

The Book of Her Life

The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila

Volume One

Chapter 14-15, Second Degree of Prayer

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Chapter 14: Begins to explain the second degree of prayer in which the Lord now starts to give the soul a more special kind of consolation. Explains how this experience is supernatural. This matter is worth noting.

1-...Let us now speak of the **second manner** ordained by the Lord of the garden for getting water; that is to turn the crank of a **water wheel** and by **aqueducts**, the gardener obtains more water with less labor; and he can rest without having to work constantly. This method ...is called the **prayer of quiet** ...

2- Here the soul begins to be recollected and comes upon something **supernatural**...as it can't acquire this prayer through any efforts it makes. ...It got **tired** of turning the crank, and working with the intellect, and filling aqueducts. But here ... the labor is much less than that required in pulling water from a well. I mean that the water is closer because **grace** is more clearly manifest to the **soul**. In this prayer the **faculties** are gathered within so as to enjoy this satisfaction with greater delight. But they are **not lost, nor do they sleep**. Only the **will** is occupied...and without knowing how, it becomes **captive**; it merely consents to God allowing him to imprison it as one who well knows how to be **the captive of its lover**. God's love holds our love so bound that it does not allow the will the freedom to love anything else but Him.

3-The **other two faculties** (intellect, memory) help the will to enjoy so much good-although sometimes, though the will is united, they are very **unhelpful**. But the will shouldn't pay any attention to them, it should remain in its **joy and quietude**. Because if the will tries to gather these faculties, they both **get lost**...be advised to behave towards them as I shall explain.

4-All that takes place here brings with it the greatest consolation and with so little labor that prayer does not tire one...The intellect's work here is very slow paced... The **tears** God gives are now accompanied by joy...

5-This **water** of great blessings and favors the Lord gives makes the **virtues grow**...the soul is now ascending above its misery and receiving a little knowledge of the **delights of glory**. It...also brings the soul much closer to the **true Virtue**, God, from whence comes all the virtues. His Majesty is beginning to communicate Himself to this soul, and He wants it to experience how He is doing so.

In arriving here, the soul begins to lose its **craving for earthly things**. It sees clearly that one moment of the enjoyment of glory cannot be experienced here below...It is a true happiness ...that satisfies us....During the time of prayer, everything is 'yes.' The 'no' comes afterward upon seeing that the delight is ended and that one cannot recover it...God in His greatness desires that the soul understand that **He is so close** it no longer needs to send Him messengers but **can speak with Him itself and not by shouting since He is so near that when it merely moves its lips, He understands it**.

6-...Our Emperor and Lord desires that in this prayer we **know** that He understands us, and what His **presence** does, and that He wants to begin to **work** in the soul in a special way. All of this ...is manifest in the great interior and exterior **satisfaction** He gives the soul...This delight and happiness seems to **fill the void** that through our sins we have caused in the soul This satisfaction takes place in its intimate depths...It seems the soul has found everything at once and doesn't know what it has found...

7- Still, I should like to explain this experience (prayer of quiet) because we are dealing with **beginners**; and when the Lord grants these favors, the soul doesn't understand them, nor does it know what to do with itself...It is a great **trial** if there is no one to understand it. To see itself **described** brings it **intense joy**... It is a great good to know what one must do to advance in any of these stages.

8- I desire very much that the Lord help me explain the **effects** caused in the soul by these things that are ...**supernatural** so that through the effects one may know when they are the **work of God's spirit**...in conformity with what one can know here below. It is always good that we **walk with fear and caution**.... The devil at times can transform himself into an angel of light; and if the soul has not a great deal of experience, it will not discern the devil's work-and, in fact...the soul needs to come close to

the very summit of prayer in order to have such discernment.

9-...It was a great delight for me to consider **my soul as a garden** and to reflect that the Lord was taking His walk in it. I begged Him to increase the **fragrance** of the little **flowers of virtue** that were beginning to bloom...that they might give Him **glory**...However, there are times... when everything seems to be **dry**...The Lord desires that it seem to the poor gardener that everything acquired in watering and keeping the garden up is being lost. This dryness amounts to an **authentic weeding** and **pulling up** of the remaining bad growth by its **roots**... By knowing that there is no diligence that suffices if God takes away the water of grace and by placing little value on the nothing that we are...the soul gains much **humility**. The flowers (virtues) begin to grow again.

10- O my Lord and my God! I cannot say this without tears and great joy of soul! How you desire to be with us and be present in the Sacrament...Your delight is to be with the children of men.

Chapter 15: Continues the same subject and gives some advice about how to act in this prayer of quiet. Discusses the fact that many souls reach this prayer but few pass beyond. Knowledge of the things touched on here is very necessary and beneficial.

1-... This quietude and recollection is something that is clearly felt through the **satisfaction and peace bestowed on the soul**, along with great **contentment and calm and a very gentle delight in the faculties**. It seems to the soul...that there is nothing left to desire and that it should willingly say with St. Peter that it will make its dwelling there. It dare not move or stir, for it seems that good will slip through its hands—nor would it even want to breathe sometimes...But it can do nothing to draw this good to itself, nor to keep it for longer than the Lord desires.

...In this **first recollection and quiet** the soul's faculties do **not cease functioning**. The soul is so satisfied with God ... the quiet and calm are not lost since the **will is united with God** even though the **other two faculties are distracted**; in fact little by little the will brings the intellect and the memory back to recollection...even

though the will may not be completely absorbed, it is so occupied ...that no matter what efforts the other two faculties make, they cannot take away its contentment and joy. But rather with hardly any effort the will is helped so that this **little spark of love of God** may not go out.

2-... There are many, many souls who reach this state, but few pass beyond it...It is very important that the soul ... realize the great **dignity** of its state and the great **favor** the Lord has bestowed on it...His goodness will make it a citizen of heaven, provided it doesn't stop through its own fault; it will be unhappy if it turns back...turning back would mean falling to the bottom, as I was doing...

3- ...If ...they should fall...and don't return to prayer, they will **go from bad to worse**...What I advise strongly is not to abandon prayer...for in prayer a person will...win repentance from the Lord and fortitude to lift himself up. And ... if you give up prayer, you are, in my opinion, **courting danger....**

4- This prayer is a **little spark of the Lord's true love** which He begins to enkindle the soul...It cannot be acquired... If a person doesn't extinguish it, it will begin to **enkindle the large fire that throws forth flames of the greatest love of God** ...given to perfect souls.

5-... This little spark is the **sign, or the pledge** God gives to this soul that He now chooses it for great things if it will **prepare itself** to receive them...This spark is a **great gift**...I know many souls that reach this stage...but...those who pass beyond...are so few...Well, there must be many...and I should advise these souls **not to hide the talent** since it seems God desires to choose them to bring **profit to many others**...

6-What the soul must do during these times of quiet amounts to no more than proceeding **gently and noiselessly**. What I call noise is ...the **intellect** looking for many words...The will **calmly** and **wisely** must understand that one does not deal well with God by force and that our **efforts...smother this little spark**...One should realize this and humbly say: "Lord, what am I capable of here? What has the servant to do with the Lord—or earth with heaven?" ... One should **pay no attention to the intellect**, for it is a **grinding mill** ...It is better that the will leave the intellect alone...and remain like a **wise bee** in the recollection and in enjoyment of that **gift**. For if no bee were to enter the beehive ...**no honey could be made**.

7- ...We are **very near** His Majesty and should ask for His gifts and pray for the Church and for those who have asked for our prayers and for the souls in purgatory, **not with the noise of words** but with **longing** that He hear us. This is a kind of prayer ...in which more is obtained than through a great deal of reflection by the intellect... Through the goodness of God, **all may reach this prayer...**

8- ...In these times of **quietude**, let the soul remain in its repose ...and in the **presence of infinite Wisdom**, a little study of **humility** and one act of humility is **worth more** than all the knowledge of the world. Here there is no need for reasoning but for knowing what we are and for **placing ourselves, with simplicity, in God's presence**, for He desires that the soul become ignorant in His presence...His Majesty humbles Himself so much that He allows us to be near Him in spite of what we are.

9- The intellect is also stirred to compose prayers of thanksgiving; but the **will**, calmly, without daring to raise its eyes, like the publican, gives better thanks than the intellect can perhaps express. Finally, at this stage one doesn't have to renounce completely discursive mental prayer or the use of some word, or even vocal prayers; but **if the quiet is great**, it is difficult to speak without a good deal of effort... We can discern ...whether this quiet comes from the spirit of God or ourselves... because when we procure the quiet, it produces **no effect**, quickly goes away, and leaves behind **aridity**.

10-If the **quiet** is from the **devil**...it results in disturbance, a lack of humility and preparation for the effects which the prayer coming from God produces. It doesn't leave light in the intellect or constancy in truth. The devil can do little harm or none at all if the soul directs to God the delight and sweetness it feels and fixes its thoughts and desires upon Him... This delight will prompt the soul—since it thinks God gives the delight—to return to prayer often ...If it is a humble soul...a friend of the cross, it will pay little attention to the consolation given by the devil. It will be unable to pay little attention to the **consolation** coming from **God** but will esteem it highly. Anything the devil gives is like itself; a total **lie**. When the devil sees that in this consolation and delight the soul humbles itself ...**he will not return often**, because he sees his loss.

11- For this reason and many others, I counselled in dealing with the first mode of prayer, the **first water**, that it is important for beginners in prayer to start off by becoming **detached** from every kind of satisfaction and to **enter the path** solely with the **determination to help Christ carry the cross** ...We should fix our eyes on the everlasting kingdom which we are trying to gain ...

12-...**Advanced souls** would be happy to renounce the good things of this world for God...for in these souls, **love has increased**...But for **beginners** this advice is most important. In this life the **soul doesn't grow like the body**...the purpose of the **soul to grow and then grow small again** must be to humiliate us ...so that we might not become **careless while in this exile** since the one who goes highest must fear the most and trust the less in himself. There comes a time when it is necessary for these souls to protect themselves from offending God. Their wills are so fixed in His that rather than commit an imperfection, they would allow themselves to be tormented and suffer a thousand deaths. But since they are attacked by temptations and persecutions ...to avoid sin, one must make use of **prayer's first weapons and return to the thought that everything will end and that there is a heaven and a hell**

13-...a solid foundation to protect oneself from tricks and consolations coming from the devil is to begin with the determination to follow the way of the cross and not desire consolations, since the Lord pointed out this way of perfection saying: take up your cross and follow me. He is our model; whoever follows His counsels for the sake of pleasing Him has nothing to fear.

14- In the progress they observe in themselves they will know that the devil is not the cause if ...there remains a **sign** that the Lord was present in their prayer: and it is that **they rise again quickly**. There are **other signs** as well that I will now mention. When the prayer comes from God's spirit ... the Lord with His light teaches **true humility** which causes an **embarrassment** that undoes one. God gives a knowledge that

makes us realize we have no good of ourselves; the greater the favors, the greater is this knowledge. He bestows a **strong desire to advance in prayer** and not abandon it no matter what trial may come.

The soul offers itself up in all things. It feels sure it will be saved. He casts out all servile fear and grants a more **mature trusting fear.** It is aware of the beginning of **a love of God that has much less self-interest.** It desires **periods of solitude** to enjoy that good more.

15-...The **prayer of quiet** is the beginning of **all blessings** ...In no way is the soul able to believe at that time that God is not with it. When it sees the imperfections in itself, it fears everything...but there are some souls that profit more by believing that this prayer comes certainly from God than by all the fears possible. For if by nature someone is loving and grateful, the memory of this favor God has granted does more to bring the souls back to God than all the infernal punishments imaginable. At least this happened in my case...

16-Because the **signs of the good spirit** will be mentioned as I go along, and it is so difficult for me to explain them well, I won't speak of them now. I believe with the help of God I shall somehow succeed. Apart from my experience in which I have understood a great deal I know about these from learned men and very holy persons.... And when souls reach this stage, through the goodness of God, may they not go about as wearied as I did.
Amen