



MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's First Reading and Gospel

In those days, like a fire there appeared the prophet Elijah whose words were as a flaming furnace. Their staff of bread he shattered, in his zeal he reduced them to straits; by the Lord's word he shut up the heavens and three times brought down fire. How awesome are you, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Whose glory is equal to yours? You were taken aloft in a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with fiery horses. You were destined, it is written, in time to come to put an end to wrath before the day of the LORD, to turn back the hearts of fathers toward their sons, and to re-establish the tribes of Jacob. Blessed is he who shall have seen you and who falls asleep in your friendship.

SIRACH 48:1-4, 9-11

As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He said in reply, "Elijah

will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also, will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

MATTHEW 17:9a, 10-13

Reflection

Historical note: In the first reading, the book of Sirach is part of the Greek Bible but not in the Jewish Canon. It is one of the deuterocanonical books accepted by the Church, originally written in Hebrew. The Latin title is Ecclesiasticus; in Greek the book was called the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach. The author lived in 190 B.C. and the scriptural quotation above is part of a meditation on salvation history.

The excerpt about Elijah was chosen because today we honor Saint John of the Cross, Carmelite priest and Doctor of the Church. In the Carmelite tradition, the prophet Elijah was considered the model and living archetype for the early hermits of Mt. Carmel when they began 800 years ago. The fiery zeal of Elijah is also expressed in the poetry of John of the Cross in his great poem, “The Living Flame of Love” quoted below.

In the Gospel passage from Matthew, Jesus mentions the return of Elijah in the person of John the Baptist, who lived among them but who was not recognized and appreciated. John suffered at the hands of a powerful unjust leader just as Jesus will suffer also “at their hands.”



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For Prayer

- 1. O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center! Since now you are not oppressive,
now consummate! if it be your will:*

tear through the veil of this sweet encounter.

*2. O sweet cautery! O delightful wound!
O gentle hand! O delicate touch
that tastes of eternal life and pays every debt!
In killing you changed death to life.*

*3. O lamps of fire! in whose splendors
the deep caverns of feeling,
once obscure and blind,
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.*

*4. How gently and lovingly you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.*

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS: THE LIVING FLAME OF LOVE

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