

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Clean of Heart Third Week of Advent Wednesday, December 14, 2016 8:15 AM
Is 45:6b-8, 18, 21b-25; Lk 7:18b-23 **St. John of the Cross**, priest and Doctor of the
Church (Our goal in life is not to be alone, but to be with God; and God's gift to us of himself
is pure grace.)

Today we celebrate the **memorial of St. John of the Cross**. **Jesus said, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God"**; and that's surely true of St. John of the Cross, as it was also true of his compatriot Teresa of Avila, as was also true of St. Thomas Aquinas. These people were clean of heart and they **had a vision of God that was unusual**. That is **the theme of his writing; it is the knowledge of God**. It was very important that he wrote when he did because at that time the Renaissance was in full swing, the Protestant Reformation was underway, and the literal mind was king. John's teachings, as really the teachings of many of the great saints, were not about what the literal mind would think or see. **But it was more about what the mystical soul could perceive about God, about life**. So this is his theme.

He says the knowledge of Christ can only come through suffering. Again, he is not unique in saying this, but he stressed that if people want to grow in the knowledge of Christ, they have to be willing to suffer. **In the midst of suffering then they discover consolation**, which comes, as it were, out of the blue, which is another way of saying **grace**. So we have to be willing to suffer and we have to be aware of and open to the grace of God that comes to us as consolation. And then we have to be willing to do something with this. **We have to be willing to live a life of discipline**, not simply giving into what we want to do, but doing what we ought to do, which is the essence of discipline. It's really what it means to be a moral person. **To be a moral person we can't live by what we feel like, but we have to live by what we see consciously to be true and good**.

This of course leads us to realize that within us is this tremendous desire. And this is perhaps the most important thing of all that **we are created with this great desire for God** and that there are so many substitutes that approach us in life trying to distract us. Suffering is a friend because **suffering helps us see the meaninglessness of all the substitutes for God.** And grace is of course an absolutely necessary help because without it, we would be all alone; but **our goal in life is not to be alone, but to be with God; and God's gift to us of himself is pure grace.** So we can look at everything in life as trying to help us find the way to God and the true good and to develop a moral life that will keep that perspective always in front of us. It means that **sometimes we have to do something that is very difficult, but right.** Once we develop a pattern of this type of life, we are becoming virtuous, and **the more virtuous we are becoming the cleaner of heart we are, and the cleaner of heart we are the more we see God in everything.**