

The Book of Her Life

VISIONS

Chps. 27-28-29

by **St. Teresa of Avila**

Chapter 27

Treats of another way in which the Lord instructs the soul and, without speaking to it, makes His will known in a wonderful manner. Explains also a non-imaginative vision and great favor the Lord granted her. This chapter is very noteworthy.

1-Well, to return to the account of my life. I was enduring this **difficult affliction** ... Many prayers were being offered up that the Lord lead me by another **safer path**...but I saw my soul so improved ... I saw that I was a **completely different person** ... I placed myself in the hands of God that He would carry out **His will** completely in me ... I saw that on this road I was **being led to heaven**, that previously I had been going to hell ...

2-After two years of all these prayers... the following happened ... Being in prayer on the feast day of the glorious St. Peter, I saw or, to put it better, **I felt Christ beside me**; I saw nothing with my bodily eyes or with my soul...I saw it was He... who was speaking to me ... I was completely unaware that there could be a **vision** like this one...I did nothing but weep. However by speaking **one word**...

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2-cont'd...the Lord left me feeling ...**quiet, favored and without any fear**. It seemed to me that Jesus Christ was always by my right side; but since this wasn't an **imaginative vision**, I didn't see any form... He was the witness of everything I did. At no time...was I able to ignore that **He was present at my side**.

3- I immediately told my confessor. He asked me in what form I saw Him. I answered that I didn't see Him. He asked how I knew it was **Christ**. I answered that I did not know how...but my **recollection of my soul** was greater, and that I was very continuously in the **prayer of quiet**, and that the **effects** were much different from those I usually experienced...

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3- cont'd...I could do nothing but **draw comparisons** in order to explain myself...but there is no comparison that fits this kind of vision very well... this **vision** is among the **most sublime**... But, how do I know ... that He is more certainly **at my side** than if I saw Him ... the vision is represented through **knowledge given to the soul** that is clearer than sunlight... a **light illuminates the intellect** ... This vision bears with it wonderful **blessings**.

4-This vision is **not** like the **presence of God** that is often **felt**... in the **prayer of quiet or union** ... in desiring to **begin to practice prayer** we find Him to speak to, and it seems we know that He hears us through the ... spiritual feelings of great love and faith that we tenderly experience... This presence is a great favor from God and should be highly esteemed ...

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4-... for it is a very **sublime prayer**, but it is **not a vision**; in the **prayer of union or quiet** one understands that God is present by the **effects** ... He grants to the soul... In this vision, it is seen clearly that Jesus Christ, son of the Virgin, is present. In the prayer of union or quiet some impressions of the Divinity are bestowed; in the vision, along with the **impressions**, you see that also the **most sacred humanity accompanies** us and desires to grant us **favours**.

5-The confessor asked me, “**Who said it was Jesus Christ?**” “He told me many times,” I answered. But, before He told me, He impressed upon my **intellect** that it was He, and before the latter He told me He was present –but I didn’t see Him... it is impressed with such **clear knowledge** that I don’t think it can be doubted. The Lord desires to be so **engraved on the intellect** that this vision can no more be doubted than can what is seen...even though a suspicion may at first arise...there is such **certitude** that the doubt has no force.

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6- Hence, there is also another way in which God teaches the soul and speaks to it... It is a **language that belongs so to heaven** that here on earth it is poorly understood ... The **Lord puts what He wants the soul to know very deeply within it**, and there He makes known without image or explicit words, but in the manner of this vision. And this manner in which **God gives the soul understanding of His desires and great truths and mysteries** is worthy of close attention. Often this is the way I understand when His Majesty explains some vision he wishes to represent to me.

7-This kind of vision and language is so spiritual that there is no restlessness in the faculties or in the senses ... Sometimes-briefly-this **suspension** takes place; but at other times...the faculties are not suspended, nor are the senses withdrawn but very much present.

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7- cont'd...This vision and locution doesn't always come during **contemplation**; it seldom does. When it does, we neither act nor do anything; all seems to be the work of the Lord... In the case of the locutions, the intellect does know... nothing is seen or understood...

8-In the previous locution, God makes the intellect become aware ... and understand what is said ... and **God makes it listen**, and it is not distracted...

9- ... the soul sees that in an instant it is **wise**; the **mystery of the Blessed Trinity** and other sublime things are explained ... it is left full of amazement...

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9- cont'd... **one of these favors** is enough to **change a soul completely**, free it from the love of things, and make it love Him who ... makes it capable ... of blessings so great, who communicates **secrets** to it and treats it with such **friendship and love** ... I am thinking of speaking but little of the favors the Lord granted me —unless I'm ordered to do otherwise — except for certain visions that can do some good for others ... or that I might explain the manner and path by which the Lord led me ...

10-...it seems to me that the Lord in every way wants this soul to have some knowledge of what goes on in heaven. I think that just as in **heaven you understand without speaking** (which I certainly never knew until the Lord in His goodness desired that I should see and showed Himself to me in a rapture), and so it is in this vision.

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10-cont'd...For **God and the soul understand each other** only through the desire His Majesty has that it understand Him...It's like ... two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other. This must be similar to what happens in the vision... these two lovers gaze directly at each other, as the Bridegroom says to the Bride in the Song of Songs...

11-... You allow me to gaze upon you... O souls that have begun to practice prayer and have true faith, what good things can you still seek in life... that could compare with the least of these favors?

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12-... God gives Himself in this way to those who give up all for Him... He loves everyone... I can't describe what is felt when the Lord gives it an understanding of His secrets and grandeurs, a delight that surpasses all those on earth... it makes you abhor the delights of this life, which are all rubbish...

13-... Why must we want so many blessings ... shall we not weep with the daughters of Jerusalem since we do not, like the Cyrenian, help Him carry the cross? ...

14- ... How **rich** he will find that he is, he who has **left all riches for Christ!** ... who has enjoyed seeing himself humbled! How **wise** will he be, he who rejoiced to be considered mad because that is what they called Wisdom Himself! ... it seems that now there are no more of those considered mad for doing the heroic deed of true lovers of Christ...

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16- And what a good image of Christ God took from us now in the blessed Friar Peter of Alcantara! The world cannot at this time endure so much perfection... He trampled the world under foot ... others may not be as detached... there are many ways ... of trampling on the world; the Lord teaches them when He sees courage...I want to say something about this penance, for I know the facts are all true.

17- He told me of it...I think he told me that for forty years he slept only an hour and a half during the night... to conquer sleep... to do this he was always either on his knees or standing. When he did sleep, he did so sitting up, with his head resting on a little log nailed to the wall. He could not have stretched out even if he had wanted to, because his cell... was no larger than four and a half feet...

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17-cont'd...However hot or rainy... he never put up his cowl; he wore nothing on his feet, nor did he wear any clothes other than a coarse serge habit...that was tight... and a short mantle over it ... He told me that when it was cold he took the mantle off and left the door and little window of his cell opened ... Eating every third day was a common practice for him...and once he went eight days without eating. It must have been while he was in prayer, for he experienced great raptures and impulses of love of God...

18- His practice of poverty and mortification during his youth was extreme. He told me that he had lived in a house of his order for three years and, because he had never raised his eyes, had not known any of the friars save by their voices and that he hadn't known how to get to the places where he had to go, but followed the other friars...

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18- cont'd...He never looked at women for many years... it seemed he was made of nothing but tree roots ... Yet with all of this sanctity he was very affable, although his words were few unless he was questioned... his ending was like his life... when he saw he was dying he recited a psalm...cast himself to his knees and died.

19- Afterward the Lord was pleased that I receive more help from him ... I have often seen him in the greatest glory... One year before he died...since I knew he was going to die, I told him so. When he died, he appeared to me and told me he was going to his rest... he had begun to live forever.

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20- ...he consoles me much more than when he was on earth. The Lord once told me that nothing would be sought in Friar Peter's name that he would not bestow...

21- But what a discourse I've gotten into! ... I see so much perdition in this world ...May the Lord pardon me for my offenses against Him ...

Chapter 28

Deals with the great favors the Lord granted her and how He appeared to her the first time. Explains what an imaginative vision is. Tells about the remarkable effects and signs this vision leaves behind when it is from God. This is a very instructive chapter and well worth noting.

1-... One day, while in prayer the Lord desired to show me only **His hands** which were very beautiful... After a few days I saw also that **divine face** which left me completely absorbed...and afterward He granted me the **favor of seeing Him entirely**, I couldn't understand why the Lord showed Himself to me in this way, little by little, until later I understood... **So much glory would have been unbearable** ...the merciful Lord was preparing me.

2-... **Glorified bodies** have such beauty that the sight of so supernatural a beauty ... causes confusion...

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3- One feast day of St. Paul, while I was at Mass, this most sacred humanity in its risen form was represented to me completely...

4- I never saw this vision —nor any other— with my bodily eyes, even though it is an imaginative one....Those who know more about these matters than I say that the **intellectual vision is more perfect**. The corporeal visions, they say, are the lowest and the kind in which the devil can cause more illusions... but it surpasses everything imaginable here on earth, even in just its whiteness and splendor.

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5-The **splendor is not one that dazzles**; it has a soft whiteness, is infused, gives the most intense delight to the sight and doesn't tire it, neither does the brilliance, in which is seen the vision of so divine a beauty, tire it. It is a light so different from earthly light that the sun's brightness...appears tarnished...so different that afterward you don't want to open your eyes. It's like the difference between a sparkling, clear water...which the sun is reflecting and a very cloudy, muddy water flowing along the ground...When the Lord desires to give the vision, it makes no more difference if the eyes are opened or closed...the vision is seen...

6- What I should now like to speak of is the way the Lord reveals Himself by means of these visions. I don't mean ... how ... so **clear an image is put in the intellect**...

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7- ...It seemed clear to me in some cases that what I saw was an image, but in many other instances, no, rather it was **Christ Himself...**

8- I don't say this example is a comparison...but the truth... For what is seen ...is a living image ... **the living Christ**. And He makes it known that He is **both man and God...** as He was when He came out of the tomb after the resurrection...

9-In this vision the powerlessness of all the devils in comparison with Your power is clearly seen...You can trample all hell underfoot...You want the soul to know how tremendous this majesty is and the **power that this most sacred humanity joined with the Divinity has...**

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9- cont'd....In this vision there is a **clear representation** of what it will be like on **Judgment Day** to see the majesty of this King and to see its severity toward those who are evil. This vision is the source of the true humility left in the soul when it sees its misery, which it cannot ignore. This vision is the source of confusion and true repentance for sins; and although the soul sees that He shows love, it doesn't know where to hide...I say that this **vision has tremendous power**...it would be impossible to endure it-unless the Lord ...helps the soul by placing it in **rapture** the majesty and beauty remain so impressed that they are unforgettable...except when the Lord wishes the soul to suffer dryness and solitude; for then it seems it even forgets God ...The soul undergoes a change; it is always absorbed; it seems a **new, high degree of love is beginning...**

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9- cont'd...These **two kinds of visions**—imaginative and intellectual—almost always come together...with the eyes of the soul we **see** the excellence, beauty and glory of the holy humanity; and through the intellectual vision, we are given an **understanding** of how God is powerful, that He can do all things, that He commands all and governs all and that His love permeates all things.

10-This vision is very worthy of esteem and, in my opinion, there is no danger in it...the devil has no power here...he can't counterfeit the image...he makes representations...but the soul resists and is agitated...it loses the devotion and delight...and remains without any prayer... It is something so very different...that the person will understand by the effects mentioned when speaking of locutions...

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10- cont'd...If the soul doesn't want to be **deceived** and **walks in humility and simplicity**, I don't think it will be deceived. Anyone who has had a true vision from God can tell the false almost immediately...So where there is experience, the devil, in my opinion, can do no harm.

11-That this vision from God could be the **work of the imagination** is the most **impossible of impossible things**...if the intellect were to produce the vision, the soul would be left exhausted...and displeased...the true vision ...gives health to the body and leaves it comforted.

12-I gave this reason along with others when they told me that the devil was the cause or that I had fancied the vision...all proved of little avail...

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13-...but if I were left some **jewels**...as **tokens of great love**...and all who knew me saw clearly that my **soul was changed**. The difference in all things was very great...I saw clearly that by these experiences I was at once changed.

14-...**my confessor**...brought upon me many **trials**...as the Lord didn't lead him by this path, **he didn't trust himself**. He suffered many great trials in many ways on my account. I knew that they told him to be careful of me, that he shouldn't let the devil deceive him by anything I told him...I did nothing but weep.

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15- By God's providence he wanted to continue to hear my **confession** ... he would have put up with anything for God; so he advised me that I shouldn't turn aside from what he told me or fear that he would fail me, and that I shouldn't offend God. He always encouraged and comforted me. **He always ordered me not to hold anything from him. I never did.** He told me that if I followed this advice the devil wouldn't be able to harm me... and that the Lord would draw good out of the evil the devil desired to do to my soul. This father strove for my soul's perfection...I obeyed him in everything, although imperfectly; for on account of these trials he suffered a great deal during the three years or more that he was my confessor...as everyone came to him, and he was blamed without any fault on his part.

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16- It would have been impossible for him to suffer so much if he hadn't been so holy and the Lord hadn't encouraged him...he had to assure me; for since in each vision there was something new...this father comforted me with great pity. If he had trusted in himself more, I wouldn't have suffered so much; God gave him understanding of the truth in all things...

17-Those servants of God who were not so sure about me conversed with me often...They asked me some things; I answered **plainly and carelessly**...It would all get back to my confessor, for certainly they desired my good; and he would again scold me.

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18- This lasted a long time, in which I was afflicted on all sides, although I was able to bear those trials by means of the favor the Lord was granting me. I say this so that it might be known what **a great trial** it is not to have someone who has **experience of this spiritual path**. If the Lord hadn't favored me so much, I don't know what would have happened to me. There were enough things to drive me insane...Among the very severe trials I suffered in my life, this was one of the **most severe**...I am certain that those who accused and condemned me were serving Him, and that it was all for my **greater good**.

Chapter 29

Continues the topic begun and tells of some great favors the Lord granted her and of some things His Majesty told her for her own assurance and so that she could answer those who contradicted her.

1-...**signs for discerning** that the **vision** is not produced by the **imagination**. How could we represent in detail that humanity of Christ and imagine His great beauty? ... In the vision we are dealing with there is **no possibility of fashioning it ourselves**... There is no taking it away or inducing it, nor, however much we try ... when we desire is there a way to see it or to stop seeing it. If we want to look at some particular thing, the vision of Christ **ceases**.

2-... I strongly desired to know the color of His eyes, or how tall He was, so that I could be able to describe these things, but I never merited to see them. Nor was I able to obtain the knowledge; rather by trying to do so, I would lose the vision entirely. Indeed **I sometimes see Him looking at me with pity**...It is clearly seen that the Lord desires nothing else than **humility** and **confusion**, and that we **accept** what is given and **praise** the one who gives it.

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Continues the topic begun and tells of some great favors the Lord granted her and of some things His Majesty told her for her own assurance and so that she could answer those who contradicted her.

3-This is the case in **all visions without exception; our effort can neither do nor undo anything when it comes to seeing more or seeing less**. So that we may be made less capable of pride, the Lord desires us to be very clearly aware that this is **not our work** but **His Majesty's work**... He can take from us these favors and gifts—and we shall be left with nothing. We should always **walk in fear** as long as we live in this exile.

4-The Lord almost always showed Himself to me as **risen**... except at times when He showed me His wounds in order to encourage me in when I was suffering tribulation... But, His body was always **glorified**. I suffered numerous **trials and persecutions** in speaking about these visions... I grieved when I saw that my **confessors** were afraid to hear my **confession**... but **I was never able to regret having seen these heavenly visions**...

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4- cont'd... I have always considered a vision a great favor from the Lord... and I saw that I was **increasing** very much in **His love**... I always came away from prayer consoled and with new strength... I didn't dare **contradict** those who were judging my spirit, because I saw that ... in doing so I would appear to them to **lack humility**. I talked to my confessor; he always consoled me greatly...

5-... one who sometimes heard my confession...began to say that it was clearly the **devil** ... He ordered that ...I should always **bless myself** and make the gesture of scorn called the **fig** ... Following this advice was very painful to me. I couldn't believe but that the vision was from God... I did all they ordered me to do...

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6- **Making the fig** at this vision of the Lord caused me the greatest pain... I **held a cross** in my hand...Jesus told me not to worry and that I **did well in obeying**, but that He would **make the truth known**. When they **forbade me to practice prayer**, it seemed to me He was annoyed. He told me to tell them that now what they were doing was **tyranny**. He gave me **signs for knowing the vision was not from the devil....**

7- Once while I was holding the **cross** in my hand...He took it from me with His own hands; when He gave it back to me, it was made of **four large stones** incomparably more precious than diamonds... no one saw this except me...When I began to try to **obey the command to reject and resist these favors**, there was a much greater **increase in them...** I never got free from prayer.

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7- cont'd...It even seemed to me that I was praying while sleeping...I obeyed when I could; but in this matter I was able to do little or nothing at all and the Lord never took prayer from me. But even though He told me to do what they said, He assured and told me what I should say to them—and so He does now.

8-...His Majesty began... **increasing the love of God in me** ...I was dying with desire to see God...Some great **impulses** of this love came upon me ... it seemed as if my soul were being wrestled from me...

9-It's impossible for anyone who has not experienced them to be able to understand these **impulses**, which are so **vehement**. For they are **not** a **disquiet of the heart**. **Neither** are they **devotional feelings**...that belong to a lower form of prayer...

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10- ...it seems that once the **fire** is going we are suddenly thrown into it so as to be burned up. The soul doesn't strive for the **pain** of this wound caused by the **Lord's absence**, but at times an **arrow** is thrust into the deepest and most living recesses of the **heart**...the arrow seems to have been dipped in a **poisonous herb** ...and the soul would gladly lose its life for Him...Yet the pain is so **delightful** ... no pleasure in life gives greater happiness. It would always want to be dying of this sickness.

11- This **pain and glory joined together** left me confused... the soul did not cause this love but seemingly a **spark** from the **very great love the Lord has for the soul** suddenly fell upon it, making it burn all over...

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12- ...the soul seeks some **remedy**...but this **pain of love** is so great that I don't know what **bodily torment** would take it away... **bodily penances**... make very **poor medicine** for so **sublime a sickness**... it sees no remedy other than **death**, for it thinks that by means of death it can enjoy its **Good** completely. At other times the pain is so severe that the ...whole body is paralyzed.

13- The Lord wanted me while in this state to see sometimes the **following vision**: I saw close to me toward my left side an **angel in bodily form**... he was not large but small; he was very beautiful, and his face was so aflame that he seemed to be one of those very sublime angels that appear to be all afire. They must belong to those they call cherubim...

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13- cont'd...I saw in his hands a **large golden dart and at the end of the iron tip there appeared to be a little fire**. It seemed to me this angel **plunged the dart** several times into my **heart** and that it reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he **left me all on fire with great love of God**. The **pain** was so great that it made me moan, and the **sweetness this greatest pain** caused me so superabundant that there is no desire capable of taking it away; nor is the soul content with less than God. The pain is not bodily but **spiritual**, although the body doesn't fail to share in some of it, and even a great deal. The **loving exchange** that takes place **between the soul and God is so sweet** that I beg Him in His goodness to give a taste of this love to anyone who thinks I am lying.

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14-...I went about stupefied. I desired neither to see or to speak, but to clasp my suffering close to me...these **raptures were so great** that even though I was among people **I couldn't resist them**; to my deep affliction they began to be made public. After I experience them I don't feel this suffering so strongly... But when this **pain** I'm now speaking of begins, it seems the Lord carries the soul away and places it in **ecstasy**; thus **there is not room for pain or suffering**, because **Joy** soon enters in. May He be blessed forever... **Amen**