

Counsels on Prayer

(ch. 4)

The Book of her Foundations

by Teresa of Avila

Treats of some favors the Lord grants to the nuns of these monasteries and gives counsel to the prioresses about the attitude one should have toward these nuns.

... I thought I should give some **counsels** to prioresses before I go further to help them better understand themselves and guide their subjects to receive greater benefit...

2. Observing what has been happening spiritually in these seven foundations to date, there is a need for what I want to say...

If the spiritual experiences are not counterfeit, it's necessary that souls not be frightened ... because if we proceed with a pure conscience and obediently, the Lord will never permit the devil to harm our souls... He doesn't do as much harm as our imaginations and bad humors do, especially if there is **melancholy** ...

Many persons have come to me, both men and women, who I felt were deceiving themselves unintentionally... Perhaps He wants to exercise them through their deceptions for them to gain experience.

3. Things pertaining to **prayer and perfection**, because of our own sins, are **discredited** in the world ... If people fear to walk this path of prayer, what would happen if we mentioned some of the dangers? There is danger in everything ... but I believe there is less of it for those who turn their thoughts more to God and **strive for perfection in their lives**.

4. Since You often free us Lord from the dangers in which we place ourselves ... how can one believe You will fail to free us when we aim to please and delight you in all? Good never brings about evil.

May what I have said help us strive to walk better along the road to please Him more and find Him sooner. That we may walk with fortitude along a road that has rugged mountain passes but not be intimidated to walk through them.

In the end, proceeding with humility, through the mercy of God, we will reach that city of Jerusalem, where all that has been

suffered will be little or nothing, in comparison with what is enjoyed.

5. These little dove-cotes of the Virgin, our Lady, are beginning to be inhabited and the divine Majesty has begun to show His greatness in these weak little women, strong though in their desires and detachment from all creatures.

Detachment, when practiced with pure conscience, must be what most joins the soul to God. If detachment is true it seems impossible to offend the Lord. Since in all their dealings these nuns are concerned with His Majesty and He doesn't seem to want to leave them.

Let those who are to come and who do not see this, not to blame the times, for it is always as suitable time for God to grant great favors to one who truly serves Him.

6. It is sometimes said, that the **first members** of religious orders are granted great favors as were our **holy forebears**; this is true.

But remember, they are the foundation for those to come. If those who come after would live as they did, the **edifice** would always be firm.

What does it profit me that those before me were holy if I am making excuses for my bad habits? What if I justify my behavior by saying I am not one of the forebears and so don't even recognize the difference between my life and their life of virtue?

7. If I don't receive the favors You granted my forebears, Lord, it is totally my fault. Nor is it useful to complain if the order declines. It is then that I have to be the kind of rock on which the edifice can once again be raised.

8. The favors that the Lord grants in these houses are many. If one or two in each house are led by meditation all the rest reach contemplation. Some are so advanced that they attain **rapture**. To others the Lord grants, in addition to **rapture, revelations and visions**.

But know, that **sanctity** or **holiness** does not lie in these favors, so let me make it understood that the counsels I want to give have a purpose. Amen