

In Praise of those who have Love in their Hearts - Part I (Saint Symeon the New Theologian)

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In Praise of those who have Love in their Hearts

Let us therefore follow one and the same path, Christ's commandments, which elevate us to heaven and to God. Even though the word shows us many paths and many ways for people to reach the kingdom of heaven, these paths are not, in fact, many, but one, though they're divided into many, according to each person's ability and disposition. While we may begin from many and varied works and actions, just as travellers depart from different places and many cities, the destination we are attempting to reach is the same: the kingdom of heaven.



The actions and ways of godly men must be understood as spiritual virtues. Those who begin to walk in them must head towards one goal, just as those who come from various countries and places come together, as we have said, to one city, the kingdom of heaven, where, together, they will become worthy to reign with Christ

and become subjects of one King, our God and Father. By this city, which is one, not many, you should understand the holy and undivided trinity of virtues, faith, hope and love, especially that virtue which comes before the others but is also mentioned as the last, since it is the goal of all good things and greater than them all- love.

All faith comes from it and is built on its foundation; on it, hope is based. Without love no thing has ever taken shape, nor ever will. Its names and actions are numerous. Even more so are its distinctive features; its properties are divine and innumerable. Yet it is one in nature, wholly beyond the ken of angels or men or any other creatures, even those which are unknown to us. Reason cannot tell of it; its glory is inaccessible; its counsels unsearchable. It is eternal and beyond time, and beyond sight, though it may be perceived. How many are the delights of this Holy Zion not made by human hand. Those who have begun to see it no longer take any pleasure in perceptible, earthly objects; they become indifferent to the glory of this world.

Permit me, for a short time, to address myself to this love, to fulfil my desire for it, insofar as I can.

When I recalled the beauty of undefiled love, its light suddenly appeared in my heart. I was ravished with its sweetness and lost my senses; I lost all perception of this life and forgot all the things of this world. But then- I don't know how- it departed from me and left me to lament my weakness.

Love desired, how fortunate are those who have embraced you, for they will no longer have a yearning to embrace any human beauty. How fortunate are they who are moved by divine love to cling to you: they'll deny the whole world, and, to whatever degree they associate with others, they won't be spoiled. How fortunate are those who caress your beauty and delight in it with great desire, for their souls will be sanctified by the undefiled blood and water which issue from you. How fortunate are those who passionately embrace you, for they will be altered for the better in spirit and will exult in their souls, because you are inexpressible joy.

How fortunate are they who gain possession of you, for they will count the treasures of the world as nothing, for you are indeed wealth “beyond the dreams of avarice”. How blessed and thrice-blessed are they whom you accept, for though they be apparently without any glory, they will be more glorious than those who are glorious, more honoured than those who are honoured. How worthy of praise are those who pursue you; even more so those who have found you. Most blessed are those who are loved by you, received by you, taught by you, those who have dwelt in you and been fed by you with immortal food, that is the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Love divine, where are you holding Christ? Where are you concealing Him? Why have you taken the Redeemer of the world and departed from us? Open a wicket gate for us, so that we also may see Christ Who suffered for us, and so hope in His mercy that we’ll die no more when we once have seen Him. Open up to us, you who became the door allowing Him to be made manifest in the flesh. Love, you who’ve forced the unforced and abundant compassion of our Master to bear the sins and infirmities of all people, do not reject us by saying, “I do not know you”.

Be with us, so that you may come to know us, for we are not known to you. Dwell in us, so that, for your sake, the Master may visit even us, who are lowly; go before us to meet Him, since we are wholly unworthy. So that He will pause on His way, to converse with you and will permit even us sinners to fall at His unblemished feet. You’ll intercede on our behalf and plead with Him to forgive the debt of our sins, so that through you we may again be found worthy to serve Him, our Master, and be sustained and nourished by Him. Because even those who owe nothing are still at risk of dying from starvation and poverty and are punished and chastised, just as those who do owe.

[To Be Continued]