

Love Better Than Wine

Contemplations on the Song of Songs

Part 3: "I am dark, but lovely"

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1:5 I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, Like the tents of Kedar, Like the curtains of Solomon..

"I am dark... like the tents of Kedar"

In the midst of her joy with her beloved, the Shulmite (human soul) examined herself. She was astonished as how the Lord has accepted her as a bride unto Himself! She is black as the tents of Kedar. Oh how dissimilar is she to her Beloved! He is the Holy of Holies, and she is the sinner of sinners! He is meek and humble and she is proud!

He is unlimited love, and she is a harbor of malice and hatred! He is light and she is darkness!

Before meeting Him, she was able to justify herself, but as she compared herself to Him, she confessed, "I am black." This is exactly what happened with Isaiah the prophet. In the first five chapters of his book, he recognized the sins of the people, and it was easy for him to think that he is something. But, as soon as he saw the Lord of Hosts, he cried out: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips." (Isa 6:5)

If St. Paul was to compare himself with us, he would be righteous in his own eyes, but rather, as he was looking at the effect of the Resurrection of the Lord, he said:

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24)

"I am dark, but lovely... like the curtains of Solomon"

The soul that meets the Lord and discovers herself in His reflection, does not despair. "I am dark, BUT LOVELY (BEAUTIFUL)"

Though she is black as the tents of Kedar (the son of Ishmael), she is beautiful as the curtains of Solomon (the son of David). Christ always shines upon His



believers and adorns them with beauty, holiness, purity, and many other gifts.



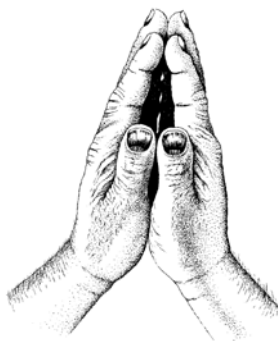
1:6 Do not look upon me, because I am dark, Because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; They made me the keeper of the vineyards, But my own vineyard I have not kept.

"Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me"

When the human soul met Christ, her relatives did not cease mocking her, because she is "dark". They ignored the fact that she is tanned because of the sun of temptations. It is these temptations that purify the soul:

"Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation... For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Ecclesiasticus 2:1,5)

Christ accepted the black bride, who was full of sins and evils, and has made her beautiful. It was expected that her relatives would rejoice with her, but



instead: "my mother's sons were angry with me."

How painful it is for the soul to feel that those how are closest to it are angry at it. This is exactly what happened in the story of the prodigal son:

"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in." (Luke 15:25-28)

They treated her with cruelty: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards." Nevertheless, she deserves the punishment she has received, because: "My own vineyard I have not kept," And so it was "all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down." (Prov 24:31)

She has kept all the other vineyards, but was not careful in keeping her own vineyard:

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt 16:26)

(To Her Beloved)

1:7 Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself By the flocks of your



companions?

"Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon."

When the soul meets The Lord in the innerroom, it also searches for Him as the Shepherd to the one universal flock. Although the Christian religion may first focus on the personal relationship between Man and His Creator, it is necessary for whoever meets The Lord to seek Him as a shepherd for the entire church.



When St. Peter was on the mount during the transfiguration, he declared among his joy:

"Master, it is good for us to be here" (Lk 9:33).

However, it was necessary for him to descend from the mountain to struggle in the service of the Lord, and to spread the "good" news to others.

While the disciples looked on in astonishment, during the Ascension of the Lord, two angels appeared to them asking them to return to Jerusalem to struggle in the service, until the Lord's return upon the clouds:

" 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 1:11-12)

The Church is the field where "the flock rests at noon", protected from the sun of temptation and pains of this life. In it, the believer would find sufficiency for his soul.

The believer comes to the church because the Great Shepherd of Shepherds:

"I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." (Jn 10:14)

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will." (Heb 13:20-21)

He does not see the human person of the priest, but rather the Person of Christ in the priest. The priest is but a representative of Christ on earth. For that reason, the soul feared to be separated from the rest of the flock:

"For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?"

It is one flock for One Shepherd:

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16)

"We believe in One Holy catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church" (The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed)



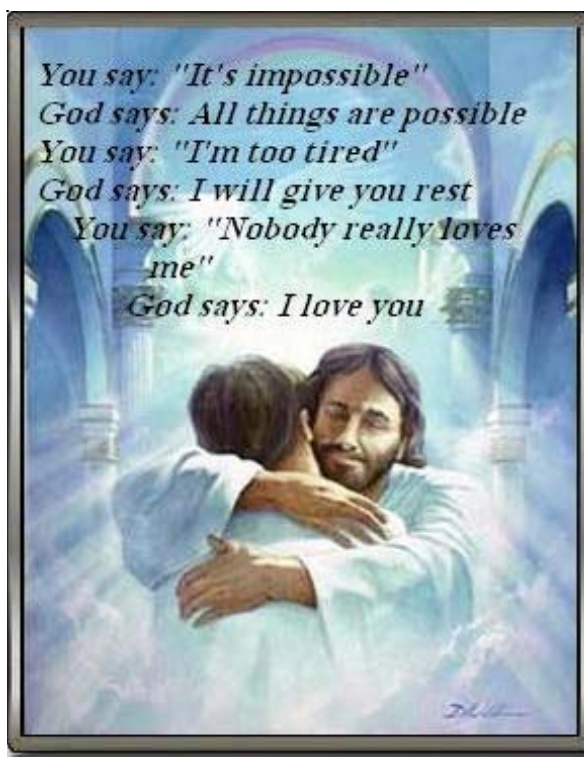
The Beloved

1:8 If you do not know, O fairest among women, Follow in the footsteps of the flock, And feed your little goats Beside the shepherds' tents.

In order that the soul may not get lost or go astray, it needs to live in the spirit of the saints: "Follow in the footsteps of the flock,"

The saints have left many footsteps for you to follow: Our Father Abraham in his faith, Isaac in his obedience, Joseph in his chastity, Job in his patience, David in his tears, Daniel in his assertion, St. Paul in his service, St. Athanasius in his defense, St. George in his steadfastness, St. Abraam in his charity, Pope Kerollos in his prayers...

Take the saints as an example. Learn from them. Follow in their path. See how they lead a righteous life. There is no reason to re-invent the wheel. The shepherds already conquered and provided a path. There is no reason to get lost and rely on limited understanding; read the Church Fathers, get the advice of the Church, communicate with the Confession Father, learn from the bishops, take example of the lives of the saints, and "feed your little goats Beside the shepherds' tents."



"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Heb 13:7)

"Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb 6:12)

There is more joy in heaven over a converted sinner than over a righteous person standing firm. A leader in battle has more love for a soldier who returns after fleeing, and who valiantly pursues the enemy, than for one who never turned back, but who never acted valiantly either. A farmer has greater love for land which bears fruitfully, after he has cleared it of thorns, than for land which never had thorns but which never yielded a fruitful harvest.

St. Gregory the Great