



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
Session 3: 4th Dwelling Places
July 28, 2022

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.

The Dwellings So Far

- Dwellings 1: Coming to know yourself and entering into relationship with God.
- Dwellings 2: Struggling against evil, building up our fortitude, detachment, humility.
- Dwellings 3: Proving our love, spiritual asceticism, growth in humility (self-knowledge).

Dwellings 4, Chapter 1

Up to Teresa's conversion in 1554 (age 39) she labored in prayer, attempting to follow a discursive, logic heavy, style of prayer suggested by her spiritual directors that was unfit for her. The spiritual experiences Teresa had in the years between 1534-1544 are what she describes as the fourth dwelling. During this time, we find intermittent waves of recollection and quiet and even some moments of union. These served to increase her desire for prayer in solitude. Noticeably in this stage, after Teresa had decided to return to prayer following the death of her father, she suffered through a veritable struggle between her prayer life and all that warred against it. As she worded it, the conflict was between friendship with God and friendship with the world.

In the midst of this struggle she began to perceive the first signs of passive prayer in the form of a contemplation which, though not "perfect" or "pure," was nonetheless "supernatural" or "infused" or "mystical." Although this grace was sporadic, it tended to recur, summoning Teresa to a more intense spiritual life until she reached the point of definitive change. When Teresa translated this period into theory, she placed it in this fourth dwelling place.

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It was the Lord himself who “saved” Teresa from the method of discursive reflection prayer. She calls the prayer that the Lord taught her, “the prayer of recollection.” “This prayer is called ‘recollection’ because the soul through its own efforts collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God. And its divine Master comes more quickly to teach it and give it the prayer of quiet than he would through any other method it might use.”

“This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer, of reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees. Keeping Christ present (which is the prayer of recollection) is what we of ourselves can do. Whoever would desire to pass beyond this point and raise the spirit to an experience of spiritual delights that are not given would lose both the one and the other, in my opinion.”

Teresa suggests two ways of maintaining this prayer of recollection: 1 – through repetition of a vocal prayer, 2 – being present with Jesus, looking at and relating to him through scenes from the Gospel. In all cases, the point is to move ourselves to love, not to just thinking,

“The important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love. Perhaps we don’t know what love it. I wouldn’t be very surprised, because it doesn’t consist in great delight, but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything, in striving, insofar as possible, not to offend Him, and in asking Him for the advancement of the honor and glory of His Son and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love.”

Discussion Questions 4.1

1. Is it possible to predict how many years we will spend in each dwelling place?
2. What are consolations and how do they differ from spiritual delights?
3. Does love consist in consolations or in spiritual delights?
4. Is the intellect the same as the mind in Teresa’s vocabulary?
5. Is it helpful to consider that prayer consists not in thinking much but in loving much?
How can we distinguish between thinking and loving in prayer?

Dwellings 4, Chapter 2

Teresa discusses the differences between consolations (*contentos*) and spiritual delights (*gustos*). Consolations are the result of our own efforts at prayer. Virtue and merit are found in all the things that cause the devotion acquired partly by the intellect (our thinking power), even though this devotion could not be merited or obtained if God did not give it. It is very good for a soul that hasn’t gone beyond this point to refrain from striving to ascend further. “But when His Majesty doesn’t give consolations, it isn’t necessary... They should believe that their desire for consolation is a fault.” If the well is dry, we cannot draw water out of it. We must not become neglectful of the well and not draw out water when it does appear, but it cannot be our focus. For Teresa, the love of God does not consist in consolation but “in serving with justice and fortitude of soul and in humility.”

Teresa’s spiritual delight is also called the “prayer of quiet,” the enjoyment of God. The prayer of quiet represented the first form of mystical prayer, a kind of passive-contemplative prayer in which God takes the initiative. Its agent of expression is the will, the heart of the whole of a person’s life. Contrasted to the noisy activity of discursive thought, the prayer of quiet represents the silence and rest experienced by the will in the exercise of love rising above the agitation of the other powers of the soul, the mind and fantasy, which are still active. At this

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beginning stage of mystical experience, only the will, according to Teresa, is touched by grace so as to place it in the prayer of love and unite it for some moments to the mysterious object of love who is God, radiating in Christ the mystery of his goodness and tender love toward humans.

Yet, in the fourth dwellings, it is not just the will that is aware of God, but the entire person who is made joyfully aware of the presence of God. “These impulses of love are like some little springs I’ve seen flowing; they never cease to move the sand upward. This is a good example of, or comparison to, souls that reach this state: love is always stinging and thinking about what it will do.” This image forms the symbolic basis for Teresa’s development of this fourth dwelling place. There are two sources of water. One is far away and require human effort to obtain it (the ascetical life and the first three dwellings). The other source is right there in the interior depths of the person. It corresponds to the experiences of the mystical life, the infused, passively bestowed (not acquired) prayer of the fourth and following dwellings.

This prayer or love comes from the interior depth, precisely because the deepest part of a person in the last dwelling place of the castle is a kind of radical opening to God and to the divine. This action of God gives the soul the sense of expansion in proportion to the amount of water that flows forth from the depths. This entrance into mystical experience is made by way of the will – that is, by way of the love of God that penetrates the human heart.

Beware, a certain illusion can take form in the person who prays when at the threshold of the mystical experience. The belief can easily arise that the prayer of quiet or any other form of mystical experience can be obtained through human effort, such as “mental emptying.” But Teresa did not see this or any other similar technique as a way of getting water from this inner fount. You cannot get this prayer by seeking it. It is an absolutely gratuitous gift from God. People can dispose themselves for this gift, but not through any psychosomatic techniques. The practices necessary for disposing oneself are humility and detachment.

Discussion Questions 4.2

1. How does Teresa explain the difference between consolations and spiritual delights?
2. Can you think of some other analogy to use for explaining this difference?
3. How does one know the true value of one’s prayer?
4. Is there any technique through which we can bring about these spiritual delights? What virtues are necessary to dispose ourselves to receiving and accepting these absolutely gratuitous gifts from God?
5. Teresa finds water to be a helpful symbol in the spiritual life. Can you think of examples from Sacred Scripture where water is an important theme? What can these examples teach us about prayer?

Dwellings 4, Chapter 3

Teresa takes a step back and describes a type of prayer that precedes the prayer of quiet she just described. This first stage of prayer she calls “interior recollection” or passive recollection. This is the first of the supernatural types of prayer. The active recollection, where the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with God and keeps Christ present, transitions subtly into passive recollection. Many writers of Teresa’s time used the term “recollection.” Teresa uses the term to describe interiority similarly as St. Augustine: “Late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you! For behold you were within me, and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that you had made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those

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things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all.”

Teresa imagines the powers of the soul like people or sheep who have gone astray who the person and God call back. “Like a good shepherd, with a whistle so gentle that even they (the powers/faculties of the soul) themselves almost fail to hear it, He makes them recognize His voice and stops them from going so far astray so that they will return to their dwelling place. And this shepherd’s whistle has such power that they abandon the exterior things in which they were estranged from Him and enter the castle.” All that is asked of the powers of the soul is that they detach themselves from the things of the world and give themselves over to the action of God. They surrender to God with expressions of humility, gratitude, love, and praise. The Holy Spirit, who is present and active in all Christian prayer, has now taken the initiative, but gently.

While we cannot empty our minds completely by our own power so as to force union with God, we can dispose ourselves for God’s gifts by training ourselves to keep Christ present within us, which Teresa calls the prayer of active recollection. Active recollection disposes us to passive recollection, which leads to the prayer of quiet. Now, in passive recollection that she has been describing, distractions are still a problem (they are less of a problem in the prayer of quiet). Teresa suggests that we should pay no attention to the wandering mind, “One should let the intellect go and surrender oneself into the arms of love.” In other words, people should fix their gaze on the mystery of Christ in such a way that they do less thinking about, and more gazing with, love. At the same time, the will finds it possible to engage itself in loving, with a love that is infused. Here, the contemplative is above all someone touched by love. But both the gazing and the loving come from God’s initiative.

As Teresa goes on to ascend the mystical ladder with us, she points out how each stage of prayer brings about in the subject an ever-growing similarity to Christ. As a result of this prayer, the soul’s faith becomes more alive, and it knows that if God sends trials, he will send the patience to suffer them. It finds itself withdrawing from worldly delights and improving in virtue. Especially, as the knowledge of God’s grandeur grows, its humility increases. Finally, Teresa gives some practical advice to those who have poor health: do not confuse a loss of strength with long periods of mystical prayer. Mystical prayer is short and not wearisome.

Discussion Questions 4.3

1. What kind of prayer does Teresa speak of in this chapter?
2. What image does she use to convey her teaching about this prayer of recollection?
3. What is a good way to dispose oneself for this prayer?
4. What are some of the good effects of the prayer of “spiritual delight?”
5. What are some of the dangers Teresa warns about?
6. How do we know when our mortifications or ascetical practices begin to cause more harm than good?
7. Does Teresa advocate for an active process of trying to clear one’s mind of all thoughts in prayer?

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.