

Saint John of the Cross

1542-1591

PARADISE

In his *Spiritual Canticle*, Saint John of the Cross describes in great detail the effects of the soul's union with God: "It is simply impossible to describe what God shares with the soul in this intimate union. Nothing can actually be expressed since it is impossible to say anything that would come close to what God is in Himself, since it is God who so gives Himself to a soul that is so transformed from itself to Him. They become then as two persons in one even though they remain essentially and uniquely as in life, as the rays of the sun through a window glass, as coal and fire, as the light from the stars and from the sun. Thus, so as to understand how much the soul receives from God in this unity, the soul can do no less, in my opinion, than to simply affirm as in the following verses: I drink from the beloved. And just as the liquid flows to each member of the body by means of its veins, so does the dialogue of God diffuse itself to the soul, or better, it is the soul that transforms itself in God, a transformation which when it does occur, occurs at its natural stage and spiritual potential, drawing its sustenance from God. In fact, it is then that the intellect receives wisdom and knowledge, the will receives the sweetest love and its memory enjoys a joy and fulfillment from its thoughtful remembrance of past glory."

Still in the *Ascent to Mt. Carmel* the Saint explains: "By their participation, souls possess the same gifts that God Himself naturally possesses. Their power is precisely the power of God, equal to Him and His followers. Thus, St. Peter says: 'Grace and peace be yours in fullest measure through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and become partakers of the divine nature.' (2 Pt 1, 2-4). These are the words of St. Peter. With them, he clearly demonstrates that the soul in God, beginning and together with Him, accomplishes the work of the Blessed Trinity as was formerly explained in the substantial union between itself and God. If it is true that all this will be verified in the next life, it is also true in this life, provided it achieves that state of perfection which the soul we are describing already possesses and experiences a wisdom that can never be described."

Saint John of the Cross was born at Fontiveros in Spain in 1540. He was orphaned early with the death of his



father. In 1563 he joined the Carmelite Order. After his philosophical and theological studies at Salamanca, he was ordained a priest in 1567. In that same year, he met St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila) who convinced him to be part of the reform. He died at Ubeda on December 14, 1591.

