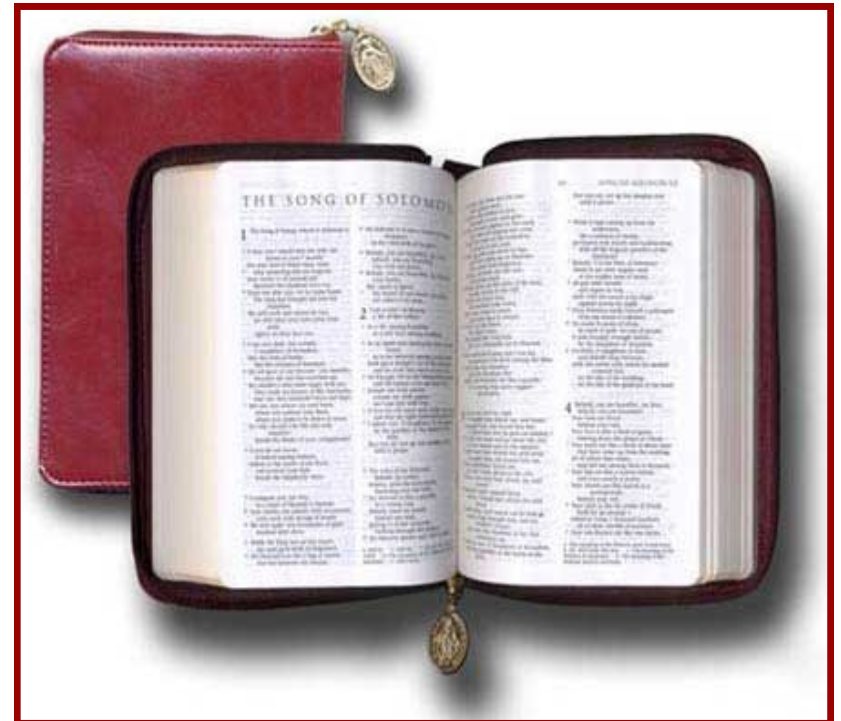




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## ***SONG OF SONGS—18***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***ON THE WAYS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT  
AND  
THE ENVY OF THE DEVIL***

*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.*

### **On the Ways of the Holy Spirit and the Envy of the Devil**

O you think we have advanced far enough into a sphere that is holy to God, in unraveling this wonderful mystery, or should we dare follow the Holy Spirit into still more secret places to search for meanings that may yet be attained? For the Holy Spirit searches not only the minds and hearts of men but even the depths of God; so whether it be into our own hearts or into the divine mysteries, I shall be secure in following him wherever he goes. He must keep watch over our hearts and our minds, lest we think him present when he is not, and follow the erratic light of our own feelings instead. He comes and goes as he wills, and no man can easily discover whence he comes and whither he goes. Ignorance of this will not lessen our hopes of salvation; but to be ignorant of when he comes and when he goes would certainly involve risk. Unless we use the utmost vigilance in attending to these gift-laden visits of the Holy Spirit, we shall neither desire him when he seems absent nor respond to him when present. If he withdraws from us to stimulate us to a more eager search for him, how shall we seek for him if we do not perceive his absence? Or when he comes to animate us, how shall we give him the welcome due his majesty if his visit passes unnoticed? The man who is indifferent to his absence will be led astray by other influences; the man who is blind to his coming cannot offer thanks for the visit.

How wonderful your love for me, my God, my love! How wonderful your love for me, everywhere mindful of me, everywhere eager for the welfare of one who is needy and poor, protecting him both from the arrogance of men and from the might of evil spirits. Both in heaven and on earth, O Lord, you accuse my accusers, you attack my attackers; everywhere you bring help, always you are close to my right hand lest I be disturbed. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have being." How great are his powers, what wonders has he not done! The first and greatest of his achievements is that revealed to me by one initiated to his mysteries, the Virgin Mary: "He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent away empty. "The second you have heard of too, it is like the first: "That those without sight may see, and those with sight turn blind. These two judgments are the poor man's consolation, they enable him to say: "Remembering your rulings in the past, Lord, I take comfort."

Let us return now to ourselves, let us examine our paths; and in order to accomplish this in truth, let us invoke the Spirit of truth, let us call to him from the deep into which he has led us, because he leads us on the way by which we discover ourselves, and without him we can do nothing. Nor should we be afraid that he will disdain to come down to us, for the contrary is true: he is displeased if we attempt even the least thing without him. For he is not one "who passes and does not return," he leads us on from brightness to brightness because he is the Spirit of the Lord. Sometimes he fills us with rapture by communication of his light, sometimes he adapts himself to our weakness and sends beams of light into the dark about us. But whether we are raised above ourselves or left with ourselves, let us stay always in the light, always walk as children of the light. And now that we have passed through the shadow-land of allegories, it is time to explore the great plains of moral truths. Our faith has been strengthened, let our lives reveal its influence; our intellects have been enlightened, let them prescribe the right behavior. For they have sound sense who do this, if they direct their actions and understanding toward the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever.

In heaven then, the devil conceived a bitter resentment that in the garden of Paradise came forth as iniquity, the offspring of malice, the mother of death and of every other misery; all these evils have pride as their first parent. For although it was through the devil's envy that death entered into the world, every sin has its origin in pride. But what has he gained from it? For you, Lord, are still in our midst, we are called by your name; and the people you have chosen, the Church of the redeemed, cries out: "Your name is oil poured out." And when I in turn am cast forth, this oil comes pouring after me and upon me, because despite your anger you remember to be merciful. Satan however has gained a hold over all who yield themselves to pride. He has made his realm of this world's darkness, yet his proud assaults serve but to increase the realm of the humble. While that realm remains his, temporal as it is, he establishes multitudes of the humble on high and eternal thrones. What a happy outcome, that this tyrant who would hammer the humble into subjection, should unwittingly be fashioning their eternal crowns for them. Attacking along every front, he is everywhere forced to yield. For always and everywhere it is God who will judge his people, it is he who will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors. Always and everywhere he will defend his own, he will drive off their persecutors, take away the scepter that the wicked wield over the virtuous, lest the virtuous in turn should take to evil. A time is coming when he will break the bow completely, shatter the spear and burn the shields with fire. As for you, unhappy one, you set up your seat in the north, a region of cloud and cold; and see! the poor are being raised up from the dust and the needy from the dunghill, that they may be placed among the princes and attain a seat of honor. To your utter frustration you will see that the poor and needy have cause to praise God's name.

We thank you, Father of orphans and Vindicator of abandoned children, because a mountain fat and fertile has shed its warmth upon us. The heavens have poured down rain at the presence of the God of Sinai. The oil is poured out. There is universal glorification of the Name which Satan envied because it was ours, and we live in its shadow. It is acclaimed, I repeat, in the hearts and words of children; even in the mouths of infants and babes at the breast praise is assured. The wicked one will see this and be filled with fury; an unrelenting fury that will feed the unquenchable fire prepared for him and his ministers. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

When Elisha perceived that his master was about to be taken away from him, he asked for a favor. He obtained it, as you know, only on the condition that he would see him as he was being taken. This is an allegory recorded for our instruction. This story of the prophets carries both a lesson and a warning, to make us vigilant and careful about the work of salvation ceaselessly performed in our inmost being with all the skill and sweetness of the Holy Spirit's artistry. If we do not wish to be deprived of a twofold gift, let us make sure that this heaven-sent Director, who can teach us all things, is never taken away from us without our knowledge. Let him never find us unprepared when he comes, but always with faces uplifted and hearts expanded to receive the copious blessing of the Lord. Let him find us like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage-feast, for he never comes empty-handed from heaven's richly-laden table. Therefore we must watch, even hour by hour, for we do not know at what hour he will come and depart again. The Holy Spirit comes and goes, and if a man can stand firmly only with his support, it follows that he must fall when abandoned by him; fall, yes, but never fatally, since the Lord supports him by the hand. Persons who are spiritual or whom the Holy Spirit purposes to make spiritual, never cease to experience these alternations; he visits them every morning and tests them at any moment. For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again, provided that he falls in the daytime and so is able to see his fall, to know that he has fallen, to make up his mind to rise and look for a helping hand, and say: "Your favor, Lord, stood me on a peak impregnable; but then you hid your face and I was terrified."

It is scarcely possible to avoid doubts about the truth when we lack the light of the Holy Spirit; but it is another thing to hanker after erroneous opinions which a man might easily guard against if he would acknowledge his ignorance, as Job did when he said: "And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself." Ignorance, an evil mother, has borne two evil daughters, falsehood and doubt, the first is the more reprobate, the other more an object of compassion; the first more pernicious, the other more troubled. When the Holy Spirit speaks, both of these yield, for he speaks not merely the truth but the certain truth. He is the Spirit of truth with whom falsehood cannot be reconciled; and the spirit of wisdom, who will not accept opinions that are equivocal or obscure, since he is a reflection of eternal life, so pure that he pervades and permeates all things. When this Spirit is silent we must be alert and hold falsehood in abhorrence, even if bound in the clutches of perplexing incertitude. Doubting the truth of an opinion is vastly different from rashly proposing something of which we know nothing. Either let the Holy Spirit always speak, a procedure that no influence of ours can procure; or let him at least warn us when he withdraws into silence, that his very silence may then be our guide; otherwise, mistakenly thinking he is still leading us on, we shall pursue with disastrous assurance an erroneous course of our own. Even if he does keep us in suspense, may he never abandon us to what is false. A man may tentatively express what is false without incurring the guilt of a lie, while another man may lie in asserting a truth of which he has no knowledge. Because the first man, far from maintaining non-facts to be facts, rather states he believes what he does believe, he speaks in truth, even though what he believes is not true; but the second man, who says he is certain when he is not, does not speak in truth, even though what he asserts is true.

I have said these things for the sake of those who are unaware of such pitfalls, and now I shall follow what I trust to be the guidance of the Spirit who lights my way, taking account as far as I can of the warnings I have issued. I will try to be faithful to my own teaching lest someone say in turn to me: "You who teach others, will you not teach yourself?" We must observe the distinction between what is clear and what is doubtful, not casting doubt on the one nor rashly upholding the other. This is where we must hope for direction from the Spirit, for even assiduous efforts on our part may be altogether insufficient.

What man knows whether the judgment of God over men, that we discussed in a previous sermon, was not preceded by a judgment pronounced in heaven?

Is it possible that Lucifer, son of the morning, yielding precipitately to the impulse of pride, began to envy the outpouring of oil on our human race before he was cast out into the darkness? In the rage that possessed him did he murmur and say to himself: "Why this waste?" I do not hold that the Holy Spirit has made this known, nor do I hold the contrary; I simply do not know. But even though some may think it incredible, it could have happened that because of his lofty endowments of wisdom and grace, he could have foreseen that members of the human race would one day be raised to be his equals in glory. And if he did foresee this it was because it was revealed to him in the Word of God. Then, stung by a wild impulse of envy, he plotted to maintain as subjects those whom he scorned as companions. To him they were by nature both lower and weaker, unworthy to be fellow-citizens, to share an equal glory. Was this impious scheming of his the consequence of his presumptuous self-exaltation, of his pretensions to a seat of power? For he said: I will climb up to the heavens; I will sit in the recesses of the north. He would assume the very likeness of the most high God; for just as God, from his throne above the cherubim governs the whole angelic host, so Lucifer, from his usurped position, would control the race of men. God forbid. He plotted mischief in his bed, let him be trapped in his own plot, for we refuse to acknowledge any overlord but our Creator. Not the devil but the Lord will be judge of the world; he who is our God forever and ever will be our ruler forever and ever.