



ST. JOSEPH
GUARDIAN OF THE HOLY FAMILY
PARISH

Adult Faith Formation

Learning to Pray with
St. Teresa of Avila:
The Interior Castle

The Interior Castle:
Learning How to Pray from Saint Teresa of Avila

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Session 2: 1st, 2nd, & 3rd Dwelling Places
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Opening Prayer

All: Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Thy faithful
and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

Lead: Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.
All: And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Lead: Let us pray.
All O God, Who did instruct the hearts of Thy faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant us in the same Spirit
to be truly wise,
and ever to rejoice in His consolation,
through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Resources

- Links to all resources are posted to the St. Joseph Website:
www.falmouthcatholic.org/interior-castle

Dwelling 1 Summary

“Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession, and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead” (CCC 357).

In explaining that we are made in the image and likeness of God, Teresa points out how we have a capacity for God that transcends the human person. Not only are we called to communion with God, but we are structured in such a way that God lives in his own dwelling place within us, more so than he does in the whole cosmos.

Teresa is a struggling soul, one who has a combative idea of life. She wants to communicate this concept to readers so that they aren't left with a false peace about what awaits

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them in their journey through the rooms of the castle. Teresa's scriptural foundation to justify her castle image and to evaluate the human person come from three places: John 14:2 (In my Father's house there are many dwelling places), Proverbs 8:31 (I found my delight in the human race), and Genesis 1:26 (Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness). Gradually, through her interior experience, these three biblical texts became a part of her and her convictions.

Prayer and reflection are the entrances to the castle. Teresa insists that this turning away from one's own interior life is one of earth's greatest tragedies. You must enter through prayer, you cannot enter just through the psyche, with a psychologist. The human person contains something sacred; the castle is inhabited by God. To enter it is to enter into relationship with God, who dwell in its inmost dwelling place. To pray is to enter personal relationship with God.

The paradox and glory of our relationship with God is the question, how can human beings attain to the love of God, whom they do not see, unless God loves them first? Although we are "like" God, still we can only know him as the totally Other. Yet, in order to give ourselves to him in love we must first learn to know him as the divine lover. And only he himself can reveal himself to us in this capacity. This is accomplished by the word of Revelation. The acceptance of divine revelation by faith already presupposes that God has turned to the soul in love. This gift of love is perfect when God gives himself to the soul in the life of grace and glory, when he draws the soul into his divine life. God lives in the innermost center of each soul, offering his gift of himself like the sun pouring forth its light. We are not sparks of God, God lives in us.

Mortal sin thwarts a person's relationship with God, it ruins the divine, primordial plan for every human being: a radical call to live in communion with God (c.f. *Gaudium et Spes* 13). Whenever Teresa touches on the theme of mortal sin, she begins to tremble: "Oh, oh, oh what a serious thing sin is" (Sol. 10.1). We must be aware of our ability to fill our soul with darkness or to let light pour through. The way to self-knowledge is to go towards God. We shall never completely know ourselves if we don't strive to know God.

A note on the castle image: we must not take it too literally. There are numberless dwelling places in each category. We should think in terms of a million, Teresa says. The things of the soul must always be considered as "plentiful, spacious, and large." They do not follow in single file, but there are rooms everywhere, above, below, and to the sides. We are all capable of much more than we can imagine and the sun shines in all parts of the castle. Nor must we stay in one room a long time.

Life in the first dwelling is not idyllic. Many enter the castle but are absorbed by self-interest, entertainment, vices, and distractions; the light can barely touch them. But there is always the possibility for some prayer. Such people are easily vanquished, although they do experience some good desires from time to time. Let us consult ourselves to see what we love, and we will find out to which city we belong, the City of the World or the City of God.

Dwelling 2 Summary

This dwelling place represents a time of struggle because of the disorder introduced into the castle through a life that was lived outside of it. A radical decision must be made at the beginning. There must be an initial and progressive sensitivity to the word of God. By meditating on the biblical word, Christians in these dwelling places become aware of their situation as prodigal children of God, who once longed to feed on the pig's food (Luke 15:16).

The themes of interiority, struggle, and communion with God are interwoven. The first

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few dwelling places stress interiority – making yourself aware of your interior life, taking a spiritual point of view. Struggle is required, especially at the beginning stages, to remain in the castle. The attractions of the outside world are very powerful; she refers to the struggle as a “great war.” And still, even as we enter deeper into the castle, the battle goes on. We can combat conflict with some tools:

- Reason: the power by which we give to ourselves and others reasons for thinking.
- Faith: a gift God pours into the soul by which we know and give assent to all that God reveals to us about himself and about the means by which we can reach him. It brings us, through development, to an ever-deeper likeness to Christ.
- Memory: the power to recall past events and keep before our minds the things we have come to know in the past.
- Intellect: a power by which we come to know truths by drawing them out from other truths we already know.
- Will: the power to make choices and rest in the choices made.

The supreme principle on which all human beings should make their choices is the will of God. The divine will is a personal project of love for all men and women which aims to bring them to their full and final happiness. The will of God can at times call us to painful sacrifice.

Teresa’s asceticism (her way of understanding living a detached lifestyle) has a militant theme. Teresa situates her castle within these regions of Pauline, spiritual militancy. The spirituality she presents is not for cowards, the comfort loving, or the lazy. Humans are both light and dark: beauty and dignity in their being (the beauty of the castle), and darkness and misery in their life story (life within the castle). Humans are never in utter darkness, but can come very close to that. We may be tempted by many of these things but, though she sometimes speaks as if God is tempting us, she insists that God only permits all that happens to us. If we fall, he allows it that we might learn a lesson and above all learn how to be sorry for our failures and grow in humility. We must come to know ourselves and reflect on our misery and get in the habit of looking at Jesus.

Dwelling 3 Summary

If the first dwelling place is entering the castle, coming to know yourself and entering into relationship with God, and the second dwelling is engaging in battle, struggling against the forces of evil, then one might expect the next stage to be a stage of triumph, victory, and peace. Yet, Teresa says that the asceticism continues, vigilance and effort are still necessary; one must prove one’s love. Teresa speaks of the risks of wishful or conceited thinking – here one passes through a kind of spiritual adolescence.

Teresa speaks of her own experience in the third dwelling, which lasted about 10 years – ending with her great conversion when she was about 40 years old. This was a time of uncertainty and back and forth movement. She remembered that everything was passing, but struggled between her friendship with God and her friendship with the world. Teresa is certain that all of us have these experiences of feeling strong and self-sufficient and weak and humiliated, determined and doubtful. In all these experience, we must come through them realizing our deep need for God’s loving mercy.

Teresa notes that fear of the Lord is important at this stage. This fear, see Psalm 112, is a respect and loving awareness of God; persons have this fear when they have a deep and sincere love of his commandments. Teresa also notes the example of the rich young man who approaches Jesus enthusiastically, but goes away sad – an image Teresa applies to herself in her

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youth before her conversion. People in the third dwelling not only have to offer themselves generously to the Lord but to recover from their failings. They have to become engaged in a more difficult task: accepting that God has plans that go far beyond one's present project, generous though it may be, and letting him take the initiative, especially when it is a surprise and upsets one's own strategies.

Teresa directs her sisters to Mary as mother, "Praise Him, my daughters, for you truly belong to our Lady. Thus you have no reason to be ashamed of my misery since you have such a good Mother. Imitate her." *Lumen Gentium* 53 points out that Mary "has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church... Wherefore she is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit honors her with filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother.

Teresa also concludes the ascetical portion of the book with the third dwelling. This does not mean, however, that in the spiritual life of the Christian there comes a moment when the task of personal effort comes to an end. Struggle and effort continue to be demanded to the final day of one's life, even in the final dwelling places of this castle. But now Teresa wants to pass as quickly as possible to the other perspective: God's action in us. She spends a little more time describing people who begin enthusiastically but get so caught up in themselves that they become unable to hand over the reins of their life to God.

These people live well ordered lives, so much so that they do not see trials as a blessing. Teresa thinks otherwise: trials are from God, trials are necessary in the spiritual life, and trials are a test of love. God has his own plans for us that might upset our plans; trials may destroy what we have been working to build. What we need are faith and love to submit to his will for us. Teresa gives some examples of trials. People especially susceptible to these trials are those who have entered the castle and struggled to get established within it by achieving a balanced arrangement in their lives and fidelity to their various obligations (such as a religious sister?). A financial loss can cause them much more distress than might have been expected, and no one can find words to comfort these persons in their affliction. On the other hand, financial gain might never be enough and they seek more and more without satisfaction. Similar with those who lose a reputation or prestige, or worry about health and lose it.

The secret of our spiritual life lies in opening ourselves to God who often desires that his chosen ones clearly see and feel their wretchedness and look toward him for any good they may come to possess; otherwise they will remain in these first dwellings their whole lives, weighed down by misery. Teresa advises obedience, which avoids a self-sufficient style of existence. We need to consult with those who will help us to do not our will, but God's and encourage us to fly to him. People who live with such composure can be easily shocked by the behavior of others and, under the appearance of zeal, complain and even gossip about the actions of others. Teresa advises that we look at our own faults and perhaps learn some worthwhile things from the very ones whose actions bother us.

Closing Prayer

Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you,
all things pass,
God does not change.



Patience
obtains all,
who has God
lacks nothing,
only God suffices.