

10. FIFTH MANSION – (i)

Till the Fourth Mansion we considered the souls dynamic entry from outside of IC towards its inner core where God dwells; in other words it is an entry from the outside of IC towards inside of it. Surprisingly from this Fifth Mansion onwards Teresa shifts her focus of the journey not as the soul entering within itself; rather God entering the soul. This shift in the dynamism is mainly because of the limitations of the use of words to explain what really happens in the depth of the soul when interaction between God and soul takes place. Teresa writes: “O Sisters, how can I explain the riches and treasures and delights found in the fifth dwelling places? I believe it would be better not to say anything about these remaining rooms, for there is no way of knowing how to speak of them” (IC V,1,i).

Spiritual Delights

Teresa begins with some comments on the great spiritual delights to be found in the Fifth Mansions. She wonders if she should even attempt to describe them, since there is nothing in human experience with which to compare them. She asks the Lord for help in explaining these dwelling places to her readers, for she believes that most of them will experience this spiritual state at some point in their lives. Having said this, she readily admits that some will get only to the door, while others will penetrate these rooms further and go deeper and deeper into a state of intimate union with God. Since reaching this spiritual state depends so much on the soul turning itself entirely over to God, Teresa advises her readers to pray for the necessary strength of soul that will make this happen. Comparisons and metaphors cannot reveal the real nature of the experiences the soul can undergo in this stage (cfr. IC V,1,i). Though very intense in experiences ironically Teresa is convinced that most of the souls enter this stage of intense mystical experience (cfr. IC V,1,ii).

Is this a Dreamy State?

Often those who experience this stage in their lives could confuse its experience with a sort of dreamy state. But Teresa immediately clarifies saying that “Don't think this union is some kind of dreamy state like the one I mentioned before. I say “dreamy state” because it only seems that the soul is asleep; for neither does it really think it is asleep nor does it feel awake” (IC V,1,iv).

There is another interpretation to this state of experience as an experience of intense love which intoxicates the soul: “in loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God.” (IC V,1,iv).

Creatures and Devil

In this stage of union of the soul with God there is no disturbance from creatures nor from devil as both creatures and devil do not in any have clue what's happening within the soul. Therefore creatures and devil are left in an uncertain stage here or in suspense (cfr. IC V,1,v). This is because the nature of union is quite different from the previous stages and quite superior to the joys and feelings of earthly things: “This union is above all earthly joys, above all delights, above all consolations, and still more than that. It doesn't matter where those spiritual or earthly joys come from, for the feeling is very different, as you will have experienced” (IC V,1,vi).

Faculties Sleep

Teresa compares the prayer of union in the fifth dwelling places to the prayer in the fourth dwelling places. In the fourth dwelling places, the soul experiences a state where it feels itself neither fully awake nor fully asleep. She calls this experience a “dreamy state.” In contrast, in the fifth dwelling places, all the faculties are asleep, both to things of the world and to self.

The soul is so completely absorbed by its experience of God that it seems to have died to the world so as to live more completely in God.

Skin and Bone Marrow

Here Teresa explains that there are many kinds of union. The prayer of union is above all earthly joys, consolations, and delights, and it is experienced differently from these ordinary experiences. Teresa contrasts earthly delights with the joys of union by using a comparison of something experienced on the skin as opposed to something experienced in the marrow of the bones.

Teresa says that the soul doesn't understand anything during this union but that after it comes out of it, it has a certitude that the soul was in God and God was in it. This is a presence of God that we call “natural,” not the presence through grace. When a priest told her that God was present in the soul only by grace, she couldn't believe it until by asking others she finally learned the truth — that God is in all things by his presence, power, and essence. And though she doesn't know how she had this certitude, she claims that anyone who doesn't think that God is present even in a sinner has not reached the prayer of union.

Practical Conclusion

Teresa concludes Chapter One of the Fifth Mansion with a reference to the Song of Songs. She says God must bring the soul to this union, as in the Song of Songs the bride is brought into the wine cellar, which is the center of the soul. This prayer cannot be attained through the soul's efforts, although through our love and complete surrender to God we can dispose ourselves to receive this favor.

Finally, Teresa emphasizes the need to trust God in everything. In the state of union, the soul has such deep certainty about the way God has visited it that, even after extended periods of dryness, it still knows when to question

dubious advice and to seek out the opinion of more experienced counselors to verify her claims. She also states that the all the faculties of the soul are united with God in this state, not just one or two of its faculties. It is God, moreover, who accomplishes this union, not the soul. People cannot enter these mansions on their own efforts. Only God can lead them into the center of their souls and reveal himself to them in this endearing and intimate way. What is more, he does not need the doors of the senses and faculties of the soul to do so. The Risen Lord was not impeded by doors when he appeared to the disciples, and he has the power to reveal himself immediately to the soul at its very center. Teresa gives some of the best examples of comparison to make us understand how God enters the soul and gets this union realized.

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