

The Prayer of Recollection

I want to see God

Chapter 4

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Those who are able to shut themselves up in this way within the little heaven of their souls...may be sure that they are walking on an excellent road. *Way of Perfection* (Way)

If we were to consider only the Teresian definition of mental prayer and the liberty it leaves the soul in this exchange of friendship with God by whom one knows one is loved, we might think that there is no special teaching to guide beginners and that none is necessary. But a careful study of the *Way of Perfection* and ... the Second Mansions clears our mind of any doubt on this subject as Saint Teresa sets forth the method of prayer she had always used and warmly recommends:

May the Lord teach this to those of you who don't know it ... Until the Lord taught me this method , I never knew what it was to get satisfaction and comfort out of prayer... I have always gained great benefits from ... interior recollection... Way

Teresa's method of prayer is the prayer of recollection ... It is the method she wants her disciples to adopt.

A. Description of the prayer of recollection

... In Teresa's description ... we find a veritable technique ...She says:

It is called the prayer of recollection because the soul collects together all its faculties and enters within itself to be with its God ...

It is as if the soul were rising from play, for it seems that worldly things are nothing but toys ... It rises above them, like a person entering a strong castle...to have nothing more to fear from its enemies. It withdraws its senses from all outward things and spurns them completely...

It's eyes close... And the soul's spiritual sight becomes clear ... Way

... The recollection defined by Saint Teresa is effected by an effort of the will:

You must understand that this is not a supernatural state but depends on our own volition ... By God's grace we can enter it of our own accord ... For without it we have not the power to think a single good thought. For this is not a silencing of the faculties but a shutting up of the faculties within itself by the soul. Way

Thus the activity of the powers of the soul, detaching themselves from exterior things in order to turn towards God in the center, is the first phase of the prayer of recollection... It is only the **preparatory act**, commanded by the presence of God dwelling within...

Remember how Saint Augustine tells us about his seeking God in many places and he eventually found Him within. Do you suppose it is of little importance that a soul which is often distracted should come to understand this truth ... And so to speak to its Eternal Father or to take delight in Him, it has no need to go to Heaven or to speak in a loud voice? However quietly we speak, He is so near that He will hear us... We have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us. Way

Recollection has no other end than to lead the soul into the most deeply intimate part of the temple of God... one must have a real contact with God and be lovingly attentive towards Him.

We must recollect our outward senses, take charge of them ourselves and give them something which will occupy them. Way

Saint Teresa fears that laziness will creep into recollection ... Stopping the activity of the faculties produces a delightful impression of repose ... Some may confuse this sweetness with the peace that comes from the action of God ... A tranquility that has nothing divine in it. This is why Teresa teaches the importance of an

active effort to seek God must follow the effort of recollection.

In the beginnings ... The soul must seek...the company of Jesus and hold conversations with Him...

For hidden there within itself, the soul can think about the Passion ... It is well to reflect for a time ... If we can, we should occupy ourselves in looking upon Him who is looking at us; keep Him company; talk with Him; pray to Him; humble ourselves before Him; have our delight in Him. Life

...this is the essential part of the prayer of recollection. The withdrawal of the powers had no purpose than to favor this living intimacy with the divine Master:

Speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord and a Spouse---sometimes in one way sometimes in another, he will teach you what you must do to please Him. Don't be foolish; ask Him to let you speak to Him... Remember how important it is for you to have understood his truth--- that the Lord is within us and that we should be there with Him. Way

Teresa continues on the subject of intimacy with Jesus...

...If you are happy look upon your risen Lord... If you are suffering trials or are sad, look upon Him on His way to the Garden.... Or look upon Him bound to the column, full of pain, His flesh torn to pieces for His great love for you... Or look at Him bending under the weight of the cross....

...the divine intimacy realized during the regular hours of prayer must be continued throughout the day:

We must retire within ourselves even during our ordinary occupations. If I recall the companionship I have within my soul for as much as a moment; it is of great utility.

In her teaching on mental prayer rarely does Saint Teresa distinguish between the time set

aside for prayer and the rest of the day... The prayer of recollection must progressively overflow into all our life...

...anyone who wishes to acquire it (since as I say, it is in our power to do so) not to grow weary of trying to get used to this method... For it is the equivalent to a gradual gaining of the mastery over oneself and is not vain labor. To conquer ourselves for our own good is to make use of the senses in the service of the interior life....if we like we need never withdraw from this good companionship ... Way

...the prayer of recollection aims at constant union. It is a method for beginners, yes, but it leads directly towards the **summits of divine union.**

B. How to attain the prayer of recollection

Ordinarily the prayer of recollection will seem to the beginner to be quite beyond his power and his habits...:

I assure you that for minds which wander ... It is one of the best ways of concentrating the mind and effecting recollection of the soul. Way

... A simple interior manifestation of God by a consolation...can suffice to facilitate recollection and teach it to the soul definitively. These divine manifestations are rather common in the spiritual life.... Who has not felt at least a sweetness that is revealing of a divine presence? Are we to say, then, that some such experience ... is necessary in order to achieve the prayer of recollection? Certainly not.... The prayer of recollection of which Saint Teresa speaks depends on our own endeavor:

You must understand that this is not a supernatural state but depends on our own volition, and that, by God's favor, we can enter it of our own accord. Way

The soul must put forth energetic effort. Recollection takes hard asceticism. Saint Teresa speaks of the fatigue of beginners...

In the Interior Castle she tells us that **"the soul will certainly suffer great trials at this time."** Her own experience taught her this: **for many years I endured this trial of being unable to concentrate on one subject, and a very sore trial it is.** Way

... Teresa considered it a grace, that she found a **method of recollection** in the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* of the Franciscan, Francisco de Osuna. And she passed on to us the fruit of her studies and her experience....

Then, daughter, as you are alone, you must look for a companion--- and who could be a better companion than the very Master who taught you the prayer you are about to say? Imagine Him at your side. Way

By using these means we may learn to say the Paternoster well and not find ourselves thinking of something irrelevant... The best remedy I have found for it is to try and fix my mind on the Person by whom the words were first spoken. Way

To maintain this prayerful contact with the Master, the **faculties must be exercised** ... Each one will use what he finds most helpful in keeping him in this loving, intimate converse with God.... A means to bring about the prayer of recollection. Some will use the **imagination, a gospel scene or picturing** the person or actions of the Master... to facilitate a **living exchange of friendship** with him. For others, ... Discursive meditation may favor the prayer of recollectionbut that they do not spend too much time in it...:

We must not always tire ourselves by going in search of such ideas; we must sometimes remain by His side with our minds hushed in silence. Life

... It is still possible to gaze at the Master with a simple regard in faith and to stay in His presence; Saint Teresa assures us of this:

O sisters, those of you whose minds cannot reason for long or whose thoughts cannot

dwell upon God but are constantly wandering must at all costs form this habit... Way

This simple gaze of faith establishes a sufficient contact. Often ... It will leave the soul in a painful helplessness... Saint Teresa suggests a few little practices:

First there is **vocal prayer**... It can provide good food for the prayer of recollection:

... The prayer may only be vocal, but the mind will be recollected much sooner; and this is a prayer which brings with it many blessings. Way

Meditative reading is also a means, and one of the best, for aiding recollection:

It is also a great help to have a good book, written in the vernacular, simply as an aid to recollection. Way

... One may also use an image:

You will find it very helpful if you can get an **image or a picture** of this Lord....and use it regularly whenever you talk to Him, and He will tell you what to say. Way

Experience will discover to each one... To hold the soul in contact with the living God. To those who persevere... Saint Teresa promises a rather prompt success:

If we cultivate the habit, make the necessary effort and practice the exercises for several days, the benefits will reveal themselves, and when we shall realize that the bees are coming to the hive and entering it to make honey, and all without any effort of ours. Way

But, according to the mind of Teresa, the prayer of recollection must extend over the entire day and penetrate the whole of life. To pursue this loving intimacy with God throughout our various occupations, the means used for mental prayer will no longer be adequate; others must be found... The divine Presence will be sought under different veils... In the tabernacle, in the soul, in the persons we meet.

By this very simple technique, joined with love, the presence of God soon becomes familiar... Saint Teresa speaks of this abiding presence of God, this intimacy with Jesus... In short, of the prayer of recollection...into our life, when she says:

Nothing, sisters, can be learned without a little trouble... I know that with God's help, if you practice it for a year, or perhaps for only six months, you will be successful in attaining it. Think what a short time for acquiring a great benefit, for you will be laying a good foundation, so that, if the Lord desires to raise you up to achieve great things, He will find you ready, because you will be close to Himself. Way

She had already said:

If a whole year passes without obtaining what we ask, let us be prepared to try for longer. Let us never grudge time so well spent. Who after all, is hurrying us? I am sure we can form this habit and learn to walk at the side of this true Master. Way

In these texts, Saint Teresa seems to say that habitual recollection demands a special grace from God. The method of prayer suggested prepares the soul for such a favor and even enables it to merit it. It employs all the faculties of the soul to this end and the drawing down upon itself the mercy of God...

C. Excellence of the prayer of recollection

It is a striving for intimate contact with God by union with Christ Jesus that gives ...value to the Teresian prayer of recollection...

... The teaching of Saint Teresa is still original and has special attraction for souls in our day, more intuitive than discursive, more avid for living contact with God than for reasoned thought.

From the moment that Saint Teresa enters into mental prayer, she is in quest of Christ... She consents to consider on her journey only what can lead her straight to the end. Having found Jesus, to talk to Him or simply to look at Him is

enough; that is her prayer. The love sought is satisfied with this simple contact.

The contact is a living one... All her powers go to this ... a complete embrace, for all are hungry for the divine and for God... There results a living exchange of friendship...

This loving commerce is living and fruitful only because it is a real exchange. Teresian mental prayer is ... a real exercise of supernatural life... The prayer of recollection makes us seek God in the center of our souls...My Lord and my God really dwells in me... Heaven is in my soul. By keeping me in the company of the Holy Trinity that inhabits it, the prayer of recollection is more than a preparation for eternal life...

... Saint Teresa asks us to go to the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ...who identified Himself with us ... By Him, in Him and with Him alone can we live our supernatural life...

As the prayer of recollection makes us live the truth and introduces us into the heart of supernatural realities, it is very effective. Saint Teresa tells us some of the practical results that this living contact with supernatural realities produces.

First of all there is a quieting of the faculties...which are wonderfully recollected. Besides Teresa has told us that the best remedy for distractions is to fix our thoughts on Christ to whom we pray. She writes:

If one prays in this way, the prayer may be only vocal but the mind will be recollected much sooner; this prayer brings many blessings. Way

The habit of fixing our gaze on our Lord produces such effects that the soul returns to it constantly :

If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, and if He sees that you love Him to be there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away. Way

Saint Teresa tells us that the habit of the presence of Christ constitutes:

A good foundation, so that if the Lord desires to raise you up to achieve great things, He

will find you ready, because you are close to Him. Way

Saint Teresa wants to make us long for this Source of living water, God giving Himself directly to the soul in contemplation.

The prayer of recollection prepares the soul for this:

The sea-voyage can be made; ... Souls who do so are more secure from many occasions of sin, and the fire of Divine love is more readily enkindled in them; for they are so near that fire that, however little the blaze has been fanned with the understanding, any small spark that flies out at them will cause them to burst into flame. When no hindrance comes to it from outside, the soul remains alone with its God and is thoroughly prepared to become enkindled. Way

God who has an infinite desire to give Himself and calls all souls to the Source of living water, cannot fail the soul that seeks Him by so direct and constant a way... She adds to this the assurance that the soul that practices the prayer of recollection as she teaches it, will certainly arrive at the prayer of quiet:

It is called recollection because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God; its Divine Master comes more quickly to teach it, and to grant it the Prayer of Quiet, than in any other way... Those who are able to shut themselves up in this way within the little heaven of the soul, wherein dwells the Maker of Heaven and earth, and who have formed the habit of looking at nothing and staying in no place that will distract these outward senses, may be sure they are walking an excellent road, and will come without fail to drink of the water of the fountain. Way

... This seems to resolve the difficult problem of the call to contemplation.

The prayer of recollection brings about a living contact with God; it is a sure way to delightful intimacies ...a consoling and encouraging promise for the beginner. AMEN