READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Till We Have Faces:
A Myth Retold

by
C. S. Lewis

QUESTIONS

1. In *Till We Have Faces*, C. S. Lewis offers his own take on the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche. Prior to reading this book, what did you know about this myth? Why might Lewis be interested in retelling it?

2. Speaking about Psyche, Orual recounts, “I wanted to be a wife so that I could have been her real mother. I wanted to be a boy so that she could be in love with me. I wanted her to be my full sister instead of my half sister. I wanted her to be a slave so that I could set her free and make her rich” (p. 26). How do you make sense of
Orual’s intense (and conflicting) outpouring of emotion here? Why is she so taken with Psyche?

3. Speaking to Trom, King of Glome, the Priest of Ungit says, “Holy places are dark places. It is life and strength, not knowledge and words, that we get in them. Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood” (p. 58). What does he mean by this? Does this sentiment resonate with you at all? What role does mystery play in your view of the spiritual life?

4. Offering herself to die a sacrificial death in the place of Psyche, Orual says, “It is fit that one should die for the people. Give me to the Brute instead of Istra” (p. 70). What is compelling Orual here? Why does she do this?

5. Chapter VII features a conversation between Orual and Psyche, with Psyche’s impending death looming. In moments of crisis, are you more like Orual, frightened and frantic, or Psyche, courageous and at peace? Why is that?

6. Orual writes, “Food for the gods must always be found somehow, even when the land starves” (p. 91). What do you learn about the gods in this story from this quote? Why does Orual see the gods as entities to fear or be appeased? Do you ever view God in a similar way?

7. After being reunited with Psyche and learning of Psyche’s new loyalty to her husband-god, Orual recounts, “For the world had broken in pieces and Psyche and I were not in the same piece. . . . Gods, and again gods, always gods . . . they had stolen her”
(p. 137). Why does Orual blame the gods for taking Psyche from her? Have you ever blamed God for taking someone (or something) from you?

8. “I perceived now that there is a love deeper than theirs who seek only the happiness of their beloved,” notes Orual (p. 156). What does Orual mean here? How would you describe this kind of love?

9. “I spoke to the gods myself, alone, in such words as came to me, not in a temple, and without a sacrifice. I stretched myself face downwards on the floor and called upon them with my whole heart. . . . I promised anything they might ask of me, if only they would send me a sign. They gave me none,” recounts Orual (pp. 170–171). Do you ever feel like God is silent? Do you ever feel like God speaks to you? Describe an example of either.

10. In chapter XIV, Orual persuades Psyche to discover the identity of Psyche’s husband-god. How does Orual accomplish this? Why does Psyche give in?

11. “[The gods] would give no clear sign, though I begged for it. I had to guess. And because I guessed wrong they punished me—what’s worse, punished me through her” (p. 283). Do you ever feel like God punishes you for your actions? If so, where did you develop that view of God?

12. According to Orual, “Without question it was true. It was I who was Ungit. That ruinous face was mine. I was that Batta-thing, that all-devouring womb-like, yet bar-
ren, thing. Glome was a web—I the swollen spider, squat at its centre, gorged with men’s stolen lives” (pp. 314–315). How does Orual come to this realization? How does this transform her understanding of herself?

13. Near the end of the book, Orual recounts, “The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered” (p. 335). What was her complaint? What was her answer? How were these one and the same?

14. “I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away” (p. 351) are striking words from Orual—especially in light of who Orual has been throughout the vast majority of this story. How might these words inform your own spiritual life?

15. The theme of “faces” appears throughout this narrative. Now that you have finished the book, why do you think Lewis titled it Till We Have Faces? Why are faces so important?

16. How has this book impacted you? Specifically, how has it impacted your view of yourself, your view of your relationships, and your view of God?