

Prayer of Recollection

Part 3 Becoming Aware of Christ's Presence
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Teresian Prayer
(translated from French)

The **most important step** according to Teresa is to **realize that God is there**, that I am **in front of Him** or that **He is next to me or within me**.

The soul must also realize ...its situation as creature and sinner. Teresa tells us to **consider whom we are going to speak with, and who we are, so as to know how to speak with Him** (W 22 3).

She calls this **consideration** and she explains: **a person who is not aware who he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of whom, I don't call that prayer** (IC 1 1 7). **She feels that simply realizing this fact is mental prayer** (W 25 3).

... She puts aside here not only the **repetition of rote formulas** ... and objects to **meditation** consisting of **reflection** ... 'on' or 'about' or '**on the subject of**' Christ, the soul being very distant from Him ...**the intellect also grows weary** (V 11 9).

To practice **interior prayer**, it is not enough to '**meditate on,**' there **must** be a **personal relationship with the Lord**, a ... direct face to face contact with Him. ... It is essentially **about talking to the Lord** like to someone who is **in front of me** ...

So then how does one bring about this living contact? Well, by a **representation of Christ in His humanity**.

But, what sort of '**image**' of Christ since Teresa suggests this method to souls who, like herself, were incapable of using their imagination this way. ... **if I hadn't seen the things, my imagination was not of use to me, ... I could ... never ... picture Him within myself no matter how much I read about His beauty or how many images I saw of Him** (V 9 6).

... What did she mean then when she declared that her interior prayer consisted of representing the Christ within herself or when she advises:

represent the Lord Himself as close to you (W 26 1) ...

Let's try and understand what she is trying to say.

... The representation of Christ that she couldn't achieve ... was speaking of an imagination capable of **reproducing an image of Christ**, both **visual** and **continuous**; like a painting or a picture of Him ...

The **representation** that Teresa proposes would **not** be **imaginative**, but rather based on **faith**, a **living faith that perceives without seeing** the Presence of Christ.

Teresa gives this explanation: **I was like one who is blind or in darkness; he speaks with a person and sees that that person is with him because he knows with certainty that he is there (I mean he understands and believes he is there but does not see him); such was the case with me when I thought of our Lord** (V 9 6).

She specifies elsewhere that it is a presence of God that has nothing to do with a vision ...

Leaning on the **certainty by faith in the living nearness of Christ**, Teresa appreciated the humanity of Christ ... which brings to the relationship of man with God, a warmth, a weight of reality, a consistency and a dynamism that the highest abstract elevations to the Divinity will never bring.

This is why Teresa insists on the '**physical**' reality of this Presence so near that **it isn't necessary to shout to speak to Him** (W 29, 5). **However softly we speak, He is near enough to hear us** (W 28, 2; V 40, 6).

This **representation by faith**, non-visual, is essential in interior prayer ... Teresa states: **Do you think it's of little importance to know what heaven is and where you must seek your most sacred Father? Well, I tell you that for wandering minds it is very important not only to believe these truths but to strive to understand them by experience. Doing this is one of the ways of greatly slowing down the mind and recollecting the soul** (W 28 1).

There remains another **confusing point** for us to clear up concerning the **representation of Christ**.

Teresa suggests that He be considered sometimes **next to you** (V 13 22), sometimes **in front of you** (V12 2) or sometimes **within you** (W 28 4).

She insists however that He is preferably represented in the most **intimate part of the soul** because such a thought is much more alluring and fruitful than thinking of Him as outside oneself (V 40 6) and **it isn't tiring the intellect by going to look for Him on Mount Calvary or in the garden or at the pillar** (W 28 4).

She once again tells us to **enter this paradise within ourselves to be with our God** (W 29 4) or in the **little Heaven of our soul** (W 28 5).

... In fact, Teresa's preference for the **representation of Christ within oneself** not only has a **psychological** or **practical** reason, but a **doctrinal one**. She is insisting on a truth which constitutes a **fundamental principle of Teresian spirituality: Christ resides in the soul, in its center, as in a mansion**. This idea, present everywhere in Teresa's writings, is marvelously developed in her last work the Interior Castle.

We now have to ask Teresa what the **nature** ... of the **activity** produced by the soul, once recollected in the presence of Christ, is going to be? ...The activity is **characterized** by the **Look** ...

... **Represent the Lord Himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you [...]** I'm not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with the intellect. I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him (W 26 3).

It is about the **look of the soul on Christ** or the **look of Christ on the soul**.

Never will your spouse take His eyes off of you, He has tolerated a thousand ... abominations against Himself, and this hasn't been enough to cause Him to look away [...] ... **He is not waiting for anything else, as He says to the bride, than that we look at Him** (W 26 3).

This **mutual look** expresses in fact an **immediate, personal relationship**. It is a **living relationship** of reciprocal presence between the soul and the Lord.

The term **look** signifies a **simple activity** abolishing a multiplicity of actions; ... the soul experiences ... the Presence of Christ... in a real ... way.

... This act of bold faith naturally includes hope ... for union with God In fact, Teresa has a significant formula:

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).

... What she will say about more advanced interior prayer is valid here:

God and the soul understand each other... without the use of any other means ... these two friends love each other. It's like ... two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other (V 27 10).

Ultimately, the **look of the soul** ...or a **loving attention...** expresses **everything of the person** in the **Presence of Christ** living within ...
Amen