

The Fifth Dwelling Places

Chapter 4 (summary)

Interior Castle

Saint Teresa of Avila

Continues with the same subject, explaining further this kind of prayer. Tells how important it is to walk with care because the devil himself uses a great deal of care in trying to make one turn back from what was begun.

... May it please God that I ... have the time to write of this. About five months have passed since I began, and because my head is in no condition to read over what I've written, everything will have to continue without order, and perhaps some things will be said twice. Since this work is for my Sisters, the disorder won't matter much. 2. Nonetheless, I want to explain more to you about what I think this **prayer of union** is. To do so, let me draw a comparison ... 3. You've often heard that God espouses souls spiritually ... Though the **comparison** may be coarse, I cannot find another comparison that would better explain what I mean than the **sacrament of marriage**. This **spiritual espousal** is different in kind from marriage, for ... there is never anything that is not spiritual ...

The **spiritual joys** the Lord gives when compared to the **delights** married people must experience are a **thousand leagues distant**. For it is all a matter of **love united with love**, and the actions of love are most pure and so extremely delicate and gentle that there is no way of explaining them, but the Lord knows how to make them very clearly felt.

4. It seems to me that the **prayer of union** does not yet reach the stage of **spiritual betrothal**. Here below when **two people are to be engaged**, there is discussion about whether they are alike, love each other and might meet to become more satisfied with each other.

So, too, in the case of this **union with God**. The agreement has been made. This soul is well informed about the goodness of her Spouse and is determined to do His will in everything ... to make Him happy...

As a result, He grants this mercy, for He desired her to know Him more and that they might meet together, as they say, and be **united**.

We can say that **union** is like this, for it passes in a very **short time**. In it... the soul sees secretly who this Spouse is that she is going to accept.

Through the work of the senses and the faculties she couldn't ... in a thousand years understand what she understands here in the shortest time.

But from that meeting alone He leaves her more worthy for the **joining of hands**. The **soul** is left so much in **love** that it does all it can to avoid disturbing this **divine betrothal**. But, if it is careless, and places its affection in something other than Him, it **loses everything** ...

5. For this reason, I ask Christian souls whom the Lord has brought to these boundaries ... not to grow careless but to withdraw from occasions. Even in this state, the soul is not as strong ... as it will be after the betrothal is made.

The betrothal belongs to the next dwelling place (6th); this present communication amounts to no more than a **meeting**.

The devil, seeing the soul entirely surrendered to the Spouse doesn't dare do much because he fears it.

6. I tell you, daughters, that I have known persons who had ascended high and had reached this union and who were then turned back and won over by the devil ...

In losing one soul of this kind, not only one soul is lost but a multitude ... Look at the multitude of souls God draws to Himself by means of one. He is to be greatly praised for ... those the devil must have lost through St. Dominic, St. Francis, ... and those he now loses through Father Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) ... How would

this have come about if they hadn't made the effort not to lose through their own fault so divine an espousal?

Oh, my daughters, how prepared the Lord is to grant us favors now ... as in the past. ... And, in part, He is even more in need now that we desire to receive them for there are fewer who care about His honor than there were then.

... There is an extraordinary amount of prudence we use not to lose our rights ... May the Lord in His mercy enlighten us so we do not fall into similar darknesses.

7. You will ... be in doubt concerning **two things: first**, if the soul is ready to do the will of God, how can it be deceived since it only wants to do His will in all? **Second**, what are the ways in which the devil can enter so dangerously that your soul goes astray?

For you are so withdrawn from the world ... and in the company of angels ... and have no other desire but to serve God and please Him in everything. With those in the midst of worldly occasions such a turn backward would not be surprising ... But Judas was in the company of the Apostles and conversing always with God Himself and listening to His words, I understand that there is **no security** in these things.

8. In **answer** to the **first**, I say that if this soul were always attached to God's will it is clear that it would not go astray. **But** the devil comes along with skillful deception ... Little by little he darkens the intellect, cools the will's ardor and makes self-love grow until he succeeds in withdrawing the soul from the will of God and brings it to his own.

Thus, we have an **answer** to the **second** doubt. There is ... **no desert** so withdrawn that he fails to go there ... Perhaps the Lord permits this so as to observe the **behavior** of that soul He wishes to set up as a light for others. If there is going to be a **downfall**, it's better it happen in the **beginning** rather than later, when it would be harmful to many.

9. The **most effective diligence** on our part ... is the following. **First**, we must always **ask** God in **prayer** to **sustain** us; remind ourselves often that if He **abandons** us we will soon end in the abyss; and, never trust ourselves. Then, we should walk with special **care** and **attention**, observing how we are proceeding in the **practice of virtue** ... especially in **love for one another**; in the desire to be **considered least** among the Sisters; and, in the **performance** of **ordinary tasks**.

If we pay attention and ask the Lord to **enlighten** us, we will soon see the **gain** or the **loss**. Don't think that a soul that comes so close to God is allowed to lose Him so quickly or that the devil has an easy task. His Majesty would regret the loss of this soul so much that He gives it in many ways a **thousand interior warnings**, so that the harm will not be hidden from it.

10. In **conclusion**, we must always strive to advance. If we don't advance, let us walk with great fear ... Love is never idle. A failure to grow would be a very bad sign. A soul that has tried to be the betrothed of God Himself, that is now intimate with His Majesty ... must not go to sleep.

To see what He does with those He now considers His betrothed, we shall begin to speak of the sixth dwelling places. You will be able to see just how little we can do to serve, suffer and accomplish so as to dispose ourselves for such great favors ... He perhaps ordained that I write so that we forget our little earthly joys and put our eyes on the reward in order to see just how immeasurable is His mercy ... With eyes fixed on His greatness, we will move about enkindled in His love.

11. May He be pleased that I manage to explain something about these very difficult things and that what I say be for your benefit ... Through His favors we can understand something of what He will give us in heaven ... If there were no danger of losing or of offending Him, it would be easy to endure life until the end of the world ... May it

please His Majesty that we merit to render
Him some service; without as many faults
...even in good works. Amen