

Prayer of Recollection

Part 2 Recollecting Yourself

Emmanuel Renault, ocd

Teresian Prayer

(translated from French)

What is this way of **interior prayer** (F 2 3) inspired by a Franciscan friar, Francisco de Osuna, and distinct from traditional meditation?

It seems that it can be summed up by **three essential points**:

-**recollect oneself**;

-**become aware** either **within** yourself or **near** to yourself of the Living Presence of Jesus Christ;

-**converse** in a heart to heart with Him;

- a few additional tips to recollect oneself have been added.

In **summary**, Teresa would say:

I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer (V 4 7).

Recollecting Yourself

To succeed, Teresa suggests a few very brief **preliminary steps**, which come from what spiritual authors call **immediate preparation**. Teresa asks that **you quickly make an examination of conscience, an act of contrition and the sign of the cross must come first** (W 26 1).

The **reason** for this **first action** is that **self-knowledge and the thought of one's sins is the bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread** (V 13 15).

To come before God, it is necessary to recognize your misery,... unworthiness, and to experience a real humility Teresa will often come back to this point recommending that: **however sublime the contemplation, let your prayer always begin and end with self-knowledge**. (W 39 5).

This **first step** is already a part of the **effort of recollection**. The **negative aspect** will consist of **abstracting yourself** from the **exterior world** and **getting accustomed to caring about nothing at all nor about seeing or hearing**. (V 11 9)

This prayer is called 'recollection,' because the soul collects its faculties (intellect, will, memory) together and enters within itself to be with its God (W 28 4).

It is about deliberately letting go of any activities of the exterior senses, particularly sight and hearing, **so, anyone who walks this path keeps his eyes closed almost as often as he prays. This is a praiseworthy custom for many reasons. It is a striving so as not to look at things here below** (W 28 6).

The **quality of interior prayer** will depend on the **quality of recollection**. This **movement of the soul to enter within itself** (W 27 1) **can be sought anytime and anywhere since God is everywhere** (W 28 2). **It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers** (V 9 5).

Nevertheless, especially in the **beginning**, to succeed, it is important to find the **favorable exterior conditions of solitude and withdrawal: the habit of silence is important for interior prayer** (W 4 9; see V 11 9; V 13 7).

But **exterior silence and solitude** are only **material conditions** to enable **interior silence and solitude** where all

preoccupations, other than seeking God, are put aside.

of quiet or union, sleep of the powers, etc.
Amen

Teresa will insist that the **soul is entering within itself** to be **alone with God** (V 11 12; S; W 35 1) so much so that the soul acts as if there were only God and itself on earth...

There is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things ... and without realizing it, the eyes close ... so that the sight might be more awake to things of the soul (W 28 6).

To be precise, **recollection** ... is more ... an effort of **attention to God**, which **absorbs** the strength of the soul to the point of **evacuating** from its consciousness everything that isn't Him. In **summary**, the **abstraction** of the **exterior world** is only the **other side** of the **attention to God**.

Before going any further, it is necessary to point out what Teresa so carefully underlined with much diligence concerning a form of recollection **where it is possible for us to acquire by our own means [...]** **this initial devotion where we can help ourselves in some way** (V 12 1). **This recollection is not something supernatural but something we can desire to achieve ourselves with the help of God—for without this help we can do nothing, not even have a good thought** (W 29 4).

This recollection that everyone can achieve with the help of grace, is called '**active**' by theologians to distinguish it from '**passive**' or '**infused**' **recollection** which is **supernatural** and in which **God absorbs the soul into Himself without the soul making any effort**.

Teresa will give supernatural prayer that **we cannot procure through our own efforts** (W 31 2) various names according to the **depth of the recollection**: contemplation, prayer