

## The Way of Perfection

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

#### Chapter 18 Contemplation & Trials

(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

**Chapter 18** Continues on the same subject and tells how the trials of contemplatives are much greater than those of persons living an active life. This Chapter is very consoling for these latter.

Now, daughters, those of you whom God does not lead by this path ... understand that contemplatives do not **bear a lighter cross**. You would be surprised at the ways God gives them **crosses**. I know both paths. The **trials** God gives contemplatives are **intolerable**. If God didn't give that **food with its delights**, these persons wouldn't be able to endure the trials. Yet it is clear that since God wants to lead those He greatly **loves** by the **path of tribulation** -- and the more He loves them the greater the tribulation— ... for with His own mouth He praises them and considers them His **friends**.

**2.** To think that He admits into His **intimate friendship** people who live in **comfort** and without **trials is foolish** ... Since He leads contemplatives along a **rough and uneven path** --- at times they even feel lost --- His Majesty must give them **sustenance**; not water but **wine** so that in their **inebriation** they will not understand what they are suffering and will be able to endure it. There are few true contemplatives who are not **courageous** and **determined** to suffer. The first thing the Lord does, if they are **weak** is to give them **courage** and make them **unafraid of trials**.

**3.** Those in the **active life** tend to see the contemplative as **favored**. There is a belief that there is nothing else to the contemplative's life than **receiving favors**. Well, let me suggest that these active persons couldn't endure one day of the kind the contemplative endures. Since the Lord knows what each one is suited for, He gives to each person a **proper task**, appropriate for that person's **soul**, for **service to the Lord** and the **good of neighbor**. If you have done what you can to be prepared, do not fear your efforts will be lost. **We should all try**

**to be contemplatives, since we are not here for any other reason...** we must be like **soldiers** who ... must always be ready for any duty the captain commands ... since he gives them their salary. But how much better is the pay our King gives ...

**4.** Since the captain sees his soldiers **eager to serve** ... he **distributes** the duties according to their strengths ...

Let us give ourselves to **mental prayer**, Sisters and let those who cannot practice it turn to **vocal prayer, reading and talking to God**. Do not **abandon** the hours of prayer for you don't know when the Spouse will call ... If He doesn't give you **delights** you must understand that they are not meant for you ... here is where meriting through **humility** enters; one truly believes that he isn't even capable of doing the little he does?

**5.** You should be **happy to serve** in what they command you to do ... If this **humility** is true, blessed be such a servant in the **active life**, for she will not complain ...

With **contemplatives**: they must keep the **flag of humility** raised and **suffer all the blows** without returning any. Their **duty** is to suffer as Christ did, to hold high the cross ... letting no weakness in suffering be seen in them ... The contemplative must not **let go of the flag** or the **battle will be lost**. This is why I believe **great harm** is done to those who are not so advanced when they see the **deeds** of those considered **captains** and already **friends of God**, not in conformity with this office.

**6.** ... So, Sisters, we don't know what we are asking for. Let us leave it to the Lord. (For He knows us better than we do ourselves. **True humility** is content with what is received.) Some persons **demand favors** from God as though these were due them in justice. That's a nice kind of humility! He who knows all seldom grants such persons favors and rightly so. He sees clearly that they are not ready to **drink from the chalice**.

**7.** What you will understand, daughters, if you are **advanced**, is that you are the most **wretched** of all. This **understanding** will be manifested in **deeds** done for your own spiritual growth and for the good of others, and not in having more delights, raptures or visions ... This attitude includes the **great virtues of humility, mortification** and careful

**obedience** ... to the superior ... who stands in God's place.

You must put the most **effort** into **obedience**, for where there is **no obedience**, there are **no nuns** ...

**8.** I don't know why a nun under **obedience** by vow is in the monastery if she doesn't make every effort to **practice obedience** with greater **perfection**. As long as she **fails in obedience**, she will never be a **contemplative**, nor will she even be a good **active** Sister ...

Any person who **aims** for contemplation ... must give up his **will** with **determination** to a **confessor** ... There is more **progress** made in this way in one year than without it in many ...

**9.** I conclude by saying that these are the **virtues** I desire you to have, my daughters, the ones to strive for and about which you should have a **holy envy**...

10. ... This **nature** of ours is weak. His Majesty will **strengthen** anyone to whom He wishes to grant contemplation. I have paused to give these counsels to those to whom He doesn't give contemplation. By practicing them, the contemplatives may also **humble** themselves ...

May the Lord ... give us light to follow His will in everything, and there will be nothing to fear.

Amen.