

## The Way of Perfection

### Section 2: Foundations of Prayer

#### Love of Neighbor (Charity)

Chapters 4-7 (summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

**Chapter 4** Urges the observance of the rule and discusses three things that are important for the spiritual life. Explains the first of these, which is love of neighbor, and how particular friendships do harm.

#### Introduction

Now, Daughters ... what do you think we must be like if we are not to be considered very bold by God and the world? Clearly, we must **work hard**, and it helps a great deal to have **lofty thoughts** so that we will exert ourselves and make our **deeds** comply with our **thoughts**. For if we strive to **observe our rule** and **constitutions** very carefully, I hope ... that our prayer will be heard.

I am not beseeching you to do something new, my daughters, but only that we **observe** what we **profess** ... this is our **vocation** and **obligation** ....

**2.** Our **primitive rule** states that we must **pray without ceasing** ... It is the most important aspect of the rule—the fasts, disciplines and silence the order commands will not be wanting ... If prayer is to be **genuine**, it must be helped by these other things; **prayer** and **comfortable** living are incompatible.

**3.** It is about prayer that you have asked me to say something ... Before I say anything about ... prayer, I shall mention some things that are **necessary** for those who seek to follow the **way of prayer**; so necessary that even those who are not very contemplative, can be far advanced in the service of the Lord if they possess these things ...

**4.** ... I shall not **burden** you with many things ... we shall do what our **holy fathers** established and observed ... It would be wrong to ... try to learn this path from anyone else. I shall enlarge on only **three things** which are from our **constitutions**. It is important to understand how much the **practice** of these three things helps us to possess ... the peace

our Lord recommended so highly to us. The **first** of these is **love for one another** (or charity); the **second** is **detachment** for all created things; and the **third** is true **humility** which is in fact the **main practice** and **embraces all the others**.

#### Confessors

**12.** **Two kinds of love** are what I am dealing with: one is **spiritual** ... as it does not take away purity. The other is **spiritual** mixed with **sensuality** ...

**13.** I want to speak of the love that is **spiritual**, not affected by any passion ... If we deal with **virtuous persons** discreetly and moderately, especially **confessors**, we will benefit. If you should become aware that the confessor is turning toward some vanity, be suspicious about everything... make your confession briefly and bring it to a conclusion. It would be best to tell the prioress that your soul doesn't get on well with him and change confessors... If you can, do it without hurting his reputation.

**14.** In similar cases ... in which one does not know **what counsel to take**, the **best thing** to do is try to speak with some learned person; when necessary there should be freedom to do this ... do what he tells you to do about the matter ... How many **mistakes** have been made in the world by doing things without counsel ... Thus what I have said about trying to speak with **another confessor** is what is best to do ... if there be an opportunity...

**15.** Keep in mind that ... such a **friendship** is **dangerous, harmful** and a **hell** for all the Sisters ... You should in the beginning cut the relationship short by every possible means ... I hope in the Lord that He will not permit persons ... always engaged in prayer to be able to love anyone who is not the **Lord's great servant** ... For if they see that a person doesn't understand their **language** and love to speak of God, they will not be able to love him, because he will not be like them. If he is like them, .... he will not want to disturb them.

**16.** I have begun to speak of this matter because the **harm** the devil can cause here is great, and is only slowly recognized ... A situation like this could disturb all the nuns and if restricted to one confessor they don't know what to do or how to be at peace. It

is the one who should be calming them and providing a remedy who is causing the harm ...

**Chapter 5** Continues on the subject of confessors. Speak of the importance of their being learned.

May the Lord ... not allow anyone in this house to undergo this trial ... of finding oneself in this affliction of body and soul. Nor may He allow a situation where no one dares to speak to either because the prioress and the confessor get along well ... The temptation would be to omit confessing serious sins for fear of being disturbed ... It seems that if they ask to go to another confessor the harmony of religious life will be lost.

**2.** I ask ... that this holy freedom ... to sometimes speak and discuss their souls with learned persons, especially when, no matter how good, the ordinary confessor is not learned ... It is possible to find both learning and goodness in some persons. The more the Lord favors you in prayer, the more necessary it is for your **prayer** and **good works** to have a **good foundation**.

**3.** ... The **cornerstone** must be a **good conscience** and ... you must strive to free yourself from **venial sins** and seek what is most **perfect**. It will seem to you that any confessor knows this, but that is misleading ...

**4.** Having **true light** at our disposal to keep **God's law** with **perfection** is all our good; prayer is well founded on such light. Without this strong foundation and if the Sisters are not free to confess and discuss their souls ... the whole building will be **wobbly**...even if the confessor has all the qualities mentioned, it is still sometimes good to consult others because he may be mistaken and mislead all ... Though never contrary to obedience... it is good to **seek counsel** so valuable to the soul.

**5.** I urge the prioress to seek the **soul's consolation** by doing what I said .... There will be no lack of holy persons who want to speak to you about your souls and bring you comfort—if your souls are what they should be ... Even if the devil tempts a confessor to deceive him about a doctrine he will be careful ... knowing you speak to others ...

**6.** I have seen and understood ... what was most suitable for this house to ensure **progress** along the **path of perfection** ... This is a lesser danger. Neither the Vicar nor the confessor should be the superior. They are to protect the recollection of the house and its progress.

**7.** This is our **practice** at present ... it was decided upon by good persons and sought from God with many **prayers for enlightenment** about the best thing to do. From what is known up until the present, this is the **best practice**. May the Lord be pleased to preserve it always since it is for His greater glory, amen.