

Prayer of Recollection

What is this way of *interior prayer* (F 2 3) inspired by Osuna and distinct from methodical meditation?

It seems to us that it can be summed up by three essential points:

- recollect oneself;
- become aware either within oneself or near to oneself of the Living Presence of Jesus Christ;
- converse in a heart to heart with Him;
- we will add to this a few tips or means to recollect oneself.

In summary, Teresa would say: *I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer* (V 4 7).

1/ **RECOLLECT ONESELF**

To succeed, she suggested a few very brief, preliminary steps which come from what spiritual authors call the immediate preparation. Teresa therefore asks that one quickly *make an examination of conscience, the act of contrition and the sign of the cross must come first* (W 26 1).

The reason for this first action is that *self-knowledge and the thought of one's sins is the bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread* (V 13 15). To come before God, it is necessary to recognize one's misery, unworthiness and experience a real humility and admiration before God. Teresa will often come back to this point recommending: *however sublime the contemplation, let your prayer always begin and end with self-knowledge.* (W 39 5).

This first step is already a part of the effort of recollection, of which the negative aspect will consist of abstracting oneself from the exterior world and of *getting accustomed to caring about nothing at all nor about seeing or hearing*, (V 11 9) obvious reminder of Osuna.

This prayer is called 'recollection,' because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God (W 28 4). It is about deliberately renouncing any activities of the exterior senses, particularly sight and hearing, *so, anyone who walks this path keeps his eyes closed almost as often as he prays. This is a praiseworthy custom for many reasons. It is a striving so as not to look at things here below* (W 28 6).

The quality of interior prayer will depend on the quality of recollection. This movement of the *soul to enter within itself* (W 27 1) can be sought anytime and anywhere since *God is everywhere* (W 28 2). *It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers* (V 9 5).¹

¹ 'To put oneself in the presence of God' is the fundamental, traditional principle of Carmelite Interior Prayer, imitating the Prophet Elijah: 'He is living Yahweh in the presence of whom I place myself' (1 R 17 1)(See Laurent de la Resurrection, *L'expérience de la Présence de Dieu*, Cerf, 1991).

Nevertheless, especially in the beginning, to succeed it is important to find the favorable exterior conditions of *solitude and withdrawal*: the *habit of silence* is important for interior prayer (W 4 9; see V 11 9; V 13 7). But this exterior silence and solitude are only material conditions to enable interior silence and solitude where all preoccupations, other than seeking God, are put aside. Teresa will insist that the soul is entering within itself to be alone with God (V 11 12; S; W 35 1) so much so that the soul acts as if there were only God and itself on earth. This recommendation will at times be wrongly interpreted by superficial readers as the attitude of an individualistic egoist.

There is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things and a renunciation of them in such a way that, without one's realizing it, the eyes close so as to avoid seeing them and so that the sight might be more awake to things of the soul (W 28 6).

To be precise, recollection cannot be attained as a thing in itself, an operation of emptying the mind and the senses which will then allow them to be filled up with the presence of God. It is more the effect, the result of an effort of attention to God, which absorbs the strength of the soul to the point of evacuating from its consciousness everything that isn't Him. In summary, the abstraction of the exterior world is only the other side of the attention to God.

Before going any further, it is necessary to point out what Teresa so carefully underlined with much diligence concerning a form of recollection *where it is possible for us to acquire by our own means [...]* *this initial devotion where we can help ourselves in some way* (V 12 1). *This recollection is not something supernatural, it is something we can desire to achieve ourselves with the help of God—for without this help we can do nothing, not even have a good thought* (W 29 4).

This recollection that everyone can achieve with the ordinary help of grace, is called 'active' by theologians to distinguish it from 'passive' or 'infused' recollection which is supernatural and in which God absorbs the soul into Himself without the soul making any effort. Teresa will give this supernatural prayer that *we cannot procure through our own efforts* (W 31 2) various names according to the depth of the recollection: contemplation, pray of quiet or union, sleep of the powers, etc.

2/ BECOME AWARE OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST WITHIN

The most important step according to Teresa is to realize that God is there, that I am in front of Him or that He is next to me or in me. The soul must realize the quality of the Lord and of our situation as creature and sinner, *consider whom we are going to speak with, and who we are, so as to know how to speak with Him* (W 22 3). She calls this *consideration* and she explains: *a person who is not aware who he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of whom, I don't call that prayer* (IC 1 1 7). She feels that simply realizing this fact is *mental prayer* (W 25 3).

One can guess what she wanted to say and reading beyond these explanations will allow a better understanding. She puts aside here not only the repetition of rote formulas to which one doesn't pay any attention, like prayer mills that the Orientals run, but again she objects to this same style in meditation consisting of reflection or consideration 'on' or 'about' or 'on the subject' of Christ, the soul remaining in a way distant from the subject being considered: *the life of Christ—the intellect grows weary in doing this* (V 11 9). To practice interior prayer, it is not enough to 'meditate on,' there must be a personal relationship with the Lord, a relationship where there is a direct face to face contact. For this to happen, it is essentially about talking to the Lord like to someone who is in front of me and to whom I can say 'you' or 'thou'...

How does one bring about this living contact? By a representation of Christ in His humanity. What sort of ‘image’ of Christ since Teresa suggests this method to souls who, like herself, were incapable of using their imagination this way. *For God didn’t give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination. In fact, my imagination is so dull that I never succeeded even to think about and represent in my mind—as hard as I tried—the humanity of the Lord* (V 4 7). Elsewhere she will say: *I had such a little ability to represent things with my intellect that if I hadn’t seen the things my imagination was not of use to me, as it is to other persons who can imagine things and thus recollect themselves. I could only think about Christ as He was as man, but never in such a way that I could picture Him within myself no matter how much I read about His beauty or how many images I saw of Him* (V 9 6).

If this is so, what did she mean when she declared that her interior prayer consisted of representing the Christ within herself or when she advises: *represent the Lord Himself as close to you* (W 26 1). Wouldn’t we have here a flagrant contradiction? Because, a little further, she asks her daughters to imagine that the Christ was *looking at you with those eyes so beautiful and compassionate, filled with tears* (W 26 5).

Let’s try and understand what she is trying to say.

Notice first of all, that the *representation* of Christ that she couldn’t achieve according to the descriptions of the authors she was reading, was speaking of an imagination capable of reproducing an image of Christ, at the same time visual and continuous, in other words, *a painting or an image of Him since I was unable to keep Him as engraved in my soul as I desired* (F 5 2, see V 22 4).²

Teresa certainly didn’t lack imagination as the images in her writings demonstrate. She doesn’t deny her role in interior prayer since she speaks of *picturing with the imagination, as when we reflect upon the Lord on the cross or in other episodes of the Passion, when we picture within ourselves how things happened to Him in the past*(W 34 8). What she wanted to say was impossible for her, was to compose an image of Christ within herself in the manner required, she believed, by the spiritual authors, in other words almost like an image seen with bodily eyes, a sort of visualization of Christ. She could only imagine in this way what she had seen with her senses (see V 9 6). But she knew that: *It wasn’t His Humanity that was with us in our soul but the Divinity* (Favors, Seville 1575) Thus her difficulties.

The representation that she proposed to make would not be imaginative but based on faith, a living faith that perceives, without seeing, the Presence of Christ. This is how one can interpret the explanation that she gives: *I was like one who is blind or in darkness; he speaks with a person and sees that that person is with him because he knows with certainty that he is there (I mean he understands and believes he is there but does not see him); such was the case with me when I thought of our Lord* (V 9 6). She will specify elsewhere that *it is a presence of God that has nothing to do with a vision, it seems rather that everyone, any person who wants to offer himself to His Majesty, at a given moment, finds God, even praying vocally, at least when there isn’t dryness* (S).

² For reference only, what Roland Barthes points out: “The Ignation image is not a vision, it’s a view, in the sense that the word has in the art of engraving {...} these views (stretching the sense of the word, because it is about all types of imaginary perceptions) can ‘frame’ the flavors, the odors, the sounds and the sensations, but it is the ‘visual’ view, if we can say that, that gets all of Ignatius’ attention” (op. cit. p.60). The author remarks that this wasn’t the case of Teresa of Avila (ibid. p. 62).

Maybe she was inspired by the Osuna method which spoke of a ‘very simple and subtle attention focused on God alone’ (o.c. tr. 21 ch. 5). In his *Fourth Spiritual Alphabet*, the Franciscan was more explicit: ‘It is nothing created but a very subtle representation by means of which they focus their attention very intensely on the very simple divinity of God, without moving from there, without turning their mind towards anything whatever’ (F. CVIII, v2).

In summary, she held an intermediary position between a vision of faith of the ‘pure divine essence’ of Osuna while thinking of *Christ as a man* and the *imaginative representation* of methodical meditation. So she avoided two possible deviations: the abstraction of a disincarnate spirituality and the emotional exaltation of a superficial piety. So, especially leaning on the certainty by faith in the *living proximity* of Christ, she appreciated the truth of the Incarnation which brought to the relationship of man with God, a warmth, a weight of reality, a consistency and a dynamism that the highest abstract elevations to the Divinity will never bring. This is why she insists on the ‘physical’ reality of this Presence so near *that it isn’t necessary to shout to speak to Him* (W 29 5). *However softly we speak, He is near enough to hear us.* (W 28 2; see V 40 6).

This representation by faith, non-visual, is major in interior prayer and can transform itself into a sort of intuition by experience. *Do you think it’s of little importance to know what heaven is and where you must seek your most sacred Father? Well, I tell you that for wandering minds it is very important not only to believe these truths but to strive to understand them by experience. Doing this is one of the ways of greatly slowing down the mind and recollecting the soul* (W 28 1).

There remains another confusing point for us to clear up concerning the subject of the representation of Christ. Teresa suggests that He be considered sometimes *next to you* (V 13 22) and sometimes *in front of you* (V12 2) and lastly *within you* (W 28 4). However, she insists that He is preferably represented in the most intimate part of the soul because *such a thought is much more alluring and fruitful than thinking of Him as outside oneself* (V 40 6); and so, in this way, it isn’t *tiring the intellect by going to look for Him on Mount Calvary or in the garden or at the pillar* (W 28 4). She will once again say to *enter this paradise within itself to be with its God* (W 29 4) or in *the little Heaven of our soul* (W 28 5).

It could be considered that the question is without importance because the representation of Christ, conceived by faith within oneself is not compatible with a representation next to oneself, since the time and space conditions have been abolished, Christ is in the soul and the soul in Christ or next to Him, according to the attraction of the grace in the moment. In fact, Teresa’s preference for the representation of Christ within oneself does not have a psychological or practical reason only, but a doctrinal one. She is insisting in fact on a truth which constitutes a fundamental principle of Teresian spirituality: Christ resides in the soul, in its center, as in a mansion. This idea, present everywhere in Teresian writings, will be marvelously developed in her last work the *Interior Castle*.

We now have to ask Teresa what is the nature, or the content, of the activity produced by the soul recollected in the presence of Christ-Man going to be? This attitude could be characterized by the *look*.

We are struck by Teresa’s special predilection for this term: *Represent the Lord Himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you [...] I’m not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with the intellect. I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him* (W 26 3).

It is about the *look* of the soul on Christ or of the look of Christ on the soul. *Never will your spouse take His eyes off of you, He has tolerated a thousand uglinesses and abominations against Him, and this hasn't been enough to cause Him to look away[...] Behold, He is not waiting for anything else, as He says to the bride, than that we look at Him* (W 26 3).

This mutual look expresses in fact an immediate, personal relationship, a living relationship of reciprocal presence.

The term *look* signifies that it is about a simple activity that abolishes all multiplicity of action; it is an intuitive activity since the soul achieves (in the strong sense of the term), the Presence of Christ as an *object present* to it, in a real, existential, living way.

The representation of Christ in His humanity and the look directed at Him depend on the vivacity of faith which brings, in a manner of speaking, the revealed truths to their maximum point of intensity, all the knowledge of the mysteries the soul received at Baptism and the teachings of the Church, as well as the acquired knowledge through study, reflection and finally, one's anterior, personal experiences.

This act of bold faith naturally includes hope in the form of desire; desire of union with God, for His service, for His glory, in a word for God. Teresa insists a lot on the importance of desires to progress in the knowledge of God and in perfection. These desires concern the soul itself, the salvation of souls, the realization of God's design for the world. In the brief definition of this kind of interior prayer, Teresa has a significant formula: *I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer* (V 4 7). She doesn't say 'my' but our God and Lord.

In any case, this look, made up of faith and hope, is mainly and principally, animated by love. What she will say about more advanced interior prayer is valid here: *God and the soul understand each other only through the desire His Majesty has that it understands Him, without the use of any other means devised to manifest the love these two friends have for each other. It's like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other* (V 27 10).

Ultimately, the look of the soul expresses everything of the person in the Presence of Christ living within. This is what spiritual writers usually name a loving attention.

3-CONVERSATION WITH CHRIST

The third part of Teresian prayer is a conversation with the Lord, an exchange that can take one of two variable forms depending on the grace in the moment or the availability of the soul.

Heart to Heart talk

The first form which normally prolongs the exchange of looks is the heart to heart talk. Today we would say a dialogue with the Lord. *For not only will you desire to look at Him but you will also delight in speaking with Him, not with ready-made prayers but with those that come from the sorrow of you own heart, for He esteems them highly* (W 26 6).

To remain in His Presence, maintain intimate contact with Him, a moment will come when the soul breaks the silence, expresses itself by delivering without preparation the bottom of its being. *The soul can [...] grow accustomed to being inflamed with love for His sacred humanity. It can keep Him ever present and speak with Him, asking for its needs and complaining of its labors, being glad with Him in its enjoyments and not forgetting Him because of them, trying to speak to*

Him not through written prayers but with words that conform to it desires and needs and our needs (V12 2).

We can see that it is out of the question to use stereotypical formulas, to express elevated feelings, to make *grand and complicated remarks*. Teresa here wants to discourage certain souls from creating a persona, from trying to present to the Lord an honorable front worthy of Him or the illusion of those who think they had a good prayer time because they spent the whole time talking without stopping! *Remain there in His presence with the intellect quiet. And if a person is able he should occupy himself in looking at Christ who is looking at Him, and he should speak, and petition, and humble himself, and delight in the Lord's presence, and remember that he is unworthy of being there (V 13 22).*

Truth, liberty and love are the three principal qualities that Teresa insists on in this *one on one* conversation with the Lord; truth of the soul that hides nothing of its misery, of its weaknesses, of its needs, knowing that it is known without any possible dissimulations and loved by the Lord in spite of everything.

They should put themselves in the presence of Christ and, without tiring the intellect, speak with and delight in Him and not wear themselves out in composing syllogisms; rather, they should show Him their needs and the reason why He doesn't have to allow us to be in His presence. The discursive reflection they can do at one time, and the other acts at another, so that the soul may not grow tired of always eating the same food (V 13 11).

The liberty which the soul can and should use in the expression of its feelings is the *parrhesia* of which the Scriptures³ and the Fathers of the Church speak. It is the familiarity, the frankness, the simplicity of two friends who know one another intimately and know that they can talk to one another without beating around the bush, without taking a thousand precautions to not wound the sensitivity of the other or pretending to have uplifting feelings. *He likes us to be truthful with Him. If we speak plainly and clearly so that we don't say one thing and then act differently, He always gives more than what we ask of Him (W 37 4).* See for example the prayer she prays for her brother Agostin de Ahumada in danger in Chili in July 1571 (Favors). This prayer from the heart, so free in its tone, was habitual for her: *I began to talk to the Lord in a foolish way, which I often do without knowing what I'm saying. It is love that is then speaking (V 34 8; see V37 9; F 19 6).*⁴ *My God is not at all touchy; He doesn't bother about trifling things [...] He adjusts Himself to our way of giving (W 23 3; see ex. V 37 8).*

At last, we are at the heart of Teresian prayer, it is important above and beyond all else to show a love that aims to be total, unique and alive.

Teresa will repeat that in interior prayer it is very important *not to think much but to love much* (IC 4 1,7, F 5 2). She affirms that with interior prayer *bodily strength is not necessary but only love and a habit (V 7 12)*. To designate those who practice interior prayer, she had this beautiful formula: they are *servants of love (V11 1)*. *If all imaginations are not capable of meditating, all souls are capable of loving (F 5 2).*

It is necessary here to recall what Teresa meant when she spoke of the love of God and neighbor, areas bringing into play her whole conception of Christian perfection. Briefly, to love

³ See Ingo Hermann, *L'expérience de la foi, Essai de théologie biblique*, X, Mappus, Lyon, 1967, p. 96-98. Ou Schlier in Kitter, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, W.M.B. Eerdmans, Michigan, 1981, t. V, p. 879-886.

⁴ Teresa almost drowned crossing the flooding Arlanzon, to go to Burgos. She allegedly heard an interior word: 'This is how I treat my friends'. To which according to legend she replied: Oh! Lord, so that's the reason you have so few!' See Fr. Otilio Rodriguez, *Legenda aurea teresiane*, Madrid, 1970. P.4. See also *Histoire de Sainte Therese d'apres les Bollandistes*, Nantes, 1882, t. II, p. 348-349.

the Lord does not only involve feelings of admiration, of recognition, of adoration, of trust, etc., but once again, and principally, of the willingness to conform oneself to the will of God, whatever it costs. In her writings, like a mantra, she continually came back to the expression *to please God in everything* (IC 4 1 7). That is why she insisted that one prove through actions the authenticity of one's love. *The love of God does not consist in tears or in delight and tenderness which for the greater part we desire and find consolation in; but it consists in serving with justice and fortitude of soul and in humility* (V 11 13).

As a sign of a good interior prayer, she wrote to Father Gracian: *The fact is that in these interior things of the spirit what is more acceptable and certain is what leaves the best effects. I do not mean immediately with respect to many desires. Even though these are good, they do not at times amount to all that our self-love paints them to be. What I mean by the best effects are those confirmed by works and that the desires for the honor of God become apparent in an authentic solicitude for it and that the intellect and memory be occupied in how best to please him and show him the love one has for him* (Letter 136 4 pg. 368).

During the time of prayer, it is necessary to do everything to keep a lively contact with Christ and maintain the relationship of love active: *and so do that which best stirs you to love* (IC 4 1 7). She suggests that the soul behave towards God according to its choice or its temperament at the time or according to the circumstances. *Speak with Him as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another.* (W 28 3; *ibid*, 28 2).

In taking into consideration all the elements presented by Teresa in her explanations of the prayer of recollection, it would seem that one must recognize in this heart to heart with the Lord two forms, close but distinct. The first could be called a simple conversation in which the soul spontaneously exposes that which has accumulated in its heart and that the Holy Spirit has inspired, that which comes to mind in the immediate. The soul empties the overflow of the heart, without an order or a plan, as we have seen.

Conversation with an Evangelical theme

A second form of conversation can be employed when this effusion tarnishes, a form that we can call a conversation with an Evangelical theme, because it calls for a simpler form of meditation. Teresa knew that the *will often needs the help of the intellect so as to be enkindled* (IC 6 7, 7).

The characteristic of this conversation with a meditative basis, compared to methodical meditation, is double. First of all, it is based on the fact that one chooses, not a general idea—the last judgment, the void, Heaven, Hell, etc. --- but a Bible scene. *Now returning to what I was saying about Christ bound at the pillar: it is good to reflect awhile and think about the pains He suffered there, and why, and who He is, and the love with which He suffered them* (V13 22). Then, we will not be happy considering the events of the life of Christ from the outside like a theater spectacle, but will enter into the action which unfolds, taking part in it as if really living the scene in the company of the actors of the Bible. We will read and interpret the words of Christ as if they were addressed to us personally and in the present moment.⁵

⁵ See 'La lecture theresienne de la Bible' in Revue Carmel num. 26 (1982-2), p. 65-80.

Teresa's preference was the Passion of Christ. She recognizes that we can choose other passages from the Bible but that it is important to always come back to this episode. It is from here *which has come and continues to come every good* (V13 13). So representing the Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, *I strove to be His companion there. If I could, I thought of the sweat and agony He had undergone in that place. I desired to wipe away the sweat he so painfully experienced, but I recall that I never dared to actually do it, since my sins appeared to me so serious* (V 9 4).

She asked her daughters to look at Christ *bound to the column, persecuted by some, spit on by others, denied by His friends, abandoned by them, with no one to defend Him, frozen from the cold, left so alone that you can console each other.* (W 26 5). In summary she suggested a real attempt to act and went even as far as saying: *Take up that cross, daughters. Don't mind at all if the Jews trample upon you, if His trial can thereby be lessened.* (W 26 7). Couldn't we say that she saw herself climbing Calvary with Christ surrounded by His enemies?

She told another of her *simplicities* as she said. After communion, she saw herself at the feet of the Lord and she *wept with the Magdalene, no more nor less than if she were seeing Him with her bodily eyes in the house of the Pharisee. And even though she didn't feel devotion, faith told her that He was indeed there* (W 34 7). The naïve considerations she allowed herself were in keeping with the familiarity of which we are speaking.

It is in this particular and restrained sense that she invites us into meditation; *for in the prayer of recollection, meditation, or the work of the intellect, must not be set aside* (IC 4 3, 8). There again, it is important to be careful not to prolong this meditative conversation, *but one should not always weary oneself in seeking these reflections* (V 13 22). As soon as the soul has been *wakened to love* (V 22 14), it is necessary to come back to the free and spontaneous conversation or to the simple look.

They would be right if they engaged for a while in making acts of love, praising God, rejoicing in His goodness, that He is who He is, and in desiring His honor and glory [...] for they are great awakeners of the will (IC 4 1,6). Doing this, we achieve the true goal of interior prayer, and it would be an aberration to want to return to *ordinary meditation* (ibid), under the pretext of wanting to end a time of interior prayer in a conventional way as outlined in manuals. We alternate periods of silence with exchange, according to the state of our soul, *He doesn't want us to be breaking our heads trying to speak a great deal to Him* (W 29 6).

We are struck by the extreme flexibility of this Teresian *manner of prayer* which allows the soul the greatest liberty provided that it is active, in other words *awakened to love*. She would be able to go, during the same time of prayer from an attitude of a simple look to a heart to heart conversation, in one or the other form and inversely, using at will the method of interior prayer which allowed her to stay vigilante and loving.

To be able to preserve this interior liberty necessary for love, Teresa really insisted that we do not force the soul with a whip. *It is very helpful not to drag the soul along, as they say, but to lead it gently for the sake of its greater advantage* (V 11 16) and further: *It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner [...] don't force it to stay a long time in one room alone.*(IC 1 2, 8).

4/ **METHODS TO RECOLLECT ONESELF**

It could happen however that the living contact with Christ cannot be established or maintained *during the time set aside for interior prayer resulting from bad body position, dryness or distractions* (see V 11 15). To achieve contact or to reestablish contact, Teresa suggests diverse,

little ploys, *skill* (W 26 10) which are only means to arrive at the goal. Indeed, *when the fire in the will that was mentioned is not enkindled and God's presence is not felt, it is necessary that we seek this presence.* (IC 6 7 9).

She recommends helping yourself with *a good book written in the vernacular in order to recollect one's thoughts and pray well vocally, and little by little accustom the soul with coaxing and skill not to grow discouraged* (W 26 10).

For eighteen years, *after Communion, I never dared to begin prayer without a book. For my soul was as fearful of being without it during prayer as it would have been should it have had to battle with a lot of people. With this recourse, which was like a partner or a shield by which to sustain the blows of my many thoughts, I went about consoled* (V 4 9).

After that, she will continue to use a book that she would keep beside her, *as soon as I have a book, if I like it, I become recollected, and the reading transforms into interior prayer* (S).

Reading offers a center of interest, something for my thoughts to focus on; it represents an intermediate which enhances recollection and even for some replaces mental prayer that they cannot achieve (V 4 8). *In any case, for those who journey along this path, a book helps to promptly recollect oneself* (V 9 5). *I have always been fond of the words of the Gospels and found more recollection in them than in very cleverly written books* (W 21 3).

Some other suggestions, she recommends would be to *carry about an image or painting of the Lord that is to your liking, not so as to carry it about on your heart and never look at it but so as to speak often with Him* (W 26 9).

We have to return to this method when He Himself is absent, or when by means of a great dryness He wants to make us feel He is absent. It is then a wonderful comfort to see an image of One whom we have so much reason to love, (W34 11), *and to feel sorry for the heretics denied this consolation.*

Now, then, let us speak again to those souls I mentioned that cannot recollect or tie their minds down in mental prayer or engage in reflection (W24 1), she suggests reciting a vocal prayer like the *Our Father*. It is important to seek to understand each word, each sentence that they say. The mind should not impose a type of thinking of which hypothetically it is not capable; it is enough for it to follow the words of the prayer forcing itself to grasp the meaning. *The intellect is recollected much more quickly with this kind of prayer even though it may be vocal; it is prayer that brings with it many blessings* (W 28 4).

Teresa affirms that even by this path it is possible to achieve perfect contemplation. *I tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father or some other vocal prayer, the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation* (W25 1). She cites the example of a person in this case (see W 30 7).

There is a last objection that needs to be addressed Teresa heard murmurings about the reality of her having had a real conversation with the Lord. The friendly dialogue that she proposes, doesn't it come down in fact to a monologue in which the soul does most of the talking without an answer?

Teresa recognized first of all that *the Lord comes very late and pays just as well, and all at once, what He was giving to others in the course of many years* (W17 2). *Even though we do not hear Him, He speaks well to the heart when we beseech Him from the heart* (W 24 5).

Concerning beginners and all those who begin, yet they never reach the end [...] thinking they are doing nothing, she remarks that *it is then perhaps that their will is being strengthened and fortified, although they may not be aware of this* (V11 15).

As for Teresa, she is certain that the Lord does not stop acting in the soul who is looking for Him. *Though He comes disguised, the disguise as I have said does not prevent Him from being recognized in many ways, in conformity with the desire we have to see Him. And you can desire to see Him so much that He will reveal Himself to you entirely (W 34 12) if we prepare ourselves to receive Him, He never fails to give in many ways which we do not understand (W 35 1).* Another noteworthy remark: *something marvelous, worthy of careful attention—for as soon as He understands that the soul is totally His [...] He never ceases to commune with it in so many ways and manners, as One who is Wisdom itself (M 5 5).*

In summary, the Lord's answer in the *heart to heart* of interior prayer happens, certainly not through words, but by His action in the most intimate part of the soul or by the feelings that He gives--delight to be there, to suffer for Him, to believe and hope in Him in spite of the contradiction of events. These are happy feelings about your misery, about knowing yourself loved and forgiven. Sometimes there is a silence full of love, of joy at His beauty, of His mercy, of His glory, of peace or of an interior light on Him. Sometimes there is a feeling that He is there, that He is listening. But more often, or usually, there is nothing other than a reinforced will to serve Him whatever the cost.