



Saint John
of the Cross
2026

St. John of the Cross and Creation

Reading the Writings of John of the Cross



Text 8:

Creation as the place of our liberation

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Suggestions for community gathering:

1. Read the text together.
2. A member of the group who has prepared something in advance presents their reflections on the text, drawing on the commentary and other resources as needed.
3. Share together as a community in response to the text.

It would be helpful if each person had read and reflected on John's text individually before the group meeting.



Introduction to the text

With this final text, the famous *Prayer of a Soul Enkindled with Love*, we wish to highlight what we have already glimpsed: namely, that for John of the Cross, creation is, on the one hand, a gift from God, and on the other, that our right relationship with it is likewise a gift from the Redeemer, who grants us the freedom to promote and care for creation. In this prayer, creation is compared to “the crumbs that fall from the Father’s table”. This expresses no contempt for creation; rather, it contains a double allusion.

First, the image of “crumbs” comes from the Gospel according to St. Mark. It refers to the episode of the woman from the region of Tyre who cries out after the apostles, and then Jesus, for the healing of her daughter. Jesus replies that it is not right “to give the children’s bread to the dogs”, alluding to the fact that she is a pagan, shaped by Greek mythology. She answers that she is willing to be content with the “crumbs” (Mk 7:24–29). With this response she alludes precisely to Greek mythology: the gods on Mount Olympus hold banquets of which human beings receive only the crumbs... By this she recognises, in faith, the divinity of Christ.

Second, following from the first allusion, the term “crumbs” clearly evokes the Eucharistic banquet. Is creation a disappointing crumb, or a satisfying manna? Everything depends, the Gospel and John of the Cross tell us, on our interior liberation. Like the woman who “goes out” from her own territory (in Matthew’s parallel passage, Mt 15:21), so too must we “go out” (make an exodus) from our egocentrism, allowing ourselves to be united to a liberating *Christocentrism* that gives both the Creator and creation in the Eucharistic mystery, where God and His creation are espoused.

This is the request of the *Prayer of a Soul Enkindled with Love*. Creation is present throughout, in filigree. What John of the Cross asks in this text is to be freed from his “ego” so as to delight in creation.



Before reading this final text, it is important to note that for St. John of the Cross, this relationship with creation (as we have seen throughout our *Sanjuanist* exploration) will remain eternally in the “life to come”. At the end of the *Spiritual Cantic* B, the Bride experiences that “all creatures have in him (the Bridegroom) their life and their root (...). The soul also asks the Bridegroom, for the life to come, to contemplate the grace, wisdom, and beauty which earthly and heavenly creatures receive from God and possess in him, and also the harmony they have among themselves (...) Wonders which, for the soul, are the source of great delight.” (SCB 39:11)

Thus, we understand that not stopping at the “crumbs”, as John of the Cross will say at the end of this text from the *Soul Enkindled with Love*, is already to begin enjoying, forever, the eschatological Banquet.



PRAYER OF A SOUL TAKEN WITH LOVE

26. Lord God, my Beloved, if you still remember my sins in such a way that you do not do what I beg of you, do your will concerning them, my God, which is what I most desire, and exercise your goodness and mercy, and you will be known through them. And if you are waiting for my good works so as to hear my prayer through their means, grant them to me, and work them for me, and the sufferings you desire to accept, and let it be done. But if you are not waiting for my works, what is it that makes you wait, my most clement Lord? Why do you delay? For if, after all, I am to receive the grace and mercy that I entreat of you in your Son, take my mite, since you desire it, and grant me this blessing, since you also desire that.

Who can free themselves from lowly manners and limitations if you do not lift them to yourself, my God, in purity of love? How will human beings begotten and nurtured in lowliness rise up to you, Lord, if you do not raise them with your hand that made them?

You will not take from me, my God, what you once gave me in your only Son, Jesus Christ, in whom you gave me all I desire. Hence I rejoice that if I wait for you, you will not delay.

With what procrastinations do you wait, since from this very moment you can love God in your heart?

27. Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me. What do you ask, then, and seek, my soul? Yours is all of this, and all is for you. Do not engage yourself in something less or pay heed to the crumbs that fall from your Father's table. Go forth and exult in your Glory! Hide yourself in it and rejoice, and you will obtain the supplications of your heart.



LAUDATO SI':

LS 9. At the same time, Bartholomew has drawn attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms. He asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which “entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion”.

LS 49. It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet’s population, billions of people. These days, they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage. Indeed, when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile. This is due partly to the fact that many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world’s population. This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality. At times this attitude exists side by side with a “green” rhetoric. Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*.



LS 64. Furthermore, although this Encyclical welcomes dialogue with everyone so that together we can seek paths of liberation, I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”. It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions.

LS 79. In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God’s transcendence, within which it develops. Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time “she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction”.

Questions:

- . In his Prayer, John of the Cross speaks of the desire for God as an inner fire, a search for the Beloved that passes through creation. In what way can this spiritual quest be understood as a form of inner liberation? From what is the soul seeking to be freed?
- . Laudato Si' (§49) speaks of peoples who are displaced, exploited, and enslaved as a result of an unjust model of development. How can the contemplation of God in creation nourish a solidarity that liberates, attentive to human dignity and social justice?
- . Laudato Si' (§79) speaks of beauty that “goes out of itself” and uplifts. John of the Cross is fascinated by this beauty which reflects God but does not contain Him. How can beauty become a path of liberation from the self—a journey of exodus towards the wholly Other?
- . How can contemplative prayer and a love of the world, according to John of the Cross, free our vision, our hearts, and our way of dwelling on the earth? Does seeing the world as gift transform our attachments and relationships?



Additional questions at the end of the programme:

- . How do John of the Cross and Pope Francis understand the relationship between creation and God? In what ways do their visions complement or differ from one another?
- . Can we say that, for both authors, creation is a path towards God? If so, how is this idea expressed in their writings?
- . What place does the human person have within creation according to John of the Cross and *Laudato Si'*? Is the human being master, guardian, or brother to nature?
- . In both texts, is creation seen as a manifestation of God's love? How does this perspective shape our way of living in the world?
- . How do the notions of "detachment" in John of the Cross and "joyful sobriety" in *Laudato Si'* converge in their critique of consumerism?
- . John of the Cross speaks of the world as a mirror of God; *Laudato Si'* describes creation as a word of God. Are these two visions compatible? How might they enrich an ecological spirituality?
- . How do both texts call us to "conversion": one spiritual (interior) and the other ecological (global)? Are the two connected?
- . In a world wounded by the ecological crisis, how can the mystical vision of John of the Cross deepen Pope Francis's call to care for our common home?





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