

### **The Nature of Complete Union**

The first quality of this exalted union is its **completeness**. **Grace** and **charity** have attained a **state of perfection** in the human soul... Before this mystical marriage, **no definite bond** had been sealed in the relationship between God and the soul.

Things are now different: there is a **definitive surrender** in love to each other ... a joining of spirit to Spirit, of human love to divine charity, what is human becomes divine by participation; the divine Spirit transforms the human spirit, penetrating and beautifying it ...

According to the Spanish mystics, there can be no higher state of union between God and the soul during life on earth. This does not however exclude growth in charity and fortitude within this union, in fact... **“this great favor does not come to its perfect fullness during our lifetime”** (IC 7,11).

As well as being complete, this union has the distinctive feature of being **permanent**. The soul has a **habitual awareness**, at the deepest level of consciousness (the soul’s “spirit”) of the presence of its God: the divine Persons **“never seem to leave it any more”** (IC 7, 1, 7). This permanency is not ... always at the same **degree of intensity** ... nor does it imply that the soul is **“sure of its salvation and safe from falling again”** (IC 7, 2, 9) The soul never loses its freedom, and **“if it were to withdraw deliberately from God, this blessing would be lost”** (IC 7, 2, 1). But, apart from such a tragedy, the covenant of love is permanent and indestructible: the two lovers are **constantly aware** of each other and can no longer be **separated**. Wishing to impress on her readers the closeness and permanency of this union, St. Teresa gives us comparisons.

**God has desired to be so joined with the creature that, just as those who are married cannot be separated, He doesn’t want to be separated from the soul ...the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river. Or it is like what we have when a little stream enters the sea, there is no means of separating the two. Or, like bright light entering a room through two different windows; although the streams of light are separate when entering the room, they become one (IC 7, 2, 3-4).**

... In its **“extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself”** (IC 7, 1, 7), the soul now enjoys the company of the **Holy Trinity**. The soul dies, as it were, in order to enter completely its new life in Christ, who asks it to consider itself his bride and to act accordingly... **“My honor is yours, and yours Mine ... So I give you all the trials and sufferings I underwent, and by these means, as with something belonging to you, you can make a request of my Father”** (SpTest 31, I; 46).

...St. Teresa declares that **“it is all a matter of love united with love: todo es amor con amor”** (IC 5, 4, 3). No other power can unite two beings so loosely as can the force of love...

St. Teresa’s “Mansions” can rightly be understood in this way too: a progressive interiorization and **growth of love in seven intensifying stages ...** The spiritual life of man is a **response to God’s call**, and its unfolding is **equivalent to a development of love**. Man succeeds only gradually in freeing his heart from all that **binds** it to **creatures** and to his own **selfish desires**. As this **liberation process** advances, **God’s love** enters the human heart and man surrenders himself more and more to its demands...This growth is a **purification** ... and the **binding power** of this deepest of unions is **supernatural love**. The **whole spiritual journey** can be considered an **awakening of love**, a

refinement and growth of love, and its fulfilment in the **merging** of human and divine love...

The reality mystics describe ... is anything but unreal and unpractical. Genuine mystics who have attained the peace and joy of the union we describe, are the most **practical and down-to-earth people**. ... The soul acknowledges that all the marvels ... come from the hand of God... **“it is the Lord who does everything ... we ourselves do almost nothing .. I play no part in obtaining even a spark of it”** (L 21, II; 39, 23). The attainment of **sanctity and union with God** ... is a **divine gift** and a **human surrender**...The soul remains in admiration and gratitude before God. The thought of self-praise simply never crosses its mind... Such a soul is conscious of its own **misery and fragility** that he cannot be in any way puffed up. **Humility and truth** become one.

When Teresa considered the wretchedness of her soul, the Lord intervened, **“It is now lowly, daughter, for it is made in My image”** (SpTest 49). The soul itself is not worthy, but it has been given divine worthiness through an accumulation of heavenly **blessings** and the infusion of supernatural **charity** which have **transformed** it into something **divinely lovable**, **“God has given the soul such great dignity”** (IC 1,2,8).

### The Testing Signs of Union: Effects

It should not be imagined that the mystical union ... is a state of **spiritual luxury** to be egotistically enjoyed... No, no one is more **considerate** or **industrious** than a true mystic. The genuineness of mystical union can be gauged from what St. Teresa calls its **effects**. She places the **authenticity of union**, not in visions or ecstatic delights, but in **practical qualities** like **fortitude** of spirit, **peace** of soul, **control** of passions, unswerving **fidelity** to God’s will, and the **union** of prayer and virtue in daily life.

**1/Peace of soul**, maybe the in the life of a person united to God...which has a **beneficial influence** on those he encounters... **“the passions are now conquered,”** declares St. Teresa (IC 7, 2, 11). ... The sensual part of the soul can no longer disturb the tranquility of its higher part, all desires are now under control of the will, the virtues are firmly established... **“God and the soul alone rejoice together in the deepest silence”** (IC 7,3,11) Painful transports and raptures cease as the soul has a greater capacity for the Divine and the soul is stronger... Evil spirits...can no longer enter and harm it anymore.

This state resembles...the **original harmony** of being, in which **all the powers** of the soul and body... conform to the **divine design** of a wise Creator. The **essential quality** of original justice was **perfect conformity** of the human will to the divine will. It is a conformity that ensures a **sinless friendship with God and perfect peace of soul...** St. Teresa regards it as the communication of the **Easter gift** Christ gave to his Apostles: pax vobis (IC 7, 7, 2, 5.3; Jn 20, 19-20)

It does **not** follow that the person will have no further troubles or trials to suffer. Indeed, his life will be marked more deeply than ever with the sign of the cross. **“Times of war, trial and fatigue are never lacking”** (IC 7, 2, 10)... We know from her writings that St. Teresa suffered from distractions, anxieties and a sense of loneliness, which at times hindered her prayer. (SpTest 53-55). The Lord said to her on one such occasion, **“Be patient, for as long as you live, a wandering mind cannot be avoided”** (SpTest 39).

However, at the deepest level there is peace in the presence of God; at a more outward level there is often a keen awareness of profound pain and distress as if the soul were divided. St. Teresa compares these contradictory feelings to the peace enjoyed by a king, secure in his palace, while all around him the war rages in his kingdom, or to a man’s mind of peace though his body be in pain (IC

7,2, 11). ... St. Teresa states, “**I know I am speaking the truth**” (IC 7,2, 10)

**2/ Total self-forgetfulness and interior freedom** is linked with peace of soul. Totally concentrated on **Christ**, the soul enjoys a **serene detachment** from all created things, even from its own self. This **perfect freedom** makes life simple, beautiful and generous.

The soul’s strength is now spent in **seeking God’s honor and glory**. No selfish desires spoil the purity of intention that makes it zealous in good works... Its longing for **solitude** where it can praise God without distraction, is outdone only by its **longing to benefit and save souls who will praise him**.

**O my Sisters! How forgetful this soul, in which the Lord dwells in so particular a way ... how little it should care for its honor, and how far it should be from wanting esteem in anything! ... All its concern is taken up with how to please Him more and how or where it will show Him the love it bears Him** (IC 7,4, 6)

Even death no longer causes it worry, “**it has no more fear of death than it would of a gentle rapture**” (IC 7, 3, 7,). It would willingly die many times to **save even one soul** or to give God any **extra honor**, yet it possesses that **holy indifference** that springs from wholehearted conformity to God’s will, “**the soul doesn’t worry about all that can happen**” (ibid., 2). The dominant attitude is wanting “**neither death nor life**” (SpTest 65, 9), but only what will **best serve** God and souls.

**3/ Highest contemplation combined with fruitful service:** the soul now enjoys a permanent **awareness** of God’s Trinitarian presence and of its own sharing in this divine life. Teresa states though:

It should not be understood that this presence is felt so fully, I mean so clearly, as when revealed the

first time, or as at other times when God grants the soul this gift” (IC 7,1,9).

... This experience made St. Teresa understand the full meaning of Christ’s promise to come with the Father and the Spirit to abide in the soul of the one who loves him and keeps his commandments (Jn14, 16-17).

Rarely does this person experience **aridity** in prayer as he did in the former Mansions. Instead there is “**a remembrance and tender love of our Lord**” (IC 7, 3, 8). Should **distraction** or **anxiety** upset him, God himself recalls him with gentle **impulses of love**. St. Teresa experienced these **awakenings of love** as if the Lord himself were pleading with her to remain in his presence. She calls them “**a note or letter of His, written with intense love**” to which the soul must answer interiorly with an act of love... (C7, 3, 8-9). These expressions of divine love are a **sufficient reward**, Teresa claims, for all the sufferings the soul went through during its life. A **radical change** takes place in the existence of the person who teaches this sublime union: the **center of his life** is no longer his own self, but **Christ**. This is the **most fundamental effect of union**. The **other effects**, peace, detachment, fortitude and joy, spring from this identification with Christ.

St. Teresa makes her own the words of St. Paul:

**For to me live is Christ, and to die is gain**” (Phil 1, 21), and asserts that it is true to say of any soul in this union, “**its life is now Christ**” (IC 7, 2, 5).

Life of **genuine union** in the Seventh Mansions is not an idle and sterile one. It is **full of fruitful activity and self-sacrifice in the service of others**. The **aim of contemplative prayer** is not to give personal enjoyment but to impart ‘**strength for service**’ (IC 7, 4, 12). The **evangelical activity of Martha** and the **contemplative solitude of Mary** are **personified** in the life of the person who is **joined to God** in this **deepest of mystical unions**.

... the soul is asking to perform great works in the service of our Lord and of its neighbor. For this purpose it is happy to lose that delight and satisfaction (of contemplative absorption in God). Although a person's life will become more active than contemplative, and one will seemingly be the loser if the petition is granted. Martha and Mary never fail to work together when the soul is in this state. For in the active—and seemingly exterior work, the soul is working interiorly. And when the active works proceed from this interior root, they become lovely and very fragrant flowers. (Med. 7, 3)

Teresa writes: **this is the aim of prayer, my daughters, this the purpose of the spiritual marriage; that it may always give birth to good works, good works...** (IC 7, 4, 6).

It goes without saying that all this demands a **life of deep humility, heroic virtue and exceptional generosity**. Only such a person can become not only the slave of God but also the “**slave of everyone, as Christ was**” (ibid., ). To arrive at this stage we need ‘**more than prayer and contemplation**’; we also require a life of **solid virtue**. Yet, only a person who strives to live such a life, merits to be called “**truly spiritual**” (ibid., 8-9).

**4/ Zeal for souls and for God's honor and glory:**  
... the realization that she is now the bride of Christ... “**she (who) looks only for the honor and glory of God in everything**” (Med 7,5). The most effective way to do this is to enter ... into the **work of redemption**, by converting and saving souls. So, people who have arrived at this point of **passive contemplation** are often generous in **charitable deeds**. The divine love that consumes them is the soul of their apostolate which makes their activity most fruitful. “**The more they advance in this kind of prayer and the gifts of our Lord, the more attention they pay to the needs of their**

**neighbor, especially to the needs of their souls**” (Med 7,8).

Even their deep longing for death which will unite them with the Lord forever, gives way to the desire to live for many years... St. Teresa says, “**their glory lies in being able in some way to help the Crucified**” (IC 7, 3, 6). And she admits that this readiness to live is the “**most costly offering**” they can present to God (ibid., 7).

**5/ Fortitude and joy in Suffering:** people often desire to have the experiences of the mystics in the hope of enjoying the delights and insights. But St. Teresa cautions us saying this would be a ‘**serious error**’.

The **purpose** of these extraordinary favors is not to give personal pleasure to the recipient but to **strengthen him for a deeper share in the redemptive Cross of Christ**.

**I hold for certain that these favors are meant to fortify our weakness... that we may be able to imitate Him in His great sufferings:** (IC 7, 4, 4).

Hence favored souls ardently desire to suffer and consider the Cross the greatest grace of all. “**Give me trials Lord, give me persecutions**” (Med 7,8). To them, it puts a seal of authenticity on all their mystical graces and spiritual favors. In the union of the Seventh Mansions, this desire no longer disturbs them: if God “**desires the soul to suffer, well and good; if not, it doesn't kill itself as it used to**” (IC 7, 3, 4). They even acquire an **interior joy** in the midst of trials and persecutions, with no feelings of hatred towards those who offend or oppose them; rather, their heart goes out to them in an attitude of compassion and mercy (Ibid., 6).

All this is possible because they have been **fortified by the Cross**, both in the delights of contemplation but also in the night of suffering and purification. Their one **all-consuming desire** now is ... to do **God's will**, whatever it may imply, and thus return love for love.

## Conclusion

The **marvels of divine union** as described by St. Teresa may seem to have **little practical value**...but simply put, these heights are the full development of **baptismal grace**. They belong to the Christian life.

No one will have the same experience as St. Teresa... but the **substance of union** is the same for all: it is a **matter of giving and receiving love**...

The **entry fee** to the King's Mansion is **high**. Many find it too costly. It demands complete **surrender of the will to God's will** and a consequent **dying to oneself**. "**But alas for us, how few there must be who reach it**" (IC 5, 3, 6) exclaims St. Teresa. Yet a few lines prior she states: "**there is no reason to doubt the possibility of this death any more than that of true union with the will of God.**"

Any baptized soul can arrive at what is essential in this sublime union. Its **degree and intensity** will depend on **God's eternal design** for each one. It will not necessarily take the road of mystical favors...but its **essentials of pure love and conformity of wills** can be considered as **normal**, though heroic, for those who live their Christian commitment to the full.

...We may not emulate the spiritual parents of Carmel who were favored with exceptional graces to be able to fulfill their special mission, but: "**All of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and to contemplation**" (IC 5,1, 2)

... St. Teresa wrote the Interior Castle in two months of effective work allowing us to glean not only an increased **knowledge of spiritual things** but a **deeper participation in life** – in the Life that lasts forever and which the Son of God came into this world to share abundantly with us. Amen