

Prayer of Recollection

Part 4 Conversation w/ Christ
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Teresian Prayer
(translated from French)

The **third part** of Teresian prayer is a **conversation with the Lord**; an exchange that can take **one of two variable forms** depending on the **grace** in the moment or the **availability** of the soul.

First Form: Heart to Heart talk

The first form, which normally prolongs the exchange of looks between the soul and the Lord, is the heart to heart talk. Today we would say a dialogue with the Lord.

For not only will you desire to look at Him but you will also delight in speaking with Him, not with ready-made prayers but with those that come from the sorrow of you own heart, for He esteems them highly (W 26 6).

... A moment will come when the soul breaks the silence, and expresses itself ... without preparation from the bottom of its being

The soul can ... speak with Him, asking for its needs and complaining of its labors, being glad with Him in its enjoyments ... trying to speak to Him not through written prayers but with words that conform to it desires and needs ... (V 12 2).

We can see that it is out of the question to use ... **formulas** or to make ... **complicated remarks**. Teresa wants to discourage certain souls from creating a **persona** ... or to think they had a good prayer time because they spent the whole time talking ...!

Remain there in His presence with the intellect quiet. And if a person is able he should occupy himself in looking at Christ who is looking at Him, and he should speak, and petition, and humble himself, and delight in the Lord's presence, and remember that he is unworthy of being there (V 13 22).

Truth, liberty and **love** are the **three principal qualities** that Teresa insists on in this **one on one conversation** with the Lord.

The **truth** of the soul that **hides nothing** of its misery, of its weaknesses, of its needs, knowing that it is ... loved by the Lord in spite of everything.

They should put themselves in the presence of Christ and without tiring the intellect speak with and delight in Him ... they should show Him their needs and the reason why He doesn't have to allow us to be in His presence (V 13 11).

The **liberty** which the soul can and should use in the expression of its feelings is ... the familiarity, frankness and **simplicity of two friends** who know one another intimately and know that they can talk to one another without beating around the bush ...

He likes us to be truthful with Him. If we speak plainly and clearly so that we don't say one thing and then act differently, He always gives more than what we ask of Him (W 37 4) ...

We are at last at the **heart of Teresian prayer**, it is important above and beyond all else to show a **love** that aims to be **total, unique and alive**.

Teresa will repeat that in **interior prayer** it is very important **not to think much but to love much** (IC 4 1,7, F 5 2). She affirms that with interior prayer **bodily strength is not necessary but only love and a habit** (V 7 12). To designate those who **practice** interior prayer, she had this beautiful formula: they are **servants of love** (V11 1). **If all imaginations are not capable of meditating, all souls are capable of loving** (F 5 2).

It is necessary here to recall what Teresa meant when she spoke of the **love of God** and **neighbor** which brings into play her whole conception of **Christian perfection**. For Teresa to **love the Lord** involves ... the **willingness to conform oneself to the will of God**, whatever it costs.

In her writings ... she continually comes back to the expression **to please God in everything** (IC 4 1 7). That is why she insisted that one **prove through actions** the authenticity of **one's love**. **The love of God ... consists in serving with justice and fortitude of soul and in humility** (V 11 13).

As a **sign of good interior prayer**, Teresa wrote to Father Gracian: ... **In these interior things of the spirit what is more acceptable and certain is what leaves the best effects ... What I mean by the best effects are those confirmed by works and that the desires for the honor of God become apparent in an authentic solicitude ... and that the intellect and memory be occupied in how best to please Him and show Him the love one has for Him** (Letter 136 4 pg. 368).

During the time of prayer, it is necessary to do everything to keep a lively contact with Christ and maintain the relationship of love active:

... **and so do that which best stirs you to love** (IC 4 1 7). ... **Speak with Him as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another.** (W 28 3; *ibid*, 28 2).

In taking into consideration all the elements presented by Teresa in her explanations of the **prayer of recollection**, it would seem that one must recognize in this **heart to heart** with the Lord **two forms**, close but distinct. The **first** could be called a **simple conversation** in which the **soul spontaneously exposes** that which has accumulated in its heart and that the Holy Spirit has inspired ... The soul empties the overflow of the heart, without an **order** or a **plan**, as we have seen.

Second Form: Conversation with an Evangelical theme

A **second form** of conversation ... is a **conversation with an Evangelical theme**. It calls for a simpler form of **meditation**.

Teresa knew that the **will often needs the help of the intellect so as to be enkindled** (IC 6 7, 7).

This type of meditative conversation ... is based ... not on a general idea ... but on a specific Bible scene.

... Teresa tells us that we will not be happy considering the events of the life of Christ from the **outside** like a theater spectacle. She encourages us to **enter into the action** ... She suggests we live the scene in the company of the **actors** of the Bible. We are to read and interpret the words of Christ as if they were addressed to us **personally** and in the **present moment**.

Teresa's preference was the Passion of Christ. She recognized that we could choose other passages from the Bible but that it is important to always come back to this episode because it is from here **which has come and continues to come every good** (V13 13).

So representing the Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, **I strove to be His companion there. If I could, I thought of the sweat and agony He had undergone in that place. I desired to wipe away the sweat He so painfully experienced, but I recall that I never dared to actually do it, since my sins appeared to me so serious** (V 9 4).

... In summary then, Teresa suggested a real **attempt to act** and went even as far as saying:

Take up that cross, daughters. Don't mind at all if the Jews trample upon you, if His trial can thereby be lessened. (W 26 7) ...

She told another of her **simplicities**:

After communion, I saw myself at the feet of the Lord and I wept with the Magdalene, ... and even though I didn't feel devotion, faith told me that He was indeed there (W 34 7).

The **naïve considerations** she allowed herself were in keeping with the familiarity of which we are speaking.

It is in this ... **restrained** sense that she invites us into meditation; **for in the prayer of recollection, meditation, or the work of the intellect, must not be set aside** (IC 4 3, 8).

There again, it is **important** to be careful **not to prolong this meditative conversation...** and as soon as the soul has been wakened to love (V 22 14), it is **necessary** to come back to the **free** and **spontaneous conversation** or to the **simple look**.

They would be right if they engaged for a while in making acts of love, praising God, rejoicing in His goodness, that He is who He is, and in desiring His honor and glory [...]for they are great awakers of the will (IC 4 1,6). By doing this, we achieve the **true goal** of **interior prayer**.

It would be an **aberration** to want to return to **ordinary meditation** (ibid), under the pretext of wanting to end a time of interior prayer in a conventional way as outlined in manuals.

We **alternate** periods of **silence with exchange**, according to the state of our soul, **He doesn't want us to be breaking our heads trying to speak a great deal to Him** (W 29 6).

We are struck by the **extreme flexibility** of **Teresian prayer** which allows the soul the greatest **liberty**

During the same prayer session, Teresa could experience an attitude of **a simple look** or a **heart to heart** conversation... using at will the method of interior prayer which allowed her to **stay vigilante and loving**.

To be able to preserve this **interior liberty** necessary for love, Teresa really insisted that we do **not** force the soul with a whip. She said:

It is very helpful not to drag the soul along, as they say, but to lead it gently for the sake of its greater advantage (V 11 16) ...

Amen