

## **Spiritual Betrothal**

Chapter VII

I am a Daughter of the Church

Blessed Fr. Marie-Eugene, ocd

**He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love Him and manifest myself to him ... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him.** John 14: 21, 23

On approaching the **summit** of the spiritual life, Saint Teresa does not leave off calling on God for help... But even at these heights she thought herself **incapable** of **putting into words** her **experience**... and yet the Masters of Carmel cause a **simple** and **clear light** to shine on these **summits**...

To perfect **fidelity in love**, God answers with perfect love, taking complete **possession** of the soul which becomes His **dwelling place**, having its **perfect realization** in **spiritual marriage**.

**Spiritual betrothal** and **marriage** are the **symbolism** used by Saint Teresa to describe the **two stages** distinguished on the **summits**.

**... It is called union of love with love, and its operations are entirely pure, and so delicate and gentle that there is no way of describing them; but the Lord can make the soul very deeply conscious of them.** V Mansions ...

Spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage ... will show us the **divine manifestations** in their **highest developments** and the **contemplative light** in its full brightness in **transforming union**.

### **A Spiritual Betrothal**

**1- In what does Spiritual Betrothal consist?**

To this question Teresa answers:

**And now you are going to see what His Majesty does to confirm this betrothal ... This is what happens when He bestows raptures which carry the soul out of its senses... VI Mansions**

In the book of her Life, the Saint is more precise:

**The Lord gathers up the soul ...til it is right out itself .... And begins to reveal to it things concerning the Kingdom that He has prepared for it... In these raptures the soul seems to no longer animate the body... No means of resistance is possible... Life XX**

... Warding off counterfeits, Teresa and John of the Cross point out that raptures are "**not like swoons and trances, which are natural... Their subject returns to themselves with the first touch of pain...**"  
Spiritual Canticle

Saint Teresa considers it important to mark the **difference** between the **raptures** of **betrothal** and the **mystical grace** of **union** of the fifth Mansions... Speaking of union the Saint says:

**It seems to me that this union ... is rather like what happens ... When two people meet ... There is a discussion about whether they are suited to each other and are both in love... They shall meet together and He shall unite her with Himself. We can compare ...union to a short meeting ... It is over in the very shortest time.** V Mansions

In **mystical union** there is a **loss of consciousness**, complete **suspension** of the internal and external **senses**.... In regaining

consciousness .... There is a **certitude** of having been in God in its own center, but of the **contact** itself, it can say nothing. In the meeting of the **betrothal** or **rapture**, the soul, says Saint Teresa,

**... Is not deprived of its interior senses...**  
VI Mansions

The soul feels itself ... **Carried away** ... By an **irresistible force**... There is **no loss of consciousness**. Saint Teresa says:

**... The soul has never been so fully awake to the things of God or had such ...knowledge of His Majesty. This may seem impossible; ... If the faculties ... Can be described as dead, and the senses are so as well, how can the soul be said to understand this secret?** VI Mansions

Elsewhere the Saint says:

**Rapture is much more beneficial than union: the effects ... are far more important and have more operations, for Union gives the impression of being the same...at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, and it all happens interiorly. But the ends of these raptures are of a higher degree, and the effects they produce are both interior and exterior.** Life XX

In the **rapture of transport** of the **betrothal**, the soul not only has **contact** with **God** but **penetration** into God... The **darkness of union** is **replaced** by **dazzling light**. The soul **gazes** into God, **eyes open**... Aware of its Union, it discovers profound secrets of the Divine. Saint Teresa writes:

**You enter into a private apartment in the palace of a king .... The soul becomes one with God. It is brought into this mansion... Which we must have in the**

**depths of our souls... After coming to itself, it will remember the great things it has seen. It will not be able to describe them...** VI Mansions

The **powerful force** that bears the soul away to these higher regions and the divine outpourings the soul is favored with there, are **different** from the **quiet** produced by the **spring of water** or the **divine spark** of the fourth Mansions:

**...with tremendous force there rises up so powerful a wave that this little ship—our soul —is lifted up on high.** VI Mansions

...Again the Saint writes:

**He feels (a person enraptured) as if he has been in another world ... and has been shown a fresh light there...** VI Mansions

He is taught many things all at once. Saint Teresa writes:

**...an imaginary vision...seen with the eyes of the soul is very much more clearly seen than we can ordinarily see things with the eyes of the body...revelations are communicated to it without words ...in intellectual visions are revealed to him—in particular, a host of angels, with their Lord.** VI Mansions

Extraordinary favors often accompany this higher light that accompanies this force...The **first time** that Saint Teresa was elevated to **rapture**, she heard our Lord say to her:

**“I will have thee converse now, not with me, but with angels”**...freeing her from all attachments to human communications.

At other times during transports or raptures, she was **avored** with **visions**, intellectual or imaginary...

Following spiritual betrothal, Saint Teresa speaks of **extraordinary graces most numerous** in this period producing the **greatest effects**. They are not the **essential element** of betrothal.

The **spiritual betrothal** is marked mainly by the **superior quality** of the **union** and the **light** in which it is concluded... Saint Teresa explains that there is **no essential difference between** the Mansion in which the **transport** begins and the Mansion in which the **perfect union of spiritual marriage** takes place ... the Creator Himself knows the secret of what happens ...she adds:

...these two Mansions ... might be fused as one: there is no closed door to separate the one from the other ... there are things in the latter Mansion which are not shown to those who have not yet reached it, I have thought it best to separate them.

... **Spiritual betrothal** bears more **resemblance** to the **spiritual marriage** than to the **mystical union** of the fifth Mansions. It introduces the soul into a **higher state**, adorning it with **jewels** preparing it for **perfect union**.

## 2. The Betrothal Jewels

Teresa speaks of “the **jewels** which the Spouse is beginning to give to His **bride**.”

VI Mansions

### a- Discovery of God in divine union

...The **most precious** of betrothal jewels is certainly the **Word Himself** as **Spouse**,

giving Himself and manifesting Himself in more and more **frequent visits**...

**Intimate knowledge** of its divine Spouse is truly the soul’s most beautiful **adornment**, its most precious **treasure**, the source of all its **good**...

Everything comes to the soul from its union with the Beloved...

It is **not** yet spiritual marriage but **closely related** to it and “**there is no closed door**” between these **two Mansions**... spiritual betrothal are visits in which **manifestation and union** are experienced at the same time. They are a union between God and the soul in light....

**The soul becomes one with God.** VI Mansions

**Manifestation** is the **effect** of union...and spiritual betrothal is a **touch of God** in the soul. Although this touch is as **unifying as spiritual marriage**, it is only a **touch**.

... Betrothal then introduces the soul into a **new state**, which is already **unitive**. It has received a **promise of perfect union**. This promise is one of betrothal jewels... perhaps the most precious one.

### b- Exchange of promises and mutual fidelity

Essentially, the spiritual betrothal is a **promise of marriage**, mutually exchanged...God affirms His choice by **renewed visits**. His **hold** on the soul becomes **progressively more powerful**... Saint Teresa says God is taking the soul to Himself, “as she is **His own property** and has now become **His bride**.”

**He will not allow her to be disturbed either by the faculties or by the senses; ... only the door of the Mansion in which He dwells remains open so that we may enter.**

#### VI Mansions

After spiritual betrothal, the soul derives a **firmness** rendering it ... almost **invulnerable** ...terrible to the devil...

Among God's gifts to it there is not only **light** or a **new attitude** but an efficacious **strength for action**...The soul's **fidelity** is now unailing. Its **gift of self** is perfect. ...The soul desires that **complete** solitude in which it finds ... the **repose** and **torment of love**.

... During spiritual betrothal love is already **fruitful**, comprising **domination by God and union with Him**. In this period Saint Teresa established her Reform and founded several monasteries... In the **works produced by the soul**, God sees **only** the **faithfulness and love** to which they testify...

God has been **attracted** by the **perfume of love** arising from **good works**; He is conquered by the soul's **silent and ardent gaze**. This twofold **fidelity of love and faith** assures the soul's victory over God...

... if it is to become the **perfect dwelling place** of God, the soul, having been **purified and adorned**, must be **dilated and enlarged** in proportion to the **gift** it is to receive. **Anguish** and **great desires** are to effect **this final preparation**. It is the **last jewel** of the **betrothal**.

#### c- Ardent desires and anguish

After the **grace of mystical union** of the fifth Mansions the soul was bewildered by the newness of the regions in which it found itself. Saint Teresa speaks at length about

the **restlessness** of the **poor little butterfly**...

The **agitation and restlessness** can be explained by the complete **obscurity** in which the **union** took place in that **mystical grace**. The **discovery of the Spouse** in the **light** of the **spiritual betrothal** dispels the darkness and brings **comforting peace** to the soul...

This **deep peace** is only **temporary**...for the **peace of satiation** might well extinguish the soul's desires ... for the **ascent**... it is not yet at the **summit**. God **rekindles the flame** of great desires, **creating new anguish** in the soul....

A strange **torment**, but one which...marks a **happy development** of the **grace** of the betrothal and **announces** that **perfect union** is near... The soul no longer **wants** anything but **God** and will brook no obstacles that hinder it from enjoying perfectly the Beloved...

At this time, God seems to visit the soul only to increase...its **habitual torment**....Saint Teresa writes:

... a **martyrdom, severe but also delectable; for the soul will accept nothing earthly offered it**. Life

... These graces mark the **end of the period of the spiritual betrothal**.

### 3. Time and Duration of the Spiritual Betrothal

Let's try and determine the time and duration of spiritual betrothal

**1-Time**. The spiritual betrothal is the **central fact** of the sixth Mansions... Saint Teresa in describing the betrothal, speaks of **purifying sufferings** and of the **awakenings**

and **words of God** in the soul... and she shows us the **ardent anguish** of love **impatient** before spiritual marriage.... In the **three periods** that **precede spiritual marriage**, the **first** consists in **preparatory mortifications**; the **second**, we recognize the **passive purifications** of the spirit; that opens into the **third** phase, a period of **divine visits** that **purify** and **enrich** the soul...

John of the Cross speaks of only **two phases** in the **preparation** for spiritual marriage. Spiritual betrothal inaugurates the **second phase** and is situated between the **negative phase of preparation** --mortification and purification -- and the **positive phase of preparation** marked by **divine visits**. It would however be a mistake to separate the two phases into airtight compartments ...The **raptures of betrothal** ... are a sign that the **purification is not complete** ... But they **bring it to the end** and happily so. The **divine visits** of the betrothal **complete** the soul's **purification** ... preparing it in a positive way for spiritual marriage ... The soul is now wholly turned toward the Beloved ... The divine visits ... Bring to **completion** the **work of purification**, though only perfected in perfect union ... And assure **God's positive action** that goes on **increasing** until spiritual marriage.

## **2-Duration of the period of betrothal.**

How much **time** is given to the **positive preparation** brought about through divine visits?

The betrothal is an **exchange of promises** preceding marriage.

To determine its length, let's examine the problem more closely. In the sixth

Mansions, chapter eleven, Teresa speaks of a **valuable sign**:

**...she comes to experience great distress ... No limitations can be set to God's acts, and that He can raise a soul to the highest point ... In a single moment. VII**  
Mansions

... Several years passed during which her desires went on increasing under the action of divine visits before she experienced the **anguish of love** which constitutes the **immediate preparation** for spiritual marriage...

For Teresa the **period of betrothal** began between 1558 and 1560 and concluded in November 1572 with the favor of spiritual marriage. We cannot say that it was prolonged by the Saints infidelities.. Saint Teresa's life shows what extraordinary favors spiritual betrothal brings to the soul but also the works and fruitfulness which manifest the union already realized.

The **example** of Saint Teresa's life is important if only one example in view of her **special mission** as **spiritual mother** and that is in harmony with the **role of positive preparation for spiritual marriage**, attributed to this period of betrothal.

**Spiritual betrothal** is then not a meeting destined to fix the conditions of a union soon to be confirmed. It **inaugurates a period of positive preparation** that the **requirements** for spiritual marriage will ordinarily prolong. This period is simply **one of waiting**; it is already marked by favors and by a supernatural fruitfulness, radiant under the light that falls from the summits. AMEN

