
My Sermon for The Ordination of The Rev. Ann Camber ~ October 15, 2022

Gathering Table, Saturday, 2 pm ~ Commemoration Day for Teresa of Avila and John of The Cross

*O Lord, take our ears and hear with them. Take our eyes and see with them.
Take our lips and speak with them. Take our hands and touch with them.
Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.*

I am truly privileged and honoured to be here at *Gathering Table* this afternoon at Ann's ordination to the priesthood. I am thankful that so many of you are able to attend. We are blessed with **Archbishop Anne, Bishop Victoria**, and clergy from this diocese and from the diocese of Toronto ~ **Rev. Ann's brother The Rev. Bob Bettson**. Wow! 2 priests. A brother and a sister. How very special. Your Mom and Dad, George and Nancy, are singing with the angels in heaven. Your parents must have fed you Christian foods for breakfast ~ pancakes, hot cross buns, eggs benedict!

This sacred space holds many precious memories for me. I was ordained to the diaconate here 21 years ago. I became a Eucharistic Assistant here and then a Lay Reader. I preached my first sermon here.

Rev. Ann will have many firsts here. She will have her first celebration of the eucharist here ~ tomorrow. This is her first incumbency in the *Anglican Church of Canada*. It has only been a month but she already loves you and feels very much at home with you. I am wondering if you have taken her into the secrets of the basement right underneath the nave . . . This was a scary place and a rite of passage for anyone new to the church. The Kraft children loved it!

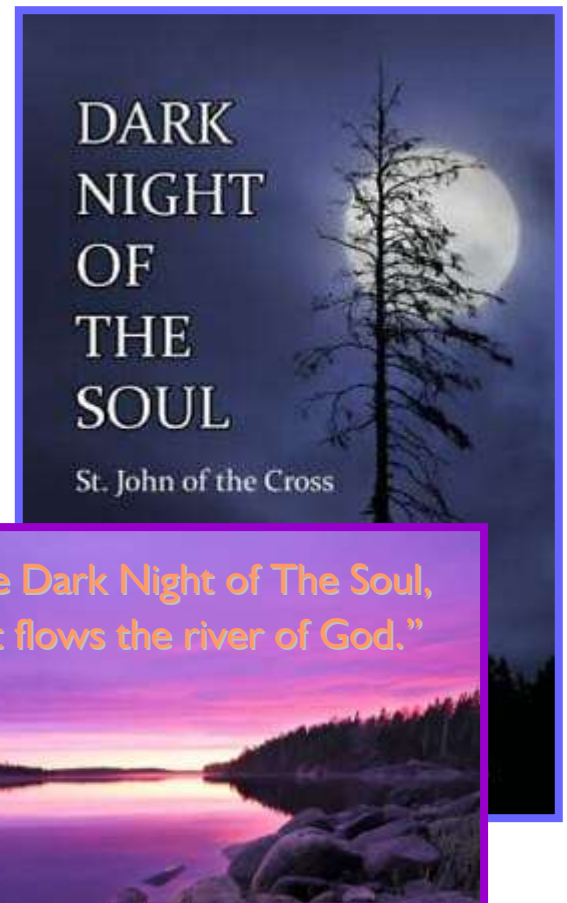
I have known Ann for over a decade, since she first came to St. Paul's. I have watched her walk in compassion and in humility with one desire only ~ to serve God. I have watched her develop and lead our "Ambassadors" Praise Band, love and take care of her grandchildren, be an essential part of our weekly Children's Livestream during the pandemic, nurture her friends, and support many on their spiritual journeys. She is a woman of prayer who has been touched by the hand of God since she was a child.

I think it is appropriate that she is being ordained on the commemoration day for two Christian mystics of the 16th century ~ **Teresa of Avila** and **John of The Cross**. St. Teresa was a Spanish nun, spiritual teacher and reformer. She was declared a doctor of the church as recently as 1970.

John of the Cross was a priest and also a spiritual teacher. Their intense love of Christ set both their hearts on fire, and this love is reflected in their writings which continue to nourish Christians, over 4 centuries later.

St. John wrote an 8 stanza poem called *The Dark Night*. This poem is the story of a journey of a soul to mystical union with God. The 'dark night' is the 'unknowing' through which we are willing to travel in order to come to know God. Sometimes this darkness can be a deep loneliness in which we feel cut off from God. But we have a destination and we know where we are headed. In his poem, *The Dark Night*, John of The Cross describes the joy of being guided to God by a divine light that is brighter than the mid-day sun.

Here is the third of the eight stanzas in the poem ~



Stanza III, *The Dark Night*

*In that happy night,
In secret, seen of none,
Seeing nought myself,
Without other light or guide
Save that which in my heart was burning.*

God is the only light in the dark night. God is the light which burns in our hearts.

However, even though we know where we are going, sometimes we do not see or experience any light at all. Sometimes in our spiritual journey to union with God, we experience the 'dark night of the soul' which is a spiritual crisis. We are left in desolation and all consolation is not to be found. You might feel lost and lonely and far away from God. **Mother Teresa** experienced the 'dark night of the soul' for years. During these times, we must remember that we are dying to our egos and we are being transformed into the likeness of God. The dark night of the soul is not depression. It is a spiritual awakening that is a blessing.

I see the dark night like this: The days are getting shorter and when we fall behind into standard time on November 6, I know that I will only have until 5:30 pm to finish Wally's walks at *Centennial Park*. The darkness comes very early. But here is what I know. When snow comes, the evening brightens and I will be able to see in the dark. I also know that the days will be getting longer again by the end of December. I walk in the darkness with hope.

This is the dark night of the soul. And these dark nights can happen to individuals and to the community of the faithful in a church. Our spiritual challenge is not to give up but to keep praying, keep worshipping, and keep surrounding ourselves with people of faith who support us and uphold us.

I look upon the dark nights as a sign of spiritual growth and a sign that we are heading towards spiritual maturity. God is always with us but we are not always able to discern his presence. If you are enduring through the dark night of the soul, please find a companion to walk with you. If you are a parish enduring through the dark night of the soul, please talk about it and stick together. It will end, and you will experience the light of God again.

Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are commemorated on the same day because they worked together to reform the *Carmelite Order* back to its original austere roots which included a focus on poverty, obedience and chastity. This reformed order wore sandals instead of shoes and socks and so were called the "discalced order." Both men and women can join the order and the colour of their habits is brown.

The gospel for today is from Jesus' farewell discourse on the evening of his arrest where he affirms his identity ~ *"I am the way, and the truth and the life."* (John 14:6). Jesus begins by describing his father's home in heaven. *"In many father's home are many rooms and I go to prepare a place for you."* The King James Version uses the word "mansions" instead of rooms.

Teresa was inspired by the image of the many mansions and in 1577, she wrote a book called *The Interior Castle*. This castle is within us and we enter into the castle through prayer. Our goal is union with God in the centre of the castle. The interior castle has 7 mansions or 7 dwelling places that we journey through to get closer to God.

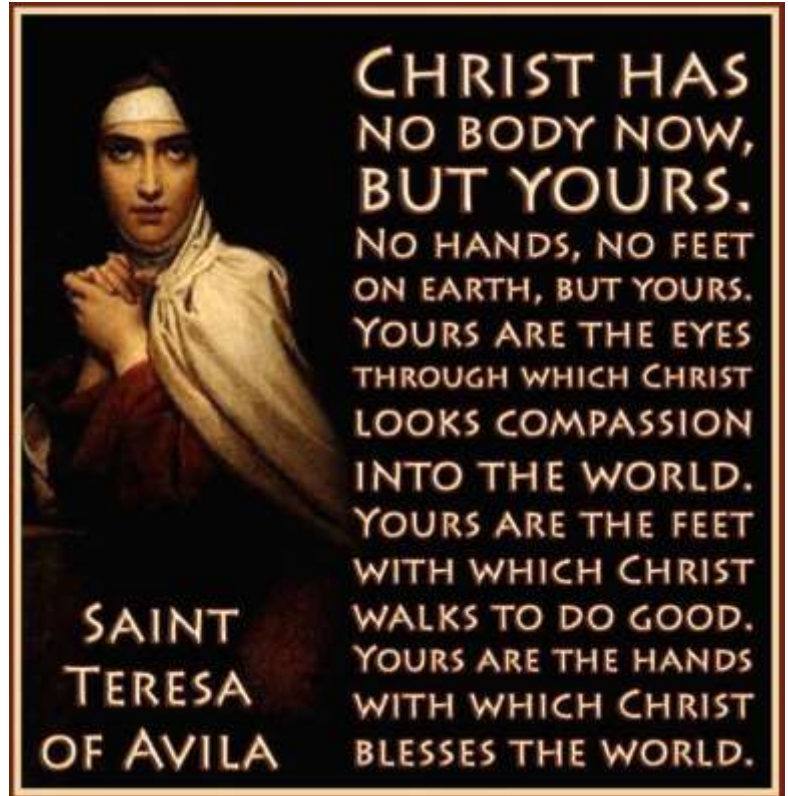
She wrote the book after she had received a vision from Christ and here are her words, *"I picture the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions."*

In the centre of the crystal castle is the 'Sun,' or God who gives all the splendour and beauty to the rest of the castle. The closer we approach the centre, the greater the light. How do we move through the 7 mansions? Through prayer. The 7 mansions are our stages of spiritual growth and we can access God in the intimacy of our own interiors. God is not way out there beyond our reach but accessible right within our hearts. We begin to hear the voice of God and we fall deeply in love with an intense longing. In her own words, *"God is enough."* If we acknowledge and invite God within us, we lack nothing.

What I find so compelling is that the writings of Teresa of Avila and John of The Cross are as relevant today as they were in the 1500's. We know that our Christian discipleship is a journey and that sometimes this journey is filled with darkness and other times, like this afternoon, it is filled with a bright and glorious light. We draw closer to God through prayer and through serving the marginalized and this is a strong and significant ministry for *Gathering Table*. One that I know Ann is committed to. She will be your servant leader and you are blessed.

Teresa of Avila is known for this quote:

*“Christ has no body now but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
he looks compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks
to do good.
Yours are the hands through which he blesses
all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”*



♥ Ann, may your heart be aflame with the love of Christ, just as Teresa of Avila's heart and John of The Cross's heart were on fire.

♥ May you continue to care as much for the people at *Gathering Table* as Teresa and John cared for the Carmelites.

♥ May all of you at *Gathering Table* continue to care as much for Rev. Ann.

♥ May you always live in peace as children of light.

♥ May you always imitate Christ, knowing that the body he has on earth is yours.

Teresa of Avila said this: *“Trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.”*

On this day of the ordination to the priesthood of our beloved sister in Christ, Ann, among the community of the faithful, I believe that Ann is exactly where she is meant to be. I believe that the people of *Gathering Table* are exactly where you are meant to be.

I will close with this **Prayer of Peace** of St. John of the Cross. Let us pray:

O Blessed Jesus, grant me stillness of soul in Thee. Let Thy mighty calmness reign in me. Rule me, O thou King of gentleness, King of peace. Give me control, control over my words, thoughts and actions. From all irritability, want of meekness, want of gentleness, O dear Lord, deliver me. By thine own deep patience give me patience, stillness of soul in Thee. Make me in this, and in all, more and more like Thee. Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

The Venerable Deborah H. Kraft
Rector, St. Paul's; Archdeacon, Thunder Bay – North Shore
