

The Way of Perfection

Part 4: Prayer in General

Chapter 20 Consolations & Conversations
(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 20 How in different ways consolation is never lacking on the path of prayer. Counsels the Sisters to let their conversations deal always with prayer.

It seems I contradicted myself in the previous chapter, when I was consoling those who were not contemplatives. I said the Lord had **different paths** by which to go to Him, just as there are many dwelling places. So I repeat it now ... But He did not say: “**some come by this path, and others by another.**” Rather His mercy was so great He **excluded no one** from striving to come to this **fount of life to drink**. May He be blessed forever!

2. ... Since He is so good, He does not force us; on the contrary, in many ways He gives drink to those who wish to follow Him so that no one will **go without consolation** or **die of thirst** ... So, Sisters, do not fear that you will die of thirst on this road. Never is the lack of **consoling water** such that it can't be endured. Since this is so, take my advice and do not stop on the road (of prayer) but, like the **strong, fight even to death** in the search, **for you are not here for any other reason than to fight**. You must always proceed with this **determination to die rather than to fail to reach the end of the journey** ... May it please the Lord that we ourselves do not fail, amen.

3. ... Let's deal with how the journey of prayer must begin so as not to **go astray**. **Th for the beginning is the most important** part for everything even if a person doesn't have the **determination** ... the Lord will continue perfecting him ...

Though afterward a person may not continue on the same road, the little progress he made will have provided him with **light** to walk well on other paths; the greater the **progress**, the more **light**. In sum, even if he later gives up ... it will not have done him any harm to have begun; for **good** never produces **evil**.

Thus, daughters, to all persons who speak with you, if they are disposed ... try and remove

any **fear** they may have of beginning to use so **great a good**... And for the love of God, I beg you that **conversation** always be directed toward bringing some **good** to the one with whom you are speaking, for your prayer must be for the **benefit of souls**. It is the good of souls that you must always beg the Lord for; strive for this in every way.

4. ... The desire to be of **benefit** to the relative is where **true friendship** lies; if you want to be a good friend, know that you cannot be one save by this path. Let **truth** dwell in your hearts, as it should through **meditation**, and you will **see clearly** the **kind of love** we are obliged to have for our neighbor.

There's no longer time, Sisters, for **worldly friendships** ... It can happen though, that for a relative to **listen to a truth** ... and admit it, you will have to dispose him by ... demonstrations of love that are always pleasing ... If you use them for the benefit of others, I do not forbid them...

Others already know that you are religious and that your **business is prayer** ... **God** is your **business** and your **language**. Whoever wants to speak to you must **learn this language** ... Be on your guard that you don't learn his; it will be a hell.

5. ... You will **gain** though in that no one will want to see you except the one who understands this **language**; ... neither will they make you weary or do you harm, for to begin to speak a new language would cause harm ... It is a great evil for the soul ...

The **new language** (of your relative) involves a constant **disturbance** from which you ought to **flee** at all costs, for what is very suited to this path that we are beginning to discuss is **peace** and **tranquility of soul**.

6. If those who speak with you wish to **learn your language**, it is not **your business to teach anyone**. You can tell of the **riches gained** since it is beneficial to the other ... so he may then **go and seek** out a **master** who will teach him. It would be no small **favor** from the Lord if you were to succeed in **awakening a soul** to this good ... amen