



# Carmelite News

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## Covenant and New Creation

A Lenten look at the "Romances" of John of the Cross

Since its beginning at Pentecost 2006, our year of intensive prayer for the Earth has concentrated on the manifold and diverse beauty of all creation. Last December, our reflections on beauty reached a moving summit as we celebrated the vigil of St. John of the Cross, the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Carmelite, mystic and poet, with a special Advent prayer service. In the gentle diffused light of 75 candles, participants listened to the story of the Incarnation told through the verse of John's tenderly touching *Romances*. A "romance" is the most traditional and plain of all Spanish verse forms, the equivalent of a narrative ballad. John's *Romances* imaginatively describe the Trinity's desire and decision for God to become human in Jesus, and for Jesus to take humanity as a spouse. Conjugal, nuptial love is the fundamental symbol, a love that longs only for true mutual relationship in which Lover and Beloved are one and equal. And so the *Romances* are a natural Advent piece, a real hymn to the Incarnation.

Yet, the *Romances* are more than an inspired telling of Christ's birth. In fact, these simple and direct verses have been called the "gospel" of John of the Cross, the very prologue to his other works. One brief passage, for instance, gives a poignantly intimate synopsis that moves from beauty to God's redemptive promise, presaging Jesus' passion and the hope of resurrection: *The Son replied to the Most High: I will go and tell the world, spreading the word of your*

*beauty and sweetness and of your sovereignty. I will go seek my bride and take upon myself her weariness and labors in which she suffers so; and that she may have life, I will die for her, and lifting her out of that deep, I will restore her to you.*

Here we find the outline of a Lenten shift in focus for our prayer for the Earth as we deepen its roots and expand its gaze. The deepening roots seek their ground in the quantum immanence of God's covenant: *I will take upon myself her weariness and labors.* The expanded gaze seeks to break the fetters of earth-bounded consciousness for a more cosmic perspective on our far future, the new creation that in hope we await: *Lifting her out of that deep, I will restore her to you.*

This emphasis on "covenant" and "new creation" is critical for understanding our human future in an ecological context. If we know God's covenant as immanently connected with earth at its most quantum level, then we begin to see nature not as a resource for our consumption but, as theologian and scientist Robert Russell has said, as a "fragile interconnected web of ecological integrity out of which all life lives." This is a web in which God is intimately present. John's *Romances* speak of this in images of water and earth: *Oh, clouds, rain down from your height, earth needs you, and let the earth open, which has borne us thorns; let it bring forth that flower that would be its flowering.* It is earth that births the divine presence, and humanity receives the covenant promise not just of presence but of creative participation with God, a fiery image: *I will hold the bride in my arms, and she will burn with your love, and with eternal delight she will exalt your goodness...And when they were thus one, God's very joy would be her joy.*

With growing contemplative awareness of God's immanence in nature, we then must look beyond this small planet. A cosmic gaze humbles us – we are far from being the universe's dominating force. And it helps us to see the intricate interconnectedness of all that exists, of all that God has made, of the evolving cosmic processes in which we have emerged. As the *Romances* remind us, the bride is not humanity alone: *And by these words the world was created, made with great wisdom and divided into rooms, one above, the*

### Please share Holy Week with us.

We warmly invite you to our Holy Week services, offering a beautiful, intensive and deep experience of the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection. We so want you to be with us; your presence will greatly enrich the liturgies. Please see the calendar box (reverse) for times.

### Celebrate!

To mark the one-year anniversary of our Prayer for the Earth, we welcome you into our grounds and gardens as we bless them and hear commentary by Hopkins geologist George Fisher. Saturday, May 19 at 4:30 pm. Rain date: Saturday, June 9.

*other below. The lower was furnished with infinite variety, while the higher was made beautiful with marvelous jewels...and though beings and places were divided in this way, yet all form one who is called the bride, for love of the same Bridegroom made one bride of them.*

All this diversity is somehow contained within God's heart in a convergent unity. Robert Russell has depicted this unity, this single vision of the universe, using Teresa of Avila's imagery: God seen as a diamond in which every facet of creation is subsumed. This is the new creation we long for: new selves that are conscious of the beautiful cosmic convergence of all creation in God. This jewel of convergence might even be found in the *Romances* – in the tears of the infant Jesus: *But God there in the manger cried and moaned; and these tears were jewels the bride brought to the wedding.* May this indeed be our far future: that we bring to our union with God the jewel of all creation.

### **Five for Five: A Report from Come & See**

Five participants graced our fifth Come and See program over Presidents' Day weekend, bringing a wonderful blend of new voices and vibrant enthusiasm. Keeping with this year's focus on the earth, we even managed to attract a climate change consultant. Our aim was to help these young women learn about the mysterious depth of desire and passion that attract women to our life of contemplation. They learned well, as we saw from their answers when asked what they were taking away from the weekend. One said she came to this understanding: that "a life of contemplation is one where God is always present and is all around and we're supposed to remember that. I