

Chambers of Love: The Eucharist and Carmelite Spirituality

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I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts.

1 Kings 19:14 (NABRE)

I. Word

“Those who do not have a sound palate, but seek other tastes, cannot taste the spirit and life of God’s words; his words, rather, are distasteful to them. Hence the loftier were the words of the Son of God, the more tasteless they were to the impure, as happened when he preached the sovereign and loving doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, for many turned away [John 6:60-61, 66]” (John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, 1.5).



“From this kind of rejoicing in the sense of touch one can fall into much evil and harm from natural goods...such as a decrease in spiritual exercises and corporeal penances, and lukewarmness and lack of devotion in the use of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist” (John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3.26.8).

My Beloved, my divine little Brother,
In your gaze I see all the future.
Soon, for me, you will leave your Mother.
Already Love impels you to suffer,
But on the cross, O Full-blossomed Flower!
I recognize your morning fragrance.
I recognize Mary’s Dew.
Your divine blood is Virginal Milk!...

This Dew hides in the sanctuary.
The angels of Heaven, enraptured, contemplate it,
Offering to God their sublime prayer.
Like Saint John, they repeat: “Behold.”
Yes, behold, this Word made Host.
Eternal Priest, sacerdotal Lamb,
The Son of God is the Son of Mary.
The bread of Angels is Virginal Milk.



The seraphim feeds on glory.
In Paradise his joy is full.
Weak child that I am, I only see in the ciborium
The color and figure of Milk.
But that is the Milk a child needs,
And Jesus' Love is beyond compare.
O tender Love! Unfathomable power,
My white Host is Virginal Milk!...

(Thérèse of Lisieux, Excerpt from *The Divine Dew or The Virginal Milk of Mary*, PN 1, 5-6).

II. Sacrament

“He has granted us an inestimable favor of great mercy in assuring us that He, Infinite Majesty, is present in the Most Holy Sacrament. But to manifest Himself openly, to communicate his blessings, and to give his treasures, are favors reserved for bestowal on those who love Him ardently” (Teresa of Avila, *The Pater Noster of Saint Teresa*, VIII).

“Do you think this heavenly food fails to provide sustenance, even for these bodies, that it is not a great medicine even for bodily ills?” (Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 34.6).

“Coming into this land of exile, You willed to suffer and to die in order to draw souls to the bosom of the Eternal Fire of the Blessed Trinity. Ascending once again to the Inaccessible Light, henceforth Your abode, You remain still in this ‘valley of tears,’ hidden beneath the appearances of a white host. Eternal Eagle, You desire to nourish me with Your divine substance” (Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, Manuscript B, IX, 5v^o).



“Jesus was sleeping as usual in my little boat; ah! I see very well how rarely souls allow Him to sleep peacefully within them...It seems to me that when Jesus descends into my heart He is content to find Himself so well received and I, too, am content. All this, however, does not prevent both distractions and sleepiness from visiting me” (Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, Manuscript A, VIII, 75v^o, 80r^o).

“It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes to us *each day* from heaven; it’s to find another heaven, infinitely more dear to Him than the first: the heaven of our soul, made to His image, the living temple of the adorable Trinity!...Remain in me as in a tabernacle and never separate Yourself from Your little victim” (Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, Manuscript A, V, 48v°, Act of Oblation to Merciful Love).



“To have divine love as its inner form, a woman’s life must be a Eucharistic life. Only in daily, confidential relationship with the Lord in the tabernacle can one forget self, become free of all one’s own wishes and pretensions, and have a heart open to all the needs and wants of others. Whoever seeks to consult with the Eucharistic God in all her concerns, whoever lets herself be purified by the sanctifying power coming from the sacrifice at the altar, offering herself to the Lord in this sacrifice, whoever receives the Lord in her soul’s innermost depth in Holy Communion cannot but be drawn ever more deeply and powerfully into the flow of divine life, incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, her heart converted to the likeness of the divine heart” (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, *Essays on Woman*, 56).

“For every Catholic there lies ready an immeasurable treasure: the proximity of the Lord in the holy sacrifice and in the most holy sacrament of the altar. Whoever is imbued with a lively faith in Christ present in the tabernacle, whoever knows that a friend awaits here constantly – always with the time, patience, and sympathy to listen to complaints, petitions, and problems, with counsel and help in all things – this person cannot remain desolate and forsaken even under the greatest difficulties. He always has a refuge where quietude and peace can again be found” (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, *Essays on Woman*, 120).



Little Key, oh, I envy you!
For each day you can open
The prison of the Eucharist
Where the God of Love resides.
But, O what a sweet miracle!
By just an effort of my faith
I can also open the tabernacle
To hide near the Divine King...

Being consumed near my God
In the sanctuary, I would like
To burn forever with mystery
Like the Lamp of the Holy Place....
Oh! what happiness...I have flames within me,
And each day I can win
A great number of souls for Jesus,
Inflaming them with his love...



At each daybreak I envy you,
O Sacred Altar Stone!
As in the blessed stable,
On you the Eternal One wants to be born...
Ah! Deign to grant my prayer.
Come into my soul, Sweet Savior...
Far from being a cold stone,
It is the sigh of your Heart!

O Corporal surrounded by angels!
How enviable is your lot.
On you, as in his humble swaddling clothes,
I see Jesus, my only treasure.
Virgin Mary, change my heart
Into a pure, beautiful Corporal
To receive the white host,
Where your Sweet Lamb hides.



Holy Paten, I envy you.
Upon you Jesus comes to rest.
Oh! may his infinite grandeur
Deign to humble itself even to me...
Fulfilling my hope, Jesus
Does not wait until the evening of my life.
He comes within me; by his presence
I am a living Monstrance!...

Oh! how I envy the happy chalice
Where I adore the divine Blood...
But at the Holy Sacrifice
I can take it in each morning.
To Jesus my soul is dearer
Than precious vessels of gold.
The Altar is a new Calvary
Where his Blood still flows for me...



Jesus, holy and sacred Vine,
O my Divine King, You know
I am a cluster of golden grapes
Which must disappear for you.
Under the wine press of suffering,
I shall prove my love for you.
I want no other joy
Than to sacrifice myself each day.

Ah! what joy, I am chosen
Among the grains of pure Wheat
Who lose their lives for Jesus...
My delight is truly great!...
I am your dear spouse,
My Beloved, come live in me,
Oh! come, your beauty has
ravished me.
Deign to transform me into You!...

(Thérèse of Lisieux, *My Desires Near Jesus
in His Prison of Love*, PN 25, 1-8).

III. The Other

“Spiritual persons have numerous imperfections, many of which can be called spiritual lust, not because the lust is spiritual but because it proceeds from spiritual things” (John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, 1.4.1).

“The sensory benefits are the least among those that this most blessed Sacrament bestows, for the invisible grace it gives is a greater blessing...Not only in receiving Communion, but in other spiritual exercises as well, beginners desire to feel God and taste him as if he were comprehensible and accessible. This desire is a serious imperfection and, because it involves impurity of faith, is opposed to God’s way” (John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, 1.6.5).



This Heart, it beats for us in a small tabernacle
Where it remains mysteriously hidden
In that still, white host.

Your body mysteriously permeates mine
And your soul unites with mine:
I am no longer what once I was.

You come and go, but the seed
That you sowed for future glory, remains behind
Buried in this body of dust.

(Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Excerpt from *I Will Remain with You...*).



“It is most important that the Holy Eucharist becomes life’s focal point: that the Eucharistic Savior is the center of existence; that every day is received from His hand and laid back therein; that the day’s happenings are deliberated with Him. In this way, God is given the best opportunity to be heard in the heart, to form the soul, and to make its faculties clear-sighted and alert for the supernatural...Moreover, life with the Eucharistic Savior induces the soul to be lifted out of the narrowness of its individual, personal orbit. The concerns of the Lord and His kingdom become the soul’s concerns...Those who attain the freedom of these heights and expansive views have outgrown what is usually called ‘happiness’ and ‘unhappiness’” (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, *Essays on Woman*, 125-126).



“So I will go to the altar of God. Here it is not a question of my minute, petty affairs, but of the great offering of reconciliation. I may participate in that, purify myself and be made happy, and lay myself with all my doings and troubles along with the sacrifice on the altar. And when the Lord comes to me then in Holy Communion, then I may ask Him, ‘Lord, what do you want of me?’ (St. Teresa). And after quiet dialogue, I will go to that which I see as my next duty” (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, *Essays on Woman*, 143-144).

Appendix: More on Carmelite Spirituality

Carmelite Spirituality

Fast Facts:

- Carmelite religious order founded by a group of European hermits on Mt. Carmel in the 12th century (no specific founder by name), inspired by the narrative of the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:1-18; “I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts”); especially devoted to Mary, Mother of God [‘Carm-el’ = ‘garden of God’]; original title of religious community: ‘Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel’
- Rule of life given to the Carmelites in 1214 by St. Albert of Avogadro, Patriarch of Jerusalem
- Among the canonized Carmelite saints: St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), St. Titus Brandsma (1881-1942), St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (1891-1942)
- Carmelite Charism:
 - Allegiance to Christ
 - Contemplation / Solitude / Silence / Lectio Divina
 - Humility
 - Charity
 - Fraternity
 - Service
- Brown Scapular: centuries-old sign of consecrating oneself to the Blessed Virgin Mary, symbolic of putting on the virtues of Mary and putting oneself under her maternal protection; scapular made from brown cloth reminiscent of the traditional Carmelite Friar’s garb; according to a tradition, Carmelite St. Simon Stock received the brown scapular during an apparition of the Blessed Mother in 1251 in England, through which Mary promised special assistance to those who wear the scapular.





St. Teresa of Avila Quotes

1. “This is true union with his will, and if you see a person praised, the Lord wants you to be much happier than if you yourself were being praised. This, indeed, is easy, for if you have humility you will feel sorry to see yourself praised” (*The Interior Castle*, 5.3.11).
2. “Once I was pondering why our Lord was so fond of this virtue of humility, and this thought came to me – in my opinion not as a result of reflection but suddenly: It is because God is supreme Truth; and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is a very deep truth that of ourselves we have nothing good but only misery and nothingness” (*The Interior Castle*, 6.10.7).
3. “In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which (the soul) doesn’t know how to explain, because of a lack of learning, it perceives this divine company. You may think that as a result the soul will be outside itself and so absorbed that it will be unable to be occupied with anything else. On the contrary, the soul is much more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God; and once its duties are over it remains with that enjoyable company” (*The Interior Castle*, 7.1.7-8).
4. “I repeat, it is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs. And, please God, it will be only a matter of not growing, for you already know that whoever does not increase decreases. I hold that love, where present, cannot possibly be content with remaining always the same” (*The Interior Castle*, 7.4.9).
5. “In sum, Sisters, what I conclude with is that we shouldn’t build castles in the air. The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done. And if we do what we can, His Majesty will enable us each day to do more and more, provided that we do not quickly tire... Thus even though our works are small, they will have the value our love for him would have merited had they been great” (*The Interior Castle*, 7.4.15).
6. “Let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so as to have this strength to serve... Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have him always present and not host him badly by failing to give him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at his feet, provide him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise him always” (*The Interior Castle*, 7.4.12).



St. Thérèse of Lisieux Quotes

1. “True glory is that which will last eternally, and to reach it, it isn’t necessary to perform striking works but to hide oneself and practice virtue in such a way that the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. A, 32r^o).
2. “He whose Kingdom is not of this world showed me that true wisdom consists in ‘desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing,’ in ‘placing one’s own joy in the contempt of self.’ Ah! I desired that, like the Face of Jesus, ‘my face be truly hidden, that no one on earth would know me.’ I thirsted after suffering and I longed to be forgotten” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. A, 71r^o [quoting from *The Imitation of Christ*, I, 2:3; III, 49:7; and Isaiah 53:3]).
3. “I recognized from EXPERIENCE that happiness consists in hiding oneself, in remaining ignorant of created things. I understood that without *love* all works are nothing, even the most dazzling, such as raising the dead to life and converting peoples” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. A, 81v^o).
4. “How sweet is the way of *love*, dear Mother. True, one can fall or commit infidelities, but, knowing *how to draw profit from everything*, love quickly consumes everything that can be displeasing to Jesus; it leaves nothing but a humble and profound peace in the depths of the heart” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. A, 83r^o).
5. “And so I understood that the Church *had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone* that made the Church’s members act, that if *Love* ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES...IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. B, 3v^o).
6. “When charity has buried its roots deeply within the soul, it shows itself externally” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. C, 18r^o).
7. “Love is nourished only by sacrifices, and the more a soul refuses natural satisfactions, the stronger and more disinterested becomes her tenderness” (*Story of a Soul*, ms. C, 21v^o).



St. Edith Stein / Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Quotes

1. “I don’t use any extraordinary means to extend my working time; I just do whatever I can. Apparently, what I can do increases in proportion to the number of things that have to be done. When nothing urgent is called for, my energy gives out much faster. Heaven evidently has a sense of economy....It all depends on having a quiet little corner where you can talk with God on a daily basis as if nothing else existed...and regarding yourself completely as an instrument, so that you treat your most frequently demanded talents, not as something that you use, but as God working through you” (*Selbstbildnis in Briefen I*, Letter 69, p. 71; Letter 45, p. 55).
2. “I have gradually come to the realization that something more is asked of us in this world, and that even in the contemplative life, one may not sever the link with the world...The deeper one is drawn into God, the more he needs to go out of himself – out into the world, that is, to carry the divine life into it” (*Selbstbildnis in Briefen I*, Letter 45, p. 54).
3. “God is there [in these moments] and can give us in a single instant exactly what we need. Then the rest of the day can take its course, under the same effort and strain, perhaps, but in peace. And when night comes, and you look back over the day and see how fragmentary everything has been, and how much you planned that has gone undone, and all the reasons you have to be embarrassed and ashamed: just take everything exactly as it is, put it in God’s hands and leave it with him. Then you will be able to rest in him – really rest – and start the next day as a new life” (*Wege zur inneren Stille*, p. 48).
4. “For the Christian there is no such thing as a ‘stranger’. There is only the neighbor – the person who happens to be next to us, the person most in need of our help. Whether he is related to us or not, whether we ‘like’ him or not, doesn’t make any difference. Christ’s love knows no boundaries, stops at no limits, doesn’t turn away from ugliness and filth. It was for sinners he came, not for the righteous” (*Wege zur inneren Stille*, p. 16).
5. “Natural love aims at possession, at owning the beloved as completely as possible. But anyone who loves with the love of Christ must win others for God instead of himself, as Christ did when he came to restore lost humanity to the Father. Actually, this is the one sure way to possess someone forever. When we entrust a person to God, we find ourselves united to him; whereas, sooner or later, the lust for conquest usually – no, always – ends in loss” (*Wege zur inneren Stille*, p. 16).

6. “The question of vocation cannot be solved merely through self-examination plus a scrutiny of the various possibilities. One must pray for the answer – you know that – and, in many cases, it must be sought by way of obedience. I have given this same advice several times, and those involved have arrived at peace and clarity by following it” (Letter to Rose Magold, August 30, 1931).
7. “The innermost being of the soul is like a vessel into which flows the spirit of God (i.e., the life of grace) if the soul by virtue of its freedom opens itself to this vital influx” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, p. 445).
8. “One can only gain a scientia crucis (knowledge of the cross) if one has thoroughly experienced the cross. I have been convinced of this from the first moment onwards and have said with all my heart: ‘Ave, Crux, Spes unica’ (I welcome you, Cross, our only hope)” (1941 letter to a friend).
9. “For Christ accomplished his greatest work, the reconciliation and union of mankind with God, in the utmost humiliation and annihilation on the Cross. When the soul realizes this it will begin to understand that it, too, must be led to union with God through annihilation, a ‘living crucifixion, in the sensual as well as in the spiritual part.’ As, in the desolation of his death, Jesus surrendered himself into the hands of the invisible and incomprehensible God, so the soul must enter the midnight darkness of faith, which is the only way to this God” (*The Science of the Cross*, p. 89).
10. “Who are you sweet Light, that fills me
and illuminates the darkness of my heart?
You who likewise lead me with a Mother’s Hand,
and were you to let go of me,
I would not be able to go a step more.
You are the Space,
which encompasses round my being and holds it within itself.
From you remembrance is released from within the abyss
of nothing, from there you raise it to the Light.
You, nearer to me than I am to myself
and more inward than my innermost heart
and yet impalpable and incomprehensible
and has burst asunder every name:
Holy Spirit – eternal Life!”
(Opening Stanza of *Und ich bleibe bei euch: Aus einer Pfingstnovene*, translation my own)
11. “The spirit in its purest and most perfect actualization is found in the total self-giving of the divine Persons, a self-giving in which each person totally divests itself of its nature [*Wesen*] and yet totally retains its nature, in which each person is totally within itself and totally in the others. The triune Deity *is* the authentic ‘realm of the spirit’ and is thus the ‘supernatural’ as such. And all the spirituality or spiritual endowment of creatures denotes an elevation or a ‘being-lifted-up’ into this realm, albeit in varying modes and degrees” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, p. 360).

12. “By virtue of its spirit nature [*Geistnatur*], humankind is called to a communal life which – after having grown from a temporally, spatially, and materially determined soil – eventually annuls the limitations of space and time...after its pure and full unfolding at its predestined place, the soul is to be inserted as a flower in an eternally imperishable wreath” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, p. 508).



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