

The First Dwelling Places

Chapter 2 (summary)

Interior Castle

by Saint Teresa of Avila

Treats of how ugly a soul is when in mortal sin and how God wanted to let a certain person know something about this. Discusses, also, some matters on the theme of self-knowledge.

This chapter is beneficial, for there are noteworthy points. Explains what is meant by these dwelling places.

... You should consider what it would mean to this so brilliantly shining and beautiful **castle** ... to fall into **mortal sin**; there is no darker darkness ... The very **Sun** that gave the soul so much brilliance ... is still in the **center**, the soul is as though it were not there to share in these things... Yet, it is as capable of enjoying His Majesty as is crystal capable of reflecting the sun's brilliance. Nothing helps such a soul; ... all the good **works** it might do while in mortal sin are **fruitless** ... separated from Him, they cannot be pleasing in His sight. After all, the **intention** of anyone who commits a mortal sin is to **please the devil**, who is darkness itself ... the poor soul becomes darkness itself.

2. ... The Lord wanted to **show** someone the state of a **soul in mortal sin** ... If it were understood, it would be impossible to sin, even though having to undergo great trials to flee the occasions. May He give you, daughters, the **desire** to beseech Him for those in this state ... For just as all the streams that flow from a crystal-clear fount are also clear, the works of a **soul in grace**... are most pleasing in the eyes of both God and man ... Thus, in the case of a soul who through its own fault withdraws from this fount and plants itself ... where the water is black and foul-smelling, everything that flows from it is **wretched and filthy**.

3. ... Keep in mind that the **fount**, the **shining sun** in the center of the soul, does not lose its beauty...; it is always present in the soul ... But is a **black cloth** is placed

over a crystal in the sun, the sun's brilliance will have **no effect** on the crystal though the sun is shining on it.

4. ... How is it possible that realizing this you don't strive to remove the **pitch** from this crystal? ... O Jesus, how sad ... to see a soul separated from this light! ... How disturbed the **senses** are ... in other words, the people who live in these rooms! How miserable is the state of those rooms within the castle! And, in the **faculties** (will, intellect, memory) of the soul ... what blindness, what bad management! In sum, since the tree is planted where the devil is, what fruit can it bear?

5. I once heard a spiritual man who was not **surprised** at things done by a person in mortal sin, but at what was **not** done... There is nothing that deserves the name "**evil**," except mortal sin, which carries everlasting evils in its wake. This, daughters, we must be in fear of and ask God to protect us against. For if He doesn't guard the city, our labor will be in vain...

The Lord granted the person (Teresa) mentioned **two blessings**: the **first** an intense fear of offending Him...; the **second** a mirror for **humility** in which she saw that none of our good deeds had its source from ourselves but from the **fount** in which the tree, symbolizing our souls, is planted and from this sun gives warmth to our works... without this help we can do nothing...

6. The time spent in reading this... would not be lost if we were left with these **two blessings**... May it please His Goodness to give us grace to profit by them.

7. These **interior matters** are so **obscure** for our minds that anyone would... be forced to say foolish things in order to say something right. Whoever reads this must have **patience**, for I have to write about what I don't know. Sometimes I ... don't know what to say or how to begin... It is important for you that I explain some things about the **interior life**... We always hear what a good thing prayer is... yet, only what

we do in prayer is explained to us; little is explained about what the **Lord does** in a soul. I mean about the **supernatural**. When speaking about this **heavenly interior building**.... and considering it in many ways, we shall find great **comfort** but the. It is so little understood by mortals The Lord, however, has given me some understanding ... especially about certain more **difficult** things... but before discussing them, I will have to repeat well-known matters...

8. Let's get back to our castle with its **many dwelling places**. You mustn't think of them... as **following** one in file after the other; but turn your eyes toward the **center**, which is ... the **royal chamber** where the King stays... Surrounding this center room are many other rooms ... The things of the soul must always be considered as ... spacious and large ... The **Sun** in the royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer ... not ... to stay in one corner. Let it **walk through these dwelling places** ... above ... below and to the sides, since God has given it such dignity... Don't force it to stay along time alone in one room. Oh, but if it is in the room of **self-knowledge**! How necessary this room is ... for never... is anything else fitting for it ... For **humility** ... is always at work like bees making honey ... Without it, everything goes wrong! Remember that the bee ... flies about gathering nectar from the flowers. So, it is with the soul in the room of **self-knowledge**; let it fly sometimes to ponder the ... **majesty of God**. Here it will discover its **lowliness** ... and be free of the **vermin** that enter the **first rooms**, those of **self-knowledge**... It is only by **God's mercy** that a person practices self-knowledge... And believe me, we shall practice much better **virtue** through God's help than by being tied down to our own **misery**.

9. ... **Knowing ourselves** is so important ... While we are on this earth **nothing** is more important than **humility**. So it is good,

indeed very good, to try to **enter first** into the room where **self-knowledge** is dealt with ... This is the **right road** ... In my opinion, we shall never completely know ourselves if we don't strive to know God. By **gazing** at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own **lowliness**; and by looking at His purity, we shall see our own filth; by **pondering His humility**, we shall see how **far** we are from being **humble**.

10. **Two advantages** come from such activity. **First** ... something white seems whiter next to something black ... the **second** is that our intellect and will, ... become ... better prepared for every good... If we are always fixed on our **earthly misery**, the **stream** will never flow free from the **mud** of fears, faintheartedness, and cowardice. I would be looking to see if I'm being watched or not... whether it would be good for a person so miserable to engage in something as **lofty as prayer**; ... that someone like myself has no need of anything **special**.

11. ... Souls think that all such **fears** stem from humility... These fears come from our **not understanding ourselves completely**. They distort self-knowledge... this **lack of freedom** from ourselves ... is what can be feared. So I say, daughters, let's set our eyes on **Christ**, our Good, and on His saints. There we shall **learn true humility**... Even though this is the first dwelling place, it is very **rich** and so **precious** that if the soul slips away from the **vermin** within it, nothing will be left to do but **advance**...

12. ... You should **not** think in terms of just a few rooms but in terms of a **million**; for souls ... enter here in many ways... The devil must have in each room many legions of devils to fight off souls when they try to go from one room to another... He is not so successful with those who have advanced closer to where the King dwells. But in the first rooms souls are still absorbed in **worldly pleasures and vanities**... These souls are easily conquered ... though they may desire not to offend God and do

perform good works... They must approach His Majesty often and take His Blessed Mother and His Saints as intercessors to fight for them... Truly, in all states it's necessary that strength come to us from God ...

13. ... There is a great deal of **harm** done us by our **failure to understand** well **humility** and **self-knowledge** which is the most important thing for us...

14. ... Hardly any of the **light from the King's royal chamber** reaches the **first dwelling places**... They are not dark and black ... as with the soul in sin, but they ... are ...darkened so the soul cannot see the light.

The darkness ... is caused by many bad things like snakes (worldly things) ... that enter with the soul and don't allow it to be aware of the light ... the soul is ... involved in **worldly things** and absorbed with possessions, honor, or business affairs ... Though it might want to see ... these things do not allow it to; nor is it able to **slip free** from so many impediments. If a person is to enter the **second dwelling places**, he must strive to give up unnecessary things and business affairs ... in conformity with his state in life ... as it is so important to reach the **main dwelling place** ... If he doesn't ... it will be impossible for him to get there. It will be even impossible for him to stay where he is without danger ... for in the midst of poisonous creatures (worldly things) one cannot help but be bitten at one time or another.

15. Now then, what would happen, daughters, if we ... who have entered much further into the castle to other secret dwelling places, should **turn back**...? There are... many persons to whom God has granted favors who through **their own fault** have fallen back into this misery ... So, **guard yourselves**, my daughters, from **extraneous cares**. Remember that there are few dwelling places in this castle in which the devils do not wage battle. True, in some rooms the **guards** (faculties of the soul: will,

intellect, memory) have the strength to **fight**; but it is necessary that we don't grow **careless** in recognizing the wiles of the devil who can **deceive** us by changing himself into an **angel of light**...

16. ... We need to **recognize** him at the outset ... For example, he gives a Sister impulses towards penance ... but if the prioress has ordered that no penance be done without permission, and the devil makes the Sister think that in a good practice she can be daring and so secretly gives herself up to a penitential life and as a result ends up losing her health...

17. What the devil is aiming at is no small thing: the cooling of the love and charity the Sisters have for one another... Let us understand, my daughters, that **true perfection** consists in **love of God** and **neighbor**; the more perfectly we keep these **two commandments** the more **perfect we will become** ... **Our rule and constitutions serve for nothing else than to be a means towards keeping these commandments with greater perfection**...

18. **Mutual love** is so important that I would never want it to be forgotten. The soul could lose its peace and even disturb the peace of others by looking at trifling things in people... If things are done against the rule and constitutions... the prioress should be cautioned, and if she doesn't amend, the superior informed. This is charity... We must not talk about these things to one another. The devil could ... get... gossiping started. The matter should be discussed with the one who could benefit ... In this house there's not much occasion for gossip since continual silence is kept; but it is good to be on guard. Amen

