

The Path to Union with God

KEY POINTS

1A/ Overview:

- ❖ Mystical life is NOT reserved for a few elite souls; All Baptized Souls are invited into mystical life in other words the fulfillment of Baptismal grace and an increase of the virtues of faith, hope and charity in the soul who believes the Kingdom of God is found within.
- ❖ The Path to Union with God is attained through Interior Prayer.
- ❖ Interior Prayer is an intimate exchange of friendship with the Lord.
- ❖ Interior Prayer is a divine journey, the Royal Road to Heaven. A determined determination is necessary to begin.
- ❖ We must learn to pray.

1B/ Introduction:

- ❖ Teresa of Avila developed a 'way' of prayer usable by either beginners or those more advanced in the way of perfection.
- ❖ It took her a lot of time to identify the original characteristics of her manner of prayer--in between ordinary meditation and contemplation (supernatural prayer).
- ❖ For a long time she wouldn't be able to explain what she was living. She later received the *grace to explain* her own interior movements.
- ❖ Teresa's difficulty to explain herself clearly and concisely also came from the *variability* of her of her spirit. She wasn't able to *discipline* herself to logically develop an idea, but did have the ability to return to her original idea. She knew her shortcoming and asked to be forgiven for it.
- ❖ Imprecise vocabulary was another difficulty. Having received no formal training in philosophy & theology.

2/ Discursive Meditation, Osuna Method:

- ❖ At the time of her final vows, Teresa said that she had *read a lot of things and didn't understand anything of what she read, nor how to proceed in prayer nor how to be recollected*. Her writings indicate that *Discursive Meditation did not suit her*.
- ❖ For Teresa meditation is essentially an exercise of the intellect. This mental gymnastics requires *a lot of work*, the intellect grows *weary*. Her attempts at meditation were torture for her. Teresa recommended a '*shortcut*' (*to contemplation*) for those like her who couldn't meditate.
- ❖ Osuna suggested finding union with God through the path of interior recollection; '*to think of nothing*'. He suggested fixing your attention on the God's *divinity*. This method agreed with Teresa's temperament. She experienced the *Prayer of Union* within 6 months. This first experience will constitute the basis of all that she will look for from then on.
- ❖ Teresa reacted to *two points*: creating *absolute silence is too radical*; God invites the person to suppress all activity of the mind; attach yourself to *Christ's humanity* (not His divinity) which provides man *friendship*.

3/ Prayer of Recollection:

A-The 3 Essential Points of the Prayer of Recollection:

1/ **Recollect Oneself**: preliminary steps (*sign of cross, examination, act of contrition—Self Knowledge*); *the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God* (W 28 4); habit of exterior leading to interior silence & solitude; this recollection is *not supernatural*.

2/ **Become aware of the Presence of Christ** : realize the Lord is there; *consideration* of who I am, etc.; Teresa insists on a personal relationship with the Lord in His humanity; the image of the Lord is based on a *living faith* that *perceives* without seeing; Teresa preferred representing the Christ within her soul.

3/ **Encounter with Christ**: the '*look*'; important not to think much but to love much; *spontaneous* heart to heart or simple conversation; conversation with an Evangelical theme (use of Scripture, preferably the Passion).

B- Methods to Recollect Oneself: To establish or maintain a living contact with Christ Teresa suggests using little ploys, skills; a Book of Gospels, helps to focus the thoughts; a Picture to your liking allows you to practice speaking with the Lord; a Vocal Prayer such as the Our Father prayed with devotion

C- A Last Objection: In the *Heart to Heart* the **Lord's answer** may not be in words, but by His action in the depths of the soul, usually though just a reinforced will to serve Him whatever the cost.

4/ The Anatomy of the Soul: The Foundations of SuperNatural Prayer

Holy Baptism is the *basis* of the whole Christian life; *two principal effects* are purification from sins & new birth in the Holy Spirit. The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized *sanctifying grace*, enabling them to *believe, hope* and *love* God through the *theological virtues* of *Faith, Hope, Charity*.

3 faculties of the Soul are Intellect, Memory & Will: *Faith* attaches to *Intellect*; *Hope* attaches to *Memory*; *Charity* attaches to the *Will*. *The Theological Virtues (faith, hope charity) purify the faculties*.

4 Ways to Water the Garden & 7 Mansions: 1st Way (1st 3 Mansions)- *ascetical* or man's effort; 2nd-4th Way (Last 4 Mansions) *Mystical* or God intervenes.

5/ SuperNatural Prayer Part 1:

- ❖ **Two very different forms of interior prayer:** the first is the prayer of recollection, Teresa's 'way' of prayer accessible through human effort; then there are the supernatural forms of prayer.
- ❖ **4 Ways to Water the Garden: manually** (ascetical), **water wheel** (prayer of quiet), **river** (sleep of the powers), **rain** (union).
- ❖ **Two different ways of enjoying God's company:** *Contentos* are natural satisfactions associated with the first three *Mansions*; *Gustos* are supernatural characteristic of the fourth *Mansions*.
- ❖ **"A few little drops of contemplation happen to everyone!":** supernatural prayer of recollection & prayer of quiet are both elementary, relatively common.
- ❖ **Passive Night of the Senses, Passive Night of the soul:** dry forms of contemplation described by St. John of the Cross. (handout available upon request)

6/ SuperNatural Prayer Part 2:

- ❖ The Prayer of Union is a much rarer gift. Teresa uses the famous image of the *Silkworm* to describe the process. The soul realizes it was thrust into another world and came out literally transformed.
- ❖ Teresa was mainly interested in the effects of the prayer of union, that they were loyal to Gospel Principle—*You know a tree by its fruit*. This gift of union is a new life for the person, a life in union with Christ's life.
- ❖ Graces given the mystics have for goal to allow us to recognize our 'little drops of contemplation' that might go unnoticed as if through a **magnifying mirror**.
- ❖ Two Pitfalls: These graces are not a sign of holiness so they aren't important; we should be asking these graces from God because they are important.
- ❖ Practical Indications when considering supernatural experiences of prayer--Caution and Care; but that does not mean contempt or rejection; it is always important to return to what is within our reach ... Teresa's prayer of recollection in the presence of the Lord.