

Life 7 (1, 2, 6, 17)

The Call of God vs. Worldly Attractions

1. I began, then, to indulge in one pastime after another, in one vanity after another and in one occasion of sin after another. Into so many and such grave occasions of sin did I fall, and so far was my soul led astray by all these vanities, that I was ashamed to return to God and to approach Him in the intimate friendship which comes from prayer. This shame was increased by the fact that, as my sins grew in number, I began to lose the pleasure and joy which I had been deriving from virtuous things. I saw very clearly, my Lord, that this was failing me because I was failing Thee. The devil, beneath the guise of humility, now led me into the greatest of all possible errors. Seeing that I was so utterly lost, I began to be afraid to pray. It seemed to me better, since in my wickedness I was one of the worst people alive, to live like everyone else; to recite, vocally, the prayers that I was bound to say; and not to practice mental prayer or hold so much converse with God, since I deserved to be with the devils, and, by presenting an outward appearance of goodness, was only deceiving others.

2. This belief which they had that I was not so wicked was the result of their seeing me, young though I was and exposed to so many occasions of sin, withdrawing myself frequently into solitude, saying my prayers, reading a great deal, speaking about God, liking to have pictures of Him in a great many places, wanting an oratory of my own, trying to get objects of devotion for it, refraining from evil-speaking and doing other things of that kind which gave me the appearance of being virtuous. I myself was vain and liked to be well thought of in the things wont to be esteemed by the world. On account of this they gave me as much liberty as is given to the oldest nuns, and even more, and they had great confidence in me.

6. Now when I began to indulge in these conversations, I did not think, seeing them to be so usual, that they would cause the harm and distraction to my soul which I found would be the case later. For I thought that, as in many convents it is such a common practice to receive visitors, I should take no more harm from it than would others whom I knew to be good. I did not realize that they were far better than I and that what was dangerous for me would not be so dangerous for others. Yet I have no doubt that the practice is never quite free from danger, if only because it is a waste of time. I was once in the company of a certain person, right at the beginning of my acquaintance with her, when the Lord was pleased to make me realize that these friendships were not good for me, and to warn me and enlighten my great blindness.

17. This Dominican father, who was a very good man and had a great fear of God, was of the very greatest help to me. I made my confessions to him and he took great pains to lead my soul aright and make me realize how near I was to perdition. He made me communicate once a fortnight; and gradually, as I got to know him, I began to tell him about my prayers. He told me never to stop praying, for they could not possibly do me anything but good. So I began to take them up once more (though I did not flee from occasions of sin) and I never again abandoned them. My life became full of trials, because by means of prayer I learned more and more about

my faults. On the one hand, God was calling me. On the other, I was following the world. All the things of God gave me great pleasure, yet I was tied and bound to those of the world. It seemed as if I wanted to reconcile these two contradictory things, so completely opposed to one another - the life of the spirit and the pleasures and joys and pastimes of the senses. I suffered great trials in prayer, for the spirit was not master in me, but slave. I could not, therefore, shut myself up within myself (the procedure in which consisted my whole method of prayer) without at the same time shutting in a thousand vanities. I spent many years in this way, and now I am amazed that a person could have gone on for so long without giving up either the one or the other. I know quite well that by that time it was no longer in my power to give up prayer, because He who desired me for His own in order to show me greater favors held me Himself in His hand.

Questions to Consider:

Remark what caused her to abandon prayer and why she took it back up again.

Try and describe Teresa's conflicting interior feelings.

What Biblical passages does this text bring to mind?