

The Way of Perfection

Part 3: Diversity of Paths w/in a Contemplative Community

Chapters 17 Contemplation: A Gift

(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 17 Not all souls are suited for contemplation, and some reach it late. The truly humble person must be content with the path along which God leads him.

Something important needs to be said about **humility**. It is important in this house where the **main occupation** is **prayer**. It is right that you should try to **train yourselves in humility**. In fact, this is an important aspect of prayer and indispensable for all who practice it. How could a truly humble person think he is as good as contemplatives? God can make you a **contemplative** through His goodness and mercy; but one should always take the **lowest place** ... Prepare so that God may lead you along this path if He so desires. When He doesn't, **practice humility**. Consider yourself lucky to **serve** the servants of the Lord. Praise Him to have been brought among them and away from devils in hell ...

2. ... It is important to understand that God doesn't lead all by one path. Perhaps the one who thinks she is walking along a lowly path is in fact higher in the eyes of the Lord.

So, **not because all in this house practice prayer must all be contemplatives**; that's impossible. It would be distressing for one who isn't a contemplative if she didn't understand that to be a contemplative is a **gift**. Since it isn't necessary for salvation, no one will demand it of her ... It could be that a Sister will gain more merit because she must work harder. The Lord leads her as one who is **strong**. He saves what she doesn't receive on earth so to give it to her all at once ... She should not give up prayer ... **sometimes the Lord comes very late and pays just as well, and all at once, what was given to others over the course of many years.**

3. I spent fourteen years never being able to practice meditation without reading. ... There are minds so

active they cannot dwell on one thing but are always restless ...

I know ... an excellent servant of God, who has spent many hours for many years in **vocal prayer**. She is helpless in mental prayer ... If **humility** is present ... she will be equals with those who receive many **delights** ... If these delights are truly from God, there is nothing to fear; they bring with them humility ...

4. Those who do not receive these **delights** walk with **humility** ... suspecting this lack is their own **fault** ... They feel behind in the service of God if they don't shed **tears** but are perhaps more advanced. Tears are good, but are not all perfect. In humility, mortification, detachment and other virtues there is greater **security** ... Don't be afraid you will fail to reach the **perfection** of the contemplative.

5. St. Martha was a saint but it was said that she was not a contemplative. What more do you want than to **resemble** this woman who often had Christ in her home ... If she had been **enraptured** like the Magdalene, there would have been no one to give **food** to the **divine Guest**. Think then of this **congregation** as Martha's home. There must be people for every task. Those led by the **active life** should not **complain** of the contemplatives ... for the Lord will **defend** them ... who are silent ... and tend to be forgetful of self and all things.

6. It is **necessary** for someone to prepare and serve the meal with Martha. Consider how **true humility** consists in being **content** with whatever the Lord may do with them and in finding themselves to be **unworthy** to be called His servant. If mental and vocal prayer, caring for the sick, doing household chores and performing the lowliest tasks are all **ways of serving the Guest** who comes to be with us ... **what difference does it make whether we serve in one way or the other?**

7. ... We should try everything, but it is the Lord's choice ... Leave it up to the Lord of the house; He is **wise**, He is **mighty**. He understands what is **suitable** for you and Him as well. Do what lies in your power. Prepare yourself perfectly for contemplation ... if He doesn't give it to you ... He will save this **gift** and grant it to you **all at once** in heaven. He wants to lead you as though you were

strong, giving you the **cross** here below ... What better **friendship** than that He desire for you what He desired for Himself? ... The **judgments** are His not yours. It is good that the choice is not ours. This is a good thing as contemplation seems a more **restful path** – we would all be great contemplatives.

O wonderful **gain**, not to want to gain from following our judgment lest we suffer any **loss**! God, in fact, never permits loss to come to a person truly mortified save for a greater gain. amen