

Daily Meditation 08-23-22

John of the Cross on the Sacredness of Creation

Good morning.

Today we are interacting with John of the Cross, the great 16th-century Spanish poet, mystic, prophet who was involved in church reform, and it cost him a lot, since he was thrown into a dungeon. He was a Carmelite, held in a cell that became a dungeon in his Carmelite order, because he was trying to reform that order. And so we're going to look at his teaching in this very famous poem that we're sharing.

"My beloved is the mountains," he says. Then he describes what it means: "mountains of heights, and they are affluent, vast, beautiful, graceful, bright, and fragrant. These mountains are what my beloved is to me." And of course, for John of the Cross, "Beloved" is his favorite name for God. God is the Beloved.

And his ancestry is mixed: he's part, Spanish, and he's part Moorish; his mother was Moorish. And in that tradition, the Sufi poetic tradition, mystical tradition, the word "Beloved" comes up all the time.

But his Beloved is also lonely, wooded valleys, and then he goes on about that: "Lonely valleys are quiet, pleasant, cool, shady," -- and remember he was living in hot Spain in the 16th century - "...and flowing with fresh waters."

I'm not sure they are today, given climate change.

And the variety of their groves and the sweet song of the birds, they afford abundant recreation and delight to the senses. And in their solitude and silence they refresh and give rest. These valleys are what my Beloved is to me.

So he offers these metaphors, as every poet does -- My Beloved is the mountains, my Beloved is lonely wooded valleys -- he goes on and talks about strange islands.

Now in his day, of course, Spaniards were coming back from the New World, telling about these strange places, these strange islands. And the news was spreading about what the Europeans called the New World but of course to Native Americans it was not a new world, but the world they'd been in for thousands of years.

And he says, these strange islands are surrounded by water and situated across the sea, far withdrawn, cut off from communication with other men. And he goes on and explains more of that.

So the soul calls God strange for these two reasons. Not only is God all the strangeness of islands never seen before, but also and wonderful to human beings. Not only to human beings, but also the angels can call God strange islands. Only to the God's ways and councils and books are very strange, and new, Godself is God neither strange, nor new.

So what I ask is: this was the cosmology, these are the stories of discovery that were going around in Spain in John's day, but what about the discoveries that we are being faced with almost on daily basis, especially discoveries of other equal planets, exoplanets, and discovery of the universe and all its galaxies and supernovas and stars. And the amazing pictures that are coming in both from Hubble telescope but now the Webb telescope as well. So are we making our poetry?

Do we see, "My Beloved is the universe?" My Beloved is the two trillion years of evolution, or excuse me, 13.8 billion years of evolution and the 2 trillion galaxies born of that evolution.

I think it's time that our mystics stand up and start putting these new metaphors, this new language, into mystical poetry, as we too can break the lines down, like John does: "My beloved is the mountains" and he goes on and talks about mountains. Lonely wooded valleys, he talks about lonely wooded valleys. Strange islands, he talks about strange islands.

Well, are we doing this with the information that is coming our way about the beauty, the grandeur, splendor, ah, the wonders of the universe that are pouring into our hearts and minds and imaginations today? I think this is a very real test of what we should be about, just as John was in his day.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.