

declares. Like her mystics of all ages, the Church knows that for some experiences 'there are no words'. She would not try to force them from our heart, but leaves them in that silence which is loud with joy. Nor would she invade the inviolability of their Source. How dare she when the Bridegroom, himself (as Jessica Powers, the Carmelite poet suggests), is 'loath to lift the bridal lace'. A theme so intimate requires the veil in order to inspire a proper reverence and sense of mystery in the faithful. For these mysteries are essentially nuptial mysteries begun by Christ's fulfilment of the eternal espousals promised by his Father to the people of Israel: 'I will espouse thee to me forever' (Osee 3, 19), betrothals sealed by the blood of his Cross, and continued in the sacramental mysteries of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Above all, the Church, the Bride of Christ, faithful to the spirit of her Bridegroom, continues to draw all men to the bridal-chamber of his Cross, offering up daily 'the sacrifices of justice . . . that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up'. (Ps. 50.) And for those who like the sparrow of the psalmist have found their nest there, 'Even thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God' (Ps. 83), there is the dilatation of the heart, the opening out to joy, the deepening of those silences which cannot contain themselves but must forever cry: 'How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!' (Ps. 83.) These are they who regenerated unto life are constantly nourished by those ever-flowing 'streams of mercy and grace' which, like secret springs, unseen and unheard, feed the deep well of the soul's interior life.

Now I know that the Lord speaks from you, because you have mastered his silence.<sup>5</sup>



## A CERTAIN MAN MADE A GREAT SUPPER

A SERMON BY MEISTER ECKHART

*Homo quidam fecit cenam magnam . . .* (Luke 14, 16)

**A** CERTAIN man made a supper, a great evening meal. If you entertain in the morning, you invite all sorts of people, but in the evening you ask important people, people dear to you and your close friends.

<sup>5</sup> Gertrud Von Le Fort. *Hymns to the Church*.

Today Christians keep the feast of the supper which our Lord prepared for his disciples, his close friends, when he gave them his holy body to be their food. This is its first meaning. But the supper has yet another meaning. Morning and noonday must pass before evening comes. God's light breaks into the soul, morning dawns there, and in this light the soul soars up into the high zenith of its noonday. And thereafter it is evening. And there is yet a third meaning to this idea of the evening. When the light fades, it is evening; when the glamour of the whole world fades in the soul, it is evening there and the soul finds peace.

Speaking of this supper St Gregory says that when you eat in the morning there is yet another meal to come; but after supper there is no other meal. For when the soul tastes this food at supper, and when the little spark of fire in the soul seizes upon the heavenly light, it needs no further fuel; it seeks outside no longer and stays wholly within the light of the Godhead. Now St Augustine says: 'Lord, if thou leavest us give us another thou, for only thou canst suffice us, and we want only thee.' Our Lord as God and man left the disciples and gave himself to them again as God and man, but in a different way and in another form. You do not expose sacred treasure to direct view or touch, but you set it in a crystal or in something of the kind. That is what our Lord did when he gave himself to us in another form. God gives himself, and all of himself, in this supper as a food to his dear friends. St Augustine recoiled from this food, but then a voice comforted him and said: 'I am the food of those who are grown great; eating me, grow thou and increase in stature. I shall not be turned into thee, but thou shalt be turned into me.'

Of the food and drink that I took a fortnight ago, some power of my soul gathered the purest and finest particles and carried them into my body, uniting them with all that is in me. There is nothing, however small, or tiny as a pinpoint, which has not merged with my body. And it is as wholly one with me as what was born with me out of my mother's body when life was first infused into me. Thus indeed the power of the Holy Ghost seizes upon what is purest and finest and highest, upon the little spark in the soul, and bears it upwards into love's fiery flames. Thus too I might instance the tree where the power of the sun seizes upon all that is purest and finest in the roots, and drawing it all up into the branches, transforms it into a blossom. In the same way the little

spark of fire in the soul is born up into the light and into the Holy Ghost. It is drawn into the beginning and cause of all things, and is so wholly united with God and grows into him, being more closely merged with him than food is with the body; indeed, the purer and nobler it is, the more deeply it is lost in God. That is why the gospel tells of a great supper.

Now David says: 'O how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them who fear thee.' But if you eat this food with fear, you do not taste its full savour; you must eat it lovingly. Indeed, a soul that loves God, vanquishes God so that he has to give himself wholly.

Now St Luke says: 'A certain man made a great supper.' This man has no name, this man has no equal, for he is God. God has no name. A pagan master says that no tongue can utter a single word of its own to describe God, for his being is too full of majesty and purity. When we speak of a tree, we are really referring to things which are greater and more fundamental than the tree, as for instance the sun which works growth and life within the tree. That is why we cannot really speak about God because there is nothing greater than God and God has no cause. And secondly, we speak of things as being like one another. Therefore we cannot really speak about God, as nothing is like him. Thirdly, we describe things by means of their effects and works. When we say something about a master's skill, we point to the picture which is the work of his hands. The picture reveals its maker's skill. But all created things are too paltry to reveal him, and all are as nothing compared with God. And so no creature can render the tribute of a single word to describe God. Dionysius says that all who want to describe God are wrong for they can say nothing about him. Those who do not strive to express him in words are right, for he is beyond the reach of words; indeed, God utters himself within himself. So David says: 'In your light we shall see the light.' St Luke says 'a certain man'. He is One and a man, and he is like unto none, and transcends all things.

The master sent out his servants. St Gregory says that these servants are preachers. But I should like to speak of a different kind of servant: I mean, an angel. Now there is another kind of servant of whom I have spoken elsewhere, and that is the intellect. In the inner sanctuary of the soul the intellect is in touch with the angelic nature and is an image of God. The soul has this light in

common with the angels, even with those who fell and yet preserved their high rank in hell. Within the soul the little spark burns unhindered, and cleansed of all suffering and circumstance, it reaches up into the essence of the Godhead. It is like the good angels who ever work in God, and comprehend in God, and carry all they do back to God. They receive God from God in God.

The little spark of fire, the intellect, is like the angels because God created it whole and without distinction, a soaring light, an image of the divine nature, and made by God. This light is within the soul. The masters say there is a force in the soul which is called 'synderesis'<sup>1</sup>—it is not a separate force. It is something which is always turned towards God and never wills evil. Even in hell it is turned towards God. It battles in the soul against everything that is not pure and godly; and without ceasing, ever calls the soul to the supper which is prepared for it.

So St Luke says, 'he sent out his servant to say that the guests should come, for now all things are ready'. No one may question what it is he is receiving in taking the Lord's body. The little sparking flame which is ready to receive our Lord's body ever dwells within the Godhead. God gives himself to the soul in ever renewed life. He does not say: 'This is past' or 'this is yet to come', but everything is eternally new and ever ready as in one endless process of being and becoming. That is why it is written 'everything is now ready'. . . .

And to this supper may we all come by God's mercy.

A M E N

[Translated from the Middle High German (*Meister Eckhart, Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, edited by the deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Die deutschen Serke, Vol. 1, pp. 342-352. Stuttgart 1936 f.) by Elizabeth Stopp.]

<sup>1</sup> Cf St Thomas, Sent. 11. d. 39, q. 3a, 1: 'Haec superior rationis scintilla, quae synderesis est, extingui non potest, sed semper repugnat omni ei, quod contra principia naturaliter sibi indita est.'