

The Way of Perfection

Part 4: Prayer in General

Chapter 19 Souls unable to use the Intellect
(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 19 Begins to discuss prayer. Speaks to souls unable to reason with the intellect.

There are many books written for those with **methodical minds** and those who can **concentrate** within themselves ... so it would be a mistake to listen to what I say about prayer ... There is nothing I have to say to anyone who can form the **habit** of this **orderly method** of prayer ... by means of so good a path the Lord will draw them to the **haven of light**. And through such a good beginning the end will be reached. All who are able to walk along this path will have **rest** and **security**, for when the **intellect** is bound one **proceeds peacefully** ...

2. But ... there are some **souls** and **minds** so **scattered**, they are like **wild horses** no one can stop. Now they're running here, now there, always **restless** ... This restlessness is either **caused** by the soul's nature or **permitted** by God ...

These souls ... seem to be like very **thirsty** persons who see water in the distance, but ... are prevented from reaching the end ... Their **efforts** cease, their **courage** fails ... and they were perhaps no more than **two steps** from the **fount of living water** of which the Savior said to the Samaritan woman, "**whoever drinks of it will never thirst.**" ... Yet thirst for the things of the next life increases ... The soul understands the great **value** of this thirst, though it is most **painful** ... When God **satisfies the thirst**, the greatest **favor** He can grant the soul is to leave in it this same need ... **to drink the water again.**

3. Water has **three properties**. The **first** is that it **refreshes**. No matter how much **heat** (temptations) we may experience, as soon as we approach the water the heat goes away ...

4. Those of you, Sisters, who drink this water ... will understand how the **true love of God** ... is lord of all the elements and of the world. Since water flows from the earth, don't fear it will extinguish this fire of God; it doesn't lie within its power. Though the two are

contraries, fire is absolute lord.; it isn't subject to water. Do not be surprised, Sisters, about the many things I have written so that you might obtain this **liberty**.

It is wonderful to think that a poor nun from St. Joseph's can attain dominion over all the earth and the elements? ... There was evidence that the saints had dominion over all worldly things because they labored to take little account of them ... The water that rises from the earth has no power over the love of God; the flames of this love are very high and its source not found in anything so lowly.

5. If it is **water that rains from heaven**, so much less will it **extinguish this fire**...the water of **true tears**, those that flow in **true prayer** readily given by the King of heaven, help the **fire burn** and **last longer**. The fire helps the water bring refreshment ... It even **freezes worldly attachments** when joined to the living water from heaven.

Heaven is the source of the tears that are given, not acquired through our own efforts. This **living water** will not let the heat from worldly things detain the soul unless to allow the soul to **communicate** this fire to others. It is not content with little. If it could, it would **burn up the whole world.**

6. Another property of water is that it **cleans dirty things** ... Once this water has been drunk, it leaves the soul bright and cleansed of all **faults**. Since this **divine union** is something **supernatural**, it is not a matter of our own choosing. God doesn't permit a soul to drink this water unless to cleanse it ... and free it from all the misery in which it was stuck. Other **delights** from the **intellect** ... come from water running on the **ground**, not from drinking at the **fount**. There is never a lack of muddy things to detain one on this path. In this prayer, there is **reasoning** with the **intellect**, so it is **not** living water ...

7. ... Suppose to despise the world we think about its **nature** and how all things come to an end ... Not that this reasoning must be abandoned ... but it is necessary to proceed with care.

By means of this **living water**, the Lord Himself takes up these cares ... He so esteems our **soul** that He doesn't allow it to be occupied with harmful things while He **favours** it. Rather, He places it near Himself and

shows it **in an instant** more **truths** and a clearer **understanding** of what everything is, than we could have here below in many years ... By this **living water** the Lord brings us to the **end of the journey** without our understanding how.

8. The **other property** of water is that it **satisfies** to the full and **takes away thirst**. It seems that **thirst** means the desire for something **essential**. How strange that if water is lacking it could kill us; and if there is too much, we die, as seen through the many who drown.

Who will find himself so immersed in this living water that he will die! Is it possible? Yes, because the **love of God** and the desire for Him can increase so much that the natural subject is unable to endure it, and so there have been persons who have died from love. I know one who would have died if God hadn't rescued her with an abundance of this living water ... for she was almost carried out of herself with raptures. I say almost because in this water the soul finds **rest** ...

9. ... Everything He gives is for our good ... If He gives a great deal, He also gives the soul the capacity to drink much ...

In desiring this water there is always some **fault** ... We are so indiscreet and since the **pain** is **sweet** and **delightful**, we never think we can have enough of it ... so we foster this desire and so sometimes it kills. How fortunate such a death! But perhaps by continuing to live we can **help others die of desire for this death**. I believe the devil causes this desire for death. He understands the **harm** that can be done by such a person while alive ...

10. Anyone who reaches the **experience** of this **thirst** ... can have the **temptation** from the devil to perform **indiscreet penance** and **lose their health** ... it is important to avoid exterior manifestations of this thirst ... But when the **impulses** that increase the desire to die come ... we should gently **cut the thread** ... It seems foolish to cut short something so good; but it isn't ...

11. ... A great **desire** can be given to see oneself with God and **freed** from this **prison** ... **Pain** for a reason like this must be very **delightful** ... Sometime the pain is so much that it almost takes away one's reason ... One

One suffers pain and from the effort to **conceal** this pain ... in so extreme a case ... the humble thing is to be fearful...

12. If a person is able ... he could try and **remove** the desire by the **thought** that if he **lives** he will **serve God** more and enlighten some soul that would have been lost. By serving more he will merit the capacity to enjoy God more. Let him fear the little he has served God ... To **serve** the Lord, one should desire to **suffer** here below and live with the Lord's afflictions ... for in every event the best we can do is leave ourselves in the **hands of God**.

13. It would be possible for the devil to foster such a **great desire** ... But, His Majesty would not consent that one be blinded ... If the desire were from God, it wouldn't cause any **harm** ... while our enemy tries to cause harm wherever he can ... Thus the time of prayer should be shortened ... when bodily energies fail ... **Discretion** is very necessary in all.

14. Why do you think, daughters, that I have tried to explain the **goal** and show you the **reward** before the **battle** by telling you about the **good** that comes from **drinking** of this **heavenly fount of living water**. So that you will not be dismayed by the **trial and contradiction** along the way and advance with courage and don't grow weary. It can happen when you arrive and have nothing left to do but to stoop and drink from the fount ... you **abandon** all and lose this good, thinking you don't have the strength to reach it or are not meant for it.

15. The Lord invites us all; and, since He is Truth itself, we cannot doubt Him. If His **invitation** were not a **general one**, He would not have promised: "**I will give you to drink.**" He could have said: "**Come, all of you, for after all you will lose nothing by coming; and I will give drink to those whom I think are fit for it.**"

But, since He spoke without this condition to all, I feel sure that **all** those who do not falter on the way **will drink this living water** unless they cannot keep to the path. May the Lord, because of who He is, give us the grace to seek this living water as it should be sought, for He promises it. Amen