

The Book of Her Life

The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila
Volume One

Chapter 16-17, Third Degree of Prayer

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Chapter 16: Treats of the third degree of prayer. Explains sublime matters and what the soul that reaches this stage can do and the effects produced by these great favors of the Lord. This prayer lifts the soul up in the praises of God and brings wonderful consolation to whoever attains it.

1-Let us now speak of the **third water** (grace) by which this garden is irrigated, that is, the water flowing from a **river or spring**... The garden is irrigated with much less labor...The Lord so desires to help the gardener here that He Himself becomes practically the gardener and the one who does everything.

This prayer is a **sleep of the** (soul's 'senses' or) **faculties** (intellect-will-memory): the faculties neither fail entirely to function nor understand how they function. The consolation, the sweetness, and the delight are incomparably greater than ...in the previous prayer...This experience doesn't seem to me to be anything else than a **complete death to all earthly things and an enjoyment of God**.

...The soul ...doesn't know whether to speak or be silent, whether to laugh or weep. This prayer is a **glorious foolishness**, a **heavenly madness** where **true wisdom is learned**; and it is for the soul a most **delightful way of enjoying**.

2- ...this prayer is **not a complete union** of all of the faculties and is more excellent than the previous type of prayer (quiet). ...Today, after communion the Lord ...taught me the manner of explaining this prayer and what the soul must do here. ...I understood at once...it is God's work ...The **faculties are almost totally united** with God but not so absorbed as not to **function**.

3-They only have the ability to be completely occupied with God. It doesn't seem that any one of them **dares to move**...One utters many **words in praise of God**...The soul would desire to cry out in praises, and is beside itself...a **delightful disquiet**. Now the flowers are blossoming; they are beginning to spread their fragrance. The soul would desire here that everyone could see and understand its glory so as to praise God...and share in its joy since it cannot bear so much joy...This joy must have been what was felt in the admirable spirit of David when he played on the harp and sang the praises of God...

4-Oh, help me God! What is the soul like when it is in this state! It would **want to be all tongues so as to praise the Lord**. It speaks folly in a thousand holy ways, ever trying to find means of pleasing the one who thus possesses it. I know a person who desired all her body and soul break in pieces to demonstrate how she felt in this **pain**. What torments can then be offered her that will not give her delight when she suffers them for her Lord? ...What will the soul feel in returning to its senses so as to live in the world with its cares and formalities? ...Nothing can compare to the joy the Lord desires a soul to enjoy in this exile. May You be blessed forever! ...Since while I write this I am not freed from such holy, heavenly madness...my King, I beseech You that all to whom I speak become mad from Your love...No longer, my God, can this servant of Yours suffer the many trials that come from seeing herself without You...This soul observes that its lifetime is passing in pleasure and that nothing other than You can give it pleasure any longer; since it no longer desires to live in itself but in You, it seems that its life is unnatural.

5-O true Lord and my Glory! How delicate and extremely heavy a cross You have prepared for those who reach this state! "Delicate because it is pleasing; "heavy" because there come times when there is no capacity to bear it; and yet the soul would never want to be freed from it unless it were

for the sake of being with You. ...It finds no rest in anything except in doing You some small service...it wants nothing other than You.

6-...It seems that what I see is in a dream, and I would desire to see not other persons than those who are sick with this sickness...that we may all be mad for love of Him who for love of us was called mad.

7-I should like the five of us who at present love each other in Christ to make a kind of **pact** ... and **to gather** to free each other from illusion and to speak about how we might mend our ways and please God more since no one knows himself as well as others who observe him with love and concern for his progress. I say we should gather in secret because this talk is longer in fashion...Even preachers... are very cautious...what ought to be stressed is that souls **abhor their lives and hold their reputations in little esteem**-

--Whoever in fact risks all for God will find that he has both lost all and gained all.

8-Oh what a great **freedom** to consider it a **captivity** to have to live and behave in conformity with the laws of the world ... may the Lord grant us the favor of obtaining this freedom...

Chapter 17: Continues with the same subject, the explanation of this third degree of prayer. Concludes the discussion of its effects; Speaks of the harm caused her by the imagination and memory.

1- ...It is God ...who now takes on the task of gardener and wants the soul to rest. The **will** only gives its consent to these favors it enjoys; and it should offer itself to all that the true Wisdom desires to do in it because **courage** is certainly necessary. For the **joy** is **so great** that it sometimes seems the soul is at the very point of going forth from the body. And what a happy death that would be!

2-...Abandon oneself completely into the hands of God: if He wants to bring the soul to heaven, it goes, if to hell, it feels no grief

since it goes with its God; if its life comes to an end, this it desires; if it lives a thousand years, this too it desires....the soul no longer belongs to itself... when God gives the soul **so lofty a prayer**, it can do all of this and much more since these are the **effects** ... and it does so without tiring the intellect...It is amazed at seeing how good a gardener the Lord is and how He doesn't desire the soul do any of the work other than delight in the fragrance the flowers are beginning to give...And what the poor soul couldn't accomplish in twenty years with its labors to bring repose to the intellect, this heavenly gardener achieves in a moment...He doesn't give it **permission to distribute fruit** until it is very **strong from what it has eaten**; otherwise it will be giving it to others to taste without their receiving any profit or gain....and perhaps it will itself be left dead from hunger...

3- In sum, the **virtues are stronger** than in the prayer of quiet...The soul begins to perform great deeds by means of the fragrance the flowers give, for the Lord desires that they bloom so that it may see that it possesses virtue...it is very clearly aware that it couldn't have acquired them in many years, and in that moment the heavenly gardener gave them. The **humility** in the soul is **greater and more profound** ...The soul sees more clearly that it did little other than consent to the Lord's favors and embrace them with its will...This kind of prayer is a very **apparent union of the whole soul with God**. But His Majesty desires **to give leeway to the faculties so that they may understand and rejoice** in the many things He is accomplishing here.

4-...very often when the **will is united**, the soul **sees clearly and understands** that the **will** is held fast and rejoicing... the **will** alone is in **deep quiet**. The **intellect and the memory** are so **free** that they can **tend to business affairs and engage in works of charity**.

Although this prayer seems the same as the **prayer of quiet**...it is **different** partly because in the prayer of quiet the soul

doesn't want to move or stir...rejoicing in the holy idleness of **Mary**; in this prayer it can also be **Martha** ... engaged in **active and contemplative life together** ... tending to works of charity and business affairs although it isn't completely master of itself. It understands that the **best part of its soul (the will)** is somewhere else ... It's as though we were speaking to someone at our side and from the other side another person was speaking to us at the same time; we wouldn't be fully attentive to either ... This prayer is felt very clearly and brings **deep satisfaction and happiness**. It is an excellent preparation so that the soul may reach a **profound quiet** when it has time for solitude... The soul is neither content with nor desirous of the world's satisfactions, because it has ... greater consolations from God...being with Him is what it wants.

5-...For it is **one grace** to receive the Lord's favor; **another** to understand which favor and grace it is; and a **third** to know how to describe and explain it...

Well, now, this kind of **union** I wish to explain often happens...God takes to Himself the **will** and even the **intellect**, it seems to me...that it be engaged in rejoicing in Him rather than discourse...The **memory**, however, remains free, but seems to be joined with the **imagination**... it strives to disturb everything...I find the memory tiresome and abhorrent...Sometimes I say to Him: "When, my God, will **my soul be completely joined** together in Your praise and not broken in pieces, unable to make use of itself?"...

6-...I see my soul become undone in the desire to be united there where the greater part (**will**) is, and this is impossible; rather the **imagination and memory** carry on such a war that the soul is left powerless...they flit from one thing to the other; they are like little moths at night, bothersome and annoying.....I don't know what remedy there is for this since until now God hasn't made one know to me...I would like to know one because they (**imagination and memory**) often torment me... the **faculties**

that run loose (memory/possibly the intellect—Teresa includes imagination as a faculty; it's an internal sense) weary and harm us so much; and those that are with his Majesty give us repose.

7-The only remedy I have found...is to pay no more attention to the **memory**...than one would to a **madman**...for only God can stop it...we must suffer it with patience as Jacob did Leah, for the Lord does us a great favor in allowing us to enjoy Rachel ...

Sometimes God is pleased to take pity when seeing the memory so lost...and consents to its being burnt in the fire of that **divine candle** where the others are already reduced to dust since they have lost their natural being and are almost supernatural in their enjoyment of such great blessings.

8- ...the glory and the repose of the soul is so great that the body shares in that joy and delight; it does so 'very perceivably,' and the virtues are... advanced ...

Your Reverence can discuss this explanation with a spiritual person who has experienced these states...believe that the explanation was given by God and thank His Majesty very much for it. ...with the passing of time a person will be very glad to understand what it is; even though he is given the grace to enjoy it, he isn't given the grace to understand it. ...May He be praised for everything throughout all ages, amen.