

The Way of Perfection

Section 2: Foundations of Prayer

Humility

Chapters 12-15 (summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 12 How the true lover of God will have little regard for his own life and honor

... Everything seems to be a **heavy burden** ... because it involves a **war against ourselves**. But once we begin to work, God does so much in the soul and grants it so many favors that all one can do in this life seems little. As nuns, we give up our freedom for the love of God ... undergo so many trials, fasts, so much silence, enclosure, and service in choir that we can only seldom please ourselves ... Why then should we **delay in practicing interior mortification** which makes everything else more perfect ...

Interior mortification is **acquired** by proceeding gradually, not giving in to our own **will** and **appetites**, even in little things until the **body** is completely **surrendered** to the **spirit**.

2. ... The whole matter, or a great part of it, lies in **losing concern for ourselves** and our **satisfaction**. The least we who have begun to serve the Lord can do is to **offer** Him is our own **life**. Since we have given Him our **will**, what do we **fear**? It is clear that if someone is a true **person of prayer** and aims to enjoy the **delights of God**, he must not turn his back upon the desire to **die for God** and **suffer martyrdom** ... In sum, there is no reason to give importance to anything that will **come to an end** ...

3. So, let us try hard to go **against our own will** in everything. If you are careful you will gradually find yourself at the **summit**. It seems rigorous to always deny ourselves ... but we don't mention the pleasure and delight that going against our will carries in its wake ... What security! Since you all **practice denial** here, the most is done; for you awaken and help one another; in this practice you can strive to be ahead of the others.

4. Take careful note of interior stirrings, especially if they have to do with privileges of rank. God, deliver us from such words as, "I have seniority," "I am older," "the other is treated better than I." If

such thoughts come they should quickly be cut off. If you dwell on them... the result is a pestilence from which great evils arise ... Pray hard that He will provide a remedy because you are in great danger.

5. You may ask why you should give so much importance to **detachment** if God gives **consolations** to those who are not detached. Well, He does this to draw them to surrender all for Him ... The **perfect soul** can be **detached** and **humble** anywhere, though being in a monastery does help, But believe me, if there is any **vain esteem of honor** or **wealth** ... you will **never grow** very much or come to enjoy the **true fruit of prayer** ... in spite of many years of prayer – or, better, **reflection** because **perfect prayer** in the end removes these **bad habits**.

6. Consider, Sisters, whether any of this pertains to you, as you are here for **no other purpose** ... Let each one consider how much **humility** she has ... A **humble person** will **reflect on his life** and consider how he **served the Lord** compared to how the Lord ought to be served and the wonders the Lord performed in lowering Himself so as to give us an **example of humility**. He will also consider his sins and where he should be because of them. The soul gains much and the devil, for fear of getting his head crushed, doesn't dare return.

7. Take this **advice** and don't forget it; do not only strive in an **interior way** ... but also in an **exterior way** that the Sisters draw some benefit ... To **free yourself** more quickly from **temptation** ... do some **lowly task** ... and go about studying how to **double your willingness** to do things that go **contrary to your nature**. The Lord will reveal these things to you ... in this way the temptation will only last a short while. God deliver us from persons who **strive for honor** ... there is no **toxin** in the world that kills **perfection** as do these things.

8. You may say that these are **natural** little things ... Don't fool yourselves, they increase like foam, and there is nothing so obviously a **danger** as **honor** and whether we have been **offended**. Then a nun will think she is **practicing charity** by asking the offended nun how she puts up with such an offense. The offended nun is now tempted to

vainglory rather than to **suffer** with the **perfection** with which you should have suffered.

9. Our nature is so **weak**. We tell ourselves that an offense should not be tolerated and are encouraged when we see others feel this way for us. As a result, the **soul** grows **weaker** and **loses** the **occasion** for **merit** ... May no one be moved by an indiscreet charity to show pity for another in something that touches upon **false injuries**, for such pity is like that of Job's wife and friends

Chapter 13 Continues to discuss mortifications and how one must flee from the world's maxims and rules about honor in order to arrive at true wisdom.

In this house, or in the case of anyone seeking **perfection**, you should **run from expressions** such as: "I was right." "The one who did this to me was wrong." This is a **poor** way of **reasoning**. I don't know why a nun who doesn't want to **carry the cross** is in this monastery. Let her return to the world and even there they will not respect such reasoning ...

2. Let us reason like this when some honor is paid us, or we receive comfort or good treatment; for it isn't right that we be so treated in this life ... Either we are brides of so great a King or we are not ... What **honorable woman** doesn't share in the **dishonor** of her spouse ... ? ... To enjoy a part of His kingdom and want no part of His dishonors and trials is **nonsense**.

3. ... The nun who considers herself **least** of all should consider herself the most **blessed** of all ... If she **bears dishonor** as it must be borne, she will not be without honor in this life or the next ... Let us **imitate His humility** in some way ... But however much we might humble ourselves ... seldom is there anyone who hasn't done something by which he has merited **hell**.

Let us, my daughters, imitate in some way the great **humility of the Blessed Virgin**, whose habit we wear ... but however much we seem to humble ourselves, we fall far short of being the daughters of such a Mother and the brides of such a Spouse. If you don't put a stop to the things mentioned ... they could lead to a venial sin ... and might suffer

its ill effects. It is something very bad for religious communities.

4. We who live in community should be very careful ... not to harm those who work to do good for us ... If we could understand the great harm done when a **bad custom** is begun, we would rather die than be the cause of it ... The **loss of souls** is a great loss ... and others follow after. All perhaps are hurt more from **bad custom** than from **many virtues**...

5. What a great **act of charity** a nun would perform in recognizing she is **unable** to practice the **customs** of this house and **leave** to avoid a hell here on earth ...

6. ... The **style of life** we aim to follow is not just that of nuns but of **hermits**, and thus you **detach yourselves** from every creature. The Lord gives this **favor of detachment** in a special way for the one He has chosen for this life. Though the detachment may not be perfect, it is apparent she is advancing by the **great contentment** and happiness she finds in not having to deal with the world and how she **relishes** all aspects of the religious life.

Again if she is inclined to worldly things and is not making progress, she should leave ...

7. This house is a **heaven** ... Here we have a very **happy life** if one seeks only to **please God** and pays no attention to her own **satisfaction**. All will be lost if a nun seeks more than pleasing God because it cannot be had. The **discontented nun** ... will be better saved elsewhere ... It takes time to become **totally detached interiorly**, but **exteriorly** it must be done **at once** ... If progress is not made in a year, it will not be made in many ...

Chapter 14 The importance of not allowing anyone to make profession whose spirit goes contrary to the things mentioned.

I believe the Lord highly favors the one with **determination**. The **intention** of the new member may simply be a **secure future** ... the Lord can bring this intention to **perfection**, but if she doesn't have intelligence, she should not be accepted ... For those who have this fault always think they know more about what suits them than those who are

wiser ... This **fault** is an **evil** I consider **incurable**...

2. When a nun with good intelligence begins to grow **attached to good**, she takes hold of it firmly ... because she sees that doing so is **appropriate**. If her **intelligence** doesn't allow her to attain a high degree of spirituality, it will be useful for giving good **counsel** and many other **services** ... If **good intelligence** is **lacking**, I don't know how she could be of use to the community. She could be the cause of much **harm**.

Lack of intelligence is not so quickly noticed ... In fact, there is a **holy simplicity** that knows little of world but a lot about dealing with God. Hence **much information** is needed before accepting new members and a **long trial period** before admitting them to profession. Let the world understand that you have the freedom to dismiss the new members ... When this type of **decision** becomes **routine** no one will view dismissal as an **affront**.

3. ... We are living in miserable times and our nature is so weak that we don't want to **offend relatives** ... May it please God that we do not pay in the next life for the new member we admit in this life ... convincing ourselves that we can't do otherwise.

4. This matter should be recommended to God ... it is so important. I beg God to give you **light**. You are fortunate not to receive **dowries**; ... in monasteries that do, to avoid giving back money they no longer have, they allow the thief to **steal the treasure** from them. It's a great pity. In this matter, take pity on no one, for you would be doing harm to the one you are trying to help.

Chapter 15 The great good that lies in not excusing oneself even when blamed without fault.

... Time is necessary to work well, and I have so little ... Now is it wrong for me to ask you to avoid making excuses for yourselves when I am doing it? Not making excuses for oneself is a **habit** characteristic of **high perfection**, and very meritorious ... yet His Majesty has never given it to me.

... I have to confess, that I have made very little progress. There always seems to be some reason for

me to think it is a greater **virtue** to **make an excuse** for myself ... It calls for great **humility** to be **silent** when condemned **without fault**. It is a wonderful way to **imitate the Lord** who took away all our faults. So, take great care about this **practice**; it brings with it great **benefits**. I see no reason ... to excuse ourselves ... unless ... where not telling the truth would cause anger or scandal ...

2. Strive to get into the **habit** of practicing this **virtue**, or to attain from the Lord the **true humility** that comes from it. The truly humble person must in fact desire to be held in **little esteem**, **persecuted** and **condemned without fault** even in serious matters. What better way to imitate our Lord? ...

3. Let's strive then for these **great virtues** and do this **penance** ... In this practice there is no reason to fear doing any harm to one's health ... on the contrary, the **soul** is **strengthened**. From very little things ... one can gain the light to come out the victor in great things ...

4. ... We are never blamed without there being fault on our part ... man falls **seven times a day**. It would be a lie to say we have no **sin**. So, even though we are blamed for faults we haven't committed, we are never entirely without fault, as was the good Jesus.

5. O my Lord, when I think of the many ways you suffered and how You deserved none of these sufferings, I don't know ... where my common sense was when I didn't want to suffer nor when I excuse myself ... Don't allow, my God ... that there be anything in Your servant that is displeasing in Your eyes ...

6. What do we expect to obtain from **pleasing creatures**? What does it matter if we are blamed by all of them if in Your presence we are without fault? O my Sisters, we never completely understand this virtue; ... When you have no other **gain** than the **embarrassment** of the one who blamed you when she realizes that you are in fact **without fault** and yet allowed yourself to be **condemned**, that **gain** is **extremely great** ... We must all try to be **preachers** through our **deeds** ...

7. No matter how **enclosed** you are, never think that the good or evil you do will remain a **secret**. Do you think, daughters, that when you do **not excuse yourselves** there will be no one to **defend** you? The

Lord answered for the Magdalene in the house of the Pharisee and when her sister accused her ... His Majesty will inspire someone to defend you and when He doesn't the defense won't be necessary. Yet, **focus not on being defended but rejoice in being blamed** ... and you will see **benefit in your soul**. For one begins to **obtain freedom**, not caring if good or evil is said of him ... and thinking of what is said as if it were **another's affair** ... as if two persons were talking but not to us; we then don't care about answering ...

This will seem **impossible** to the sensitive ... In the beginning it is hard; but I know that such freedom, self-denial, and detachment from ourselves can, with God's help, be attained.

Amen