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# A D O R A T I O N

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*knowing ourselves beloved*

Br. Jim Woodrum, SSJE

If someone were to turn to you and say, "I adore you!" what would your reaction be? It would probably depend on the nature of your relationship with the person at that time. *Adore* is a simple little word often used as an expression of affection, which might confuse its meaning with "love." And while you may adore someone you love, the word's meaning is actually deeper and lustier than mere affection. "Adore" comes from the Latin *adōrāre*, which means "to plead with, appeal to, approach as a suppliant or worshipper." It is synonymous with the words *revere* and *venerate*. To *adore* someone is to gaze upon them with the upmost reverence, veneration, and worship. With this in mind, you may not be comfortable with being the object of someone's adoration, nor with adoring your own loved ones!

In the language of the church, *adoration* is one of the seven principal types of prayer (along with praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition). The catechism in the Book of Common Prayer defines the prayer of adoration as "*the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.*" In this selfless act, we suspend our expectations and give our total attention to the wonder, beauty, and grace of the presence of God in our midst. Fr. George Congreve, SSJE once wrote of the importance of prayerful adoration:

*How strange it is that though we would not waste half an hour doing nothing, yet often when walking for half an hour along the road we do worse perhaps than waste it, when we might*

*have glorified it and made it radiant with the brightness and sweetness and preciousness of the life and love of God by thinking of God and speaking to Him.<sup>ii</sup>*

Adoration is a sanctifying act whereby we consecrate and hallow our affections to the One in whom we live and move and have our being.

We can see examples of adoration to God throughout Holy Scripture and especially in the Psalms, which give voice the full range of human emotions. The psalmist writes, "*Whom have I in heaven but you? And having you I desire nothing upon the earth. Though my flesh and my heart would waste away, God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*"<sup>iii</sup> Adoration is the most intimate of all the prayers because, as we hear in the psalmist's songs, its substance is desire and yearning. We can hear echoes of this desire in the Song of Solomon, a series of lyric poems celebrating human love, but which from an early date began to be interpreted symbolically as an account of the love between God and Israel.<sup>iv</sup> Listen to the beauty of these words of adoration:

*As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,  
so is my beloved among young men.  
With great delight I sat in his shadow,  
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.  
He brought me to the banqueting house,  
and his intention towards me was love.  
O that his left hand were under my head,  
and that his right hand embraced me!*

And a reply:

*You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,  
you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes,  
with one jewel of your necklace.  
How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride!  
how much better is your love than wine,  
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!<sup>v</sup>*

Reading such a passage, we may feel uneasy, as if we are reading private love letters exposing a torrid love affair. What we can definitely surmise from this passage is that the lovers' adoration is mutual.

Like our Jewish forebears, followers of Jesus have interpreted the Song of

Solomon as a dialogue of love, but we've seen it as a love affair between Jesus and his bride, the Church, rather than between God and Israel. Its poetry expresses mutual adoration between God and God's Creation in the most incarnational of terms. We – as a part of God's Creation and as God's beloved human children – are invited to hear in these words the promise that God is gazing at *us* in loving adoration. God hopes that we will join in and return the song, just as the two lovers in the Song of Solomon sing back and forth while they hold each other in mutual adoration. You were created in love for the sake of relationship with God. You are the *"apple of God's eye!"*<sup>vi</sup> Made in the image of God, you have the capacity to mirror back to God the same adoring love that is God's essence.

This adoration is meant to be no torrid one-night affair. We're invited to make it the center of our lives. At SSJE, the fact that prayer is at the very center of our life together is symbolized by the position of the Chapel in the very center of the Monastery, between the Guesthouse and the Enclosure (where the Brothers live and work). Five times a day the bell in the tower tolls, calling us to stop what we are doing and meet in the Chapel for a period of prayer and worship. An important feature of the Chapel is a sanctuary lamp situated front and center. Its lit candle symbolizes the fact that Jesus is present to us in the Sacrament, reserved in a Tabernacle.<sup>vii</sup> It is common for Brothers and our guests to spend prayer time in front of this Tabernacle, where we believe Jesus is present to us in this very special way. Quarterly, we Brothers gather together in vigil before the Sacrament, which has been exposed for all to see. Together we spend a "Holy Hour" in intimate prayer, prayer of adoring love for the One who has created us out of love, for the purpose of love. In these moments, especially, I come to know myself as the beloved of God.

So, if *God* were to turn to you and say, "I adore you!" what would your reaction be? Would your heart race, your face flush, and your palms sweat? Would you have the courage – in your vulnerability – to gaze back at Jesus and, in the language of the Psalms, reply: *"My soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water. Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, that I might behold your power and your glory."*<sup>viii</sup> *Keep me as the apple of your eye!"*<sup>ix</sup>

[i] *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), pp. 856-857

[ii] Woodgate, M. V. *Father Congreve of Cowley*. London: S.P.C.K, 1956. Print.

[iii] Psalm 73:25-26

[iv] Coogan, Michael David, et al. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Third ed., Oxford University Press, 2001.

[v] Song of Solomon 2:3-4,6; 4:9-10

[vi] Psalm 17:8a

[vii] The Sanctuary Lamp symbolizes the manifestations of the presence of God to the Israelites in Exodus: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Exodus 13:21-22

[viii] Psalm 63:1b

[ix] Psalm 17:8a

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## QUOTES *to ponder*

"The Eucharist is connected with the Passion ...To make sure that we do not forget, Jesus gave us the Eucharist as a memorial of his love ... When you look at the Crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then, when you look at the Sacred Host you understand how much Jesus loves you now."

– *Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)*

"The eyes need not to see the power of God, if the heart gazes upon it; and, if the heart gazes upon it, the life cannot but manifest it."

– *Fr. Richard Meux Benson, SSJE (1824-1915)*

"At times, when we have to wait and have nothing to do to occupy ourselves with – Oh! Then it is not wasted time if we have thought of God in it, if we have looked into the face of Jesus. Then anything that we do at the end of such waiting times we do with a glory and a power to witness to Jesus which is, indeed, a precious result. Everything should become by degrees an act of communion with God."

– *Fr. George Congreve, SSJE (1835-1918)*

"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us."

– *1 John 4:16, 18-19*

## PRACTICES *to try*

In many Anglican, Episcopal, and Catholic churches, the Sacrament (consecrated bread and wine) is reserved in a Tabernacle. This is usually indicated by a Sanctuary Lamp that is burning nearby. We believe that Jesus is really present to us in the consecrated elements. Spend some time praying in front of a Tabernacle and consider how God is in our midst in this unique and special way.

Some churches occasionally have a special service of Adoration called "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament," in which the host is exposed. The congregation spends time together in Adoration, singing hymns of praise to God, and being blessed with the Sacrament before it is returned to the Tabernacle, where it continues to be reserved. It may be helpful for you to experience God's presence in this special service of Adoration.

Following Fr. Congreve's example, go for a walk with the intention of thinking about Jesus and appreciating the wonder of God's creation. When you are moved by something in nature, pause to gaze on it and think of Jesus, offering a word of thanksgiving and praise.

## QUESTIONS *to consider*

How do you experience God's quiet presence in your life? When and how might you intentionally stop to recognize this presence?

What words of praise could you offer Jesus? This could be while spending time in Adoration before a Tabernacle, or simply in a quiet moment of connection, communion, and prayer.

How do you experience God gazing adoringly on you? Can you accept (even embrace) that God adores you? What stands in the way of you celebrating that mutual love?

How might practicing adoration help you to see the presence of God in your neighbor, friend, co-worker, or even a stranger you pass on a walk?

## RESOURCES *to explore*

*The St. Augustine's Prayer Book*, Rev. David Cobb and Derek Olsen PhD, editors. Forward Movement: 2012.

*Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as a Guide to Spiritual Life*, Derek Olsen PhD. Forward Movement: 2016.

## A PRAYER *of adoration*

God our Father, whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a memorial of his passion: Grant us so to venerate the sacred mysteries of his Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of his redemption; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

**The Brothers of SSJE** are a community of men giving our whole selves over to living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rooted in the ancient monastic traditions of prayer and community life, and critically engaged with contemporary culture, we seek to know and share an authentic experience of God's love and mercy. We live a common life shaped by worship, prayer, and our Rule of Life.

We invite you to learn more at [www.SSJE.org](http://www.SSJE.org)

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