

Learning to Pray

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Method of Teaching Prayer

Teresa
did not have a
method of prayer
but
she had a
method of teaching prayer

- Teresa's method was very personal & effective consistent throughout her works;
- As long as it was her using it, it was documented to be **quite effective**;
- Initially her success at teaching her method of prayer was limited but as she progressed, her success improved.

School of Prayer

Of one she says:
'One of the people
who commanded me
to write this book,
whom the Lord has
brought in four months
to a point far beyond
that which
I reached in
seventeen years..."
(L, II.8).

- The book of her *Life* was the result of an increase in virtue & a mastery of her way of prayer;
- Her *Life* written for her **first school of prayer**, a small group of friends;
- At the **second writing** of her *Life*, the members of this group had made considerable progress.

Testimony

“His prayer had reached such a degree that at the time of his death when he wanted to avoid mental prayer because of his great weakness, he couldn’t on account of his many raptures. He wrote me asking what he should do”
(L, 38, 13).

- Her testimony concerning the most famous of this group the theologian **Ibanez**;
- He was a man who had given up his chair of theology for a life of prayer & died transformed by it.

Teresa's Success

Her own estimate of these was very favorable...

She wrote:

“So many are the favors which the Lord does in the houses that though there are one or two (nuns) in each whom God leads by way of meditation, **all the rest attain perfect contemplation**”

(F. 4,5).

- Before she founded her first monastery, she was successful with a large number of **disciples** in the monastery of the **Incarnation**;
- To quote a contemporary witness: “More than forty nuns are practicing great recollection in her house;”
- Her **greatest success** came when she had **her own group of novices** in the convent of **St. Joseph in Avila**, & subsequently in the **other convents** she founded.

A Teaching Mission

Letters
show a
teaching mission
to a
variety of people

- Her **father** was an early and successful disciple of Teresa's in prayer (IC 7, 10);
- Later, her **brother**, Lorenzo, who had returned from America, made great progress in a very short time.

A Travelling School of Prayer

Ribera, an early biographer, wrote:

“They traveled in covered carts
& organized themselves as if
they were in their **monastery**...

They always brought a little **bell**,
which they rang for regular times
of prayer & **silence**, & a sand-
glass to measure time. At such
times all had to be silent.

Afterward, she **rewarded their
silence** by giving them
something to eat.”

- On those journeys through Castile and Andalusia who knows what other friends she may have attracted to prayer;
- The **covered wagons** in which she and her nuns travelled were to some extent a **traveling school of prayer.**

The Principal Personage, God

To grasp Teresa's method
of teaching prayer
we must examine her
experience

She was convinced that
her life only really began
when she made it
a life of prayer

- Teresa always talked to God. This **inner attitude** allowed her to rise above life's circumstances;
- In Teresa's writings, prayer introduces the reader into her dialogue with God, a party to her conversation rather than a subject;
- She writes as if talking to the reader but alternates her conversation between the reader & God;
- Teresa's writings tell the reader what vocal & mental prayer, or meditation & contemplation, are & provide an opportunity for her to try & pray with him.

Model of her Technique of Alternating Dialogue

The *Way of Perfection*,
where she sets out
to teach her nuns
how to pray
The first chapter
is a
Model of her Technique
of
Alternating Dialogue

- Teresa writes for nuns, talking to them & to God alternately;
- Her aim was to tell them the reason for the life they were leading;
- The reader sees the author become moved talking to the Other & gets caught up in that conversation;
- God is present as one of the group. Nothing is discussed without him.

This Way is Difficult

Teresa knows from experience that 'this way' is difficult almost impossible without solid support

She is convinced of the necessity for practical guidance & the efficacy of communicated experience

- The **central lesson** in the *Way of Perfection*... aspects of prayer...Teresa simply brings in God by introducing his word & declaring him Master;
- Combining communication of ideas with practice simplifies the learning process;
- Nothing is impossible, if some things are not a reality now it is because they have not yet become part of one's life;
- It is by relating to God that one's capacity for relationship grows. "The Lord invites everybody" He offers 'living water' to everybody. He excludes nobody from the Way (W 19; 20, I).

Individual Training

Two levels of initiation & training :

one is **personal** & individual;
the other is at a group or
community level;

St. Teresa requires certain
predispositions setting out
on "**this road of prayer**"

One's life which must be
converted into prayer
to bring forth flowers
not weeds

In the Way of Perfection, these requirements are expressed as follows:

- “The **first** is a general one: to aim at having the Church as an ideal to serve and as a reason for living. This is to avoid the trap of living as if only ‘God and oneself’ existed...”
- The **second** concerns sustenance for the journey: practical virtues that keep one's feet on the ground, such as brotherly love, detachment from material things, and humility to walk in truth.
- **Her final and most insistent requirement is a ‘resolute determination’.** Teresa sees it as the key component of the whole operation.

Resolute Determination

These two texts, which have parallels in her *Life*, 9 & 11, are enough to show what Teresa thought

Determination
is not a
Conversion to Practice a
few Virtues
it is a
Conversion to the Person
of Christ;
a Definitive Binding.

- Teresa is talking about a **fundamental firmness of purpose in life** which **typifies a conversion experience** like the one she had;
- Teresa knew that a **life of prayer** pursued to perfection required “**more courage** than the suffering of a quick martyrdom” (L 31, 17);
- Teresa gives her **basic requirement** a military tone : “I would not want you, my daughters, to be womanish in anything...but like **strong men...**” (W 7, 8).
- “But this little bit of time we resolve to give him... let us be wholly determined never to take it back from him...I should consider the time of prayer as not belonging to me ...” (23, 2).

Simple & Effective Way

When it comes to
**introducing us to
personal prayer**

Teresa feels she has a
**simple & effective way
guaranteed by her
experience**

She says she had
never known

**“what it was to pray with
satisfaction until the Lord
showed her this way”**

- Teresa is convinced that anyone who tries will succeed: “I know that if you try you will acquire it in a year, or maybe six months” (29, 8).
- She is convinced of the effectiveness of her teaching method;
- She doesn't believe in teaching beginners about such distinctions as active and contemplative prayer;
- She introduces a kind of rhythm in praying, alternating between vocal & mental prayer, meditation & recollection, recollection & contemplation.

Teresa's Concept of 'Recollection'

Each concentrates on one of the two people 'sharing the friendship'

Each has its specific function

The **first** simplifies things as much as possible;

The **second** serves to interiorize & spiritualize the act of prayer.

- The **central chapters** in the *Way of Perfection* are 26-29;
- The first two (26, 27) deal with the **most important aspect**: introducing Christ into our prayer;
- The second two (28, 29) cover: entering within ourselves to pray;
- These **two elements** make up Teresa's concept of '**recollection**'.

Teresa's Concept of 'Recollection'

Since you are alone
daughters,
strive to find a
companion.

Well what better
companion than the
Master who taught
you this prayer?

Represent the Lord himself
as close to you

& behold how lovingly & humbly
he is teaching you.

Believe me,
you should remain with so
good a friend
as long as you can

(26, 1)

The Center of her Whole Exposition

Christ is really present;
one has only to 'look'
or 'see him looking at us',
& to accept that he speaks
as a teacher

"Turn your eyes &
look at him"

'look at him on his way
to Gethsemane ...
look at him bound...
or look at him burdened;
& he must look at you ...

(W26, 4-5)

- The encounter with the Person is paramount; an effort is made to simplify the act of faith by which the presence of Christ is made real;
- All her guidance is to avoid the **tangle of meditation**, the distraction of too much thinking;
- The advice '**to look at him**' is the **center** of her whole exposition. Her intention being to grasp his entire presence in this intuitive act.

The Center of her Whole Exposition

Her concluding remarks in the
Way of Perfection are
the same:

“Draw near to this good
Master with strong
determination to learn
what he teaches you,
& His Majesty will see
to it that you turn out to
be good disciples.
He will not abandon
you, if you do not
abandon him...

(W 26, 10)

In her *Life* she impressed on beginners:

“...it is good to reflect awhile and think
about the pains Christ suffered...
but one should not always weary oneself ...
just remain in his presence with the
intellect quiet...
occupy himself in looking at Christ looking
at him;
he should speak to him, ask him for things,
humble himself, and delight in the Lord’s
presence, remembering he is unworthy to
be there.

Whenever he can do this...
he will derive great benefit...

(L 13, 22)

Entering into oneself:
the second aspect of
recollection

“It is called
recollection
because
the soul collects
its powers
& retires within itself
with God”

(W 28, 4)

- ‘Recollecting oneself’ requires a **twofold effort**;
- **First:** letting go of the external, the sensory world;
- **Second:** engaging in ‘interior acts’.

The Door is Prayer

This is the starting point of the *Interior Castle*, the **door** to which is **prayer**

To enter the castle
is to pray;

To continue into the castle
is to progress through
the various stages
of prayer-
the degrees by which
prayer is intensified &
purified.

- Teresa, a contemplative, was determined to develop in her disciples the powers most suited to **penetrate the divine sphere**;
- The call to interior prayer is based on the conviction that our **inner world** is more spacious than the world around us;
- The measure of any person is the **depth of his inner life**.

Group Training

“Of myself I can say that had the Lord not revealed this truth to me and given me the means by which I could frequently talk with persons who practiced prayer, I, would have ended by falling headlong into hell...” (L 7, 22)

‘It is a very hard thing for a soul to be alone amid so many dangers...

I would advise those who practice prayer, especially in the beginning, to seek the friendship and conversation of others who are doing the same... even if all you do is help one another by your prayers; it is so important...

Those who serve him must stand shoulder to shoulder if they are to advance. Until they are strong, they ought to seek companionship as a defense...Charity grows by being communicated ...

sharing is very important” (L 7, 20-22)

- By group training is implying a group of people called by God to live out the experience of prayer by **walking** the ‘**road of prayer**’ together in community;
- Teresa’s early experience convinced her that on the difficult road of prayer, the **lone walker** stood little chance of surmounting the difficulties;
- It was a necessity she felt to find people whose solidarity will provide **mutual support**.

Vision of Fellowship

“Since friends are sought out for conversations & human attachments... I don’t know why a person who is to truly love & serve God is not permitted to talk with others about his joys & trials, for those who practice prayer have both”

(L 7, 20)

- The vision of fellowship, at the service of prayer, cultivating human communication to further communication with God, is beautiful;
- Teresa’s first group experience dates from before her first foundation based on this conviction: “I should like the five of us who love each other in Christ to make a pact of friendship...” (L 16, 7);
- This group sought to demonstrate the importance of the group in advancing the **ideal of prayer**.

Vision of Fellowship

Teresa sums it up
after making
the foundation

“It is the most wonderful consolation
to be able to live with
souls so detached.

Their whole object in life is to learn
how to make progress in the
service of God.

Solitude is their comfort, & the thought
of seeing others...is a burden...

no one comes to this house save those
who speak about this love

The only language they know is
speaking about God,
so they understand & are understood
only by those who
speak the same language”

(L 36, 26)

A Language

“For the love of God
I beg you that
your conversation always
be directed towards
bringing some good
to the one with whom
you are speaking,
for your prayer must be for
the benefit of souls...
strive for this in every way...
Let truth dwell in your hearts,
as it should through
meditation,
and you will see clearly
the kind of love
we are obliged to have
for our neighbor” (W 20, 3-4)

- The group’s fellowship developed into a ‘language’ they used to communicate with God & man;
- A language which was expressed in words, in their lives & all that influenced it: environment, means of livelihood, communal living (Teresa’s greatest joy);
- The ideal picture is later given in doctrinal form in the *Way of Perfection* prompted by the theme of the apostolate of prayer...

LifeStyle

“**Your business is prayer**...it is your business and your language. Whoever speaks to you must learn this language; if he doesn't be on guard that you don't learn his; it will be a hell. If they should think you unsophisticated, what does it matter? If they take you for hypocrites, it matters even less.

You will gain in that no one will want to see you except those who understand this language ...

for what is best suited to this **path** which we are beginning to discuss is **peace and tranquility** of soul.

If those who wish to speak with you wish to learn your language...you can tell about the riches that are to be gained by leaning it” (W 20, 4-6).

- Teresa defined clearly the kind of lifestyle the group should have;
- Dealings & language are seen as expressing a way of life, an indication of the spirit of the group;
- In a kind of citadel where relationship with God has been made the center & justification of life;
- Teresa was thinking of the mixture of language spoken in Castile in her day.

One Language to speak to both God & man

The whole thrust of a community life oriented towards the 'road of prayer' is to create within the group a spirit & channels of communication that facilitate the vertical movement of fellowship with God in such a way as to be a normal extension of fellowship amongst themselves;
hence one language to speak to both God and man.

- There were a few indispensable elements: enclosure, separation, real poverty; but even these had to have a **spiritual function**;
- They were preparatory: creating adequate space for prayer, a space suitable for turning the group into a school of prayer & a community of praying people;
- They had solitude & privacy; enclosure & individual cells saw to that and the Rule imposed silence. But these things were relative;
- The solitude was to foster community as well as meeting God on one's own;
- Apprenticeship to a life of prayer did not begin with the reciting prayer; but with speaking & listening in a fraternal environment.

Castle of the Soul
Synthesis of Recollection

A **synthesis**
of St. Teresa's
twofold pedagogy of prayer
-at individual &
community level
might be sought from the
symbol of the castle,
which she used
in both
the *Interior Castle*
& the *Way of Perfection*.

- The *Interior Castle* opens with an invitation to the reader to enter the **castle of his own soul** - the **synthesis of 'recollection'**;
- The *Way of Perfection* opens with an invitation to a group of readers, Teresa's first praying community, to enter the **'little castle'** of their **Carmelite monastery**, a miniature of Christ's Kingdom, the Church;
- To live the Christian life there as intensely as possible, in the presence of God & the Church.