

# Stages of the Mystical Life of Grace

Topic 6

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

## Stages of the Mystical Life of Grace

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 for 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;
- The stages of prayer are distinguished according to the measure in which the natural efforts of the soul and God's grace participate;
- When the soul is no longer active of its own efforts, but is simply a receptacle for grace, one speaks of a mystical life of prayer.

## Stages of the Mystical Life of Grace

Our Father

Hail Mary

Rosary

Divine Office

- Teresa presented the mystical life of grace in all its stages with incomparable clarity;
- Vocal prayer is the lowest stage;
- It remains within specifically designated spoken forms;
- Vocal prayer is not just saying words;
- The words are spoken as the soul raises itself to God;

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Meditation involves the  
soul's powers:

The Spirit's Imagination  
(*Phantasie*)

The Intellect

The Will

- Meditative prayer is one stage higher;
- The Spirit moves more freely without being bound to specific words;
- It can immerse itself in the mystery of the birth of Jesus for example;
- When practiced with faithful persistence can gradually remake the whole person;

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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 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;
- Activities are replaced by the recollection of spiritual energies;
- The soul is no longer in a position to reflect intellectually or to make definite decisions;
- The soul is engaged by God's presence who is close to her and allows her to rest in him;
- The perception of God's presence captivates the soul and gives it a happiness incomparable to any earthly happiness.

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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 entirely; in some cases the body becomes rigid like a corpse;
- The soul however lives an intensified life as if it were outside the body;

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These Revelations are seldom absent in the lives of saints, but are not a sign of holiness. Usually they only appear during a certain phase and later vanish again.

- Sometimes Our Lord or the Mother of God or an angel or a saint appears;
- Or its intellect is enlightened and 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.

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God expects them to put themselves completely at his service; at the same time, he takes them into safekeeping, cares for them, 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 into a covenant with them called ‘spiritual betrothal;’



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The beginnings were during that time of greatest bodily suffering:

...I was not yet twenty years old and already believed that I saw the world lying conquered under my feet. I pitied all who had relationships with the world...I tried with all my strength to be truly present in my soul to Our Lord... My way of praying was to think about one of the mysteries of his divine life and make a mental image of it  
(L, 4, 7).

- Teresa calls the highest state of blessedness “spiritual marriage;”
- Events have now stopped;
- The soul is constantly unite with the Lord;
- She enjoys 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.

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The insight he had into this  
pure soul...  
disturbed him so much that  
he confessed to Teresa  
the serious sin in which  
he had been living for years.

- 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 first person to experience it was the priest to whom she confessed in Becedas;