

4/ Communion in Friendship

B. Effects of Quiet/Union

Chapter 7

Meditations on the Song of Songs

by Teresa of Avila

Explains the Bride's strong desire to suffer much for God and neighbor, and the abundant fruits that come to the Church from souls favored by the divine union and detached from self-interest.

Sustain me with flowers and surround me with apples, for I am dying of love. (Sg. 2:5)

How well this **divine language** applies to what I want to say here. **Holy bride**, how is it that this **sweetness slays** you! Yes, sometimes the **delight** is so excessive that it seems to **dissolve the soul** ... that there is no longer any desire to live.

You ask for flowers? What flowers? They provide **no remedy** unless you ask for them to die. But, in truth nothing else is desired when the soul arrives here.

This interpretation, however, does not fit well as the bride says: *sustain me with flowers*. Asking to be sustained does not seem to be a request to die but for life. Is it not perhaps a desire to **serve** the One to whom she owes so much?

2. Don't think, daughters, there is any exaggeration in saying she dies. Sometimes **love** operates with such **force** that it rules over the powers of the natural subject.

A person, while in this prayer, heard someone with a beautiful voice singing. If the Lord had not provided that the singing stop, she could easily have died. Powerless

to stir or to make any exterior movement, she could not tell the singer to stop. Her **state** resembled someone in a **deep sleep** unable to awaken and speak even though she may have wanted to.

3. In this **suspension**, the soul would not want to come out of this **sleep**, nor would **death** be **painful** to it, but great **happiness**. This is what it desires.

How happy a death it would be! A death at the hands of this love! Yet, sometimes His Majesty gives it **light to see** that **living** is **good** for it.

However, the soul's natural weakness would not be able to **suffer** that **good** if the delight lasts; so, the soul begs for **another good** to escape from the extraordinary one, and says: *sustain me with flowers*.

The **fragrance** of these flowers is different from the fragrance of earthly flowers. It seems the soul is asking to perform **great works of service for our Lord and its neighbor**. For this **purpose**, it is happy to lose the delight and satisfaction.

Though the soul's life will become **more active than contemplative**, and appear to lose if the petition is granted. However, **Martha and Mary** never fail to work **almost together** when the soul is in this state. **For in the active --- seemingly exterior --- work, the soul is working interiorly.**

When the **active works** arise from this **interior root**, they become lovely and very **fragrant flowers**. They proceed from the tree of God's love and are done for Him alone, with no self-interest.

The fragrance from these flowers spreads to the benefit of many. It is a lasting **fragrance** that has a **great effect**.

4. Someone preaches a sermon to benefit souls, but in reality he is not completely detached from **human considerations**—such as honor or credit...

There are many things people do ... to please. They fear **persecution**; ... They proceed with the **discretion** the world honors. This **discretion shelters many imperfections** ...

5. These persons serve His Majesty and they profit much. But these are **not** the **works** and **flowers** asked for by the bride. The bride seeks only the honor and glory of God in all.

Those **brought to this state** by the Lord do not think of themselves, or if they will lose or gain ... They only look at **serving and pleasing the Lord**. Since they know the love He has for His servants, they leave aside their own satisfaction and good to please Him and serve ...

They keep before their minds the **neighbor's benefit**, nothing else. To please God more, they forget themselves to benefit their neighbor. In the challenge, they lose their own lives as did many martyrs.

They are unaware of what they say enveloped in a **sublime love of God**, or in other words, in their **inebriation** from that heavenly wine. Even aware, they do not seek to please men. **These souls do much good**.

6. The holy **Samaritan woman** ... must have really taken the words of the Lord into her heart because she left the Lord for the **gain** and **profit** of the villagers. In payment for her charity, she **merited** to be believed and to **see** the good the Lord did in that village.

One of the **greatest consolations** a person can have on earth must be to see other souls helped through His efforts. It is then that one **eats the delicious fruit** of these flowers.

Happy are those to whom the Lord grants these favors. These souls are **obligated** to serve Him.

This holy woman, in that **divine intoxication**, went shouting through the streets. What is amazing is to see how the people believed her, a woman.

She could not have been well-off since she drew water. Indeed, she was very humble because when the Lord told her her faults she was not offended, but told Him He must be a prophet.

In sum, people believed her. On her word alone, a large crowd went out of the city to meet the Lord.

7. Much good is done by those who ... want to **serve** Him in **difficult ways** after receiving His **gifts** and **delights**.

The **fragrance** of these **flowers** and **works** produced and flowing from the **tree of love** last much longer.

One of these souls **does more good** with its words and works than many others whose works carry the **dust** of our **sensuality** and some **self-interest**.

8. From these **flowers** comes the **fruit**, the **apples** of which the bride says: *Surround me with apples*. Give me **trials**, Lord; give me **persecutions**. This soul genuinely desires them and goes through them well because it is no longer seeking its own satisfaction, but only **what pleases God**. The soul now finds pleasure in somehow **imitating the laborious life** that Christ lived on earth.

By the “**apple tree**,” I understand the **tree of the cross** because in another verse of the Song of Songs we read; *under the apple tree I raised you up*.

A soul surrounded by **crosses, trials** and **persecutions** has a powerful **remedy** from often continuing in the **delight of contemplation**. It rather finds great delight in **suffering**. Yet suffering does not consume it and waste its strength, as would frequent suspension of the faculties in contemplation.

The soul has another reason for making this request; **it must not always be enjoying without serving and working in something**.

In some persons, not many though because of our sins, the more they advance in this type of prayer and the gifts of our Lord, the more attention they pay to **their neighbor’s needs**, especially to the **needs of their neighbors’ souls**. To draw one soul away from **mortal sin**, such persons would give many lives.

9. Who will make those, to whom our Lord begins to give these delights, believe this? But maybe it could seem that such persons are not making good use of their lives and to continue enjoying this delight is what is important. It is really up to the Lord.

Beginners do not understand where these other souls are because the **initial fervor** would cause them to want to **leap forward** to this stage that would not be good for them as they are **not weaned**.

Let them remain close to the **divine breasts**. The Lord will bring them forward when they are **strong**. If they seek to benefit others too soon they could **harm** themselves. There is danger in going out ahead of time (*Life*).

My intention when I began was to explain how you can find **comfort** when you hear words from the *Song of Songs*. Though the words may appear obscure, you can reflect on the **profound mysteries** contained in them.

10. This work has been done to **obey** the one who commanded me to do it. If there is something good here, it does not come from me. Because of my many occupations, I have written this hastily ...

Any Sister (or anyone) who thinks she may have experienced some of these delights should praise our Lord and ask Him for **works** and **trials** so the **gain** will not be only for herself.

May it please our Lord to keep us in His hands and teach us always how to carry out His will, **amen**.

