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THE DARK NIGHT

An explanation of the stanzas describing a soul's conduct along the spiritual road which leads to the perfect union with God through love, insofar as it is attainable in this life. A description also of the characteristics of one who has reached this perfection.

PROLOGUE FOR THE READER

In this book we will first cite the entire poem, then each stanza will be repeated separately and explained, and finally we will do the same thing with the individual verses.

The first two stanzas proclaim the effects of the two kinds of spiritual purgation: one, a purification of the sensory part; the other, a purification of the spiritual part. The remaining six stanzas proclaim some of the marvelous results which are obtained from the spiritual illumination and from the union with God through love.

STANZAS OF THE SOUL

1. One dark night,
Fired with love's urgent longings
—Ah, the sheer grace!—
I went out unseen,
My house being now all stilled;
2. In darkness, and secure,
By the secret ladder, disguised,
—Ah, the sheer grace!—
In darkness and concealment,
My house being now all stilled;
3. On that glad night,
In secret, for no one saw me,
Nor did I look at anything,
With no other light or guide
Than the one that burned in my heart;

4. This guided me
More surely than the light of noon
To where He waited for me
—Him I knew so well—
In a place where no one else appeared.
5. O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
The Lover with His beloved,
Transforming the beloved in her Lover.
6. Upon my flowering breast
Which I kept wholly for Him alone,
There He lay sleeping,
And I caressing Him
There in a breeze from the fanning cedars.
7. When the breeze blew from the turret
Parting His hair,
He wounded my neck
With His gentle hand,
Suspending all my senses.
8. I abandoned and forgot myself,
Laying my face on my Beloved;
All things ceased; I went out from myself,
Leaving my cares
Forgotten among the lilies.

(Beginning of the explanation of the stanzas which deal with the way a soul must conduct itself along the road leading to union with God through love.)

Before embarking upon an explanation of these stanzas, we should remember that the soul recites them when it has already reached the state of perfection—that is, union with God through love—and has now passed through severe trials and conflicts by means of the spiritual exercise which leads one along the narrow way to eternal life, of which our Saviour speaks in the Gospel. [Mt. 7:13] The soul must ordinarily walk this path to reach that sublime and joyous union with God. Recognizing the narrowness of the path and the fact that so very few tread it—as the Saviour Himself says [Mt. 7:14]—the soul's song in this first stanza is one of happiness in having marched along it to this perfection of love. Appropriately, this narrow road is called a dark night, as we shall explain in later verses of this stanza.

The soul, therefore, happy at having trod this narrow road from which it derived so much good, speaks in this manner:

BOOK ONE

(A treatise on the passive night of the senses)

One dark night,
Fired with love's urgent longings
—Ah, the sheer grace!—
I went out unseen,
My house being now all stilled;

EXPLANATION

1. In this first stanza, the soul is speaking of the way it followed in its departure from love of self and of all things through a method of true mortification, which causes it to die to itself and to all these things and to begin the sweet and delightful life of love with God. And it declares that this departure was a "dark night." As we shall explain later, this dark night signifies here purgative contemplation, which passively causes in the soul this negation of self and of all things.

2. The soul states that it was able to make this escape because of the vigor and warmth gained from loving its Spouse in this obscure contemplation. It emphasizes the intense happiness it possessed in journeying to God through this dark night; so great was the soul's success that none of the three enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil, which are always in opposition to the journey along this road) could impede it, for that night of purifying contemplation lulled to sleep and deadened all the inordinate movements of the passions and appetites in the house of sense.

The verse then states:

One dark night,

CHAPTER 1

Quotes the first verse and begins to discuss the imperfections of beginners.

1. Souls begin to enter this dark night when God, gradually drawing them out of the state of beginners (those who practice meditation on

the spiritual road), begins to place them in the state of proficient (those who are already contemplatives) so that by passing through this state they might reach that of the perfect, which is the divine union of the soul with God.

We should first mention here some characteristics of beginners for the sake of a better explanation and understanding of the nature of this night and of God's motive for placing the soul in it. Although our treatment of these things will be as brief as possible, beginners will be helped by it to understand the feebleness of their state and take courage and desire that God place them in this night where the soul is strengthened in virtue and fortified for the inestimable delights of the love of God. And, although we shall be delayed for a moment, it will be no longer than our discussion of this dark night requires.

2. It should be known, then, that God nurtures and caresses the soul, after it has been resolutely converted to His service, like a loving mother who warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food, and carries and caresses it in her arms. But as the child grows older, the mother withholds her caresses and hides her tender love; she rubs bitter aloes on her sweet breast and sets the child down from her arms, letting it walk on its own feet so that it may put aside the habits of childhood and grow accustomed to greater and more important things. The grace of God acts just as a loving mother by re-engendering in the soul new enthusiasm and fervor in the service of God. With no effort on the soul's part, this grace causes it to taste sweet and delectable milk and to experience intense satisfaction in the performance of spiritual exercises, because God is handing the breast of His tender love to the soul, just as if it were a delicate child.

3. The soul finds its joy, therefore, in spending lengthy periods at prayer, perhaps even entire nights; its penances are pleasures; its fasts, happiness; and the sacraments and spiritual conversations are its consolations. Although spiritual persons do practice these exercises with great profit and persistence and are very careful about them, spiritually speaking, they conduct themselves in a very weak and imperfect manner. Since their motivation in their spiritual works and exercises is the consolation and satisfaction they experience in them, and since they have not been conditioned by the arduous struggle of practicing virtue, they possess many faults and imperfections in the discharge of their spiritual activities. For, assuredly, everyone's actions are in direct conformity to the habit of perfection he has acquired, and since these persons have not had time to acquire those firm habits, their work must of necessity be feeble, like that of weak children.

For a clearer understanding of this and of how truly imperfect beginners are, insofar as they practice virtue readily because of the satis-

faction attached to it, we shall describe, using the seven capital vices as our basis, some of the numerous imperfections beginners commit. Thus we shall see how very similar are their deeds to those of children. Then the benefits of the dark night will become evident, since it cleanses and purifies the soul of all these imperfections.

CHAPTER 2

Some of the imperfections of pride possessed by beginners.

1. These beginners feel so fervent and diligent in their spiritual exercises and undertakings that a certain kind of secret pride is generated in them which begets a complacency with themselves and their accomplishments, despite the fact that holy works do of their very nature cause humility. Then they develop a desire somewhat vain—at times very vain—to speak of spiritual things in others' presence, and sometimes even to instruct rather than be instructed; in their hearts they condemn others who do not seem to have the kind of devotion they would like them to have, and sometimes they give expression to this criticism like the pharisee who despised the publican while he boasted and praised God for the good deeds he himself accomplished. [Lk. 18: 11-12]

2. The devil, desiring the growth of pride and presumption in these beginners, often increases their fervor and readiness to perform such works, and other ones, too. For he is quite aware of the fact that all these works and virtues are not only worthless for them, but even become vices. Some of these persons become so evil-minded that they do not want anyone except themselves to appear holy; and so by both word and deed, they condemn and detract others whenever the occasion arises, seeing the little mote in their brother's eye, and failing to consider the beam in their own eye [Mt. 7:3]; they strain at the other's gnat and swallow their own camel. [Mt. 23:24]

3. And when at times their spiritual directors, their confessors or superiors, disapprove their spirit and method of procedure, they feel that these directors do not understand, or perhaps that this failure to approve derives from a lack of holiness, since they want these directors to regard their conduct with esteem and praise. So they quickly search for some other spiritual adviser more to their liking, someone who will congratulate them and be impressed by their deeds, and they flee, as they would death, those who attempt to place them on the safe road by forbidding these things—and sometimes they even become hostile toward such spiritual directors. Frequently, in their presumption, they make many res-

olutions but accomplish very little. Sometimes they want others to recognize their spirit and devotion, and as a result occasionally contrive to make some manifestations of it, such as movements, sighs, and other little ceremonies; sometimes, with the assistance of the devil, they experience raptures, more often in public than in private, and they are quite pleased, and often eager, for others to take notice of these.

4. Many want to be the favorites of their confessors, and thus they are consumed by a thousand envies and disquietudes. Embarrassment forbids them from relating their sins clearly, lest their reputation diminish in their confessor's eyes. They confess their sins in the most favorable light so as to appear better than they actually are, and thus they approach the confessional to excuse themselves rather than accuse themselves. Sometimes they confess the evil things they do to a different confessor so that their own confessor might think they commit no sins at all. Therefore, in their desire to appear holy, they enjoy relating their good behavior to their confessor, and in such careful terms that these good deeds appear greater than they actually are. It would be more humble of them, as we shall point out later on, to make light of the good they do and to wish that no one, neither their confessor nor anybody else, should consider it of any importance at all.

5. Sometimes they minimize their faults, and at other times they become discouraged by them, since they felt they were already saints, and they become impatient and angry with themselves, which is yet another fault.

They are often extremely anxious that God remove their faults and imperfections, but their motive is personal peace rather than God. They fail to realize that were God to remove their faults they might very well become more proud and presumptuous.

They dislike praising anyone else, but they love to receive praise, and sometimes they even seek it. In this they resemble the foolish virgins who had to seek oil from others when their own lamps were extinguished. [Mt. 25:8]

6. The number of these imperfections in some people is serious and causes them a good deal of harm. Some have fewer, some have more, and yet others have little more than the first movements toward them. But there are scarcely any beginners who do not fall victim to some of these imperfections at the time of their initial fervor.

Souls, however, who are advancing in perfection act in an entirely different manner and with a different quality of spirit during this period. They receive great benefit from their humility by which they not only place little importance on their deeds, but also take very little self-satisfaction from them. They think everyone else is far better than them-

selves, and usually possess a holy envy of them and would like to emulate their service of God. Since they are truly humble, their growing fervor and the increased number of their good deeds and the gratification they receive from them only cause them to become more aware of their debt to God and the inadequacy of their service to Him, and thus the more they do, the less satisfaction they derive from it. Their charity and love makes them want to do so much for God that what they actually do accomplish seems as nothing. This loving solicitude goads them, preoccupies them, and absorbs them to such an extent that they never notice what others do or do not accomplish, but if they should, they then think, as I say, that everyone is better than they. They think they themselves are insignificant, and want others to think this too and to belittle and slight their deeds. Moreover, even though others do praise and value their works, they are unable to believe them; such praises seem strange to them.

7. These souls humbly and tranquilly long to be taught by anyone who might be a help to them. This desire is the exact opposite of that other desire we mentioned above, of those who want to be themselves the teachers in everything. When these others notice that someone is trying to give them some instruction, they themselves take the words from their very mouths as though they already know everything.

Yet these humble souls, far from desiring to be anyone's teacher, are ready to take a road different from the one they are following, if told to do so. For they do not believe they could ever be right themselves. They rejoice when others receive praise, and their only sorrow is that they do not serve God as these others do.

Because they consider their deeds insignificant, they do not want to make them known. They are even ashamed to speak of them to their spiritual directors because they think these deeds are not worth mentioning.

They are more eager to speak of their faults and sins, and reveal these to others, than their virtues. They have an inclination to seek direction from one who will have less esteem for their spirit and deeds. Such is the characteristic of a pure and simple and true spirit, one that is very pleasing to God. Since the wise Spirit of God dwells within these humble souls, He moves them to keep these treasures hidden, and to manifest only their faults. God gives this grace to the humble, together with the other virtues, just as He denies it to the proud.

8. These souls would give their life's blood to anyone who serves God, and they will do whatever they can to help others serve Him. When they see themselves fall into imperfections, they suffer this with humility, with docility of spirit, and with loving fear of God and hope in Him.

Yet I believe very few souls are so perfect in the beginning. We would be happy enough if they managed not to fall into these imperfections of pride. As we shall point out later, then, God places these souls in the dark night so as to purify them of these imperfections and make them advance.

CHAPTER 3

Some imperfections of spiritual avarice commonly found in beginners.

1. Sometimes many beginners also possess great spiritual avarice. They will hardly ever seem content with the spirit God gives them. They become unhappy and peevish owing to a lack of the consolation they desire to have in spiritual things.

Many never have enough of hearing counsels, or of learning spiritual maxims, or of keeping them and reading books about them. They spend more time doing this than striving after mortification and the perfection of the interior poverty to which they are obliged. Furthermore, they weigh themselves down with overly decorated images and rosaries; they will now put these down, now take up others; at one moment they are exchanging, and at the next re-exchanging; now they want this kind, now they want another; and they will prefer one cross to another because of its elaborateness. Others you will see decked out in *agnusdeis* and relics and lists of saints' names, like children in trinkets.

What I condemn in this is possessiveness of heart and attachment to the number, workmanship, and over-decoration of these objects. For this attachment is contrary to poverty of spirit which is intent only upon the substance of the devotion, benefits by no more than what procures this sufficiently, and tires of all this other multiplicity and elaborate ornamentation. Since true devotion comes from the heart and looks only to the truth and substance represented by spiritual objects, and since everything else is imperfect attachment and possessiveness, any appetite for these things must be uprooted if some degree of perfection is to be reached.

2. I knew a person who for more than ten years profited by a cross roughly made out of a blessed palm and held together by a pin twisted around it. He carried it about and never would part with it until I took it from him—and he was not a person of poor judgment or little intelligence. I saw someone else who prayed with beads made out of bones from the spine of a fish. Certainly, his devotion was not for this reason less precious in the sight of God. In neither of these two instances, obviously, did these persons base their devotion on the workmanship and value of any spiritual object.

They, therefore, who are well guided from the outset do not become attached to visible instruments, nor burden themselves with them. They do not care to know any more than what is necessary to accomplish good works, because their eyes are fixed only upon God, upon being His friend and pleasing Him; this is what they long for. They very generously give all they have. Their pleasure is to know how to live for love of God or neighbor without these spiritual or temporal things. As I said, their eyes are fastened on the substance of interior perfection, on pleasing God and not themselves.

3. Yet until a soul is placed by God in the passive purgation of that dark night, which we shall soon explain, it cannot purify itself completely from these imperfections nor from the others. But a person should insofar as possible strive to do his part in purifying and perfecting himself and thereby merit God's divine cure; in this cure God will heal him of what through his own efforts he was unable to remedy. No matter how much an individual does through his own efforts, he cannot actively purify himself enough to be disposed in the least degree for the divine union of the perfection of love. God must take over and purge him in that fire that is dark for him, as we shall explain.

CHAPTER 4

The imperfections of lust, the third capital vice, usually found in beginners.

1. A number of these beginners have many more imperfections in each vice than those I am mentioning. But to avoid prolixity, I am omitting them and touching on some of the principal ones which are as it were the origin of the others.

As for the vice of lust—aside from what it means for spiritual persons to fall into this vice, since my intent is to treat of the imperfections that have to be purged by means of the dark night—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. It happens frequently that in one's very spiritual exercises, without one's being able to avoid it, impure movements will be experienced in the sensory part of the soul, and even sometimes when the spirit is deep in prayer or when receiving the sacrament of penance or of the Eucharist. These impure feelings arise from any of three causes outside one's power.

2. First, they often proceed from the pleasure human nature finds in spiritual exercises. Since both the spiritual and sensory part of the soul receive gratification from that refreshment, each part experiences de-

light according to its own nature and properties. The spirit, the superior part of the soul, experiences renewal and satisfaction in God; and the sense, the lower part, feels sensory gratification and delight because it is ignorant of how to get anything else and hence takes whatever is nearest, which is the impure sensory satisfaction. It will happen that while a soul is with God in deep spiritual prayer, it will on the other hand passively experience sensual rebellions, movements, and acts in the senses, not without its own great displeasure. This frequently happens at the time of Communion. Since the soul receives joy and gladness in this act of love—for the Lord grants the grace and gives Himself for this reason—the sensory part also takes its share, as we said, according to its mode. Since, after all, these two parts form one *suppositum*, each one usually shares according to its mode in what the other receives. As the Philosopher says: Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver. Because in the initial stages of the spiritual life, and even in more advanced ones, the sensory part of the soul is imperfect, it frequently receives God's spirit with this very imperfection. Once the sensory part is reformed through the purgation of the dark night, it no longer has these infirmities. For then the spiritual part of the soul rather than the sensory part receives God's spirit, and the soul thus receives everything according to the mode of the spirit.

3. The second origin of these rebellions is the devil. To bring disquietude and disturbance upon a soul when it is praying, or trying to pray, he endeavors to excite impure feelings in the sensory part. And if a person pays any attention to them, the devil does him great harm. Some souls, through fear, grow slack in their prayer—which is what the devil wants—in order to struggle against these movements, and others give it up entirely, for they think these feelings come while they are engaged in prayer rather than at any other time. And this is true, because the devil excites these feelings while souls are at prayer, instead of when they are engaged in other works, so that they might abandon prayer. And that is not all, for to make them cowardly and afraid he brings vividly to their minds foul and impure thoughts. And sometimes the thoughts will concern spiritual things and persons who have been a help to them. Those who attribute any importance to such thoughts, therefore, do not even dare look at anything or think about anything, lest they thereupon stumble into them.

These impure thoughts so affect people who are afflicted with melancholia that one should have great pity for them; indeed, they suffer a sad life. In some who are troubled with this bad humor the trial reaches such a point that the devil, they think, definitely has access to them without their having the freedom to prevent it; yet some of these melan-

choliacs are able through intense effort and struggle to forestall this power of the devil.

If these impure thoughts and feelings arise from melancholia, a person is not ordinarily freed from them until he is cured of that humor, unless the dark night flows in upon the soul and deprives it successively of all things.

4. The third origin from which these impure feelings usually proceed and wage war on the soul is fear of them. The fear that springs up in people at the sudden remembrance of these thoughts, caused by what they see, are dealing with, or thinking of, produces impure feelings without their being at fault.

5. Some people are so delicate that when gratification is received from the spirit or from prayer, they immediately experience a lust which so inebriates them and caresses their senses that they become as it were engulfed in the delight and satisfaction of that vice; and this experience will endure passively with the other. Sometimes these individuals become aware that certain impure and rebellious acts have taken place.

The reason for such occurrences is that since these natures are, as I say, delicate and tender, their humors and blood are stirred up by any change. For these persons will also experience these feelings when they are inflamed with anger or agitated by some other disturbance or affliction.

6. Sometimes too, in their spiritual conversations or works, they manifest a certain sprightliness and gallantry upon considering who is present, and they carry on with a kind of vain satisfaction. Such behavior is also a by-product of spiritual lust (in the way we here understand it), which generally accompanies complacency of the will.

7. Some will spiritually acquire a liking for other individuals which often arises from lust rather than from the spirit. This lustful origin will be recognized if, upon recalling that affection, there is not an increase in the remembrance and love of God, but remorse of conscience.

The affection is purely spiritual if the love of God grows when it grows, or if the love of God is remembered as often as the affection is remembered, or if the affection gives the soul a desire for God—if by growing in one the soul grows also in the other. For this is a trait of God's spirit: the good increases with the good, since there is likeness and conformity between them.

But when the love is born of this sensual vice it has the contrary effects. As the one love grows greater, the other lessens, and the remembrance of it lessens too. If the inordinate love increases, then, as will be seen, the soul will grow cold in the love of God, and, owing to the recollection of that other love, forget Him—not without the feeling of

some remorse of conscience. On the other hand, as the love of God increases, the soul will grow cold in the inordinate affection, and come to forget it. For not only do these loves fail to benefit one another, but, since they are contrary loves, the predominating one, while becoming stronger itself, will stifle and extinguish the other, as the philosophers say. Hence our Saviour proclaimed in the Gospel: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit* [Jn. 3:16], that is: Love derived from sense terminates in sense, and the love which is of the spirit terminates in the spirit of God, and brings it increase. And this, then, is the difference between these two loves which enables us to discern the one from the other.

8. The dark night, when it enters the soul, puts all these loves in reasonable order. It strengthens and purifies the love of God, and takes away and destroys the other. But in the beginning it will cause the soul to lose sight of both of them, as will be explained.

CHAPTER 5

The imperfections of the capital vice of anger into which beginners fall.

1. Because of the strong desire of many beginners for spiritual gratification, they usually have many imperfections of anger. For when the delight and satisfaction procured in their spiritual exercises passes, these beginners are naturally left without any spiritual savor. And because of this distastefulness, they become peevish in the works they do and easily angered by the least thing, and occasionally they are so unbearable that nobody can put up with them. This frequently occurs after they have experienced in prayer some recollection pleasant to the senses. After the delight and satisfaction is gone, the sensory part of the soul is naturally left vapid and zestless, just as a child when withdrawn from the sweet breast. These souls are not at fault if they do not allow this dejection to influence them, for it is an imperfection which must be purged through the dryness and distress of the dark night.

2. Among these spiritual persons there are also those who fall into another kind of spiritual anger. Through a certain indiscreet zeal they become angry over the sins of others, they reprove these others, and sometimes even feel the impulse to do so angrily, which in fact they occasionally do, setting themselves up as lords of virtue. All such conduct is contrary to spiritual meekness.

3. Others, in becoming aware of their own imperfections, grow angry with themselves in an unhumble impatience. So impatient are they about these imperfections that they would want to become saints in a day.

Many of these beginners will make numerous plans and great resolutions, but since they are not humble and have no distrust of themselves, the more resolves they make the more they break, and the greater becomes their anger. They do not have the patience to wait until God gives them what they need when He so desires. Their attitude is contrary to spiritual meekness and can only be remedied by the purgation of the dark night. Some, however, are so patient about their desire for advancement that God would prefer to see them a little less so.

CHAPTER 6

The imperfections of spiritual gluttony.

1. A great deal can be said on spiritual gluttony, the fourth vice. There is hardly anyone among these beginners, no matter how excellent his conduct, who will not fall into some of the many imperfections of this vice. These imperfections arise because of the delight beginners find in their spiritual exercises.

Many, lured by the delight and satisfaction procured in their religious practices, strive more for spiritual savor than for spiritual purity and discretion; yet it is this purity and discretion which God looks for and finds acceptable throughout a soul's entire spiritual journey. Besides the imperfection of seeking after these delights, the sweetness these persons experience makes them go to extremes and pass beyond the mean in which virtue resides and is acquired.

Some, attracted by the delight they feel in their spiritual exercises, will kill themselves with penances, and others will weaken themselves by fasts and, without the counsel or command of another, overtax their weakness; indeed they try to hide these penances from the one to whom they owe obedience in such matters. Some will even dare perform these penances contrary to obedience.

2. Such individuals are unreasonable and most imperfect. They subordinate submissiveness and obedience (which is a penance of reason and discretion, and consequently a sacrifice more pleasing and acceptable to God) to corporal penance. But corporal penance without obedience is no more than a penance of beasts. And like beasts, they are motivated in these penances by an appetite for the pleasure they find in them. Since all extremes are vicious and since by such behavior these persons are doing their own will, they grow in vice rather than in virtue. For, through this conduct they at least become spiritually gluttonous and proud, since they do not tread the path of obedience.

The devil, increasing the delights and appetites of these beginners and thereby stirring up this gluttony in them, so impels many of them

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that when they are unable to avoid obedience they either add to, change, or modify what was commanded them. Any obedience in this matter is distasteful to them. Some will reach such a point that the mere obligation of obedience to perform their spiritual exercises makes them lose all desire and devotion. Their only yearning and satisfaction is to do what they feel inclined to do, whereas it would be better in all likelihood for them not to do this at all.

3. Some are very insistent that their spiritual director allow them to do what they themselves want to do, and finally almost force the permission from him. And if they do not get what they want, they become sad and go about like testy children. They are under the impression that they do not serve God when they are not allowed to do what they want. Since they take gratification and their own will as their support and their god, they become sad, weak, and discouraged when their director takes these from them and desires that they do God's will. They think that gratifying and satisfying themselves is serving and satisfying God.

4. Others, too, because of this sweetness have so little knowledge of their own lowness and misery and such lack of the loving fear and respect they owe to God's grandeur that they do not hesitate to insist boldly that their confessors allow them the frequent reception of Communion. And worse than this, they often dare communicate without the permission and advice of the minister and dispenser of Christ. They are guided here solely by their own opinion, and they endeavor to hide the truth from him. As a result, with their hearts set on frequent Communion, they make their confessions carelessly, more eager just to receive Communion than to receive it with a pure and perfect heart. It would be sounder and holier of them to have the contrary inclination and to ask their confessor not to let them receive Communion so frequently. Although humble resignation is better than either of these two attitudes. But the boldnesses referred to first will bring great evil and chastisement upon the others.

5. In communicating they spend all their time trying to get some feeling and satisfaction rather than humbly praising and reverencing God dwelling within them. And they go about this in such a way that, if they do not procure any sensible feeling and satisfaction, they think they have accomplished nothing. As a result they judge very poorly of God and fail to understand that the sensory benefits are the least among those that this Most Blessed Sacrament bestows, for the invisible grace it gives is a greater blessing. God often withdraws sensory delight and pleasure so that souls might set the eyes of faith upon this invisible grace. Not only in receiving Communion, but in other spiritual exercises as well, beginners

desire to feel God and taste of Him as if He were comprehensible and accessible. This desire is a serious imperfection and, because it involves impurity of faith, opposed to God's way.

6. They have the same defect in their prayer, for they think the whole matter of prayer consists in looking for sensory satisfaction and devotion. They strive to procure this by their own efforts and tire and weary their heads and their faculties. When they do not get this sensible comfort, they become very disconsolate and think they have done nothing. Because of their aim they lose true devotion and spirit, which lies in distrust of self and in humble and patient perseverance so as to please God. Once they do not find delight in this, or any other spiritual exercise, they feel extreme reluctance and repugnance in returning to it, and sometimes even give it up. For after all, as we mentioned, they are like children who are prompted to act not by reason but by pleasure.

All their time is spent looking for satisfaction and spiritual consolation; they can never read enough spiritual books, and one minute they are meditating upon one subject and the next upon another, always in search for some gratification in the things of God. God very rightly and discreetly and lovingly denies this satisfaction to these beginners, for if He did not, they would fall into innumerable evils because of their spiritual gluttony and craving for sweetness. Wherefore it is important for these beginners to enter the dark night and be purged of this childishness.

7. Those who are inclined toward these delights have also another serious imperfection, that is, they are weak and remiss in treading the rough way of the cross. A soul given up to pleasure naturally feels aversion toward the bitterness of self-denial.

8. These people incur many other imperfections because of this spiritual gluttony, of which the Lord in time will cure them through temptations, aridities, and other trials, which are all a part of the dark night. So as not to be too lengthy, I do not want to discuss these imperfections any more, but only point out that spiritual sobriety and temperance beget another very different quality, one of mortification, fear, and submissiveness in all things; an individual thereby becomes aware that the perfection and value of his works does not depend upon their number, or the satisfaction found in them, but upon knowing how to practice self-denial in them. These beginners ought to do their part in striving after this self-denial, until God in fact brings them into the dark night and purifies them. In order to get to our discussion of this dark night, I am passing over these imperfections hurriedly.

CHAPTER 7

The imperfections of spiritual envy and sloth.

1. As for the other two vices, spiritual envy and sloth, these beginners also have many imperfections.

In regard to envy, many of them will feel sad about the spiritual good of others and experience sensible grief in noting that their neighbor is ahead of them on the road to perfection, and they will not want to hear others praised. To learn of the virtues of others makes them sad; they cannot bear to hear others praised without contradicting and undoing these compliments as much as possible. Their annoyance grows because they themselves do not receive these plaudits and because they long for preference in everything.

All of this is contrary to charity, which, as St. Paul says, rejoices in goodness. [1 Cor. 13:6] If any envy accompanies charity, it is a holy envy, saddened at not having the virtues of others, rejoicing that others have them, happy that all others are ahead of it in the service of God, since it is so wanting in His service.

2. Also regarding spiritual sloth, these beginners usually become weary in the more spiritual exercises and flee from them, since these exercises are contrary to sensory satisfaction. Since they are so used to finding delight in spiritual practices, they become bored when they do not find it. If they do not receive in prayer the satisfaction they crave—for after all it is fit that God withdraw this so as to try them—they do not want to return to it or at times they either give up prayer or go to it begrudgingly. Because of their sloth, they subordinate the way of perfection (which requires the denial of one's will and satisfaction for God's sake) to the pleasure and delight of their own will. As a result they strive to satisfy their own will rather than God's.

3. Many of these beginners want God to desire what they want, and become sad if they have to desire God's will. They feel an aversion toward adapting their will to God's. Hence they frequently believe that what is not their will, or that which brings them no satisfaction, is not God's will, and, on the other hand, that if they are satisfied, God is too. They measure God by themselves and not themselves by God, which is in opposition to His teaching in the Gospel: that he who loses his life for His sake will gain it, and that he who desires to gain it will lose it. [Mt. 16:25]

4. Beginner's also become bored when told to do something unpleasant. Because they look for spiritual gratifications and delights, they

are extremely lax in the fortitude and labor perfection demands. Like those who are reared in luxury, they run sadly from everything rough, and they are scandalized by the cross, in which spiritual delights are found. And in the more spiritual exercises their boredom is greater. Since they expect to go about in spiritual matters according to the whims and satisfactions of their own will, to enter by the narrow way of life, about which Christ speaks, is saddening and repugnant to them. [Mt. 7:14]

5. It is enough to have referred to the many imperfections of those who live in this beginner's state to see the need there is that God put them in the state of proficient. He does this by introducing them into the dark night, of which we shall now speak. There, through pure dryness and interior darkness, He weans them from the breasts of these gratifications and delights, takes away all these trivialities and childish ways, and makes them acquire the virtues by very different means. No matter how earnestly the beginner in all his actions and passions practices the mortification of self, he will never be able to do so entirely—far from it—until God accomplishes it in him passively by means of the purgation of this night.

May God be pleased to give me His divine light that I may say something worthwhile about this subject, for in a night so dark and a matter so difficult to treat and expound His enlightenment is very necessary.

The verse, then, is:

One dark night,

CHAPTER 8

The beginning of the exposition of this dark night. An explanation of verse 1 of the first stanza.

1. This night, which as we say is contemplation, causes two kinds of darkness or purgation in spiritual persons according to the two parts of the soul, the sensory and the spiritual.

Hence the one night or purgation will be sensory, by which the senses are purged and accommodated to the spirit; and the other night or purgation will be spiritual, by which the spirit is purged and denuded as well as accommodated and prepared for union with God through love.

The sensory night is common and happens to many; these are the beginners of whom we shall treat first. The spiritual night is the lot of very few, of those who have been tried and are proficient, and of whom we shall speak afterwards.

2. The first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to the senses. But