

The Book of Her Life
The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila
Volume One
Chapter 40: The Benefit to Souls
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Chapter 40: Continues with the same subject, telling of the great favors the Lord granted her. Good doctrine can be deduced from some of these favors; for in addition to obeying, her main intention, as she said, has been to write about those favors that will be of benefit to souls. With this chapter the written account of her life comes to an end. May it be for the glory of the Lord, amen.

1- Once while in prayer the **delight**...was so great that ... I began to think about how I merited to be in that place I had seen reserved for me in hell... With this reflection my soul began to grow more **enkindled** and there came upon me a **spiritual rapture**... It seemed I was carried into and filled with that majesty ... Within it I was given **knowledge of a truth** that is the **fulfillment of all truths**... I didn't see anything. I was told without seeing anyone... but I clearly understood it was **Truth itself** telling me: "This is no small thing I do for you, because it is one of the things for which you owe Me a great deal; for all the harm that comes to the world comes from its **not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth**; not one iota of Scripture will fall short." ... "Alas daughter, how few there are who truthfully **love** me! For if they loved me I would reveal to them my **secrets**. Do you know what it is to **love me truthfully**? It is to understand that everything that is **displeasing** to me is a **lie**. By the **beneficial effects** in your soul you shall see clearly what you now don't understand.

2-... since then, that which I observe is not directed toward the **service of God** seems to me to be such **vanity and deception**... I didn't see anything in this rapture; but I was left with a feeling of indescribable good fortune and with the greatest and most authentic fortitude ... to carry out the least part of Sacred Scripture.

3- From this **divine Truth**...there was **engraved within me**... a truth that gave me a **new reverence for God**... There was left in me a keen desire to **speak only those things that are very true**... and so I began to **experience the pain of living in this world**. This experience left me feeling a great tenderness, consolation, and humility... I didn't see anything, but understood the great blessing there is in **not paying attention to what doesn't bring us closer to God**. Thus I understood what it is for a soul to **walk in truth before Truth itself**... the Lord gave me understanding of what Truth itself is.

4- ... I understood **extraordinary truths about this Truth**, more than if many learned men had taught me. I don't think they could have... made me understand so clearly the **vanity of the world**. This **truth**... given to my understanding... is **without beginning or end**; **all other truths depend on this truth**, just as **all other loves depend on this love**... And what power this Majesty appears to have since in **so short a time** He leaves such an **abundant increase** and things so marvelous **impressed upon the soul**! ... How is such great consolation and favor compatible with one who so poorly deserves this from You?

5-Once while reciting ... the Divine Office, **my soul** suddenly became **recollected**; and it seemed to me to **be like a brightly polished mirror**, without any part on the back or sides or top or bottom that wasn't **totally clear**. In its **center Christ, our Lord**, was shown to me ... I saw Him clearly in every part of my soul, as though in a mirror. And this mirror ... was completely engraved upon the Lord Himself by means of a very **loving communication** ... this vision is very beneficial to me each time I remember it especially after receiving Communion. I was given understanding of what it is for a soul to be in **mortal sin**. It amounts to **clouding this mirror with mist and leaving it black**... the Lord cannot be revealed or seen, though He is always present giving us being... **Heresies** amount to **breaking the mirror**... much worse than it being darkened... It brought me much profit and caused me grief for the times I so

darkened my soul through sin that I couldn't see this Lord.

6- ... this vision is **advantageous** to **recollected persons**, in teaching them to **consider the Lord as very deep within their souls**; this thought is much more **alluring and fruitful** than thinking of Him as outside oneself... the glorious St Augustine speaks about this ... nowhere that he sought God did he **find Him** as he did when he sought Him **within himself**. Within oneself, very clearly, is the **best place to look**; and it's not necessary to go to heaven, nor any further than our own selves; for to do so is to **tire the spirit and distract the soul**, without gaining as much fruit.

7-There is one thing I want to advise ... It happens in deep rapture after the soul is in union (in union the faculties are absorbed, this doesn't last long...) the soul remains **recollected** and **cannot return to itself...**; but the **memory** and **intellect** are left almost **delirious and mad** ... especially in the beginning. I think our natural weakness cannot bear such spiritual force ... it is advisable to **stop prayer** at this time ... it is fitting to consider what our health is capable of.

8- ...**Experience** and a **spiritual master** are **necessary** once the soul has reached these **boundaries**... It is necessary to have someone to talk to... But there are few who have arrived at the experience of so many things. If there isn't anyone with **experience**, there is **no remedy** at all...but it's necessary to discuss this with one's **confessor**... it is very important. There are more women than men to whom the Lord grants these favors. This I heard from the saintly Friar Peter of Alcantara--- and I too have observed it—who said that women make much more progress along this path than men do...

9-Once while in prayer I was shown quickly... a totally clear representation— **how all things are seen in God** and **how He holds them all in Himself**... it was deeply impressed on my soul, and it is **one of the great favors** the Lord has granted me ... the vision is so subtle and delicate a manner...I don't know how to explain these visions that don't seem to be imaginative...

but since the **faculties are in rapture** they are unable to describe how the Lord is represented and how He desires that they enjoy Him.

10- Let us say, to make a comparison, that the **Divinity** is like a **very clear diamond**... or like a **mirror**... except that it is a mirror in so sublime a way ... we could say that everything we do is **visible** in this diamond... as it **contains all things** within itself... It was a frightening experience for me to see in so short a time **so many things joined together in this diamond**... Who could explain this to those who commit very indecent and ugly **sins**, that they might recall that these sins are not hidden and that **God is rightly aware of them** since they take place squarely in the presence of the Majesty? And we act so **disrespectfully** in front of Him. I saw how **hell** is deserved for only one mortal sin... one cannot understand how serious it is to commit this sin before such awesome Majesty ... So His mercy is seen more clearly since even when we understand all this He bears with us.

11- ... What will the day of judgment be like when His Majesty will be shown clearly to us and we will see the offenses we have committed? ... Your Reverence should ... be surprised at how I can go on living after seeing these things and then looking at myself ... May He be blessed forever...

12- Once while I was in prayer with deep recollection, delight and quiet, it seemed to me that I was surrounded by angels and very close to God. I began to beseech His Majesty for the Church. A revelation was given me of the great good that would be done by a religious order in the later times and the strength with which the members would sustain the faith.

13- Once while praying near the Blessed Sacrament, a saint appeared to me, whose order was somewhat fallen. He held in his hands a great book. He opened it and told me to read some large and very legible letters..."In the time to come this order will flourish and have many martyrs."

14- Another time ...there was shown to me six or seven members ...of the same order, holding swords in their hands. I think this meant that they will defend the faith. For at

another time while in prayer, my spirit was carried off ... It seemed to be in a large field where many were in combat, and those of this order were fighting with great fervor. Their faces were beautiful and very much aglow. They conquered many.... It seemed... The battle was against heretics.

15- I sometimes saw this glorious saint, he ... Thanked me for praying for his order and promised to recommend me to the Lord... Each member must strive ... that the Lord make his order so prosperous that it will be of service to God in the extreme need the Church is now in. Happy the lives lost for such a purpose.

16- A person once asked me to beg God to let him know if it would be to the Lord's service that he accept an offer to become a bishop. The Lord told me after Communion: " When he understands in all truthfulness and clarity that true lordship consists in possessing nothing, then he will be able to accept it." With these words the Lord indicated that anyone to become a bishop must be far from desiring or striving after it."

17-The Lord ... continues to grant these favors ... Allowing my soul to be understood as can also the spirit the Lord has given me. May He be blessed forever who has taken such care of me.

18-Once...He told me with much love that... In this life we cannot always be in a stable condition, that sometimes the soul will experience fervor and at other times not, that sometimes it will have disturbances and at other times quiet, and again temptations, but that it should hope in Him and not be afraid .

19- One day wondering if it were an attachment to find satisfaction in being with persons with whom I discuss my soul and whom I love, or with those I consider to be great servants of God ... The Lord told me that if a sick person in danger of death thought a doctor was curing him, he wouldn't be virtuous if he failed to thank and love the doctor; that if it hadn't been for these people what would I have done; that conversation with them is not harmful, but that my words should be measured and holy, and that I shouldn't fail to converse

with them. It is beneficial rather than harmful. This consoled me greatly... Always and in all matters this Lord counseled me even to the point of telling me how t I should behave ... with certain persons. Never does He neglect me.

20-... Sometimes I worry because I see I do so little in His service...Once I was in prayer and the hour for going to bed came; I was in pain and had to induce the usual vomiting. Since I saw how bound I was to myself and that my spirit wanted more time... I began to weep...I became angry with myself... truly hated myself ... May it please the Lord that I do not care for myself more than is necessary ... The Lord appeared to me and comforted me... He told me I should suffer and do these things... now necessary for my life. So I think I was never afflicted afterward as I am determined to serve this Lord...though He allowed me to suffer ... He comforted me much... Now it seems to me there is no other reason for living than to suffer trials... I am consoled to hear the clock strike for...it seems I am drawing a little closer to the vision of God.

21- At other times ... I neither feel like living nor have any mind to die, but I experience a lukewarmness and darkness in everything, with many trials... Though the Lord desired that these **favors** He grants me be **publicly known**... His Majesty told me some years ago that **it must be so**... I took extreme care not to tell anyone but my confessors or persons...who knew about them. And I did this not out of humility... it is even painful for me to tell my confessors. Now glory to God... I am **bothered little** by it all since I understand ... that the Lord has desired to provide a **cure for many souls**. I don't know if this public knowledge of these favors is partly the reason His Majesty placed me in this **little corner so enclosed**... But things haven't turned out quite as I had wanted, for **I am forced to speak** to some persons. Yet, I am not where I can be seen, it seems the Lord brought me to a refuge which I hope will be safe.

22- Since I am among **a few holy companions** and not in the world, I observe as though from up high and am really **little bothered by what they say or know about**

me. I would like **some soul to profit from all that can be said about me.** Since living in this house all my desires have converged around this **one desire.** He has given me a kind of **sleep in life...** I am aware in myself of neither happiness nor pain. If certain things do give me either... it passes quickly ... **like a dream** ... The Lord has **now awakened my soul** from that which... caused me many **feelings**; and His Majesty does not want my soul to become **blind again.**

23- This is the way I now live... May your Reverence beg God that He either take me to Himself or **show me how to serve Him.** May it please His Majesty that what is here written be of **some benefit...** it was **difficult** to do on account of the **small amount of time** I had. But the difficulty will have proved well worthwhile if I have managed to say something that may bring someone to praise the Lord, even if only once...

24- ... If this account of my life is **badly done,** it will be a good thing if they lose their high opinion of me; if it is **done well,** ... that they will see where it comes from and **praise Him** who told it through me. May His Majesty always keep your Reverence in His Hands... that you may illumine this miserable woman....who dared to undertake the task of **writing things so sublime...** I have dared to recount this dissipated life of mine... to put it in writing and record as clearly and truthfully as I could what has taken place in me. May it please the Lord ... that I might succeed in doing His will in everything. May His Majesty not allow this soul to be lost...which ... He has rescued from hell and brought to Himself. Amen