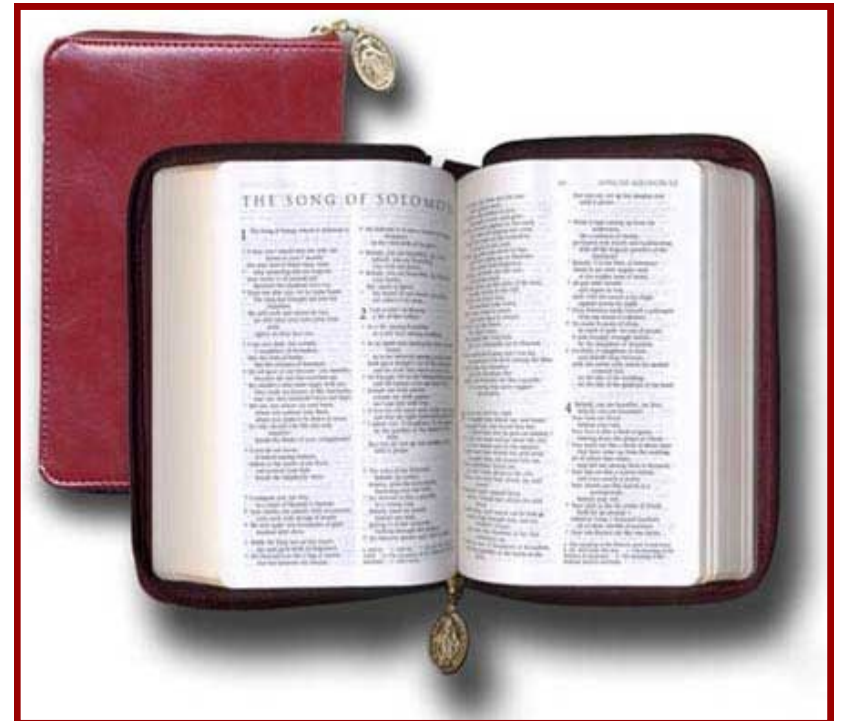




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## ***SONG OF SONGS—70***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***OF THE COMING  
OF THE FATHER AND THE SON  
TO THE SOUL***

*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.*

## **Of the Coming of the Father and the Son to the Soul**

“My beloved is mine, and I am his.” In my last sermon I attributed this saying to the Church Universal, because of the promises made to her by God in this present life as well as in the life to come. The question was raised whether it was possible for an individual soul to claim for itself what the whole Church might claim without presumption, or whether indeed it could appropriate the promise to itself in any way at all. If this may not be done, we must apply it to the church in such a way that it may not refer to any individual and not only this saying, but others like it which express great truths, like ‘I waited for the Lord and he inclined to me’, and others which were mentioned in the last sermon. If you think that they apply to the individual, I would not contradict you. But this is a matter of some importance, for it cannot apply to everyone indiscriminately. Certainly there are within the Church of God spiritual persons who serve him faithfully and with confidence, speaking with him as a man speaks with his friend, and whose consciences bear witness to his glory. But who these are is known only to God, and if you desire to be among them, then hear what sort of people you should be. I say this, not as one who knows it by experience, but as one who desires to do so. Show me a soul which loves nothing but God and what is to be loved for God's sake, to whom to live is Christ, and of whom this has been true for a long time now; who in work and leisure alike endeavors to keep God before his eyes, and walks humbly with the Lord his God; who desires that his will may be one with the will of God, and who has been given the grace to do these things. Show me a soul like this, and I will not deny that she is worthy of the Bridegroom's care, of the regard of God's majesty, of his sovereign favor, and of the attention of his governance. And if she is minded to boast, she will not be a fool, so long as she who boasts, boasts in the Lord. Thus what many dare to boast of, one may also dare, though for a different reason.

**What does it mean for the Word to come into a soul?**

**It means that he will instruct it in wisdom.**

7. Consider how great is the grace of intimacy which results from this encounter of the soul and the Word, and how great the confidence which follows this intimacy! I think such a soul need not fear to say, 'My beloved is mine'; for she perceives that she loves, and loves ardently, and has no doubt that she is loved ardently in return. Then by virtue of the single-minded devotion of watchfulness, the care and attention, the diligence and zeal with which she has ceaselessly and ardently studied to please God, she recognizes these attributes in him also, with certainty and peace, recalling his promise 'with what measure you measure it shall be measured out to you in return'. Yet the Bride is prudent and careful to take as her share only thankfulness for grace received, for she knows that the initiative lies with the Bridegroom. Thus it is that she mentions his part first: 'My beloved is mine and I am his.' She knows then without any doubt, from the attributes which have their origin in God, that she who loves is herself loved. And so it is: the love of God gives birth to the love of the soul for God, and his surpassing affection fills the soul with affection, and his concern evokes concern. For when the soul can once perceive the glory of God without a veil, it is compelled by some affinity of nature to be conformed to it, and be transformed to its very image. So God must appear to you as you have appeared to God; 'with the holy he will be holy, and with an innocent man he will be innocent.' Why not also loving with the loving, eager with the eager and concerned with those who are concerned?

8. Lastly, he says, 'I love those who love me and they who seek me early shall find me'. See how he assures you of his love, if you love him, and of his concern for you, if he sees you concerned for him. Do you keep watch? He keeps watch also. If you rise at night before the time of vigil and hasten to anticipate the morning watch, you will find him there. He will always be waiting for you. You would be very rash if you claimed to love him first or love him more; his love is greater, and it preceded yours. If the soul knows this or because she knows it - is it any wonder that this soul, this bride, boasts that great majesty cares for her alone as though he had no others to care for, and she sets aside all her cares and devotes herself to him alone with all her heart. I must bring this sermon to an end, but I will say one thing to the spiritual among you, a strange thing, but true. The soul which looks on God sees him as though she alone were looked on by him. It is in this confidence that she says he is concerned for her, and she for him, and she sees nothing but herself and him. How good you are, Lord, to the soul who seeks you. You come to meet her, you embrace her, you acknowledge yourself to be her bridegroom, you who are the Lord, God blessed for ever above all things.

**END OF SONG OF SONGS — 70**

2. These considerations do indeed give confidence to the many faithful, but there are two which apply to the faithful soul. First, the essential simplicity of the Godhead is able to see many persons as if they were one, and one as if he were many, without division of attention between many or restriction to one, with no diminishment on the one hand or intensification on the other, being neither disturbed by anxieties nor troubled by cares; thus he may occupy himself with one without preoccupation, and with many without distraction. Next, a thing very sweet to experience, as it is very rare; such is the courtesy of the Word, such the tenderness of the Father towards the well-disposed, well-ordered soul, itself the gift of the Father and the work of the Son - that they honor with their own presence the one whom they have foreordained and prepared for themselves, and not only do they come to him, but they make their dwelling-place with him. For it is not enough that their presence is revealed; they must also give of their fullness.

What does it mean for the Word to come into a soul? It means that he will instruct it in wisdom. What does it mean for the Father to come? It means that he will draw it to the love of wisdom, so that it may say, 'I was a lover of her beauty'. It is the Father's nature to love, and therefore the coming of the Father is marked by an infusion of love. What would happen to learning apart from love? It would be puffed up. What would happen to love apart from learning? It would go astray, as they went astray of whom it was said, 'I grant that they have a zeal for God but it is not according to knowledge'. It is not fitting that the Bride of the Word should be ignorant; moreover the Bridegroom does not allow the Bride to be uplifted with pride; for the Father loves the Son and never hesitates to cast down and to destroy whatever sets itself up against the knowledge of the Word, tempering zeal through judgment or increasing it through mercy. May he cast down in me all pride: destroy it, reduce it to nothingness, not by his blazing anger but by his welling love. May I learn not to be proud, but by the tutelage of anointing rather than of avenging. Lord, rebuke me not in your indignation, as you did the angel who exalted himself, neither chasten me in your wrath, as you did man in paradise. Both were resolved on wickedness, aspiring to exalt themselves, the one through power, the other through knowledge. For the woman foolishly believed the deceiver's promise: 'You shall be gods, when you know good and evil'. He had already deceived himself; when he persuaded himself that he would be like the Most High. For he who thinks himself to be something when he is nothing deceives himself.

3. But they who exalted themselves were both cast down, yet the man more gently, for his judge was the one who orders all things by weight and measure. The angel was punished, even damned, in fury, but the man only suffered displeasure, not fury. 'For though he was angry, he remembered his mercy.' For this reason his seed are called the children of wrath, not of fury, until this day. If I were not born a child of wrath, I should not have needed to be re-born in baptism; if I were a child of fury, either I could not have attained to it, or it would not have benefitted me. Would you wish to see a child of fury? If you have seen Satan falling as lightning from heaven, cast down by the force of God's fury, you know what the fury of God is. He did not remember his mercy then, whereas when he is angry he will remember it. It is not so when his fury is kindled. Woe to the children of disobedience, to those descended from Adam, who were born of wrath, but turned it into fury against themselves by their fiendish obstinacy, turning as it were a switch into a rod - or rather into a hammer! 'For they store up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath.' But what is stored-up wrath but fury? They have committed the devil's sin, and incur the same punishment as the devil. Woe too, though less terrible, to those children of wrath who, being born in wrath, have not looked forward to being reborn in grace. For they have died as they were born, and shall remain children of wrath. I say of wrath, not of fury, because piety and compassion lead us to believe that those who are infected by sin from outside themselves incur the mildest of punishments.

4. Therefore the devil is judged in fury, because his wickedness incurred hatred, while that of men incurred wrath, and so is chastised in wrath. Thus all pride is destroyed, both that which exalts a man and that which casts him down, for the Father is exceedingly zealous for his son. And in both instances the Son is dishonored: in the first because power is usurped in opposition to the might of God, which is himself, and in the second because knowledge is presumed not in accordance with the wisdom of God, which is also he. Lord, who is like you? Who but your own image, the splendor and likeness of your being. He alone is in your form, he alone did not think it robbery to be equal with you, he, the most high Son of the Most High. How can he be other than equal with you? For you and he are one. His seat is at your right hand, not under your feet. How can anyone presume to usurp the position of your only begotten Son? Let such a one be cast down. Is he to take his seat on high? Let the chair of pestilence be overturned. Who shall teach man wisdom? Is it not you, O Key of David. Who open and shut to whomever you wish? How can the doors of the treasure of wisdom and knowledge be opened without a key? How could an entry be forced? He who does not enter by the door is a thief and a robber. Peter, of course, will enter, for he received the keys. But he will not be alone, for he will admit me also, if he sees fit, and shut out someone else if he sees fit, through the knowledge and the power conferred on him from above.

5. And what are these keys? They are the power of opening and closing and of discerning who should be let in and who should be kept out. They are not in the possession of the serpent, but of Christ. Therefore the serpent could not give knowledge which he did not possess but he who possessed it gave it. Nor could he have power which he had not received; it was he who received it, who had it. Christ it was who gave it, Peter who received it. He was not puffed up at his knowledge; nor did he deserve to be cast down because of his power. Why was this? It was because he did not exalt himself against the knowledge of God, nor did he lay claim to any of those things beyond the knowledge of God, as did he who acted deceitfully in the sight of God, whose wickedness became hateful. How indeed could Peter have claimed anything beyond the knowledge of God when he described himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father? And these things were said with reference to the zeal of God which he directed against those who transgressed - whether angel or man, for he found wickedness in both - just as he destroyed in his furious anger all pride which sets itself up against the knowledge of God.

6. We must now turn to the zeal of pity not the zeal directed against us, but that which is extended towards us. For the zeal directed against us, as we have seen, is the zeal of judgement, and has inspired us with sufficient fear from the examples already quoted of those who have received so terrible a punishment. Therefore I will flee from the sight of the anger of the Lord and go to a place of refuge, to that zeal of mercy which burns sweetly and wholly purifies. Does not charity make amends? Truly it does powerfully. I have read that it covers a multitude of sins. But I would ask this: is it not right and sufficient to cast down and humble all pride of eyes and heart? Yes indeed, for love does not vaunt itself and is not puffed up. Therefore if Our Lord Jesus condescends to come to me, or rather enter into me, not in the zeal of anger or even in wrath, but in love and in a spirit of gentleness, striving with me with the striving of God - for what greater attribute of God is there than charity? Then he is indeed God. If he comes in such a spirit, then I know that he is not alone but that the Father is with him. What could be more like a father? Therefore he is not only called the Father of the Word, but the Father of mercies, because it is his nature always to have mercy and to pardon. If I feel that my eyes are opened to understand the Scriptures, so that I am enlightened from above to preach the word of wisdom from the heart or reveal the mysteries of God, or if riches from on high are showered upon me so that in my soul fruits of meditation are produced, I have no doubt that the Bridegroom is with me. For these are gifts of the Word, and it is of his fulness that we have received these gifts. Again if I am filled with a feeling of humility rich with devotion whereby love of the truth I have received produces in me so urgent a hatred and contempt for vanity that I cannot be inflamed with pride by reason of knowledge, nor elated by the frequency of heavenly visitations then truly I am aware of fatherly activity and do not doubt the Father's presence. But if I continue as far as I can to respond to this condescension in worthy disposition and action, and the grace of God in me has not been fruitless, then the Father will make his abode with me to nourish me, as the Son will teach me.