

The Shepherd's Call: Teresa and The Prayer of Recollection

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To the Living Water

‘For many years I endured
this trial,’ she says,
‘of being unable to
concentrate on one subject,
and a very sore trial it is’

(W 26:2)

- Teresa of Avila described her distress in coping with distractions like living with a madman;
- She admits that until the Lord taught her to pray, she did not know what it was to pray with satisfaction;
- Teresa says that once the Lord has granted the Prayer of Recollection, we would not exchange it for any treasure;
- Her teaching on the prayer of recollection is one of the most original and helpful contributions she makes to the whole journey of prayer.

To the Living Water

Prayer
is a
'Royal Road'
(W 21:1.5)

- We are all called to travel, a sure and safe way that will ultimately lead to the fountain of living water;
- There are difficulties and hazards along the way and Teresa has encountered most of them;
- Teresa offers help and guidance to her daughters in the Way of Perfection;
- The book is divided into four divisions: importance and value of prayer (1); nature of prayer (2,3); commentary on the Our Father (4).

Prayer of Awareness

Prayer for Teresa
involves having
'a clear realization
and full consciousness'

(W 22:1)

of what we are doing

- An attention and an awareness are more important than the words we use;
- When we speak to God we need to be aware of who we are speaking to and what we are saying; this is true prayer;
- The focus of Teresian prayer is about a relationship with God; establishing an open & receptive heart and an attention to his presence;
- Teresa begs her sisters not to address God while thinking of other things. (W 22:88)

Prayer of Companionship

Prayer is a friendship
with Christ,
keeping him company,
talking to him often,
in a heart-to-heart
conversation of love.

(L 8:5)

- The Prayer of Recollection is the prayer of companionship; Teresa asks that we seek the companionship of Jesus;
- The best remedy she found for distractions in prayer was to fix her mind on the person of Christ, present and close to her;
- The Master is never so far away that the disciple needs to raise his voice to be heard;
- The relationship with Christ is the essential element of Teresian prayer;
- Teresa suggests using whatever supports are helpful: a book; an image or picture.

Personal Response

The soul is drawn
'without any sound of words'
to the side of the Divine Master;
it is 'enkindled in love' without
knowing how and
'knows that it is rejoining in the object
of its love' ...
'It is a gift of the Lord of earth and
heaven...' (W 25:2)

- For Teresa the Prayer of Recollection is within our reach by God's favor; it is not supernatural;
- It is a prayer of faith and can be achieved by our own efforts and faithfulness to grace;
- It is a faith-awareness of God's abiding presence in the soul;
- Teresa felt that the Prayer of Recollection was an opening to contemplation;

Personal Response

God
molding and shaping
the soul in
the image and likeness
of
Christ

- The essence of contemplative prayer is not found in favors from God ;
- It is the awakening of a genuine love for God, a deepening of friendship and intimacy with him, a detachment from all that hinders the soul's response;
- The soul has an unselfish generosity in the service of love;
- The qualities of contemplative prayer, gifts received in joy but more often in pain and dereliction of spirit.

Prayer of Presence

The important thing
is not to think much,
but to love much
(IC 4, 1, 7)

- The Prayer of Recollection can also be called the Prayer of Presence;
- It is an awareness in faith that God is within, close and personal;
- It is a prayer of friendship, open to and aware of the reality of this presence;
- It is a prayer of love, silence and listening, not a prayer of many words;
- The Prayer of Recollection is toward simplicity and attentiveness; it opens the heart to service, compassion and love for others.

Prayer of Presence

It is called recollection because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God, close to the fountain of living water.

The 'Divine Master comes more speedily to teach, and to grant the soul the Prayer of Quiet.'

(W 28: 4)

- The movement toward contemplative prayer is often so subtle that the soul is hardly aware of it;
- These people who have heard the Shepherd's call, 'are sometimes in the castle before they have begun to think about God at all';
- The prayer of recollection is the bridge that opens the heart to receive contemplative prayer;
- The heart is open and listening, ready for the Shepherd's call, however gently and quietly it is perceived.