

Candles

We stand in a double and contrary relationship to objects outside ourselves. We stand to the world and all its contents as when God brought the animals to the first man for him to name. Among them all Adam could find no companion. Between man and the rest of creation there is a barrier of difference, which neither scientific knowledge nor moral depravity can remove or efface. Man is of another make from every other earthly creature. To him they are foreign. His kinship is with God.

On the other hand he is related to everything that exists in the world. Everywhere we feel somehow at home. The shapes, attitudes, movements of objects all speak to us, all are a means of communication. It is the incessant occupation of the human soul to express through them its own interior life, and to make them serve as its signs and symbols. Every notable form we come across strikes us as expressing something in our own nature, and reminds us of ourselves.

This feeling of our connection with things is the source of metaphor and simile. We are profoundly estranged from, yet mysteriously connected with, outside objects. They are not us, and yet all that is or happens is an image to us of ourselves.

One of these image-objects strikes me, and I think most people, as having more than ordinary force and beauty. It is that of a lighted candle. There it rises, firmly fixed in the metal cup on the broad-based, long-shafted candlestick, spare and white, yet not wan, distinct against whatever background, consuming in the little flame that flickers above it the pure substance of the wax in softly-shining light. It seems a symbol of selfless generosity. It stands so unwavering in its place, so erect, so clear and disinterested, in perfect readiness to be of service. It stands, where it is well to stand, before God.

It stands in its appointed place, self-consumed in light and warmth.

Yes, of course the candle is unconscious of what it does. It has no soul. But we can give it a soul by making it an expression of our own attitude.

Stir up in yourself the same generous readiness to be used. "Lord, here am I." Let the clean, spare, serviceable candle bespeak your own attitude. Let your readiness grow into steadfast loyalty. Even as this candle, O Lord, would I stand in your presence.

Do not weaken in or try to evade your vocation. Persevere. Do not keep asking why and to what purpose. To be consumed in truth and love, in light and warmth, for God, is the profoundest purpose of human life.

