



· I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW ·

Wounded

Trilogy of Love
(Part II)

SERVANTS SPIRITUAL DAY

JUNE 20TH, 2026

"I am wounded by love"
(Song of Songs 2:5)



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OBJECTIVE

To provide servants with a day of honest spiritual encounter centred on the theme of “Wounded” – exploring how the wounds of service, when brought to God with honesty and trust, become not obstacles to formation but its very instruments. Through contemplation, teaching, and prayerful discussion, servants will be invited to name what they carry, to bring it before the living God, and to discover that the One who was wounded before them has already entered their wound from the inside.



AIM

1. To help servants receive the theological truth that wounds are intrinsic to genuine love, not a deviation from it – and that the Cross is not the interruption of the servant’s story but its deepest chapter.
2. To distinguish honestly between wounds that form and wounds that fester – and to equip servants with the spiritual tools to bring their wounds to God rather than to manage them alone.
3. To present the God who speaks within the wound – who meets His servants not by removing the wilderness but by entering it with them, and speaking to the heart there.
4. To help servants understand how their wound, offered to God, becomes the credential of compassion in serving others – a doorway, not a dead end.
5. To send servants home not with the wound resolved, but with it named, prayed over, and placed in the hands of the One who was wounded first.

THEME: “WOUNDED”

The theme “Wounded” is drawn from the heart of the patristic tradition and from the lived experience of every servant who has carried the weight of genuine love in service. It flows directly from Day One: having received the identity of “Beloved,” the servant discovers that to love as the Beloved loves is inevitably to be wounded. *The wound does not contradict the gift of belovedness – it is its deepest expression.*

St Gregory of Nyssa, meditating on the Song of Songs, describes the soul struck by the arrow of divine love as one who has been not damaged but enlarged: every wound opens a new space that only God can fill. This day invites the servant to receive and offer that enlargement.

The soul that has been struck by the divine love is not diminished by the wound. It is opened by it. What enters through the opening is the very life of God.

Background

The servant who has served with any depth of love knows the wound. It takes different forms in different lives: the pastoral wound of love given and not returned, years of faithful investment that seemed to bear no visible fruit; the wound of self-knowledge, the broken sight of one’s own poverty and inconsistency before the immensity of the calling; the wound of the dark night, the season of dryness and divine silence in which prayer seems to strike the ceiling and fall back; and beneath all of these, the holy wound of divine love – the aching longing for God that is itself a kind of suffering, because it reaches toward an infinity it cannot yet fully hold.

The Orthodox tradition does not counsel the servant to evade these wounds. It counsels them to receive them with open hands, to bring them to the Physician, and to allow Him to do within the wound what no amount of external management can accomplish. The Church is, as our Lord Himself describes her, a hospital – not a court in which the healthy pronounce on the sick, but a place where all are patients and the Great Physician moves among them. The servant who enters this understanding no longer needs to project invulnerability. They are free to be, in St Paul's precise phrase, “treasure in earthen vessels” – and to discover that the very fragility of the vessel is what makes the treasure visible.

The Coptic servant carries this knowledge in the marrow of their tradition. The Coptic Calendar – the Calendar of the Martyrs, Anno Martyrum – begins in 284 AD with the accession of Diocletian, the great persecutor. The Copts count time from the wound. This is not morbidity; it is the recognition that the wound is not incidental to the Church's story but constitutive of it. The Church was forged in the crucible, and the servant who carries that history carries it not as a burden but as a credential: the marks of a people who have known, across seventeen centuries, that the wound does not have the final word.

For the wound is not the servant's alone. It belongs to a pattern – the great paschal pattern at the heart of all things: Baptism, Wilderness, Cross, Resurrection, Pentecost. Beloved, then Wounded, then Poured. The servant does not stand outside this pattern and study it from a safe distance. They are drawn into it from within. The servant's formation is not the rehearsal of a programme. It is a participation in the life of the Paschal Christ – the same life that was laid down at Calvary and taken up again at dawn, still being lived out, still being offered, in every servant who has been loved, and broken, and given.

Welcome, Wounded Servants

Today we return. Not as we left – for no one who has truly served for a season returns unchanged. We carry more than we did on the first day: more love, yes, but also more weariness; more knowledge of God's goodness, but also more honest knowledge of our own poverty. We carry the weight of faces we could not reach, of seasons that bore less fruit than we had hoped, of prayers that seemed to pass through empty air. We carry the wounds.

This Spiritual Day does not ask you to set those wounds aside. It asks you to place them on the altar.

We are here today under the second word of our journey together: **Wounded**. It is not a comfortable word. It does not sit easily beside the polished language of ministry programmes and servant formation curricula. But it is an honest word – and the Fathers of our Church, who knew the cost of love from the inside, were never afraid of honest words. The Desert Fathers named their wounds with the precision of surgeons. St John Chrysostom preached from his wounds even as he was being marched into exile. And one among the elders of recent memory bore his wound for nearly a century and found in it not an obstacle to holiness but its very furnace – the place where everything that was not of God was burned away, and what remained was love.

The word “wounded” is also, in the language of the Fathers, a word of honour. To be wounded by love – struck by the divine arrow, opened by the encounter with the living God – is not a sign of failure. It is the mark of one who has drawn close enough to be touched. The Bride in the Song of Songs does not lament her wound. She announces it: “I am wounded by love” (Song of Songs 2:5). St Gregory of Nyssa hears in that announcement not complaint but the highest form of spiritual confession: I have encountered a love I cannot contain, and the encounter has left its mark.

And there is one wound above all that stands at the centre of our faith – the wounds of the Risen Christ, still present in His glorified body when He appears to His disciples on the evening of the Resurrection. He does not appear healed in the sense of being restored to the state before the Passion. He appears glorified – bearing His wounds. Thomas is invited not to touch an undamaged body but to place his finger in the marks. The wound is not erased by the Resurrection. It is transfigured by it. And it becomes the ground of belief.

This is the mystery at the heart of today. We come not to have our wounds explained away or spiritually managed. We come to bring them into the presence of the One who bore wounds first – and who, in bearing them, made of every wound a doorway.

HYMN

NIKA



Contemplation - 'Struck By The Divine Arrow'

St Gregory of Nyssa – The Wound That Expands

“I am wounded by love.” – Song of Songs 2:5



The Hebrew of the Song of Songs says she is faint with love – overcome, overwhelmed, laid low by a longing she cannot contain. The Septuagint, the Greek translation beloved by the Fathers, renders the word differently: she is wounded – struck open – by love. It is a small difference in translation and an enormous difference in theology. The Septuagint's Bride is not merely overcome. She has been struck. Something has entered her. A mark has been made that was not there before.

St Gregory of Nyssa hears this and does not flinch from the image. In his magnificent Commentary on the Song of Songs – fifteen homilies of sustained, soaring theological poetry – he develops what becomes one of the most remarkable ideas in all of patristic literature: the divine Archer, striking the soul with the arrow of love. The arrow is the Logos Himself, writes St Gregory. Its point is the Spirit. Its feathers are Scripture. And the wound it makes is not damage. It is opening.

His great insight, extending across his theology of the spiritual life, is the concept of the eternal stretching-forward of the soul toward an infinite God.

The soul that truly encounters God does not reach satiation – it reaches a deeper hunger.

It does not arrive at a point from which no further movement is possible – it discovers that every horizon opens onto another. The wound opened by divine love creates a new space in the soul that only God can fill. And He fills it – and the filling opens the soul further, and the further opening creates more space, and the space draws Him deeper still.

This is one of the most liberating insights the Fathers offer the servant who is struggling with the wound of unfulfilled spiritual longing: the ache for deeper prayer, the hunger for a fuller sense of God's presence, the longing to serve from a place of genuine love rather than habit or obligation. St Gregory's word is this: that ache is not evidence of something wrong. It is evidence that this holy stretching-forward is alive. The soul is still stretching. Still being struck. The wound is open – and the wound that is open is the wound that is being filled.

The Bride in the Song of Songs does not lament her wound. She announces it. She is not embarrassed by the mark the divine Archer has left in her. She speaks of it as her most intimate boast: I have been struck by a love I cannot contain. The inability to contain it is not a defect of her spiritual capacity. It is the nature of finite creatures encountering an infinite love. The wound is the sign that something real has happened. The mark left by a love that is not theoretical, not doctrinal, not liturgical, but personal, piercing, and present.

For the Coptic servant, there is an additional resonance. The tradition of the Desert Fathers, the monastic heartbeat of the Coptic Church, is saturated with this understanding of holy desire. Abba Isaac, speaking to the young monks at Scetis, describes the life of prayer as a life of perpetual reaching – not a life of arrival but of movement, of the soul always being drawn further into the mystery of the God who is inexhaustible. The servant who serves in the spirit of the desert tradition serves from this inexhaustible desire – and finds that the inexhaustibility is not exhaustion. It is the wound of love, kept open by the love itself, and filled, constantly and overflowing, by the same.

Of all the wounds this day names, the wound of holy longing is the one servants are least likely to speak aloud. It feels presumptuous. The servant who admits they ache for more of God fears sounding arrogant, or theatrical, or spiritually inflated. But the Fathers are unanimous: this ache is not arrogance. It is the most honest thing a servant can say. ***The heart that is not yet aching toward God has not yet been struck. The heart that aches has been found.***

Talk - ‘The Wound We Cannot Escape – and the God Who Enters It’

The Cross and the Wilderness – Why the Wound Belongs, and What God Does Within It

Verses

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” – John 12:24

“Behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her heart.” – Hosea 2:14

Key Focus

The wound is not incidental to love – it is intrinsic. The Cross is not the interruption of the servant’s story. It is its deepest chapter.

God does not absent Himself from the wound. He enters it. The wilderness is not abandonment – it is the place He has chosen to speak.

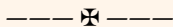


Contemplation - ‘Glory to God for All Things’

St John Chrysostom – The Wound That Becomes Doxology

“Glory to God for all things.”

– The last words of St John Chrysostom, † 407 AD



He is remembered as the Golden-Mouthed: the greatest preacher of the ancient Church, the Patriarch of Constantinople, the man whose homilies on the Gospels shook cities and drove the powerful to repentance. When he spoke, the crowd was silent with a silence that felt like listening for one’s own name. But it is not his eloquence that speaks most powerfully to the wounded servant. It is his end.

St John Chrysostom was deposed twice. The first deposition lasted only days before popular pressure and a convenient earthquake brought him back. The second was permanent. The Empress Eudoxia, whom he had challenged publicly for her vanity and indulgence of the rich at the expense of the poor, secured his exile with the support of a synod he would not have called legitimate. He was sent first to Cucusus in Armenia – a city he described as exposed to every wind and every hostility – and then, when it became clear he was still drawing visitors and influence, the order was given to march him further, to Pityus on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. He did not survive the march. Forced to walk in the rain regardless of his age and illness, forbidden to shelter, he died in September of 407 AD at the small town of Comana in Pontus.

Those with him recorded that his final words were these:

Glory to God for all things.

Not for the good things. Not for the homilies that shook Antioch, or the thousands baptised under his episcopate, or the moments of unmistakable grace that had marked his ministry across three decades. For all things – including the exile, including the cold, including the abandonment by those he had formed and loved, including the end that looked from the outside like the defeat of everything he had worked for.

This is not stoicism. Stoicism is the refusal of pain through an act of will – the determination to remain unmoved by what happens. St Chrysostom was moved. His letters from Cucusus describe real loneliness, real cold, real grief at being separated from his people. He felt the wound fully. He did not manage it from a distance. What he did – what the long formation in prayer and the Liturgy and the honest offering of repeated wounds to God had made possible in him – was to take the wound and offer it. To say, from inside the exile: You are here. And You are good. And therefore: Glory.

The doxology is not what St Chrysostom achieved through spiritual willpower. It is what God had been building in him across a lifetime of smaller offerings – through the wounds of misunderstanding in Antioch, of political machination in Constantinople, of watching those he loved fall away, of serving a people who were sometimes ungrateful and sometimes faithless and always, in his eyes, worth every sacrifice. He arrived at the final doxology because he had been practising smaller doxologies all his life.

The servant who meditates on this is not asked to arrive at “Glory to God for all things” today. They are asked a more manageable and more demanding question: Am I on the path that leads there? Is there a wound in my current service from which I am, by God’s grace and my own imperfect cooperation, learning to offer something? Not resignation. Not bitterness swallowed and relabelled. But genuine offering,

the wound placed in the hands of the One who permitted it, who is present within it, and who is doing something inside it that is not yet visible but is already real.

St John Chrysostom’s feast day is observed in the Coptic Orthodox Church on the thirteenth of Hatour. When we commemorate him, we commemorate not only the Golden-Mouthed preacher. We commemorate the man who stood in the rain on the road to Pityus and found, at the very last, that he had nothing left to offer but everything – and that everything was enough.

SAINT JOHN

CHRYSOSTOM

SAINT OLYMPIA

THE DEACONESS



SO RISE UP AND EXTEND
YOUR HAND TO ME, THAT I
MAY WRITE TO THEE THAT WHICH I DESIRE - THAT YOU
ARE NOT DISQUIETED, THAT YOU ARE NOT WEeping,
BUT RATHER THAT YOU ARE LIVING IN SE-
RENITY & JOY...

Workshop 1 - The Anatomy of the Wound

Read 2 **Corinthians 4:7–12** slowly, and then sit in silence for one minute before beginning the discussion.

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” – 2 Corinthians 4:7–10

The earthen vessel is not a defect in the plan. It is the plan. St Paul does not say: “In spite of my weakness, God works.” He says: “That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” The weakness is the purpose. The wound is not the obstacle to God’s power through the servant. It is the occasion of it. The servant who waits until they are whole before being useful has misread the logic of the Kingdom entirely. The broken jar is precisely the one through which the light can escape.

Question 1: The Fathers distinguish between wounds that form and wounds that fester. In your experience of service, can you identify a wound – a disappointment, a failure, a difficult season – that has, over time, actually deepened your compassion or your dependence on God? Looking back, what made the difference between formation and bitterness in that experience?

Question 2: The Fathers make a careful distinction between holy mourning – the gift of tears that opens the heart before God – and the noon-day despair, that grey, corrosive spirit that convinces the servant that nothing is worth the effort, that God is silent, that the work is futile. One opens; the other closes. Where are you in that spectrum right now, in your service? Is there a place where honest confusion has begun to tip toward the despair that closes?

Question 3: The Holy Spirit fills humble and broken vessels. The Spirit descended at Pentecost not on triumphant disciples but on frightened people hiding behind locked doors – and before Pentecost, the Risen Lord had already breathed on them in that same locked room. Where are the locked doors in your service – the rooms you have sealed off from God’s presence because you are too ashamed or too frightened to open them? What would it mean to open one of those doors today – not all of them, just one?

Question 4: There are two entirely different sources from which a servant can serve. The first is effort: the servant who pushes toward goodness through discipline, willpower, and the determined management of their own spiritual life. The second is the servant who has been so genuinely and personally struck by love for Christ that the service flows not from effort but from capture – from being seized by something that the person did not produce and cannot command.

These two servants may look identical from the outside. From the inside, they inhabit entirely different worlds. “You must love and suffer – suffer for the One you love.” The suffering here is not pastoral disappointment alone. It is the suffering of a love so serious, so personal, so consuming that it costs the servant something simply to carry it. This wound – the wound of being genuinely, not theoretically, in love with Christ – is the wound every servant must seek above all others. Without it, the service is activity. With it, the service is transmission.

Can you identify a season in your service when you served from the second place – when something was flowing through you rather than being produced by you? And if there have been longer seasons of effort alone – what was happening in your interior life during those seasons?

Contemplation- ‘The Altar Receives All Things’

The Divine Liturgy – Where the Wound Is Placed on the Altar

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” – Romans 12:1



St Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the Ephesians on his way to martyrdom in Rome, describes the Eucharist as the medicine of immortality (*pharmakon athanasias*). He is not speaking metaphorically. He is speaking as a man who knows he is about to be torn apart by wild beasts, who has received the wounds of the journey, and who testifies from inside that knowledge: the Body and Blood of the Lord is the medicine. Not the reward for having recovered. Not the celebration of having managed the wound. The medicine. For the sick. For the broken. For the wounded servant who comes to the altar carrying what they could not leave at the door.

The Coptic servant lives liturgically in a way that much of the Christian world does not. The Divine Liturgy is not one activity among others in the Coptic week. It is the event around which the week is oriented – the moment toward which the servant moves all through the week and from which they depart strengthened, or consoled, or at least accompanied. The preparatory prayers, the prayer of thanksgiving, the prayer of reconciliation before the anaphora, the Great Entrance, the fraction, the communion – each of these is a moment in which the wound the servant carries can be deliberately offered.

The prayer of reconciliation is particularly important for the wounded servant. Before the anaphora begins, the deacon calls: “Salute one another with a holy kiss.” This is not a formality. It is the Church requiring of every person present that they not approach the mystery of the Cross while nursing an unresolved wound against their brother or sister. It is the Lord’s own instruction: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23–24)

The Liturgy is not a space the servant enters with their wound managed. It is a space they enter with their wound present – and the Liturgy itself does what the servant cannot do alone.

St John Chrysostom, in his homilies on priesthood, speaks with awe about what happens at the altar. He does not describe the priest as a spiritual professional performing a religious function. He describes him as standing in a place where heaven and earth are not separated, where the sacrifice of Calvary is made present, where the wounds of Christ are not historical but living. The servant who participates in that Liturgy – who brings to the altar the wound of their service and unites it consciously, to the wound of the Cross – is not performing an act of spiritual management. They are doing the most fundamentally Orthodox thing available to them: they are placing the wound inside the great offering.

The Coptic Liturgy of St Basil is explicit about this. The anaphora prays: “Remember, O Lord, those who are sick and suffering, those in need, the poor and the needy.” It names the suffering. It brings it in. It does not ask the suffering to wait outside until the holy things are over. The Liturgy was never designed for the well and the strong. It was designed, as St Ignatius knew on the road to the arena, for those who need medicine. And the medicine it offers is not consolation in the sense of comfort alone. It is the Body and Blood of the One who, by descending into the lowest wound, made of it a place of encounter.

The practical invitation for the servant is this: do not leave the wound in the car before entering the church. Bring it in. Name it in the silence of the preparation prayers. Offer it consciously at the Great Entrance. Receive at the communion rail not as a graduate of the week’s spiritual exercises but as one who needs the medicine – and who is receiving, in that moment, the same medicine that sustained St Chrysostom in Cucusus, that held Pope Kyrillos VI in the desert, that accompanied St Pishoy Kamel on the thin mattress. The altar is not a place of arrival. It is a place of offering. And the servant who brings their wound to it discovers, Sunday by Sunday, that the altar receives all things.



DAVID.

Workshop 2 - The God Who Speaks in the Wound

Read **Hosea 2:14** aloud once more, slowly.

“Behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her heart.” – Hosea 2:14

The wilderness is not where the love story ends. It is where it went deepest. The questions in this workshop are for those who know that wilderness from the inside – who have served in seasons of silence and dryness and the apparent absence of God, and who carry the question: what was He doing in it? This is the workshop where we find out. Or begin to.

Question 1: Has there been a season in your service – or in your prayer life – where God seemed completely silent? Prayer reaching nothing, the Liturgy feeling flat, the sense that heaven had closed its door. Looking back on that season now, from the outside of it: what do you understand was happening that you could not see from the inside? And if you are in that season now – what would it mean to receive it as preparation rather than punishment?

Question 2: The Church is a hospital, not a law court. The Physician who presides over it is not distributing verdicts but healing wounds. And the servant who enters His service is being welcomed not as a physician already cured, but as a patient who has found the clinic – who is now, in the process of their own healing, pointing others toward the same Physician. Is there a place in your service where you have been performing wholeness rather than offering poverty? Where the pressure to appear spiritually robust has prevented you from serving from the place of honest need? What would it free you to stop pretending?

Question 3: Romans 8:26–27 says the Spirit intercedes through us with groanings that cannot be uttered. Have you known prayer reduced to a groan – stripped of all eloquence, no words, just the naked cry? What season was that? And does it change anything to know that the Spirit receives even the groan – that the wordless cry is not a failure of prayer but, by St Paul’s own testimony, the Holy Spirit praying through you at the depth no polished vocabulary can reach?

Question 4: The prodigal in Luke 15 came to himself inside the wound – the clarity to return came through the hunger and the distance, not despite them. The wound in the far country was the wound that brought him home. Can you identify a wound in your own service, or in your own life, that has turned you back toward God rather than away – that produced clarity rather than bitterness? What was the turning point? And is there someone in your service community right now who is in their own far country, for whom your wound might be the very thing that makes you credible to accompany them home?

Question 5: The teaching at the heart of Orthodox ascetical wisdom is both demanding and liberating: our thoughts determine our lives. When you are in the middle of a wound – not looking back at a healed season, but in it now – what do you actually do with it in the hours that follow? Do you bring it to prayer? Carry it in thought? Manage it alone? Share it with a spiritual father? And what would it look like, practically and specifically, to give that particular wound to God rather than rehearse it – not as a spiritual exercise, but as a genuine act of trust?

Contemplation - 'The Wound That Does Not Disappear'

The Risen Christ and the Servant's Marks

"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

— John 20:25

— — — ✠ — — —

Thomas has missed it. When the disciples say to him "We have seen the Lord," his answer is not disbelief in the Resurrection as a theological proposition. It is something more personal than that. It is the response of a man who will not accept a secondhand report of the most important event in history. He does not want a testimony. He wants the marks. Unless I see, unless I put my finger into the print of the nails — unless I put my hand into His side: he is asking for contact with the wound, not with the glory of the Resurrection viewed from a safe distance.

Eight days later, the Lord comes. He stands among them, and He does not rebuke Thomas for his demand. He offers exactly what was asked for: Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. The wound is still there. The glorified, risen, death-conquering body of the Son of God still carries the marks of the Passion. The Resurrection has not removed them. The Resurrection has transfigured them — transformed what was the evidence of death into the evidence of life.

Thomas touches the wound and confesses: My Lord and my God. This is the highest Christological confession in the entire Gospel of St John — and it is made, not in response to a miracle, not in response to a teaching, but in response to a wound. The wound is the doorway to the deepest faith. The marks in the hands of the Risen Christ are the ground of the fullest confession. What the wound carries, when it has passed through the hands of God, is not the evidence of defeat. It is the proof that Love does not ultimately lose.

The servant who carries wounds from their service – and who has brought those wounds, however frail the offering, to the God who was wounded before them – is not marked by failure. They carry, in those marks, something that the unwounded servant does not possess: the capacity for a particular kind of encounter. Not the encounter of strength meeting weakness from above, but the encounter of wound meeting wound at the same level, in the same dark, with the testimony of one who has been held.

St Paul understood this when he wrote: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17). The marks are the identification. They are the sign that the servant has not served from a comfortable distance. They are the mark of one who drew close enough to be touched – and was. And the marks are permanent. They are carried into the Resurrection, just as our Lord carried His. They are not shed on the threshold of glory. They are taken up into it. And there, in the light of the Resurrection, they shine not as the evidence of what was lost but as the evidence of what Love was willing to enter in order to find us.

The Coptic liturgical tradition carries this knowing in its very bones.

The Church that begins its calendar from the wound prays its Liturgy from within the wound – and finds there, at the very centre of it, not emptiness but the Body and Blood of the One who entered every wound from the inside, and made of the deepest wound the door of life.

You are not the same as when this day began. The wound is the same. But something has shifted in how it is held. It is still yours. But it has been placed, however tentatively, in the hands of the One who was wounded before you. And the One who holds it knows what to do with it. He has done it before.



ΑΠΑΡΧΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΓΕΝΕΣ

Νικόλαος

YOU ABANDON
NOTHING YOU
HAVE MADE,
ONLY YOU ARE
NEAR EVEN TO
THOSE WHO GO
FARTHEST
FROM YOU.



Contemplation - ‘The Restless Heart’

St Augustine and St John Climacus – The Wound of Holy Longing

“Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.” – St Augustine, Confessions, Book I



St Augustine wrote those words at the beginning of the most honest book ever written about the human soul's search for God. He wrote them after a decade of seeking in the wrong places – philosophy, pleasure, reputation, a brilliant career, the love of a woman he could not marry, the approval of men who could not give him what he most deeply needed. He wrote them not as a man who had arrived, but as a man who had been found, and who recognised, looking back over the landscape of his wasted years, that the restlessness had been the clue all along. The wound had been doing its work even in the years when he refused to name it. His heart had been reaching toward God even while his hands were reaching toward everything else.

The restlessness St Augustine names is not a character flaw. It is not a spiritual deficiency or a sign of weak faith. It is the structural consequence of being made for an infinite love and living in a finite world. He is describing what it is to be human before God – to be a creature whose deepest capacity cannot be satisfied by anything less than the One who made it. Every servant who has given their best years to a ministry, a community, a vision – and found that even the good fruit was not quite enough, that there was still something they were reaching for that the work itself could not supply – knows this restlessness from the inside.

The wound of holy longing takes a particular form in the servant. It is not the wound of failure. It is the wound of the person who has served well, who has loved genuinely, who has given much – and who finds, in honest moments, that they are still hungry. Still reaching. Still not quite arrived at the thing they most want, which is not a more successful ministry but a fuller encounter with the living God who called them into this ministry in the first place. They wanted more of Him, and the service – however fruitful – gave them more of the work but not always more of the Person.

St John Climacus, standing at the summit of his Ladder of Divine Ascent, describes the soul in love with God as one permanently and happily unfinished. Love, he writes, by its very nature, is a reaching toward God. The one who loves God is always longing for Him – not with the longing of deprivation but with the longing of the one who has tasted and found the taste inexhaustible. Every encounter with God opens a new horizon. Every answered prayer reveals a deeper prayer that was waiting underneath it. The soul that has genuinely met the living God does not reach satisfaction. It reaches a deeper hunger.

This is the same teaching St Gregory of Nyssa names as the eternal stretching-forward of the soul – what the previous contemplation explored in its mystical dimension. But St Augustine and St Climacus bring it into the servant's daily experience with a practicality that Gregory's soaring theology does not always reach. The servant who prays the morning prayers and finds their mind elsewhere is not failing at prayer. The servant who celebrates the Liturgy and feels, on some Sundays, that heaven has not come as close as it does on others – is not failing at the Liturgy. The servant who loves their class and gives their best and still drives home with a quiet ache that something more was supposed to happen – is not failing at service. They are living the restlessness St Augustine described. And that restlessness, honestly held, is not the opposite of faith. It is one of its deepest expressions.

There is one dimension of this wound that servants rarely speak aloud, because it feels presumptuous. It is the ache for more of God Himself – not more spiritual experiences, not more fruit in ministry, but more of the Person. The servant who dares to say “I have not found enough of Him yet – I want more” is not being arrogant. They are being honest about a longing that the Fathers consider the mark of genuine spiritual life. One of the great witnesses of the twentieth century spent nearly a century with this wound – the wound of a love for God so intense that it coloured every encounter of his ministry, and from which he would not have recovered even if he could. He did not call it a problem. He called it the life.

The servant is invited to receive the restlessness as the document the Fathers say it is: the proof that the heart is alive to God, that the encounter has been real, that the hunger is the hunger of the one who has already tasted and cannot stop.

The heart that is not restless toward God is the heart that has not yet been struck.

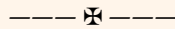
The heart that aches is the heart that knows, however imperfectly, what it was made for. And the One for whom it aches is not indifferent to that aching. He made the heart that way. He is the one it is reaching toward. And He does not remain at a distance from those who reach.

Contemplation - 'Wounded in the Seeking'

The Bride Struck at the Walls – The wound that comes from going Out

“The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.”

— Song of Songs 5:7



The Bride has already been found once. Earlier in the Song she searched, and she found Him, and she brought Him to her mother's house, and the love story seemed to have arrived at its destination. But the Song of Songs does not end there – because the encounter with divine love does not end there. It opens further. The Beloved withdraws again, not out of indifference but out of an invitation to a deeper seeking, a more costly love, a pursuit that will cost the Bride more than the first one did.

So she goes out again. Into the night. Through the city. Searching. And this time the watchmen find her before she finds Him – and they do not assist her search. They strike her. They wound her. They take her veil.

The Fathers of the Church sat with this passage and what they found in it was not a complaint but a confession – and not a sign of abandonment but of proximity. The Bride was struck because she went out. She was wounded because she was close enough to the walls of the city – the city where the Beloved dwells – that the watchmen encountered her. The wound did not come to her sitting at home in safety. It came to her in the act of love-driven searching. She earned the wound by refusing to stop seeking.

The veil that was taken from her is the last layer of self-protection. The first search had cost her something, but she had retained, perhaps, the veil of her own spiritual confidence – the sense that she knew where to look, that the search was within her capacity, that love was something she could navigate.

The second search strips even that. The veil is gone. She stands before the walls with no protection and no dignity and nothing left but the one thing she went out with: the question. Have you seen the one I love? She asks it of the watchmen who just struck her. She does not stop to nurse the wound. She keeps seeking.

This is the particular wound that the servant will recognise with a shock of familiarity. It is not the wound of failure – the wound of having stayed home and played it safe and done nothing. It is the wound of the second search, the wound of one who has already been found and loved and served, and has gone out again anyway, further this time, into a darkness more disorienting than the first, and has been struck in the going. The years of faithful, unglamorous, fruit-unseen service. The pastoral relationships that cost everything and seemed to yield nothing. The prayer life that stripped away every spiritual consolation and left only the bare cry: Where are You? Have You seen the one I love?

The Bride who has been struck at the walls and has lost her veil is closer to the Beloved than she was when she began. This is not comfortable news. It does not make the striking hurt less. But it orients the wound correctly – not as evidence that the search has failed, but as evidence that it has reached the place where the real encounter happens. The walls where the watchmen stand are the walls of the city where He dwells. She has come far enough to be struck. And the One who permitted the striking is already moving to meet her.

For the servant, the ancient voices that carried this teaching were never merely academic. The Desert Fathers who went out into the Egyptian wilderness did not find it comfortable. The fathers and mothers who have served faithfully in the diaspora, in communities that did not always understand them – they know what it is to go out in the night and be struck at the walls. They know the particular loneliness of the second search, when the first joy has faded and the road ahead is longer than expected. And they know – those who have persevered – that the wound at the wall is not the end of the story. It is, in the economy of God's love, almost always the beginning of the deepest chapter.



PETER •

Contemplation - ‘The Gift of Honest Poverty’

The Wound of Self-Knowledge – The Servant’s Most Private Wound

“A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

– Psalm 51:17

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There is a wound that most servants carry more privately than any other. It is not the wound of being misunderstood by a colleague or abandoned by someone they invested in. Those wounds can at least be named in safe company. This wound tends to stay inside, in the dark, because naming it feels like a confession that disqualifies rather than a prayer that opens. It is the wound of looking honestly at yourself – at your own motives, your own inconsistency, your own poverty before the demands of the calling – and not liking what you see.

The servant who has been in ministry for any length of time knows this wound with specificity. They know the Sunday morning when they led a session about love for the young people in front of them while privately resenting one of their colleagues in the next room. They know the moment they gave pastoral attention to a struggling family while part of their mind was somewhere else entirely. They know the season when the prayers felt mechanical, the preparation felt like duty, and the service felt like performance – and when they are honest, they cannot be entirely sure that season ended. The gap between what they are called to be and what they actually are is very visible, from the inside, in uncomfortable detail.

The tradition of the Church is precise about what to do with this wound, and the precision is important because two very different responses are possible. The first is guilt – the kind of self-recrimination that turns inward and stays there, rehearsing the poverty, cataloguing the failures, reaching no resolution and deepening no trust. This is what the Desert Fathers called the counterfeit of repentance: it has the appearance of spiritual seriousness but produces only paralysis. The soul that is absorbed in its own failures has not moved toward God. It has simply moved from one kind of self-absorption to another.

The second response is what the Fathers call holy mourning – the gift of tears that comes from seeing oneself clearly before God and bringing what one sees directly into His presence. The difference between the two is not in the severity of what is seen. It is in the direction of the gaze. Guilt looks at the self and stays there. Holy mourning looks at the self and then immediately looks up. The Psalmist does both in the same breath: I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me – and then, in the same movement: create in me a clean heart, O God (Psalm 51:3, 10). The wound of honest self-knowledge, brought to God rather than nursed alone, is the beginning of the very humility the Fathers consider the summit of Christian life.

Pope Shenouda III, in his meditations on the Song of Songs, observes something remarkable about the Bride's search for the Beloved: that the searching itself reveals to her how little she has, how inadequate she is, how poor her resources are for finding the One she seeks. She goes out. She is struck. She loses her veil. And what is taken from her in that process – the veil of her own spiritual confidence, the sense that she was capable of managing the search – is precisely what had been standing between her and the fullness of the encounter. The poverty is the path. The discovery of inadequacy is not the obstacle to finding God. It is the condition of finding Him honestly.

The servant who has served faithfully for years and who has come, through that service, to a genuinely humble knowledge of their own poverty – who no longer entertains illusions about the purity of their motives or the consistency of their love – is not a failed servant. They are a formed one. The servant who still believes they are more or less equal to the task, whose self-knowledge has not yet been deepened by the honest mirror of prolonged service, has not yet received the gift. The gift is not comfortable. But without it, what the servant offers is performance dressed as service. With it, what they offer is the genuinely broken vessel through which the light, as St Paul insists, can actually escape.

The Coptic tradition has built this wound into its liturgical rhythm with great pastoral wisdom. The preparatory prayers before the Divine Liturgy are not triumphant. They are confessional – the servant approaching the altar through the narrow door of honest self-offering. The Book of Hours (the Agpeya) provides seven daily moments of the same movement: I am small, I am insufficient, I bring what I have, receive it.

The daily examination of conscience is not an exercise in self-punishment. It is the Church's invitation to keep the wound of self-knowledge clean – to bring it regularly into the light of the presence of God, where it becomes not the source of shame but the ground of genuine and continuing encounter.

This is the gift in the wound of honest poverty: the servant who knows they cannot do this alone has learned the one thing their service most requires them to know. They have been freed from the exhaustion of pretending otherwise. They have been given, in the place of self-sufficiency, a dependence on God that is not weakness but the truest form of strength the tradition knows. The broken and the contrite heart, the Psalmist promises, God will not despise. He will not turn away from the servant who comes with nothing to offer but what they honestly are. That – and the Fathers are unanimous on this – is the servant He has always most wanted.



Contemplation - 'What Our Thoughts Do to Us'

The Wound Transformed From Within

“Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:7



Those who made their way to a certain monastery in Serbia to sit with an old monk in his later years did not come looking for theology. They came because of something they had heard, or sensed, or could not quite articulate: that there was, in the presence of this old man, a stillness. A quality of peace that was not merely temperamental or produced by the serenity of the monastic environment. A peace that seemed to come from somewhere deeper than personality, deeper than the absence of disturbance. A peace that felt, to those who sat in it, like standing in a warm room after a long time in the cold.

That peace did not arrive through the absence of suffering. It arrived through the interior transformation of suffering across many decades.

He had been imprisoned. He had been subjected to deliberate physical and psychological humiliation by the communist authorities who governed Yugoslavia for much of his ministry. He had known chronic illness, material deprivation, and the particular loneliness of a monastic life lived under a regime that regarded the Church as an enemy to be subdued. He knew what wounds were. He did not speak of them from a comfortable distance.

What he taught – and what he embodied – was this: our thoughts determine our lives. The phrase sounds simple. It is, in fact, a compressed summary of Orthodox anthropology, of the entire ascetical tradition of the Eastern Church, of the Philokalia and the desert Fathers and the practical wisdom of centuries of monasticism. In Orthodox understanding, the spiritual intellect – the eye of the soul, the capacity in the human person that is made for direct knowledge of God – is the centre of the human being.

ΠΙΣΤΙΣ

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ΑΓΑΠΗ



That deep faculty shapes the interior climate. The interior climate shapes everything the servant gives to those around them.

The servant who carries a wound in their service and who spends the subsequent hours rehearsing it in thought – replaying the difficult conversation, the thankless response, the years of what seemed to be wasted effort – is cultivating a climate the wound will eventually come to dominate. Not because the wound is stronger than God, but because the servant has given it more interior territory than God. They have moved the wound to the centre and built their interior life around it. And from the centre, it spreads.

The servant who is wounded and who, repeatedly and imperfectly and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, refuses to give the wound that central territory – who brings the specific thought to God as it arises, who returns the interior gaze to Christ when the gaze has drifted to the wound – discovers in time what the long monastic tradition has always known: that the wound can exist within an interior climate of peace. It does not vanish. It is not suppressed or spiritually managed into invisibility. But it is no longer master. It has been displaced from the centre. And from the centre, where the wound was, something else has been permitted to take residence.

This is the protection of the interior life that the wisest among the wounded lived and taught – and that the servants gathered on this day are invited to receive not as a technique but as a way of being. It is not denial. It is not the performance of positivity. It is the hard and holy and daily work of refusing, with God's help, to give the wound more interior space than it deserves – and offering that space, instead, to the One who was wounded before us and who has made of His wound the ground of all peace.

Contemplation - 'Descended into Desolation'

The Dark Night as Preparation

"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice!"

— Psalm 130:1-2

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There are wounds that announce themselves – that arrive with a recognisable face, that can be named and prayed over and brought, in some form, to a spiritual father. And then there is the wound described by those who have walked furthest into the dark with an honesty that is almost uncomfortable to encounter – the wound that has no face, because it is not the wound of something that happened but the wound of something that has gone: the withdrawal of all spiritual consolation, the complete removal of the experienced sense of God's presence, the silence where there was warmth, the wall where there was an open door.

The monastic tradition does not call this the absence of God. It calls it – with precision – the most hidden form of God's presence.

Those seasons are described with unflinching honesty – not days, not weeks, but seasons – in which prayer seemed to strike the ceiling and fall back. Seasons in which the Liturgy was celebrated without the felt participation of heaven. Seasons in which one sat before the icon and felt, not the warmth of encounter, but the blankness of interior poverty. The tradition does not explain these seasons away. It does not offer three steps toward restoration. It sits in them. It prays from the void. It waits with the patience of those who have learned that God has not gone. He has gone quiet. And there is a difference.

On the other side of those seasons – after years, not days – comes the testimony of what was happening in the dark. The capacity eventually forged to intercede for others with a depth and an authority that astonished those around them, to carry in prayer the suffering of the world with a weight that was personal rather than notional, to accompany the most desperate souls with a compassion that seemed to come from a place deeper than empathy.

That capacity was forged in the desolation. Not despite it. Through it.

The conclusion of those who have passed through such seasons, offered not as theory but as testimony, is one the servant in dryness needs more than almost any other word: the one who has never descended cannot accompany the descent of another. The servant who has known only consolation in prayer – who has never sat in the silence where God seemed absent, never prayed from the void of their own poverty – cannot fully sit with the person who is in that silence now. They can offer advice. They can offer encouragement. But they cannot offer the particular gift of one who has been in the same dark, and was held, and came back with the testimony that the dark was not empty.

The Coptic servant who encounters this teaching will recognise something in it from their own tradition. The Silent Patriarch, His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI, was known not for eloquence but for a presence. Those who came to him in crisis often reported that he said very little – sometimes nothing at all. What they received from him was not information but transmission: the quiet of a man who had spent so many hours in the dark before God that he had become, in some way, a living space of God's presence. His silence was not emptiness. It was the fruit of desolations he had brought to God and been held through. The seed of his intercession for others was planted in the dark seasons of his own poverty.

For the servant who is currently in such a season: this is not abandonment. This is preparation. The seed is being buried. The dying that precedes the grain – the dying that John 12:24 describes as the condition of fruitfulness – is happening in the dark. You cannot see it. You may not feel it. But the testimony of those who have walked through the same dark, and of the long line of Fathers who walked through it before them, is that:

The dark before the dawn is not evidence against the dawn. It is evidence that the dawn is nearer than it appears.

CHRIST THE GOOD
SAMARITAN



A question to carry away from this contemplation:

Is there a person in your service community – a young person in crisis, a struggling family, a colleague in ministry – whose darkness you have found genuinely difficult to enter? Could it be that the wound of your own desolation or failure is precisely what would equip you to sit with them – not with answers, but with presence?

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Contemplation - ‘Have You Sinned, and Come to Complain?’

The Wound Turned Outward – When the Father of Confession Refuses to Console

“Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

— Matthew 5:44

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A young servant came to his father of confession carrying a wound he was sure was justified. He had been serving faithfully in his church, teaching his class, giving his time. Another servant had seen him distribute calendars to his group and, missing his share, came across the room and shouted at him in front of all the children. The entire church fell silent. Every class turned to watch. The young man stood without retaliating. He did not raise his voice or fight back. He waited until the other servant was led away, then continued his lesson.

The following week he went to confession. He told the story in full: the humiliation, the injustice, the public shame before the children, his own silence and restraint. He expected, at the end of it, a word of comfort. He expected to be told that he had done well to hold his tongue. He expected consolation.

The father of confession looked at him and said: “Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?”

The young man was bewildered. He thought he had not been heard. He told the story again. The answer was the same: “I heard you the first time. Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?”

And then came the examination that the young servant had not expected and would never forget. Is this man not your brother? Yes. And did the devil trick him? Yes. And he fell into the sin of anger? Yes. Then: How much did you pray for your brother before you came to me? How much did you fast for your brother, that the Lord might remove his anger? How many prostrations did you make for him?

The answer to each question was the same. Nothing. He had done none of these things. He had come straight to confession to tell the story.

And so the father of confession said what had to be said: “Did I not tell you that you sinned, and came to me to complain?” He sent the young man away not with absolution but with an assignment: Go. Pray. Fast. Do prostrations. And after that, come back.

This story has been passed between servants like a torch, because it illuminates something the wound almost always conceals. The servant who has been genuinely wronged is almost always focused on the wrong. They replay it. They name it. They bring it to confession, or to a trusted friend, or to God in prayer – and in every case they carry it as a grievance, however quietly and however legitimately.

What the father of confession did was not deny the wound. The humiliation had happened. The other servant had sinned. None of that was in dispute.

What he refused to do was allow the wound to remain the centre of the story. He turned the young servant entirely around. Your brother has fallen. You are the one positioned to intercede for him. You carry this not as a grievance to be processed but as a responsibility to be fulfilled. The wound is not yours to nurse. It is yours to pray from.

This is one of the most demanding teachings in the entire tradition of Coptic spiritual formation, and it is also one of the most liberating. The servant who carries the wound of another’s sin against them is not simply a victim of that sin. They are, by the same wound, invited into an intercession uniquely theirs. They know the shape of that sin from the inside. They have felt what it does. No one can pray for that brother or sister more specifically, more honestly, more effectively than the one who was wounded by them – if the wound is brought to prayer rather than to complaint.

The father of confession who raised saints from his spiritual children did it precisely this way: by refusing to allow the wound to become a possession, and insisting that it become instead a prayer.

The Orthodox tradition names what happened to the young servant in that confession with a word that deserves to be recovered from theological abstraction: the turning of the whole person (*metanoia*). Not merely remorse for sin, not the management of guilt, but the reorientation of the deepest self in a new direction. The young servant came to confession with his whole interior attention fixed on the wound, on the one who had inflicted it, on the injustice that had been done. The father of confession turned him around: away from the wound received, toward the brother who had fallen and needed intercession. That turning – sharp, painful, unglamorous – was true repentance. It is what the sacrament of confession is always, at its deepest, doing: not counting up the wrongs and pronouncing absolution, but reorienting the interior gaze toward God and neighbour. The servant who leaves confession still carrying the wound as a grievance has, in some sense, not yet confessed it. The servant who leaves with their whole interior gaze turned toward intercession for the one who wounded them has.

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Contemplation - “She Stood”

The Theotokos – The Prototype of the Wounded Servant

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother.” – John 19:25



Simeon told her thirty-three years before it happened. He took the infant into his arms in the Temple, blessed God, and then turned to Mary with a word no mother should hear about her child: “A sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:35). She received this prophecy on the eighth day of her Son’s life. She carried it for the full length of His earthly ministry – through the hidden years of Nazareth, through the public ministry, through every healing and every confrontation and every moment she watched the world misunderstand, reject, and plot against the One she knew from the inside out. She carried the wound of that prophecy before the wound itself arrived.

And when it arrived, she stood.

The Greek word the Evangelist uses is precise and deliberate: the active word meaning she was standing firm. Not collapsed. Not watching from a distance. Standing at the foot of the Cross, close enough to hear His breathing, close enough to see His face, present in the wound with the full weight of maternal love and the full cost of what that love required her to witness. Every other account of the Crucifixion speaks of the disciples having fled. She did not flee. She stood.

This is not the endurance of someone who has suppressed their pain. The Coptic tradition has never read the Theotokos as emotionally absent from the Passion. The Theotokia hymns – sung at every Hour, woven into the fabric of every liturgical day – describe her grief with an honesty that is sometimes startling: her tears, her cries, the desolation she carried. The tradition does not ask her to perform composure. It asks something harder: to remain present in the wound, to stay at the Cross, to receive into her own soul what Simeon had told her was coming. The sword pierced. And she stood.

In the Coptic midnight praise, the tasbeha, the faithful gather in the dark hours and cry out: Ya Umm al-Nour – O Mother of the Light. They bring to her what they carry: the grief of the day, the wound of the week, the chronic ache of service that costs more than it appears to return. They bring it to her not because she is a solution but because she is a companion – one who has stood in a wound greater than any they will ever carry, and who remains, still, interceding from within it.

The servant who has sat with a suffering person they love and could not help, who has watched a young person they invested years in walk away from the faith, who has carried the grief of another's darkness into their own prayer and found it almost unbearable – this servant knows something of what it means to stand at the Cross. Not the Cross of personal suffering only, but the Cross of love that suffers in another's suffering. This is the wound the Theotokos bears, and it is the wound she consecrated by choosing not to look away.

St Cyril of Alexandria, whose theology of the Incarnation insists on the full humanity of the One born of her, also insists on what this means for her: she bore in her body and her soul the full weight of what it cost God to become human and to die. She is not a symbol of passive acceptance. She is the prototype of the servant who loves so completely that they will stand in whatever the love requires them to stand in – and who discovers, standing there, that they are not standing alone. The Beloved Disciple was given to her in that moment. She was given to him. Neither stood in the wound without the other.

For the Coptic servant, she is always near. The Coptic Church commemorates the Theotokos on the twenty-first of every Coptic month without exception – a liturgical rhythm that ensures no month passes without her name on the lips of the faithful. This is not sentiment. It is the Church's pastoral wisdom: the servant who forgets to run to her will carry alone what was always meant to be carried together. She stood at the Cross. She stands still. And she knows how to stand with those who are standing in their own.

· I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW ·



Iconography

The Artist's Vision

"Christ in this icon is the Redeeming Groom. He stoops down to His Bride, descends to her Hell, and much like Eve, restores her from the shame and guilt of her nakedness.

The early morning of her trial became the dawn of her new life, revealed by the Light Himself."

The icon holds two figures close enough to touch. A man in white robes, his head encircled by a golden halo from which light radiates in every direction – blue and gold and red, filling the space behind them both. A woman in the same light, her face turned toward His, His hand reaching to touch her cheek. The inscription at the top: I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW. There is nothing in the image that speaks of a courtroom, of accusers, of the crowd that surrounded her that morning. All of that has already happened. What remains is two figures in the light, one reaching toward the other's face.

The scene is John 8. Early morning in Jerusalem. The scribes and Pharisees bring her in and set her into the middle – exposed on every side. The Law is cited. The question: What do You say? He does not answer. He stoops and writes on the ground with His finger. St Cyril of Alexandria and St Augustine both observe what the crowd does not: that the same finger tracing in the dust of a Temple floor is the finger that once traced the Law in stone on Sinai. The Lawgiver has returned to the dust. He bends. He writes. He descends. When they press, He speaks the one sentence that empties the courtyard. And what St Augustine names in what remains when they are gone is this: two were left, misery and mercy. The woman in her wound. And the One who is incapable of condemnation.

"Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, Lord."

"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

He does not ask about the sin. He asks about the accusers. He receives her at the precise point of her wound – not before it, not after it has been managed, but in the exact moment of it, when the dust has not yet settled and her shame is still raw. He asks only what remains. And when the answer is no one, He confirms it: neither do I.

The Theological Vision

“The artist who painted this icon has named what the Fathers have always seen within this scene: Christ is the Redeeming Groom. He stoops not only in this courtyard on this particular morning, but across the whole arc of the Incarnation – descending from the throne of heaven to the womb of a woman, from the Passover feast to the floor of a garden in Gethsemane, from the heights of Golgotha to the deepest dark of death. Every stooping is the same movement, the same divine posture: the One who is highest descending to meet what is lowest, not to condemn it from above but to redeem it from within.

In this stooping, the artist perceives the first garden revisited. Adam and Eve, after the fall, were found in their nakedness and shame – hiding, covered, unable to stand before the face of God. The woman in the courtyard stands in the same ancient humiliation. She has been seen in the most exposed possible moment. There is nowhere to cover herself. But what comes toward her now is not the voice that called Where are you? in judgment. It is the voice of the One who has come precisely to answer that question on her behalf, once and for all. As the artist writes: He descended to her Hell, and much like Eve, restores her from the shame and guilt of her nakedness.

This is the theology of the Anastasis – the icon of the Harrowing of Hell that stands at the heart of the Coptic Pascha. Christ descending to the uttermost depths, grasping Adam and Eve by the wrist, drawing them upward from the pit they could not escape by any effort of their own.

The woman in the courtyard cannot raise herself from the middle of the crowd. She cannot undo what has been done or reverse the exposure that has already happened. What she can do is what the icon shows her doing: she remains. She does not flee when the others leave. She stays, standing before the One who stayed when all the accusers went. And His hand reaches toward her face.

From the tradition of divine love that runs through the wisdom of the Fathers – the teaching that God’s love is not a calm benevolence but a burning, seeking, descending fire – comes this recognition: the love of God does not wait for the Bride to be presentable before it moves toward her. It seeks her in the worst morning of her life. The Bride of the Song of Songs cries Have you seen the one I love? as she is wounded and stripped at the walls of the city. This woman does not even cry out. She is simply there, at the bottom of everything – exposed, silent, alone in the middle. And He comes.

The Artist on the Inscription

“The early morning of her trial became the dawn of her new life, revealed by the Light Himself. Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’ -John 8:12”

The inscription on the icon is taken from the last book of Scripture, the word spoken from the throne at the end of all things: Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5). The Fathers are precise about what the Greek says. He does not make new things to replace the old. He makes all things – the existing things, the broken things, the exposed and ashamed things – new. The wounds are not removed. They are remade. The woman does not leave the courtyard as though the morning had not happened. She leaves carrying a morning that has been transfigured. What had been the worst dawn of her life has become, in the moment He says neither do I condemn you, the first dawn of another one entirely. The artist names it precisely: the early morning of her trial became the dawn of her new life, revealed by the Light Himself.

And then He says, in the verse that immediately follows in St John's Gospel: I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. The light that reveals all things at dawn in the Temple courtyard – that same light, falling on her – does not expose her shame and hold it up before the crowd. It shows her face, held in the hand of the One who descended to find her. The light of the world is not a searchlight. It is the face of the One who stooped.

For the Servant

“Wounded” - Servants Spiritual Day, June 2026

The servant who stands before this icon carries something with them into that encounter. Perhaps it is the wound of another's sin against them. Perhaps it is the wound of their own failure in service. Perhaps it is the older, deeper wound of having sought love in the wrong place for too long, of having reached for something smaller than the love they were made for and found it insufficient. Whatever the shape of the wound, what the icon offers is this: the image of what happens when the wound is brought into the presence of the One who does not condemn.

She did not arrive in the courtyard intending to meet Him. She was brought. In her worst moment, in the most exposed place, with no preparation and no opportunity to present herself well, she found that only two remained: her own misery, and a mercy she had not asked for and could not have anticipated. He asked about her accusers. He confirmed there were none. He sent her forward, not backward. He did not give her back her past – He gave her a morning. The servant who has been in the middle – surrounded, exposed, carrying something that has been seen and named and cannot be unseen – is the one this icon speaks to most directly. Not with consolation in the sense of being told it does not matter. But with the word that is harder and better than consolation: neither do I. And then: go. And then: I am the light of the world. He makes all things new. Including the wound. Including this morning. Including you.

PRAYERS

Prayers for the Wounded Servant



The prayers gathered here are offered for the servant to pray alone – in the quiet before the day begins, in the dark of a difficult season, or at the close of a day in which much was given and little seemed to return. They are not liturgical texts but personal prayers, written in the voice of one who serves and knows the cost of serving. They may be prayed as written, or held as a starting point from which the servant's own words may come.

Before the Day Begins

Lord Christ, I come to this day carrying what I always carry – the weight of faces I could not reach, of seasons that bore less than I had hoped, of prayers that seemed to pass through empty air. I come with the wound I have been managing alone, and the wound I have not yet named, and the wound I am not sure I fully understand.

I do not ask You to remove it. I ask You to enter it. You have been here before me. You have descended further than any wound I carry. And You have come back – not unscathed, but glorified, bearing the marks that became the ground of the deepest faith the Gospel records.

Let this day be not the management of my wounds but their offering. Let me place on the altar what I have carried too long alone. And let me go from here not healed in the sense of restored to how I was before – but held. Held by the One who was wounded first. And who knows what to do with broken things. Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world: receive my wound into Your Passion. Not because I have managed it well. Not because I bring it clean. But because You are the One who receives what no one else can hold, and makes of it the bread that feeds the world.

In the Season of Darkness

Lord, You have gone quiet. I know, because the tradition tells me so, that You have not gone absent – that this silence is not the silence of indifference but the silence of a love that is doing its deepest work in the dark. I know this. I do not always feel it.

I pray from the void, because the void is where I am. I bring You the flatness of prayer that reaches nothing, the dryness of service that produces no felt warmth, the loneliness of a season in which heaven seems to have closed its door. I bring it not because I have transformed it but because I cannot carry it alone.

You said that the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be put into words. This is my groan. I cannot make it more eloquent than it is. I trust that You receive it as it is – and that somewhere in this dark, the seed is falling. I cannot see the ground from the inside of the dark. But You can. And You are already tending what I cannot yet see.

Come, Lord. I am here. And I am waiting.

For the one Who Has Wounded Me

Lord, I bring before You the one who wounded me. I confess that I have spent more time rehearsing this wound than I have spent praying for the one who gave it. I have carried it as a grievance when You are asking me to carry it as a prayer.

I do not know how to pray for them from a place of genuine love yet. So I begin with honesty: here is what happened. Here is the wound. Here is my brother, my sister, who fell into the sin that hurt me. The devil tricked them. They are not my enemy. They are my brother. They are my sister. And they need what I need: mercy, and a way home.

I pray for the removal of their anger, and mine. I pray for the healing of what was broken between us. I pray that the wound which came from their falling might become, through Your mercy, the same intercession that helps them rise. Let me be the one who prayed for them when they could not yet pray for themselves. And absolve me, Lord, of the sin of nursing this wound when I was meant to be turning it into prayer.

When the Fruit is Hidden

Lord, I have served faithfully and I cannot see what it has given. The years of investment in faces that have moved on. The prayers offered in the dark for people who do not know I prayed them. The faithful, unglamorous, fruit-unseen service that constitutes most of what my ministry actually is.

I know that You hid from St Pishoy Kamel the power of his own service during his sickness. He lay on the thin mattress and could not perceive the extraordinary work that was passing through him. The seed buried in the dark does not see its own germination.

I trust – on the days when I can trust, and I ask for trust on the days when I cannot – that You are hiding from my eyes the power of something You are doing through my wound that I will not be able to perceive until much later. Let me give You the wound. Let me give You the dark. Let me give You even the not-knowing. And let me go on serving from the place of that trust.

The grain buried in the dark is already, in the economy of Your love, beginning to grow.

At the Close of the Day

Lord, the day is closing. I am not the same as when it began, though I may not yet know how I am different. Something has shifted, however quietly, in how the wound is held. It is still mine. But it has been placed, however frail the offering, in Your hands.

Receive what I have brought today. Receive the wound I named and the wound I could not yet name. Receive the ache for more of You that I have carried quietly, not knowing it was holy. Receive the honest poverty of one who serves imperfectly and knows it, and who comes to the altar not as a graduate of the week's spiritual exercises but as one who simply needs the medicine.

And tomorrow, when the wound is still there – because wounds do not disappear overnight, and the Risen Christ still bears His marks – let me remember that what You do with the wound is not erase it. It is transfigure it. The marks become the credential. The broken place becomes the doorway. Go in peace, wounded servant. The One who permitted the wound is inside it. And what He does with broken things is beyond what we can ask or imagine

Closing Message

The Jar That Had to Be Broken

“She broke the flask and poured it on His head.” – Mark 14:3



She came without announcement. The Gospel of Mark does not give her a name and perhaps that is itself a kind of theology: her act was not about her name. She came carrying an alabaster flask of spikenard, very costly, worth more than a year's wages for a working man. She came to where Jesus was at the table of Simon the leper's house, and she broke the flask and poured the oil on His head.

She did not give a lecture on sacrifice. She did not explain her theology of love. She did not carefully measure out a portion and keep the rest for future use. She broke the jar. The breaking was not comfortable. The jar does not break painlessly. The fragrance filled the whole house. Those who watched were indignant at the waste. Jesus said: She has done a good work for Me. The jar had to be broken. Without the breaking, the oil stayed inside. The fragrance had no way out.

This is the image that gathers the whole of this day into a single moment. You came today carrying something – not the alabaster jar of spikenard, but the equivalent in your service: the love you have given, the years you have poured out, the prayers offered in the dark, the faithful presence in the classroom when no one seemed to notice, the pastoral visits that changed nothing visible, the long seasons of service in which you gave what you had without knowing whether any of it reached the place it was aimed. And somewhere in that carrying, there has been a breaking.

St Augustine described his own long suffering before his conversion with words that have not lost their precision across sixteen centuries: Late have I loved You, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved You. The lateness was the wound.

The years of wandering, of seeking in the wrong places, of pouring his considerable gifts into vessels that could not hold them – all of that was the wound. And out of it came the Confessions, and the City of God, and a theology of grace that has fed the Church for a millennium and a half. The jar had to be broken before the fragrance could escape. The wound had to occur before the beauty could emerge.

And this includes the wound of honest self-knowledge – perhaps the most privately carried wound of all. The servant who has looked clearly at their own poverty, who has seen the gap between what they are called to be and what they actually are, and who has brought that poverty honestly to God rather than managed it alone, has been given the beginning of the very humility the Fathers call the summit of the Christian life. The broken and the contrite heart, the Psalmist promises, God will not despise. The jar that knows it is cracked is precisely the jar the light can escape from. And the servant who serves from honest poverty – who has stopped pretending otherwise – serves with a freedom and a genuineness that no amount of accumulated competence can replicate.

Pope Shenouda III, in his meditations on the Song of Songs, describes the soul's search for the Beloved as a search that passes through the wound: Have you seen the one I love? The watchmen found her; they struck her; they wounded her (Song of Songs 5:7). The wound comes in the act of searching. The servant who searches for God in service, who pursues genuine love rather than the appearance of it, will not be kept safe from hurting. They will be struck. But the striking is not punishment. It is the sign that the search is real – that they have drawn close enough to the walls of the city where the Beloved dwells that the watchmen have seen them.

The one whose title gave this day its name was struck by love early and permanently. His wound was not the wound of failure or pastoral disappointment – though he knew those too. His wound was the wound of a love for God so intense, so consuming, that it shaped every encounter of his long ministry.

Those who came to him came to be warmed by it. And what they received was not his strength. It was his wound, transfigured. The love that had struck him in his youth, that had burned through his long years of illness and isolation on Holy Mountain, that had survived the indifference of those who should have nurtured it and emerged brighter for the survival – that love was the fragrance in the room. And it came out through the crack in the jar.

You are leaving this day not with the wound resolved. That was never the intention. The invitation was not to healing in the sense of erasure, not the return to a state before the breaking. The Risen Christ did not return to a state before the Passion. He carried His wounds into the Resurrection, and made of them the ground of the greatest confession the Gospel records. The invitation of this day was simpler and more demanding than erasure: to name the wound, to bring it into the presence of the One who bore wounds first, and to allow Him to begin in it what only He can begin.

That beginning has started. You may not feel it yet. The seed buried in the dark does not feel like a beginning. But it is one.

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**If the wound is real – and it is –
and if God is tending it – and He is –
then what is He preparing you to pour out?**

*Who is waiting, somewhere in the dark of their own wounding,
for a servant who has been wounded too – not from above, but from beside?*

Go in peace, Wounded Servant. Go in love.

*The One who permitted the wound is inside it.
The One who was wounded before you has already gone ahead.
And what He does with broken things is beyond what we can ask or imagine.*

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FEEDBACK



ssch.one/wounded-feedback

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

By the grace of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the prayers of our beloved Church Fathers, this booklet was prepared as part of the *Wounded Servants Spiritual Day* (Mulgoa), 20th June 2026 - to serve as a small offering for the edification of the servants of the Church and as part of the Continuous Spiritual Program (CSP).

The content, reflections and writings contained within draw from the rich wellspring of Coptic Orthodox teaching—the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints, the wisdom of the Early Church Fathers, and the tradition of sacrificial service. It reflects the call to shine not with our own light, but with the light of Christ, through prayer, fasting, self-denial, and love.

We pray that it has been a source of spiritual encouragement and renewal. May the Lord who began this good work in you perfect it, strengthen your journey, sanctify your service, and grant you to shine with His light, bearing the fruit of the Spirit in all things.

To God be all glory, honour, and worship, now and forevermore. Amen.

JUNE, 2026 - ST. MARY AND ST. MINA COPTIC ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL, BEXLEY - AUSTRALIA

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THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

