONG OF SONGS — 77***

9. Therefore give heed, you who have been chosen for this ministry; give heed, I say, to yourselves and to the precious charge which has been entrusted to you. It is a city: watch then, and keep it in peace and safety. It is a bride: see to her adornment. It is sheep: see that they are pastured. These three considerations may well have a bearing on Our Lord's threefold inquiry.

Again, the care of the city must be threefold if it is to be effective; it must be protected from violence of tyrants, from the snares of heretics, and from temptations of evil spirits. The Bride must be adorned with the threefold adornments of good works, good character, and good disposition. Likewise the sheep must all be pastured on the Scriptures, which are the Lord's legacy, but there are differences among them. There are commandments, the rough pasturage appointed for the stubborn and unspiritual as a guide to life and discipline, and there is the lush grass of dispensations granted out of pity to the weak and timid; and there is the strong solid grass of the counsels provided for the healthy, whose faculties have been trained to distinguish between good and evil. The young, the lambs, then, must be given the milk of exhortation to drink, not solid food. Therefore good and faithful shepherds never cease to feed their flock with good and choice examples - from their own lives rather than from other people's. If they offer those of other people and not their own, this is to their discredit, and their flock will not profit. I, for example, apparently carry the responsibility of being your shepherd. Now if I hold up to you as examples the compassion of Moses, the patience of Job, the mercy of Samuel, the holiness of David, and so on, but if I myself remain without compassion, impatient, unmerciful, and anything but holy, my exhortations would, I fear, be unpalatable and you would not be keen to listen. I can only leave this to the goodness of God, that he may supply what is lacking in me and correct my mistakes. The good shepherd will also take care to have salt in himself, the salt of which the Gospel speaks, for he knows that a discourse seasoned with salt is both pleasing to the taste and profitable to salvation. This is all I have to say for the moment about guarding the city, adorning the bride, and feeding the sheep.

3. But meantime, consider whether it may not be more worthy of and more fitting to supreme righteousness not to give what is holy to the dogs, or to cast pearls before swine; whether perhaps in accordance with the Scriptures the wicked man should be removed, lest he look upon the glory of God; or whether faith should be disappointed, since it is more clearly proved in believing what is not seen - and thus what is hidden from the unworthy may be reserved for those who are worthy of it, so that those who are filthy may be filthy still, and the righteous may become more righteous, if they do not grow weary and fall asleep. Let the heavens and the heaven of heavens decay and be disappointed of their hope, as long as the Almighty Father himself is not thwarted of his heart's desire, and the only-begotten Son is not any longer hindered from entering into his glory - which would be most unsuitable! What glory do you imagine can be given by mortals which would be worthy to keep him even for a moment from the glory which had been prepared for him by his Father from all eternity?

Remember, too, that it is quite wrong for the fulfillment of the Son's petition to be deferred any longer. What petition do I mean, you ask. The one, of course, which says, 'Father, glorify the Son.' No, I think that this petition was made as a prophecy rather than as a prayer, for what is asked for without reservation is within the power of taking of him who asks. So the Son's petition is a matter of divine economy rather than necessity, for whatever he receives from the Father he also gives with the Father.

4. It must also be said that not only does the Father glorify the Son, but the Son also glorifies the Father. Let no-one say that the Son is inferior to the Father because he is glorified by the Father, for he himself glorifies the Father. Notice, he says, 'Father, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.' Perhaps you still think that the Son should be considered inferior, because to receive glory from the Father in order to give it back to the Father implies a lack of glory.

But it is not so. Hear what he says: 'Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was made.' If the Son's glory is not inferior or secondary, since it has been for all eternity, then the Father and the Son give equal glory to each other; and if this is so, in what does the primacy of the Father consist? For where there is co-eternity there is surely equality, and the equality is such that the glory of both is one, since they are themselves one. It seems to me, then, that when he says on another occasion, 'Father, glorify your name,' he asks nothing other than to be glorified himself; and he receives from his Father the reply, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' This reply in itself gives no small glory to the Son. And he was given greater glory and higher honor at the fords of the Jordan by the testimony of John: his marking out by the dove, and the voice saying, 'This is my beloved Son.' But greatest majesty and glory was that which attended him on the mountain in the company of the three disciples, both by that same voice sounding again from the heavens, and by the remarkable beauty and wonder of his physical transfiguration, and again by the witness of the two prophets who also appeared there and talked with him.

5. It remains then for him to be glorified once more, in accordance with his Father's promise, and that will be the fullness of glory, to which nothing can be added. But where will this blessing be given? Not, as she supposed, in the streets and squares, unless it be in those of which it is said, 'Your streets, O Jerusalem, shall be paved with pure gold, and "alleluia" shall be sung in your by-ways.' There, indeed, he has received from his Father that glory whose like cannot be found even in the heavens. For to which of the angels was it said, 'Sit at my right hand'? Indeed, none of the angels is found fit to assume the greatness of this glory, nor any among the other higher orders of the blessed. To none of them has come that proclamation of singular glory, to none of them has it been given to experience in himself its workings. Thrones, Dominations, Principalities and Powers certainly desire to look upon him in his glory, but none presume to compare themselves with him. So it is to 'My Lord' that the proclamation was made, to him alone that it was granted by the Lord to sit at the right hand of his glory, for he alone is co-equal in glory, consubstantial in being, identical by generation, alike in majesty, and coeval in eternity. There, there it is that he who seeks will find him and will see his glory - not glory as of one among many, but glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.

6. What then, O Bride, will you do? Do you think you can follow him there? Dare you, can you penetrate to that holy hiding place, that hidden sanctuary, to look upon the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son? Assuredly not. Where he is, you cannot come now, but you shall come hereafter. Come then, follow, seek him; do not let that unapproachable brightness and glory hold you back from seeking him or make you despair of finding him. 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' 'The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.' Believe, and you have found him. Believing is having found. The faithful know that Christ dwells in their hearts by faith. What could be nearer? Therefore seek him confidently, seek him faithfully. 'The Lord is good to the soul who seeks him.' Seek him in your prayers, follow him in your actions, find him in faith. How can faith fail to find him? It reaches what is unreachable, makes known what is unknown, grasps what cannot be measured, plumbs the uttermost depths, and in a way encompasses even eternity itself in its wide embrace. I speak in faith I believe the eternal and blessed Trinity, although I do not understand it, and I hold fast by faith what I cannot grasp with my mind.

7. But someone says, 'how shall she believe without a preacher, since faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of a preacher? God will provide for this. Look, they are here already, they who are to instruct the new bride in the things she needs to know, and prepare her for her marriage to the heavenly Bridegroom, and to teach her the faith and counsel her in the ways of holiness and true religion. For hear what she says next. 'The watchmen who guard the city have found me.' Who are these watchmen? Surely those of whom the Savior said in the Gospel, 'Blessed are they whom the Lord finds watching when he comes.' How good they are, these watchmen who keep watch while we sleep, as though they would answer for our souls! How good they are, these guardians who are watchful in spirit and spend the night in prayer, who scout the snares of the enemy, forestall the plots of the wicked, detect their traps, avoid their entanglements, tear their nets, and frustrate their evil designs! These are lovers of their brethren and the Christian people, who pray a lot for their people and for all the Holy City. These are they who care with all their heart for the Lord's flocks committed to their charge, and early in the morning call upon the Lord who made them and pray to the Lord most high. They watch and pray, for they know that of themselves they cannot keep the city safe, for 'unless the Lord keep the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.'

8. Now since the Lord commands us to 'Watch and pray, so that you do not enter into temptation,' it is clear that without this twofold activity of the faithful, and the constant care of those who guard them, neither the city nor the Bride nor the sheep can abide in safety. Do you ask what difference there is between these three? They are one and the same. The city, because an assembly of souls; the Bride, because beloved; sheep because gentle. Do you want to know why the Bride is called a city? St John says, 'I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' This and of the sheep will become clear to you and full of meaning if you remember how the Lord in his wisdom entrusted the sheep to the first shepherd - I mean St Peter - and urged him with such persistence to tend it lovingly. He would not have taken such care over this unless he had, from the depth of his conscience acknowledged himself as the Bridegroom. Listen to this, you friends of the Bridegroom, if friends you are. But to call you friends is not enough; those who are granted the privilege of such great intimacy should rather be called close and dear friends. It was not pointlessly that Our Lord, in handing over the sheep, said three times, 'Peter, do you love me?' It was, I think, as though Jesus had said: 'Unless your conscience bears witness that you love me and love me so strongly and completely - more than you love your possessions, your family, and even yourself - that this threefold command of mine is fulfilled, you must not, on any account, take this charge upon you, nor must you have any dealings with these sheep of mine for whom my blood was shed.' A speech to inspire dread, and to strike terror into the heart of any tyrant, however bold.