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When Words Run Dry (Katherine Johnson)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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Sometimes words lose meaning,

their depth emptied from overuse.

Words like:

Friend,

Love,

Conversion...

I turn over the shell of a word, a name that once meant something more, something different, and I wonder at the skin left behind. A word shed of meaning. Is it because we've grown too familiar with mystery? Excessively punctuating our everyday language with words that once expressed wonder? Is this why words of awe have been emptied of substance?

Or are they empty because they've been filled with our ego?

Because in this fallen world, love means "What's in it for me?" and friend means "How much do you mirror me?" and conversion is a matter of choosing sides. And we pray for the conversion of others, not because we love our friends, but because we've got it all figured out. And we certainly know what's best for everyone else. We think we know better than God. We think we know how to best order the world

around us.

We forget that we're Adam and only order Hades.

A few years ago in a conversation with Archimandrite Zacharias, a friend of mine began to ask a question. "I'm a convert to Orthodoxy and..." And the good monk stopped him mid-sentence and, lowering his head, whispered, "Glory to God, you have converted. Perhaps someday I will convert, too." And my friend's chin lowered heavy to his chest, the humility of a holy man working healing through words - words alive with the wonder of their deepest meaning.

Conversion isn't a moment. Not something in the past or a decision, at least not an intellectual one. Decision fails the essence of conversion. It's a movement, a heart made tender, moving towards the Unknowable One who knows. It's the boundless searching out of the depths for the Source of that warm ache of the heart. Finding those hidden places and the One who takes up His place there. It's about being known.

It's not the choosing of a side, the determining of the right set of propositions and squaring ourselves up with them and then feeling secure because we figured right. Conversion is the turning of the heart to a Person. A dynamic relationship, eternal, from glory to glory - hope in being made right.

It's an intimate thing, conversion.

And since that blessed conversation filled with words deep and wonderful, I never pray for the conversion of others, never pray for a change of sides. Because when we pray for the conversion of another, we're only filled with ego. We're asking God to change someone. "Make them more like me." I don't think we should ask such things of the Creator of heaven and earth. Just look at His handiwork! He doesn't need the clumsy meddling of His servants.

The heart is God's work, not mine, and the unceasing whisper of Lord have mercy is the one thing needful.

To pray for another's conversion is to mistake a miracle for a mirror, not so much praying for someone to be more like Him, but more like me. In matters of the heart, we enter holy ground. It's here that we remove the sandals of self before we step in the holy place, the innermost recesses of the heart, the dwelling place of God.

How could we possibly know the path of another? Who are we to presume to pray that another's steps be set according to ours?

Conversion is in God's Hands.

Gentle turning.

The healing of the heart.

A union of persons, human and Divine.

With the fear of God, with faith and love, only then draw near.

Because only God knows what circumstances will remedy the infirmity of the soul. And I'm quite certain that God hides His work from those who presume to know the way in which another should walk. Egos frustrated. I prefer ignorance, to walk blindly. When God's work is hidden, I'm much more likely to reach out for His hand and hold on long and tight, and trust.

When the created self finally sets, the brilliance of the Light appears.

I know of a saint who prayed for the world, but he didn't pray that the world would be changed, at least not like we do. He prayed that the world might come to know God in His All-Holy Spirit. Because that is conversion. Not the choosing of a side, but the knowledge of a Person - the knowledge of God as the experience of the heart, true theology.

To pray for our friends. To love. To pray that another might know God, however He sees fit to make Himself known. To allow the Artisan of the heart, mold and shape it with His own Hands. To sit back in wonder at the beauty of His work. Such prayers are fitting for one made of clay. And He answers them.

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