

## **Teresian Prayer (Summary)**

Carmelite Nuns

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### **Introduction**

We have only to look to Teresa to discover the **elements** that make a **Carmelite vocation** and **how to live it** in an adequate way. This applies too in the **area of prayer**, the **center** and **characteristic mark** of **Teresian life** and charism and, because of this, the **principle component of Carmel's place** in the **Church**.

St. Teresa's **person** and **message**, along with the Carmel itself, cannot be explained without speaking of **prayer**. The **study of Teresian prayer** gives us access to the whole of her **life** and **teaching** while allowing an **understanding** of the **Carmelite vocation**.

Today's person has the right to expect from us the **experience of prayer**. It is through Teresa that the **Carmel** has become known in the **Church** as a **praying community**.

All the **elements** that make a **qualified teacher of prayer** can be found in **Teresa**: vast **experience**; profound **understanding** of grace received from God; ability to **communicate** her experience. She writes:

**“For it is one grace to receive the Lord's favor; another, to understand which favor and grace it is; and one more, to know how to describe and explain it”** (L 17:5 ...)

These **three mystical graces** make Teresa a qualified **teacher of prayer**, while mapping out for us the subjects for studying Teresian prayer: **Experience, Doctrine and Pedagogy**.

### **Part 1. Teresa's Experience of Prayer**

To **understand Teresa's message**, knowledge of her **experience** is necessary. It is from her experience, where she saw the **essential elements** of **Christian life**, that she drew her knowledge...

... A schematic helps us grasp her word and message. **Three periods** are apparent in the **development** of St Teresa's prayer.

#### **1-First Period:**

Easy and spontaneous prayer. Teresa took to prayer. (cf. LI)

#### **2-Second Period:**

**Difficult** and **testing prayer** from an **adolescence crisis** triggered by her mother's death up to her **definitive conversion** in 1554. (L9)

The **difficulty** had a **two-fold source**:

- Teresa's inability for **discursive (or methodical) reflection** and **thoughts** that ran wild (L4 ...);
- Teresa's **resistance** to embracing the way of love, and the **contradictions** in her lifestyle.

#### **3-Third Period:**

This period begins with Teresa's entry into **mystical life** in 1554, the year of her **definitive conversion**.

From now on, she will no longer fall back but only ascend. She avoids **occasions of sin** and spends more time in **prayer**. God lavishes His attention on her.

**“Now, then, when I began to avoid occasions and devote myself to prayer, the Lord ... started to grant me favors”** (L 23:2; ...)

A careful study of **mystical prayer** ... allows us to discover that ... it is a **communication of God**, a **personal communication** to the **human being**. The person “experiences” this communication each time to a **greater level inwardly**, until it becomes **personal communion**.

Mystical prayer for Teresa is about a **Person to person relationship**”, “**a friendly communication**”. God is more **active** in the prayer than the person. In friendship, friends take first place and all else becomes secondary.

### **Part 2. Teresa's Method of Prayer**

Teresa's “**method**” or “**manner**” can be described as follows:

**“I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ ..., present within me”** (L 4:7).

**“This is the method of prayer I used: ... I strove to represent Christ within me”** (L 9:4).

At the moment of Communion ... **(I) “entered (my poor home) to be with Him”** (W 34:7).

Praying means: **Attention to the person , and this within, where the personal encounter takes place.**

To pray is: **to be with Him, “to draw Present” or “to represent”,** that is to revive His presence. **“I remained with him”** (L9:4). It means to **make contact** with the Person.

When Teresa converts her experience into teaching she only needs to change the subject of the sentence:

**“One should just remain there in His presence”** (L 13:22).

Teresa would later call this way of praying **“the prayer of recollection”**. She sets it out in chapters 26-29 of the *Way*.

**“I never knew what it was to prayer with satisfaction until the Lord taught me this method”** (W 29:7)

Her **experience** of prayer leads her to **equate prayer and perfection**. To be a **“friendly relationship”**, prayer is a **commitment** of one’s entire life...

-To pray is to **opt** for God as a **friend ...**

-To pray is **“to seek to be servants of love”** and **“to follow resolutely by means of this path of prayer Him who has loved us so much”** (L 11;1)

Living for another, the **Friend**:

**“Once you are placed in so high a degree as to desire to commune in solitude with God and to abandon the pastimes of the world ... Let His Majesty lead the way along the path He desires. We belong no longer to ourselves but to Him”** (L 11:12).

Prayer follows the **type of life** we lead. We are what our **prayer is or** what our **friendship with God** is. For this reason, prayer is a **‘relationship of friends’**. It brings about and deepens our friendship with God.        Amen