

Part 2 : Prodigal Son & Teresa of Avila

Luke 15:11-32

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As was pointed out in Part 1, **The Prodigal Son & Carmelite Prayer**, the movement of the Prodigal turning within **initiated a conversion** that will drive him to his father's house to seek once again his father's face.

Each one of us is called in our deepest self to live more fully. We need to realize that we thirst for God and thus seek to wake up that thirst for Him.

It is the practice of silent prayer that can bring about a new encounter with the Father. This encounter allows Him to reveal a new aspect of His face to us as He did with the Prodigal Son to whom He showed all His mercy and love.

This is what Teresa of Avila experienced.

In the text I am going to read taken from the Book of her Life, Teresa describes her experience, an experience seen in the Bible and commonly in all who thirst for God.

In this, Teresa is a bit like us.

It may be many years that you have been praying, but there still lingers within you an **unsatisfied desire for God**. It is this desire that needs to be **cultivated**. It is the **right desire** that will keep pushing us forward on the path towards God and to a deeper conversion as Teresa experienced.

Let's allow Teresa to describe her experience taken from an extract from the Book of her Life, her first book, which is a sort of confession of God's mercy in her life and shows her thirst for God.

We realize that Teresa is like us. She has listened to many sermons, but continues to

feel deep within herself that she doesn't measure up:

[...] On the one hand the sermons brought me great comfort, on the other they tormented me; I understood then that I was not who I should be, in many ways. I begged the Lord to help me; but as it seems to me now, I must have been wrong not to put all my trust in His Majesty and not to lose all that I had in me. I was looking for a cure, I was diligent; but I did not understand that all this is of little use, if completely repelling trust in ourselves, we do not pass it on to God. I desired to live, understanding that I was not living, but that I was struggling with a shadow of death; there was, however, no one to give me life, and I could not take it myself; Whoever could give it to me was right not to come to my rescue, for as often as he had brought me back to Him, I had abandoned him. Life, 8:12

We can understand that Teresa must have been in a lot of pain and suffering when writing the above text. This experience can bring us to realize that we are not loved nor do we live a life of love to the fullest extent. Teresa is seeking a remedy or someone to give her a remedy. She is like the Samaritan woman who was looking for living water to quench her thirst and so asked for some of our Lord. The thirst for God is what needs to be awakened within each one of us.

The practice of Carmelite prayer should not leave us satisfied. It of course does give us something, it fills us yet leaves us longing. Saint John of the Cross says that God heals us by deepening the wound.

There remains in us parts of ourselves that are not yet completely abandoned to God's mercy. So, it is important not to abandon

silent prayer but to intensify it because it gives us what we really want and that is God!

This next text from Teresa, also taken from the Book of her Life, is important because it gives us **courage** to continue our practice of silent prayer. It also gives us Teresa's well-known definition of Carmelite prayer found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that enlightens us about our **relationship with God**.

[...] I can say what I know from experience: despite the mistakes made, the one who has begun to practice silent prayer must not renounce it; it is the way for him to heal himself; without prayer, it would be much more difficult. If the devil tempts him to renounce it out of humility as he did for me, let him not give in; that he believe that God cannot fail us when we truly repent and resolve not to offend Him again, the old friendship is renewed, He grants us His favors again, and often much more, if our repentance is sincere.

As for those who have not yet begun to pray, for the Lord's sake I beseech them not to deprive themselves of such a great good. It is not a question of fear, but of desire; for even if one does not advance, if one tries to be perfect to deserve the pleasures and feasts that God gives to the perfect, the least of their gains will be to see what path one must follow to go to heaven; if one perseveres, I put my hope in the mercy of God, since no one has taken him as a friend without reward; mental prayer is nothing more, in my opinion, than a commerce of friendship where we speak often and intimately to the One whom we know loves us. Life 8:5

Notice that Teresa points out the importance of not giving up prayer though you may have periods of dryness. But you may wonder why it is important not to give up?

Well it is because by turning within that we **find the Christ** and by drawing near to Him are **healed from our afflictions**.

Remember that it was in going within that the Prodigal Son recalled he had a father. Without having turned within (silent prayer), he would not have found the Father.

God wants to heal us from our spiritual sickness and especially from our lack of love. Without silent prayer, it would have been so much harder for the Prodigal Son to heal.

God restored the old friendship between the Prodigal and Himself which is what He wants to do for us.

Silent prayer is not only turning within towards God but turning towards Him as a sinner with a contrite heart, a heart that regrets its sin. This is the **hallmark of Carmelite (Silent) or Teresian prayer: the sinner who turns towards his Father**.

Silent prayer is not about feeling good but is about a conversion of the sinner returning home to the Father.

If you do not have the **humility** or the awareness to recognize that God wants to heal what's wounded within you, you will only be praying superficially.

It is with an attitude of humility that you are invited to tell the Lord that you are a sinner asking His forgiveness in order to return to Him.

Disregard the demon telling you that all is washed up, but rather hear the **deep calm voice of mercy that calls you from the deepest part of yourself** in order to rekindle the old friendship as did the Prodigal son. It is through silent prayer that this friendship is restored.

Initially all the Prodigal wanted was to come home to get something to eat. But deep down he really wanted to pursue that beautiful friendship with the father that only the Father can give him.

The Prodigal wants not only to be in the Father's house but in a relationship with Him. Heaven is living out a relationship with the Trinity. God wants to give us this new life that we cannot even imagine.

You are practicing silent prayer when you ask God who He is and to teach you to pray and to love Him---our essential desire.

The Prodigal doesn't dare tell him though because he doesn't know him any longer. But yet the father still gave him everything before he even began working for him.

He is in a sense just like us. We fear God and don't dare ask him what we hold in our deepest heart. Our greatest desire though is to simply love Him.

The Prodigal found the path to heaven – which only gradually comes into focus as he moved closer to the father.

The Prodigal got up, came to life and walked towards the father. It's the father who showed him the path when he came to welcome his son home. He took him in his arms and brought him home. The reward of course is the Divine Life.

And now let's turn to Teresa's definition of silent prayer. First, she underlines that what we are seeking is an exchange where I give myself to God and I wait for Him to give Himself to me. I passively welcome in contemplation this God who comes to me.

Teresa also stresses the importance, as with any important relationship, of consistency in our encounters with God that will in turn modify our other relationships as we draw closer to Him and then to those in our inner circle.

Teresa speaks of God's love for us. The cross is the manifestation of God's love for us and rather than frightening you, allow this love to draw you towards Him.

As the father came to the prodigal son, don't think that this separation from us doesn't hurt God. He is waiting for us to return to him by turning within in silent prayer. Amen

Part 3 will offer a guided time of prayer.

Translated from French

