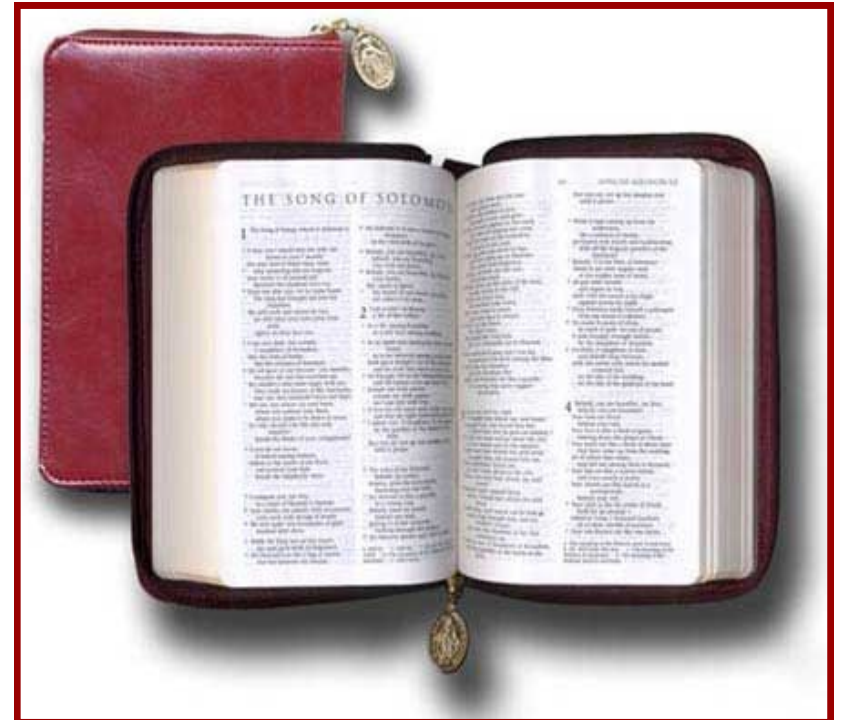




# ***SONG OF SONGS—50***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***THE  
WINE-CELLAR***

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*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.*

## **The Wine-Cellar**

'The king led me into the wine-cellar, he set love in order in me.' The words of the proposed text seem to mean that after the bride had achieved her desire of sweet and intimate conversation with her beloved, she returned, at his departure, to the maidens so refreshed and animated in speech and appearance that she looked drunken. And when they, surprised at this novelty, asked for the reason, she answered that it is not surprising if one who entered the wine-cellar should be tipsy with wine. So much for the literal meaning. But she also does not deny that she is drunk in the spirit, but with love, not wine -except that love is wine. 'The king led me into the wine-cellar.' When the bridegroom is present and the bride addresses him, then 'bridegroom' is said, or 'beloved' or 'whom my soul loves'; but when she speaks about him to the maidens she calls him 'the king'. Why? Because it is appropriate for the bride who loves and is loved to use familiarly, as she pleases, the titles of love, and it is necessary that the maidens, who need discipline, be constrained by the awesome title of majesty.'

2. 'The king led me into the wine-cellar', I omit mentioning what that wine-cellar is, because I remember having described it. But if the term is referred to the Church—since the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, were thought by the people to be drunk with wine—then Peter, the friend of the bridegroom, standing in their midst said on behalf of the bride: 'These men are not drunk as you suppose.' Take note that he denies not that they are drunk, but drunk in the manner supposed by the people. For they were drunk, but with the Holy Spirit, not with wine. And as if they would witness to the people that they had really been led into the wine-cellar, again Peter says on behalf of all: 'But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "and in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams".' Does it not seem to you that the wine-cellar was that house in which the disciples were assembled, when 'suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting,' and fulfilled Joel's prophecy? And as each of them went out intoxicated by the abundance of that house and drunk from a torrent of a pleasure so great, could he not truly say: 'the king led me into the wine-cellar'?

**But if anyone obtains, while praying,  
the grace of going forth in spirit into the mystery of God,  
and then returns in a glowing ardor of divine love,  
overflowing with zeal for righteousness,  
fervent beyond measure  
in all spiritual studies and duties,  
so that he can say:**

***'My heart became hot within me; as I mused the fire burned'***

8. 'And how can I advance,' you say, 'I, who am jealous of my brother's progress?' If you grieve for your jealousy, you feel it with out yielding to . It is a passion that time will heal, not an action to be condemned. But you must not relax in it, plotting mischief in your bed, how to foster the disease, that is, how to pander to the contagion, how to persecute the innocent by disparaging his fine achievements, by discouraging, misrepresenting or obstructing his undertakings. Otherwise it does not injure the one who advances and strives for better things, because it is no longer he who does it but the sin that dwells within him. Condemnation therefore is not for him who does not give his body to wickedness, nor his tongue to slander, nor any other part of his body to the infliction of damage or injury; on the contrary he is ashamed of his evil disposition, and strives to expel the deep-seated vice by continued confession, by tears, by prayer. And should he not succeed he is thereby more gentle toward others, more humble in himself. Can a wise man condemn the sensible person who has learned from the Lord to be gentle and humble of heart? It must not be that we should find devoid of salvation one who follows the Saviour, the Church's bridegroom, our Lord, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

### ***END OF SONG OF SONGS — 50***

3. But even you too, if recollected in spirit, if with a mind serious and devoid of cares, you enter the house of prayer alone, and standing in the Lord's presence at one of the altars touch the gate of heaven with the hand of holy desire, if in the presence of the choirs of saints where your devotion penetrates - for 'the prayer of the righteous man pierces the heavens'—you bewail pitifully before them the miseries and misfortunes you endure, manifest your neediness, implore their mercy with repeated sighs and groanings too deep for words; if, I say, you do this, I have confidence in him who said: 'ask and you shall receive,' that if you continue knocking you will not go empty away. Indeed when you return to us full of grace and love, you will not be able, in the ardor of your spirit, to conceal the gift you have received; you will communicate it without unpopularity, and in the grace that was given to you, you will win the acceptance and even the admiration of everyone. And you can declare with truth: 'the king led me into the wine-cellar'; only be careful that you glory not in yourself but in the Lord. I would not vouch that every gift, even if spiritual, proceeds from the wine-cellar, since the bridegroom has other cellars or repositories in which are hidden varying gifts and charisma, in accord with the riches of his glory. I have discoursed on these cellars quite extensively elsewhere. 'Are these not laid up in store with me,' he said, 'sealed up in my treasuries?' Therefore there is a distribution of graces in accord with the diversity of cellars, and 'to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'. And although one is given wisdom in speech, another the power to instruct, another prophecy, another the grace of healing, another the gift of tongues, another the ability to interpret doctrine, and still others gifts similar to these, yet none of them can say in consequence that he was led into the wine cellar. For these are taken from other cellars or treasuries.

4. But if anyone obtains, while praying, the grace of going forth in spirit into the mystery of God, and then returns in a glowing ardor of divine love, overflowing with zeal for righteousness, fervent beyond measure in all spiritual studies and duties, so that he can say: 'My heart became hot within me; as I mused the fire burned', since the abundance of love shows he has clearly begun to live in that state of good and salutary intoxication, he is not unjustly said to have entered the wine-cellar. For as holy contemplation has two forms of ecstasy, one in the intellect, the other in the will; one of enlightenment, the other of fervor; one of knowledge, the other of devotion: so a tender affection is a heart glowing with love, the infusion of holy ardor, and the vigor of a spirit filled with zeal, are obviously not acquired from any place other than the wine-cellar. And everyone to whom it is granted to rise up from prayer with an abundance of these can truly say: 'the king led me into the wine-cellar.'

5. She continues: 'He set love in order in me'. Utterly necessary. Zeal without knowledge is insupportable. Therefore where zeal is enthusiastic, there discretion, that moderator of love, is especially necessary. Because zeal without knowledge always lacks efficacy, is wanting in usefulness, and all too often is harmful. And so the more eager the zeal, the more vigorous the spirit, the more generous the love, so also the greater the need for more vigilant knowledge to restrain the zeal, to temper the spirit, to moderate the love. Hence the bride, lest she be feared by the maidens as overbearing and insufferable because of the impetuosity of spirit that she seems to have brought back from the wine cellar, adds that she too has received the fruit of discretion, a regulating of love. Discretion regulates every virtue, order assigns proportion and beauty, and even permanence. For it is written: 'By your ordinance the day goes on', day meaning virtue. Discretion therefore is not so much a virtue as a moderator and guide of the virtues, a director of the affections, a teacher of right living. Take it away and virtue becomes vice, and natural affection itself a force that disturbs and destroys nature. 'He set love in order in me.' This took place when he appointed some in the Church to be apostles, some prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints. It is essential that the one love should bind and merge all these into the unity of Christ's body, and it is entirely incapable of doing this if it is not itself regulated. For if each one is carried away by his own impulse in accord with the spirit he receives, and applies himself indifferently to everything as he feels suggests rather than as he judges by reason, until no one is content with his assigned duty but all simultaneously undertake to administer everything indiscriminately, there will clearly be no unity but confusion instead.

6. 'He set love in order in me.' Would that the Lord Jesus would set in order in me the little fund of love he gave me, that while my interest may extend to all his concerns, I may care before everything else for the project or duty he has appointed especially for me. My primary concern for this however should be such that I may be drawn all the more to the many things that do not especially pertain to me. For that which demands first care does not always demand greater love, since often the thing that we worry about most is of no great use, and should not constrain our love. So frequently what is duty's first concern is less esteemed by the judgment, and what truth considers of first importance true love demands must be embraced more ardently. For example, does duty not impose on me the care of all of you?

Now if by chance I should prefer to this work something that would prevent me striving with all my strength to execute it worthily and profitably, the principle of order would not approve it, even though I might seem to do it for love's sake. Yet if I apply myself as I ought to this charge before everything else, but fail to rejoice in the greater gains for God that I see another achieving, it is evident that I partially observe the order of love and partially do not. If however I reveal genuine concern for that which is my special charge and nevertheless a still finer sympathy for a work that is greater, I find that I have fulfilled the order of love in both ways, and there is no reason why even I should not be able to say that 'he set love in order in me'.

7. Yet if you say it is hard for a person to rejoice more in another's great achievement than in his own small effort, you certainly perceive from this the excellence of the bride's grace, and that not every soul can say: 'he set love in order in me'. Why have the faces of some of you fallen at this statement? These deep sighs bear witness to a sad mind and dispirited conscience. Measuring ourselves against ourselves, we feel, from the experience of our own imperfection, some of us, how rare a virtue it is not to envy the virtue of another, not to mention rejoicing in it, not to mention that one should be all the more happy with himself the more he considers himself surpassed in virtue. There is yet a little light among us, brothers, as many of us feel this way about ourselves.

Let us walk while we have the light, lest darkness overtake us. To walk is to make progress. The apostle was walking when he said: 'I do not consider that I have made it my own;' and added: 'but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind I strain forward to what lies ahead.' What is this one thing? One thing, he says, has remained with me, as a remedy, a hope, a consolation. What is it? Evidently 'forgetting what lies behind I strain forward to what lies ahead'. What sublime confidence. That distinguished 'chosen instrument', denying that he is perfect, declares that he is moving ahead! The danger therefore is that not he who walks but he who takes his ease will be overcome by the darkness of death. And who takes his ease but the man who has no will to advance? Pay heed to this, and if you die early, you will be at rest. You may say to God: 'Your eyes beheld my imperfect being.' And nevertheless 'in your book all shall be written.' Who are all? Surely those who possess the desire to advance. The text continues: 'days shall be formed, and no one in them'; you supply: shall perish. Understand 'days' as those who are advancing, who, if they are surprised by death, will be made perfect in that which is lacking in them. They shall be formed, and none among them left imperfect.