“Ascend then, O my soul, and do not delay; direct your steps toward the summit of the mountain where God is revealed.”
—St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Prologue 1

I. Introduction: What can a 13th-century mystic teach us today?

In the midst of constant noise, hyperconnectivity, and spiritual fatigue in today’s world, it may seem that a theological text written by a Franciscan friar in the 13th century has little to offer. But it is precisely in this modern chaos that the voice of St. Bonaventure shines like a serene beacon, inviting us to reorient our hearts toward the source of all truth, beauty, and love: God.

St. Bonaventure (1217–1274), known as the “Seraphic Doctor,” was not only a brilliant theologian and Minister General of the Franciscan Order but also a mystic deeply rooted in the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. His most famous work, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (*The Journey of the Mind into God*), written in 1259 during a pilgrimage to Mount La Verna — the very place where St. Francis received the stigmata — is a gem of Christian mysticism and a spiritual roadmap that remains astonishingly relevant even eight centuries later.

II. The historical and spiritual context of the *Itinerarium*

St. Bonaventure lived during a time of intellectual flourishing. The rediscovery of Aristotle and the rise of the universities were transforming theology into a rigorous science. But Bonaventure, though trained in Paris and possessing a brilliant mind, understood that theology could not be reduced to speculative knowledge. For him, true knowledge must lead to love. The goal was not merely to know more, but to love better.

Inspired by St. Francis, Bonaventure proposed a spiritual path that united reason and contemplation, study and adoration, intellect and affection. His *Itinerarium* is not a systematic treatise but a lived spiritual guide, written for those who seek God with all their hearts.

III. Structure and content of the *Journey of the Mind into God*

The *Itinerarium* is structured in **seven stages** or "steps," reflecting the process of purification and ascent of the soul toward God. The framework draws on Trinitarian and Augustinian thought. Each stage is a step toward union with the Creator.

1. **Contemplation of God through His traces in creation**
   "The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the work of his hands." (Ps 19:1)
   In the beauty of the natural world — nature, creatures, the order of the universe — we perceive the footprints of the Creator. This stage invites us to recover a sense of wonder and to recognize God's presence in all things.
2. **Contemplation of God in the human soul (His image within us)**
   The human soul, made in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27), is a mirror that reflects His light. Self-examination and introspection allow us to discover the God who dwells within our innermost being.
3. **Contemplation of God through the powers of the soul (memory, understanding, will)**
   This stage explores how each human faculty leads us to God: memory preserves the good, understanding seeks truth, and the will loves the good.
4. **Contemplation of God in His eternal and unchanging Being**
   After considering creation and the soul, the journey takes us to the contemplation of God's essence: His necessary, eternal, simple, and true being. Here, reason begins to fall silent before the mystery.
5. **Contemplation of the One and Triune God**
   God is not solitude but communion. This is a profoundly Christian stage: we discover that the One God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not a cold concept but a living relationship of love offered to us.
6. **Contemplation of God through Jesus Christ crucified**
   Access to the Father is through the Son. In the Crucified Christ, we see the ultimate revelation of God's wisdom and mercy. Bonaventure insists: only those who gaze upon the crucified Christ can truly ascend to the Father.
7. **Mystical union with God at the summit of the soul (ecstasy and rest in Him)**
   The culmination of the journey is not intellectual knowledge but a loving experience — a "Sabbath rest" for the soul. Here, one no longer reasons or explains: one loves, contemplates, and adores. This is "ecstasy" not as emotional rapture, but as going out of self to enter into God.

IV. Theological relevance of the *Itinerarium* today

1. A theology of the heart
Bonaventure reminds us that knowledge of God is not just about study but about love. This is especially vital in an age that tends to intellectualize the faith, separating it from spiritual experience.

2. An incarnate and Christ-centered mysticism
Against the backdrop of vague and depersonalized spiritualities, the *Itinerarium* offers a deeply Christocentric mysticism, centered on the Crucified, who does not evade human suffering but transforms it.

3. A Christian ecological vision
Seeing the world as "God's footprint" forms a spirituality of care. Creation is not a resource to exploit, but a revelation to cherish. This outlook can nourish a truly Christian integral ecology.

4. An answer to modern existential emptiness
The *Itinerarium* offers a path of meaning in a world marked by nihilism, individualism, and fragmentation. It is a pedagogy of the soul, teaching us how to dwell in the world with God.

V. Spiritual and pastoral guide: How can we live the *Itinerarium* today?

Step 1: Recover the contemplation of creation

- Spend time daily observing nature with gratitude.
- See every creature as a sign of God's goodness — a tree, a cloud, a smile.
- Suggested prayer: *"Lord, teach me to see Your face in all You have created."*

Step 2: Look within yourself with honesty

- Do a daily examination of conscience — not as control, but as a search for truth.
- Reflect on your desires, thoughts, and decisions in the light of the Holy Spirit.

Step 3: Offer your memory, understanding, and will

- Remember with gratitude (memory), study with humility (understanding), love with generosity (will).
- Pray: *"Lord, take my memory, understanding, and will; everything is Yours."* (cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Step 4: Adore God in His mystery

- Spend moments in silence before the Blessed Sacrament. Say nothing. Just gaze upon Him.
- Slowly pray Psalm 139: *"O Lord, You search me and You know me..."*

Step 5: Enter into communion with the Trinity

- Pray the Gloria with greater awareness.
- Live in community: the Trinity is the model of communion. Be a peacemaker, not a divider.

Step 6: Contemplate the Crucified One

- Meditate daily for a few minutes before a crucifix.
- Ask yourself: What is Jesus saying to me from the Cross today?
- Key verse: *"They shall look upon the one they have pierced."* (Jn 19:37)

Step 7: Rest in God

- Learn to be with God without words. You don't always have to "do" — just "be" with Him.
- Silently repeat the name of Jesus as a prayer of the heart.

VI. Conclusion: A path of fire and sweetness

The *Journey of the Mind into God* is not an esoteric adventure or a set of spiritual techniques. It is the path of a soul in love — thirsty for God. St. Bonaventure walked it in Franciscan humility, with his feet on the ground and his eyes on heaven. And today, he invites us to do the same.

Because the human heart still seeks God. Because the Cross is still the throne of Love. Because in a world that forgets silence, the soul still whispers: *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* (Ps 42:3)

Are you ready to begin this journey? The first step is to pause. The second is to see. The third… is to love.