

## Union GPS

### Seeking God

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all seeking God; He makes his home in our hearts at Baptism; Most look for him outside of ourselves in the world but don't find him there; Teresa of Avila has mapped out the **'GPS' to union of the soul with God within**. It is the soul's path to God that we will be discussing.

### Ice Breaker

- Who are you? What do you know about the Carmel; about St Teresa?
- Who is St. Teresa? Born in Avila, Spain; Author; Reformer of the Carmel; Founder of 17 monasteries; Doctor of the Church for her writings on prayer;
- Who am I? Tell a bit of how I became a secular Carmelite.

### The Garden of Eden: The Fall

-Here is where it all started; man's choice caused him to fall from God's grace and to be cast out of the garden of Eden.

-**Genesis 2:** describes how Adam and Eve came to be. Let me encourage you to read it too but we will now look at Genesis 3.

-**Genesis 3:** describes the Fall of Man:  
<sup>22</sup> And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."  
<sup>23</sup> So the **Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground** from which he had been taken.  
<sup>24</sup> After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

### God's Law is written on Man's Heart

But the good news is that God's law is written on man's heart as **Romans 2: 14-16** tells us:  
For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for the selves even though they do not have the law.  
<sup>15</sup> **They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts**, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even

defend them  
<sup>16</sup> on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus. Our conscience guides us through the Holy Spirit in the way of the Lord. It is up to us whether we follow the guidance or not. We can truly wonder whether **free will** is truly a desirable gift. It's something to think about. In the 4<sup>th</sup> House of the Interior Castle, Teresa of Avila describes the **will** absorbed by God, being sad for one thing only, knowing it will be released back to its own will.

### The Heart of Man is Restless

St. Augustine, born in Roman N. Africa to a devout Catholic mother and a pagan father, was a notoriously rebellious teenager who cohabitated with a girlfriend, joined an exotic Eastern cult, and ran away from his mother. While there, he happened to hear the preaching of the bishop of Milan, Ambrose, who baptized him in 386.

St. Augustine ultimately renounced his secular career, put away his mistress, and became first a monk, then a priest, then the bishop of Hippo, a small town on the N. African Coast. The voluminous writings of this Early Church Father span every conceivable topic in theology, morality, philosophy, and spirituality. He died in AD 430. In his Confessions, St. Augustine tells us that we were made by God for God and that **the heart of man is restless until it rests in God**.

### Turning to Eastern Thought for Answers

Seeking to quiet the restless heart westerners often turn to Eastern thought unaware that the Catholic Church offers the path to union with God.

### The Path to Union with God

The Carmel offers a Way of prayer practiced two hours daily by the friars/nuns; it's a direct Path to the Heart, to Union with God; Carmel is defined by the belief that God lives in the heart and that we can reach Him there through faith, hope and charity; a relationship results satisfying a person's thirst to be loved by God; we offer God our availability; It is a leap into the invisible.

### The Four Ways to Water the Garden

Around 1562 Teresa made a first attempt to describe her prayer experience. She described the watering (prayer) of the **garden** (soul). The **first** way or drawing water from a well requires effort; the effort required of the beginner in prayer who struggles to develop the habit. The **second** is easier due to God's involvement. She uses the analogy of a water wheel and aqueducts to water the

garden. The **third** is even easier as one grows in practice and God's participation increases, it is the river and then **finally** the rain which requires no effort as God is watering the garden of the soul.

### **Prayer is the Door to enter the Castle of the Soul**

Fifteen years later in 1577, Teresa wrote her masterpiece, the **Interior Castle**. She described the journey of the soul through seven mansions or stages of purification. The destination is **spiritual marriage**, the summit of the spiritual life.

### **Teresa's Definition of Prayer**

For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing but an intimate **conversation** between **friends**; it means conversing frequently and alone with him who we know loves us... (V, 8, 5)

### **How is a Friendship between the Creator and the Created possible?**

That's a great question! Let's find out!

### **Baptism and the Theological Virtues**

Holy Baptism is the **basis** of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are **freed from sin and reborn as sons of God**.

The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace: enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity... the whole organism of the **Christian's supernatural life** has its **roots in Baptism**. ccc 1213, 1266

### **Nature of Man**

Body and Soul according to St. John of the Cross

### **The Soul & the Theological Virtues**

The Theological Virtues of faith, hope & charity are **grafted into the Soul at Baptism** and allow us to enter into contact with God. They are **supernatural & infinite virtues that are directly infused into our soul**. This differentiates them from other virtues. The **theological virtues are actually God giving himself to us**.

These virtues render the **soul's faculties divine**, and by proxy, **man himself shares this divine life**. In a certain way we are made **equals to God by participation**, not by nature though, there is only one God.

The Book of Genesis tells us that we were created in God's image and likeness. St. John tells us that God is love. The essence of love is to share itself. God desired

that man have his best. What is his best? Himself. So, he transforms us into his image.

### **The Goal of the Spiritual Journey**

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

### **Stages of the Mystical Life of Grace**

Prayer is the highest achievement of the human spirit; Prayer is a Jacob's ladder on which the human spirit ascends to God & God's grace descends to people; Teresa presented the mystical life of grace in all its stages with incomparable clarity;

**Vocal** prayer is the lowest stage; The words are spoken as the soul raises itself to God; **Meditative prayer** is one stage higher; the Spirit moves without being bound to words; when practiced faithfully, it can gradually remake the whole person. The Lower stages of prayer are accessible to every believer by **human effort** and **God's grace**.

We are now standing at the **border of the mystical life of grace that cannot be entered by human effort**; St. Teresa calls the next stage the **prayer of quiet** or **simplicity**; The soul can no longer reflect or make decisions; it is engaged by God's presence and rests in him; his presence gives the soul a happiness beyond any earthly happiness. At this stage of mystical favor many events occur that are outwardly recognized as extraordinary: **Ecstasies & Visions**.

**Union** with the Lord surpasses the soul's happiness in the presence of God; it usually lasts but a short time; the senses lose their effectiveness; in some cases, the body becomes rigid like a corpse; the soul however lives an intensified life as if it were outside the body.

These Revelations are not a sign of holiness; they usually only appear during a certain phase and vanish again; sometimes Our Lord or Our Lady or an angel or saint appears; or it gains insights into hidden truths; such private revelations usually have the purpose of teaching souls about their own condition or that of others; or of confiding God's intentions to them, and of forming them for a specific task for which God has selected them.

God expects them to be at his service; he takes them into safekeeping and is always ready to grant their requests. These souls have been prepared & tested by repeated transitory union with him, by extraordinary illuminations, through suffering & trials; The Lord wishes to bind them to himself. He enters in a covenant with them called '**spiritual betrothal**';

Teresa calls the highest state of blessedness "**spiritual marriage**;" events have now stopped; the soul is constantly united with the Lord; she enjoyed his presence even in the midst of external activities without being hindered; Teresa went through all these **stages**, it took years before she could account for them herself & give others advice.

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.

### **The 7 Mansions of Teresa's Interior Castle**

Silent prayer is the door into the castle of the soul; Mansions 1, 2, 3 represent man's effort to reach God; Mansions 4, 5, 6, 7 represent the action of God in the soul.

### **Mystical Life: Who's it for?**

For many, mystical life is reduced to unnecessary extraordinary phenomena; In reality, it is the fulfillment of Baptismal graces, an increase in the virtues of faith, hope and charity in the heart of the one believing the Kingdom of God is within; For Teresa, all the baptized are invited to a mystical life for which interior prayer is the vital nourishment; this life is not reserved for a few elite souls.

### **Be Zealous for the Lord**

The banner surrounding the seal carries the Order's motto; Taken from the mouth of the prophet Elijah it cries out with his prophetic spirit and absolute dedication to the one, true, God; "Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo exercituum"

"With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of Hosts." – 1 Kings 19:10

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