

Chapter 6

1 I have really tried to understand where the complete abstraction of mind comes from that I have seen in some people who have received many delights in prayer from our Lord, and who prepare to receive these favors from Him. I am not talking here about the suspension of a soul or rapture by the Divine Majesty, for I have already written a lot on this matter elsewhere. Besides, in such cases, much need not be said, because, if the rapture is true and real, we can do nothing to prevent it however much we may resist; and I should remark, that the power which prevents us from being masters of ourselves lasts but a short time. But it often happens that there is a type of **prayer of Quiet** that resembles a spiritual sleep, which **absorbs the soul** in such a way, that, unless we know what to do in such cases much time may be lost, and our strength wasted through our own fault and with little benefit.

2 I would like to know how to make myself understood on this difficult subject. I don't know if I will succeed. I am certain that souls who suffered this misconception will understand, if they want to believe me. I have known people who were in a state they thought was rapture for seven or eight hours. These were individuals of great virtue. The simplest virtuous exercise took them immediately out of themselves thinking it would be wrong to resist our Lord. And, gradually, they might have died or lost their minds if no remedy were made available to them. What I know is that when our Lord begins to caress a soul (and our nature is fond of delights), it is so engaged with this pleasure that it desires not to stir and risk losing the delight. In all truth, it is more delicious than any worldly pleasures. And when this takes place in a weak nature or comes from one's own invention (or better, imagination), nature will offer them a thousand pleasant lies. To be more precise, when the imagination is not quiet, but focusing on a subject, fixated on it, as is the case with many people, who, as soon as they begin to think of something (though not God), or look at something, without thinking about what they see, and remain absorbed. They are like people who are slow, who through inadvertence seem to forget what they are going to say. Now, the same thing happens here, according to our weak nature or constitution; and if the persons should be of a melancholy (depressive) disposition; these people end up believing a thousand pleasant lies.

3 On depression (melancholy), I will speak a little later; but whether there is melancholy (depression) or not, what I have mentioned still takes place in persons worn out from penance, for (as I have said) when love begins to give physical delights to the senses, they allow themselves to be carried away too much by them; and, in my opinion, they would do better if they resisted because at this degree of prayer they can still resist. When the constitution is weak, fainting is seen which prevents speaking or moving; it is the same here, if no resistance is made because the person is weak, the strength of the spirit overwhelms and subjects the individual.

4 You may ask what the difference is between this state of absorption (stupor) and rapture? They are the same in appearance, but not in reality. For, a rapture, or union of all the powers with God, lasts but a short time (as I have said), and leaves great effects. The soul is left bathed in an interior light, the intellect does nothing, our Lord works in the will. But in the other case it is quite different: the body is seized but the will, the memory, and the intellect (3 faculties of the soul) are free. They all perform their functions, as if in a stupor, and if by chance they take hold of a thought, they hold onto it with all their might.

5 As for myself, I don't think there is any benefit whatsoever to be gained by this painful weakness except that it has a good origin. It is better not to waste time in such activity. Much more is gained through making an act of love which often awakens the will to the love of God than through weakening ourselves and making ourselves unable to obey. I therefore advise the

prioresses to forbid these long faintings which (in my opinion) serve to paralyze the faculties and the senses; the soul, which they don't heed, is then deprived of spiritual benefits that it would have otherwise acquired from obedience and attention paid to pleasing God. If the prioresses discover that this absorption arises from weakness, they should forbid the fasts and disciplines (I speak of those only which are not obligatory, and at times it may happen that even these may be dispensed of without blame), and give them tasks to occupy their minds.

Questions:

At what level of our beings does 'real' interior prayer take place? False interior prayer?

According to the text, especially #5 who must we obey? Why?

How does one distinguish in one's life, using this text as a guide, the true peace given by God from false peace?