

LIFE (4:7; 6:8)

Blessings of Prayer (Silent, Interior, Mental)

4:7 On the way there, I stopped at the house of this uncle of mine, which, as I have said, was on the road, and he gave me a book called *Third Alphabet*, which treats of the Prayer of Recollection. During this first year I had been reading good books (I no longer wanted to read any others, for I now realized what harm they had done me) but I did not know how to practice prayer, or how to recollect myself, and so I was delighted with the book and determined to follow that way of prayer with all my might. As by now the Lord had granted me the gift of tears, and I liked reading, I began to spend periods in solitude, to go frequently to confession and to start upon the way of prayer with this book for my guide. For I found no other guide (no confessor, I mean) who understood me, though I sought one for fully twenty years subsequently to the time I am speaking of. This did me great harm, as I had frequent relapses, and might have been completely lost; a guide would at least have helped me to escape when I found myself running the risk of offending God. In these early days His Majesty began to grant me so many favors that at the end of this entire period of solitude, which lasted for almost nine months, although I was not so free from offending God as the book said one should be, I passed over that, for such great care seemed to me almost impossible. I was particular about not committing mortal sin -- and would to God I had always been so! But about venial sins I troubled very little and it was this which brought about my fall. Still, the Lord began to be so gracious to me on this way of prayer that He granted me the favor of leading me to the Prayer of Quiet, and occasionally even to Union, though I did not understand what either of these was, or how highly they were to be valued. Had I understood this I think it would have been a great blessing. It is true that my experience of Union lasted only a short time; I am not sure that it can have been for as long as an *Ave Maria*; but the results of it were so considerable, and lasted for so long that, although at this time I was not twenty years old, I seemed to have trampled the world beneath my feet, and I remember that I used to pity those who still clung to it, even in things that were lawful. I used to try to think of Jesus Christ, our Good and our Lord, as present within me, and it was in this way that I prayed. If I thought about any incident in His life, I would imagine it inwardly, though I liked principally to read good books, and this constituted the whole of my recreation. For God had not given me talents for reasoning with the understanding or for making good use of the imagination: my imagination is so poor that, even when I thought about the Lord's Humanity, or tried to imagine it to myself, as I was in the habit of doing, I never succeeded. And although, if they persevere, people may attain more quickly to contemplation by following this method of not laboring with the understanding, it is a very troublesome and painful process. For if the will has nothing to employ it and love has no present object with which to busy itself, the soul finds itself without either support or occupation, its solitude and aridity cause it great distress and its thoughts involve it in the severest conflict.

6: 8 If I were a person writing with authority, I would gladly describe, at greater length and in the minutest detail, the favors which this glorious saint (Joseph) has granted to me and to others. But in order not to do more than I have been commanded I shall have to write about many things briefly, much more so than I should wish, and at unnecessarily great length about others: in short, I must act like one who has little discretion in all that is good. I only beg, for the love of God, that anyone who does not believe me will put what I say to the test, and he will see by

experience what great advantages come from his commending himself to this glorious patriarch and having devotion to him. Those who practice prayer should have a special affection for him always. I do not know how anyone can think of the Queen of the Angels, during the time that she suffered so much with the Child Jesus, without giving thanks to Saint Joseph for the way he helped them. If anyone cannot find a master to teach him how to pray, let him take this glorious saint as his master and he will not go astray. May the Lord grant that I have not erred in venturing to speak of him; for though I make public acknowledgment of my devotion to him, in serving and imitating him I have always failed. He was true to his own nature when he cured my paralysis and gave me the power to rise and walk; and I am following my own nature in using this favor so poorly.

Questions to Consider:

What effect did the reading of the Third Spiritual Alphabet have on Teresa?

How is Saint Joseph present in the life of Teresa?

A relationship with Jesus implies certain details, requirements, what are they?