

Love for Love: The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Avila

Part 2 (of 4)
Topic 5-8

By St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

5. In the Monastery
of the Incarnation:
Novitiate

In spite of my preference for the monastery where my friend lived, I felt ready to enter some other one should I have had the hope of serving God better there or should it have been my father's wish. For I was seriously seeking the salvation of my soul and placed little value on quiet living (L, 2, 2).

- Juana Suarez, the sister of Teresa's teacher, Maria Briceno, from the Augustinians, was her friend;
- Teresa now belonged to the Order of the Most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel founded by the Prophet Elijah;
- Mitigation befell the Order when it was transplanted from Mount Carmel to the west;
- There was scarcely a trace left of the strong spirit of the original Carmel when Teresa entered the Incarnation in 1535;
- The framework given by the Constitutions continued to offer the possibility of a true life of prayer;
- Teresa progressed through the school of the interior life to perfection at the Incarnation monastery.

5. In the Monastery of the Incarnation: **Novitiate**

At the same time as I put on the holy habit, God showed me his preference for those who constrain themselves in his service.

I also felt so happy in my new position that this blessed feeling still continues. Nothing could rob me of this delight. God changed the dryness that could bring me to doubt into love for him.

All the monastic practices were congenial to me.....I did not understand the source of such joy...
(L, 4,2)

- Teresa was the happiest spending her free hours in silent contemplation before the tabernacle;
- God's love gave her natural amiability...;
- She felt a day lost if she did not do a work of charity;
- Teresa enveloped with tender care a nun who was dying of a terrible disease that disgusted others;
- The nun's patience aroused Teresa's desire for similar trials;
- Teresa had a strong desire for eternal goods and would do whatever was necessary to get them. (L, 5, 2)

6. The School of Suffering : **Interior Life**

Pedro Sanchez gave Teresa the Third Spiritual Alphabet by Osuna about the Prayer of Recollection which was to become her spiritual guidebook.

In spite of her pain she continued her contemplative prayer; God rewarded her by raising her to a high level of Interior Life.

- Soon after her profession, (November 3, 1537), Teresa developed heart problems. She bore the trial with the patience of the nun who had amazed her & won the love of the other sisters;
- Her father decided to take her to a healer;
- While at Maria's farmhouse Teresa maintained her solitary prayer & remained faithful to her vocation outside the monastery;
- In her writings, this doctor of prayer would present the mystical life of grace in all its stages with incomparable clarity.

6. The School of Suffering : **Interior Life**

Prayer is the communication of the soul with God.
God is love, love is goodness giving itself away.
It is fullness of being that doesn't want to remain enclosed in itself, but rather to share itself with others...
All of creation exists thanks to Divine Love spending itself

- Prayer is the highest achievement of which the human spirit is capable;
- Prayer is a Jacob's ladder on which the human spirit ascends to God & God's grace descends to people;
- When the soul is no longer active, but is simply a receptacle for grace, one speaks of a mystical life of prayer;
- Vocal prayer is the lowest stage; Meditative prayer is one stage higher.

6. The School of Suffering : **Interior Life**

We are now standing at the border of the mystical life of grace that cannot be entered by virtue of human energy, for here only God's special favor grants admission.

- St. Teresa calls the next stage the prayer of quiet or simplicity. The soul is engaged by God's presence who allows her to rest in him;
- Union with the Lord surpasses the soul's happiness in the presence of God; it usually lasts but a short time; Ecstasies & Visions may accompany union;
- The Lord wishes to bind these souls to himself. He enters into a covenant with them called 'spiritual betrothal;'
- Teresa calls the highest state of blessedness "spiritual marriage."

6. The School of Suffering : **Interior Life**

I bore these sufferings...with joy...
I was completely surrendered to
God's will...all I wanted was to
withdraw into solitude...
the other sisters wondered at
my God-given patience...
I understood how prayer is a
blessing. It showed me what God's
true love was... I felt new virtues
developing in me...I never said
anything bad about others... (L,6, 3-4)

- The effect of her prayer life was an ever-increasing love of God & souls; her supernatural power to love gave her an almost irresistible force;
- After her return to Avila, Teresa was unconscious for 4 days, her grave dug; she finally opened her eyes;
- Teresa was confined to bed for three more years suffering much pain; she decided to beseech heaven to end her suffering;
- She ascribed her healing to St. Joseph...through him I regained my strength. I stood up, walked, & was free of the paralysis. (L, 6, 6-8)

7. Infidelity

“Under the pretext of humility,
I was afraid of prayer...
I said to myself that, as the most
imperfect of persons,
it was better ...to limit myself to
verbal prayer...In my condition...
I did not want to pursue so much
intimacy with God.
I was also afraid of
deceiving the entire world. (L,7,1)

- When Teresa left the solitary sickroom, she lost all she had gained;
- Teresa delighted visitors & drew them to return; they diverted her from God; she lost taste for prayer;
- The sisters thought her a first-rate nun;
- The Lord wanted more from her; he let her know she was distressing him;
- Her father told her that lengthy lingering is time lost;
- False humility held her back for about a year; she was in great spiritual unrest.

8. Return

Interior life usually takes this course. God draws the soul to himself by letting it enjoy his presence, but then test its fidelity by taking all joys away & letting it languish in dryness.

- Teresa was to find deliverance at the deathbed of her father;
- Teresa confessed to Fr. Vincente Barron, a Dominican who assisted her dying father, &
- She gave him complete insight into her soul; he advised her to take up prayer again;
- Years of spiritual struggles followed for Teresa; on the one hand, God called me; on the other, the world flattered me;

8. Return

For three years I was oh so often concerned....with the desire for seeing the end of the hour of prayer. I listened for the bell...
The battle I had to endure ...
to make myself go to the oratory is indescribable. As soon as I entered, a deadly sadness came over me, and it took all my courage....
to give myself to prayer. (L, 8, 7)

- Teresa endured these struggles for fourteen years without ever wavering in her faithfulness;
- Holy week 1554 brought her release;
- She saw before her an image of the Savior; true life began for her that day (L, 9, 1-2);
- Soon afterward, someone gave her the Confessions of St. Augustine; while reading his conversion, she felt God speaking to her;
- The Lord led her from death to life.