

CONTEMPLATION, fr. Luc-Marie, o.c.d. Lourdes15

Carmelite prayer is the ideal path to **sanctification** because in silent prayer we receive **Living Water**, in other words the grace of contemplation. We are all called to receive this grace. **3 Points:**

1/ **Definition** of Contemplation;

2/ Different **Degrees** of Contemplation-there is a variability in the intensity of the Holy Spirit received in contemplation.

3/ **Problems** with Contemplation. Questions that contemplation brings about such as: why does that person receive this form of contemplation and this person another form? Why is contemplation given to some and not to others?

### **I/ Definition of Contemplation:**

**-Dictionary:** the act of absorbing oneself in the observance of something or someone.

**-Teresa of Avila:** Contemplation according to St. Teresa doesn't have the same meaning as the one given by the dictionary. For St. Teresa, **contemplation** and the absorption are brought about by **God**. The Holy Spirit overtakes the mind. It no longer seeks to be recollected. God takes the reins; He is now in charge. God is doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. The Holy Spirit recollects the soul; He prays in us.

In both **meditation** & **contemplation**, Christ is **looked at** by faith with our faculty of the intellect. Christ is **loved** by our faculty of will (or charity). For this reason, meditation has the **same objective** as contemplation. The objective being **Christ in his humanity**, who is God, the Holy Trinity.

However, in **contemplation**, we receive **special help from the Holy Spirit to look at Christ by faith**. The Holy Spirit activates this special help himself with a major force. It is the Holy Spirit in us who loves with charity.

So, once again, meditation and contemplation have Christ as the objective but don't work in the same way. In contemplation, God is no longer approached by our natural forces as in meditation. It is **not** through work on the part of our faculties that we reach God. In **contemplation**, **He is approached supernaturally** through the action of the Holy Spirit who makes up for our weakness making prayer '**easy**'.

**Example:** I meet a boat's Captain (Holy Spirit) on the dock. He invites me to come aboard (my soul);

to enter within myself; to come aboard my heart which is to enter into contemplation.

In my heart there are **two chests**. From one of the chests the Holy Spirit gives me the oars(**will**) and a compass (**intellect**). I am in charge. I set out on my journey to Christ. I row and row. After 2 days, I have gone a mile. I'm exhausted.

The Holy Spirit is touched by the **effort** of my intellect and will. He timidly and kindly offers to take over; to help me out. Most often we say 'yes' but there are those who refuse His help and insist on doing it alone.

The Holy Spirit puts the oars (**will**) and the compass (**intellect**) in the first chest and removes the **sails** from the second one. He is now at the helm. He blows in the sails. Cruising speed is quickly reached. It takes time to arrive at the destination, but we do arrive.

In **meditation** then, we go into our hearts with all the powers the Holy Spirit has given us. With our **natural forces** we **seek Christ**. **Contemplation**, on the other hand, is when the Holy Spirit takes-over the prayer. He takes over our humanity, leading us to union with Christ.

You **know** if you have received the **gift** of contemplation in your life. The criteria used to determine the grace of contemplation are the following: the prayer was **easy**; there was a profound **peace**; the **time** passed quickly; and, we can't **reproduce** the experience ourselves.

### **2/ Degrees of Contemplation:**

There are different degrees of contemplation; different intensities in the 'over-taking' of the soul by the Holy Spirit:

**-Prayer of Quiet:** the Holy Spirit takes over the power of the **will**, or the faculty of love (charity). The soul experiences a **supernatural draw**, a magnet-like draw towards God. The soul can't explain how it happens, but it finds itself 'swallowed up' in the depths of itself. It is irresistibly attracted to its center where God lives. It is there by the action of the Holy Spirit, inclined forward towards the Spouse who is there with it in the secret. God poured a delicious, suave anointing on the faculty of the will which fills the soul with a love for Him. It is plastered against Him.

This was done by the Holy Spirit. It is a divine action; it is not a human action. You are there in a deep serenity, a great interior peace, like ink on a

blotter. You are totally pacified. This is the prayer of quiet. You don't want to move. You are very content, like a child in its mother's arms; still in body and soul. You have found a peace that the world will never give you, even the greatest peace like that of a mother who receives her newborn in her arms for the first time after the pain of childbirth.

This peace is nothing compared to the prayer of quiet; compared to the supernatural peace that the Holy Spirit gives when He penetrates the soul with His love through the faculty of the will.

Here is a **description** of the Prayer of Quiet given us by St. Teresa of Avila: 'God and the soul are so close to one another that they can understand one another by signs. The soul finds itself in the inside the palace very close to the King. The soul understands that He is beginning to give it His kingdom. It feels like it is out of this world. Nothing bothers it. The interior joy and peace make it feel inebriated and absorbed. It can't imagine needing anything else and with your whole heart you say with St. Peter: 'Let's put up 3 tents here!'-- The Transfiguration was the unexplainable contemplative experience, far greater than the prayer of quiet. Peter and the others were lost in God wanting the experience to last eternally.

Enough of the things of your Father, let's set up 3 tents that you can share with us.

Remember in the prayer of quiet, God only has a hold of the **will**. The **intellect** is **free**. Paradoxically, the will is absorbed while the intellect remains free. It continues to wander and function normally. It focuses on things that are not at all related to God. St. Teresa wondered about this when she received the first graces of quiet. How can you be at peace in the center of yourself while thinking of a million things; completely distracted.

We are not a monolithic block. We have faculties that are completely distinct; the will is one thing, the intellect another. This should be comforting for us that once we have chosen, love, through our will, to pray and to be present for God, **we win!** Even if we continue to experience a million distractions. If we continually return to God each time we realize that our minds have wandered, **we win!** Even if we had twenty-five minutes of distractions and five minutes of peace, **we win!**

St. Teresa gives us **three tips related to the grace of quietude**:

**a** -Don't try and bring the intellect into God's presence; just enjoy the interior peace, ignore the distractions. If I try and bring the intellect to God and to concentrate in His presence, I take back the reins; I take back control of the prayer. I become the principle actor in my prayer. When God sees that I **prefer** the 'oars' to the 'sails', He lets me take charge. I lose the 'sails' and I return to **meditation**. I have lost the gift; the anointing. Don't try and control the distraction. When you aren't in grace of quietude (contemplation) however, do bring yourself back to God's presence if you realize you are distracted.

**b** -Lessen your daily activities, seek **solitude**. When you receive the grace of quiet, avoid the hussle-bussle of the world that day. Seek the 'desert'. Put the world outside/aside. Don't be so quick to take control back, rather, bask in the gift of God.

**c**-**Stay humble and small**. This is the most important piece of advice. This seems to be determinant in God giving us the gift of quiet. Why? Well because God gives this gift to whomever He wants, when and how He wants, and for reasons that only He knows. The gift is not based on what we deserve so be careful not to tell yourself that this is a reward for my hard work. When you receive it, it is important to thank God and to wonder why you were granted the gift; to admit to God that you don't deserve it but to accept it because he is giving it to you, an unworthy servant. With such an attitude of humility, He will continue to give it to you. You will lose it however, if your attitude is one of wanting it, clamoring after it.

**-Prayer of Union**, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of prayer: the soul's take-over by the Holy Spirit is complete. The Holy Spirit has taken possession of the intellect. What's happening? You no longer think and don't think that you no longer think because the Holy Spirit has stopped the intellect. He has turned it off. There is no more wandering, no more distractions. You know longer have an awareness of self. You are like someone who fainted. There is a loss of awareness of the self. You are lost in God.

St. Teresa says that God suspends the intellect. This is the grace of the prayer of union. It's a rare gift. Teresa says it lasts the length of an 'Ave'. It is called union because God **unites the faculties**, He has the faculties of love and intellect in His hand. There are other degrees of union, other experiences that are superior. They are all laid out in the 6<sup>th</sup> Mansion in the Interior Castle: quiet (wound of love); interior words; vision in images, intellectual visions; transverberation or martyr of love, ecstasies. What's an ecstasy? It is when God fills you with a formidable force of love for Christ that your soul 'flies away', there is a **disconnect** of the body and soul.

### - 2 Types of Contemplative Prayer

It is important to distinguish between **2 types of contemplative prayer**. When contemplative grace is granted, our spirit is taken over by the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural, God is in control of the faculties of love and knowledge. This 'take-over' or possession of our faculties can be experienced in 2 different ways, **positively** or **negatively**:

a. **Positively**: the Holy Spirit grants the grace of quietude, the wound of love or transverberation. I become aware that the Holy Spirit, through contemplative grace, is working in my faculty of knowledge in a whole new way. He suspends it; or grants ecstasies, intellectual visions, visions in images, internal wounds of love.

In short, we are talking about **fruitful** contemplation. It's the 'juice' that brings about the 'joyful' experience of God. The contemplation is the experience of God being in control. He put the 'oars' and the 'compass' away, in other words I can't use them. He has taken out the 'sails.'

b. **Negatively**: contemplative grace experienced negatively. In this case, we aren't allowed to know or experience what God is doing in the faculties of love and knowledge. We are simply left without the ability to use them. This is contemplative **dryness** talked about by St. John of the Cross. We only perceive the dimension of neutralization in self. It is **difficult** and **painful**. We can't meditate anymore. This is a **passive** action of the Holy Spirit, a **neutralization** of my faculties. We can't use our intellect, nor do we have emotions. We are not able to feel or appreciate the positive work the Holy

Spirit is doing in our lives. This is dry contemplation.

Going back to the example of the boat. The Holy Spirit has taken out the sails, blown in them but we are not able to appreciate His effort. We know that the boat is at sea, but we don't know the speed. We feel **lost** and **abandoned**, unable to use our own powers to draw closer to God. We are having a contemplative experience.

### Which form of Contemplation is preferable?

The **fruitful** form of contemplation or the **dry** form?

What is important in our spiritual life is contemplative grace not the form it takes. What matters is that the Holy Spirit is in charge and that He acts in us instead of us acting. This is what matters, not how He does it. The Holy Spirit gives this grace to all of us no matter the form usually after 'rowing' for **6 months**. Remember there is 'rowing' in **meditation** and 'rowing' in **dry contemplation**.

The spiritual director with the toolbox from St. John of the Cross helps us to discern if we are in the contemplative grace or lukewarm spiritually. The **Key** is the contemplative grace and not the form it takes. What the grace **produces** is what is important. The product is a **new way of loving** and a **new way of knowing**.

Charity takes on a new heroic dimension in us. We love without limits like the Saints. We make acts of love like the love of the Christ crucified.

We are hurt but our hearts remain open. When offended, we pardon and don't turn within. We let go of the debt that others owe us. We give our whole being completely and rapidly for the joy of giving ourselves completely.

This change is the result of the passive action of the Holy Spirit. We don't shy away from sacrifice for the love of God and neighbor; we accept it totally. We have a tireless generosity; we have gone from 'me' to 'other'.

We offer our lives as pure waste for the salvation of the world. We forgive everything. We accept everything. Others remark that there is something divine about our behavior which transcends the ordinary and expected in this world here below. When we receive contemplative grace, we achieve a new way of knowing in faith and hope.

Contemplative grace allows us to see the world through the **eyes of Jesus**. We perceive the mysteries of faith with more clarity and assuredness. We fully believe in the Church, the one, holy and apostolic Church. We understand that the behavior change comes from the presence of Christ in the **Eucharist**. The mystery of the holiness of the Church comes from Christ's presence amongst sinners. He makes the college of Apostles holy.

Despite of our sinful nature, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit who opens the mysteries of the Church to us the spouse of Christ. We understand with unshakeable faith that God will never abandon us.

Another criterion of discernment that we are under the Holy Spirit's influence is that we give advice to our brothers and sisters, but it is the Holy Spirit speaking through us.

We are called to contemplative life by the Holy Spirit. We are all called to union of love with God, to spiritual marriage and to holiness. We are not however all called to the same type of prayer; some may be called to **fruitful** prayer and others to **dry** contemplation.

**Why does God want a certain type of contemplation for one and another for someone else?**

**-Why does God give Fruitful Contemplation?**

St. Teresa gives us **4 reasons**:

1/ **To Draw the Soul to Christ**: the Holy Spirit knows that fruitful contemplation is needed to 'capture' a soul. It makes the soul want to become friends with Christ, to be in His company, to try and avoid sin and convert.

2/ **To Show His Mercy**: The soul doesn't deserve contemplative grace. When God gives it to the soul, it is overwhelmed. True contemplative grace humiliates the soul who knows it doesn't deserve this grace.

3/ **To strengthen the soul for a Mission in the Church**: this mission will be difficult. John, James and Peter received this grace of contemplation during the Transfiguration. God sends his 'soldier' into battle after getting them '**inebriated**' from grace- to overcome fear.

4/ **Visualize the action of the Holy Spirit in the Soul**: to be a faith booster for others to strengthen and edify the Church.

**-Why does God give Dry Contemplation?**

1/ We are too **gourmands**: most receive the grace of dry contemplation because we are too self-centered, sensual. If God gives fruitive contemplation we want more, ever more. We become '**obese**' on God's grace. God wants **moderation**. He wants us to come to Him not for His gifts but for Him.

2/ The Lord wants us to **earn** the fruitful grace. In dryness **credibility** can be tested. If you have persevered in dryness for 20 years this shows God that you want Him and not His gifts; that you love Him. The harder the prayer the better. It is harder to go to Calvary than to Cana. Jesus can count His friends on both hands. Only His friends can stick with it when it gets tough.

3/ God wants us to grow in **humility**.

**Conclusion:**

**-Ask** for the grace of Contemplation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, holiness, to know and love God as He loves Himself in the mystery of the Trinity.

**-Accept** with Abandon whatever form of contemplation God gives you!