

## **Spiritual Marriage**

### Chapter VII

I am a Daughter of the Church

(Extract from...)

Blessed Fr. Marie-Eugene, ocd

**First, it must be known that if a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it much more.** Living Flame

These two loves, seeking each other with such purity... meet in the perfect and mutual gift of spiritual marriage. Comparing this new state to spiritual betrothal, John of the Cross says:

**There is a great difference between.... betrothal and marriage.... in betrothal there is only consent by agreement, and a unity of will between the two parties and the jewels ...given her by the bridegroom...In marriage there is ...communication between the persons, and union. During the betrothal ... there is no union... For that is the end of the betrothal.** Living Flame

... The soul has come to the end of its journey, has reached the center of itself or the seventh Mansion where God abides... The soul now dwells in perfect union with God... perfect contemplation and sanctity are one.

Let's begin by studying God's manifestation in spiritual marriage.

#### **1-The grace of spiritual marriage**

##### **a. The inaugural imaginary vision**

In one of her spiritual "Relations," Saint Teresa gives the most complete account of this favor:

**When I was at the Incarnation, the second year I was Prioress there, on the octave-day of Saint Martin, I was making my communion and Fray John of the Cross who was giving me the Most Holy Sacrament, divided the host between another sister and myself. I thought he was doing this....to mortify me... His Majesty said to me: " Have no fear, daughter, that anyone will be able to part thee from Me." ...**

**Then He revealed Himself to me, in an imaginary vision, most interiorly... He gave me His right hand, saying to me: "Behold this nail, it is a sign that from today onward thou shalt be my bride. Until now, thou had not merited this; but hence-forward thou shalt regard My honor not only as that of thy Creator and thine, Mine." This favor produced such an effect upon me that I could not restrain myself but became like a person who is foolish... For the whole of that day I remained completely absorbed ... In exchange for such great favors I am doing nothing.** Relations XXXV

Writing the Interior Castle, five years later... Saint Teresa had learned the importance of this favor...the one that secured for her spiritual marriage. She writes:

**... Granting this favor for the first time, His Majesty is pleased to reveal Himself to the soul through an imaginary vision of His most Sacred Humanity, so that the soul clearly understands what is taking place... that it is receiving a sovereign gift. To other people the experience will come in a different way.** VII Mansions

She wants to emphasize that this favor has something special about it.

**... It was so different ... it left her confused and dismayed: for one reason because this vision came with great force; for another because of the words He spoke to her; and because in the interior of her soul where He revealed Himself to her, she had never seen any visions but this.** VII Mansions

These differences extend to all manifestations proper to spiritual marriage:

**... There is the greatest difference between all the other visions ... And those belonging to this Mansion, and there is the same difference between Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage as there is between two betrothed persons and two who are united so that they cannot be separated anymore.** VII Mansions

... The imaginary vision, with the symbolic nail and the words that give it meaning, is not an essential element in spiritual marriage. In the Teresian ascent we find at each Mansion an extraordinary favor... This spiritual mother with a universal mission needed to describe ... and know how to discern with exactness the entry into each period and its characteristics.... Divine Wisdom may dispose things in other souls that they do not know the stage at which they have arrived...The authentic signs of spiritual marriage lay elsewhere ...

### **B. Union of betrothal and union of spiritual marriage**

... Saint Teresa points out the distinction between betrothal and spiritual marriage...:

**When our Lord is pleased to have pity upon this soul... he brings her into this Mansion of His... before consummating the Spiritual Marriage. For He must have an abiding place in the soul as He has one in Heaven... Let us call this a second Heaven.** VII Mansions

To enter the Mansions where God dwells is to be united to Him. All mansions symbolize a degree of union.

But the soul already knows perfect union with God in spiritual betrothal. Saint Teresa explains the difference in the **two ways** of entering into God's Mansion: by **betrothal** and by **spiritual marriage**.

**...when His Majesty is pleased to grant... Divine Marriage, He... brings the soul into His own Mansion...and that it not be...as when He granted it raptures in which ... though united to Him... the soul does not feel called to enter into its own center... VII Mansions**

... In the **rapture of the betrothal** there was a certain **separation of soul and spirit**, the spirit rising up above the soul... In **spiritual marriage**, the **union is complete**. No longer is the spirit alone but the whole soul is drawn into its **center** where God is... All is peace and inner unity.

**This may lead you to think that such a person ... is completely absorbed... But in the service of God she is more alert than before.** VII Mansions

Teresa adds another more **important difference**: this union is not only **complete** but **definitive**.

**The Spiritual Betrothal is different: two persons are frequently separated ... In this other favor of the Lord it is not so: the soul remains all the time in that center with its God.** VII Mansions

**Spiritual marriage** then is a **union** that is **complete** and **definitive**...

### **C. Intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity**

The **imaginary vision** of the **sacred humanity of Christ** was **fleeting**. For Teresa it was the beacon showing her the entry to the port... **Spiritual Marriage** brings a deeper and more **enduring** manifestation of God....continuing to compare to compare the grace of spiritual marriage with the graces of spiritual betrothal:

**When He unites it with Him, it understands nothing; the faculties are all lost... he makes it blind and dumb, as He made Saint Paul at His conversion... The great delight of which the soul is then conscious is the realization of its nearness to God. In this Mansion everything is different. Our good God now desires to remove the scales from the eyes of the soul so that it can see and understand something of the favor He is granting it.... It is brought into this Mansion by means of an intellectual vision, in which, by a representation of the truth in a particular way, the Most Holy Trinity reveals Itself in all three Persons. First of all the spirit becomes enkindled and is illumined .... by a cloud of the greatest brightness. It sees these three Persons, individually... The soul realizes that ... all three persons are one Substance and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone; ... Although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or of the soul, for it is no imaginary vision. Here all three Persons**

**communicate Themselves to the soul and speak to the soul and explain to it those words which the Gospel attributes to the Lord--- namely, that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul which loves Him and keeps His commandments. VII Mansions**

...**Intellectual vision** is not of the same order as the **imaginary vision** of the **humanity of Christ**, marking the entry to spiritual marriage. The imaginary vision is an **extraordinary favor** produced by God in the faculties and giving a distinct light. The intellectual vision, or knowledge of the Holy Trinity, is of another order which proceeds from perfect union and is a **fruit** of the one and **same nature** this Union produces between God and the Soul.

A union quite fleeting and less profound took place in complete darkness in the mystical grace of union of the fifth Mansions. It left only **certitude** that there had been union with God. In the **rapture of the betrothal**, the union realized in a simple meeting ..... the soul experienced a divine Union and in this contact with God **divine secrets** were revealed to it, but was unable to tell what it had discovered. The rapture of betrothal ... was a sudden and fleeting plunge into the depths of perfect union---a blinding and sweet meeting, blinding with its light.

In **spiritual marriage, perfect union...** is a thing confirmed, imposing itself with all of its consequences... The soul is **immersed in God** like a sponge in the ocean; it rests in the transforming love that has taken it captive...

The **perfection and stability** of this union, characterized by the soul now having **one nature** with God which results in perfection and continuity. The light of dawn radiates from it and gives way only to the full light of the beatific vision in an unending day:

**It is very important, sisters, that we should not think of the soul as something dark...there is not only a light we can see but also an interior light...** VII Mansions

... This light... suffices to reveal to the soul the Mansion in which it is.... In an intellectual vision, the most Holy Trinity reveals Itself, in all three Persons, to the soul, Saint Teresa writes:

**"First of all the spirit becomes enkindled and is illumined by a cloud of the greatest brightness. VII Mansions**

...the experience of the presence of the three divine Persons remains, and the soul has only to turn its gaze within to find again that living and luminous Presence. Saint Teresa writes:

**This Presence is not of course always realized so fully ... I mean clearly, but... the soul is always aware that it is experiencing this companionship. We might compare the soul to a person who is with others in a very bright room; and then suppose the shutters are closed so that the people are all in darkness.**

VII Mansions

... This light of love from which the intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity comes, brings about the promise of Jesus in the Gospel:

**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 14:23**

That this ...vision can reveal the distinction and unity of the divine Persons, the operations common to the Three, and the ... attributes of each one, is evidence of the **high quality of light** coming from the transforming Union.

... Saint Teresa writes:

**It sees these three Persons, individually , and yet.... the soul realizes ... All these three Persons are one Substance, and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone; so that what we hold by faith the soul may be said here to grasp by sight, although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or of the soul, for it is no imaginary vision. VII Mansions**

Saint Teresa seems to give as a **characteristic sign of spiritual marriage**-- the intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity... But neither Saint Therese nor Saint John of the Cross speak of it. The knowledge essential to spiritual marriage is the knowledge resulting in the soul now having the same nature as God, fruit of the transforming union.... It is this deep knowledge of the Holy Trinity through experience, of the unity and distinction of Persons-- a veritable **dawning of eternal life** -- that we shall find in **all the saints** who have reached this high degree.

Let's conclude by saying that with spiritual marriage comes an **experience of God** and of the Holy Trinity, of the nature and distinction of the divine Persons; but that this lofty and clear knowledge can be made explicit **under different forms**, which are **not always** an intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity, in the Teresian sense of the word.

#### **D. The peace of spiritual marriage**

**Peace** is also one of the characteristic and essential **fruits** of spiritual marriage. Saint Teresa writes:

**The soul... neither moves from that center nor loses its peace, for He who gave His peace to the Apostles when they were all together can give peace to the soul...**VII Mansions

... Peace comes from the possession of God in that light of dawn that satisfies the faculties. We are made for God who is our end... Saint writes:

**This little butterfly has now died, full of joy at having found rest, and within her lives Christ... In short, the desires of these souls are no longer consolations or favors, for they have with them the Lord Himself and it is His Majesty who now lives in them.** VII Mansions

Saint John of the Cross writes that the soul is protected by

**... The rampart of peace and virtues and perfection which the soul now has... The wall**

**and the defense of the garden of its Beloved.** Spiritual Canticle

Saint Teresa describes this peace that comes from detachment, from solitude and inner harmony... No more dryness and disturbance, no more weakness under God's action:

**... The soul is almost always in tranquility ... On reaching this state the soul has no more raptures... save very occasionally, and even then it has not the same transports and flights of the spirit.** VII Mansions

The soul is now **detached** from everything, wholly satisfied with the loving Union it is enjoying.... the enemy is powerless to penetrate into this inmost Mansion and cannot draw the soul away from union; at most he can hinder the enjoyment of that union.

...Grace however does not destroy nature. God asks of the Saint **works** and **sufferings** ... Let us turn to Saint Teresa for light on the **peace** proper to spiritual marriage...

**When Our Lord brings the soul into this Mansion of His, which is the center of the soul itself... It seems on entering, to be subject to none of the usual movements of the faculties and the imagination, which injure it and take away its peace.** VII Mansions

This statement finds confirmation in the description the Saint gave of her condition at the time she was writing the "Fourth Mansions" of the Interior Castle. She had been experiencing the favors of spiritual marriage for several years at that time:

**As I write this, the noises in my head are so loud that... My head sounds as if it were full of brimming rivers ...and all that water...came suddenly came rushing downward; and a host of little birds seem to be whistling... in the upper part of my head where the higher part of the soul is said to be.** IV Mansions

Yet the Saint remained united to God. To conclude, let us hear her describe this peace and its limits:

**The "center" of the soul or the "spirit," is something difficult to describe... It is difficult to understand how the soul can have trials and afflictions and yet be in peace. I want to put before you one or two comparisons ... A king lives in his palace; many wars are waged in his kingdom...but he remains where he is despite them all. So it is here: although in other Mansions there are many disturbances and poisonous creatures... Nobody enters this Mansion and forces the soul to leave it; and, although the things the soul hears cause it some distress ... They do not take away its peace, for the passions are already vanquished, and are afraid to enter there... Our whole body may be in pain, yet, if our head is sound the fact that the body is in pain will not cause it to ache as well. These comparisons make me smile and I do not like them at all, but I know no others. VII Mansions**

## **2- Growth of the Grace of Spiritual Marriage**

Saint John of the Cross tells us that spiritual marriage is “**the highest estate attainable in this life.**” ... But is spiritual marriage a **goal**, a summit beyond which one cannot go, where the soul takes its stand immobile in the repose of its peace and the brilliance of its light?

At the outset, Saint Teresa says speaking of spiritual marriage:

**This great favor cannot be fulfilled perfectly in us during our lifetime. VII Mansions**

Saint John of the Cross too... tells us that all this is not eternal life but is only **shadow** and **imperfection** when compared with the longed-for vision face to face.

In spiritual marriage, the soul continues its progress toward God. Its love possesses its object as yet only in shadow. The living faith

that illumines it becomes each day more desirous of light...

**Not all veils are drawn back from the face of God,** says Saint John of the Cross, **but the soul has been able to see Him somewhat darkly.**

We are here at the confines of the eternal vision. We had to come thus far to follow the **luminous discoveries of spiritual marriage.** AMEN