

19. CHRIST CENTERED MYSTICISM (SIXTH MANSIONS)

It is human to forget that we have many wonderful things happening around us that give us pleasure, happiness, joy and security. Often we try to be unhappy because we do not see what we have and forget that what we have is quiet enough to make us happy in our daily lives. Teresa reminds her listeners or readers often that God is generous and will give his love to us unconditionally whoever we may be. But we on our part must be grateful to every bit of grace we receive from His Majesty. When we are not grateful and begin to grumble, the possibility of losing our balance in spiritual growth and relationship with God can be serious. Teresa says that, no matter how many favors from God a soul receives, it should never forget that at one time it was in a miserable state. Even the thought that the Lord has already pardoned and forgotten our sins, instead of providing relief, adds to the suffering because of seeing so much goodness granted to ones who deserve nothing but hell.

Grateful and Suffering Souls

Teresa discusses at some length the suffering of souls whom God has favored with ecstasies and visions. The suffering, in addition to the great longing for God mentioned in the previous Chapters, consists of a perpetual awareness of having offended God and sorrow for having done so. She says this affliction is greater at some times than at others, but never leaves entirely (cfr. IC VI,7,i-ii) ones memory. This is the condition of those who were aware of their sinfulness and God's goodness they encounter on their way to union with him. This is a kind of suffering that tortures the soul experiencing only goodness and love on the part of God.

Moments of Intense Suffering

It would be a mistake to think in the process of this spiritual journey that the soul enjoys these mystical graces continuously. Clouds still appear amid the sunshine. The first source of suffering is that mystical grace itself, because under the power of its marvelous light appears the sinfulness of the soul. We become cognizant of our ingratitude, lack of reverence. The foolish mistakes we made in the past, and the possible offenses we may easily commit in the future. It is a two-way battle, one to be aware of God's immense generosity and the other is a tough road ahead of keeping oneself from offending God. In this situation the soul suffers intensely and cannot explain how all this can happen at the same time. Teresa explains that persons whom the Lord places in the Seventh dwelling place don't often need to make an effort to keep the fire of love enkindled. They walk continually with Christ, in whom the divine and the human are joined, and he is always their companion. Until we reach that dwelling place, however, we should follow the path by which we please God, and that is by keeping the commandments and counsels and thinking of Christ's life and death and of the many things we owe him (IC VI,7,ix). The suffering that is caused at this point is eased because of the consolation that is received through the person of Christ who suffered for us. This is a moment to follow literally the command of Christ and learn that there is no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friend.

Evil in the World and Spiritual Crisis

Throughout the history of mankind, we notice notorious acts of violence and war have taken place. Even in the recent years we have seen humanity stooping down to the lowest level of treating other human being as his worst enemy. This is what we find in the world as we go through human condition of violence, hatred, envy, jealousy, war, homicide, betrayal, corruption etc. All these experiences show a deep connection to our spirituality and

experience with God. When Teresa speaks so repeatedly of her wretchedness, the problem of her humility is situated at a deeper depth. We are dealing with the abyss at which the mystic feels and measures human evil and the entire negative mass of all the crimes committed by humans throughout history. It can only be explained by the solidarity and a symbiosis of the mystic with all that makes up the universal, human condition. Just as the innocent Jesus is weighed down by the sins of this world, so in human history there have been those who have shared this experience with Jesus and exercise a mysterious, vicarious priesthood, which causes them to feel weighed down by the weight of the evil incurred or committed by other human beings throughout history.

Christ is the Way

The safest way for any mystic on this tough terrain is to keep Christ in heart all the time. No matter what we experience, we need to learn from Christ and keep Christ in our hearts. That is why Teresa all the more insists that in all uncertainties, to keep Christ at the centre of our lives is the safest means to attain to perfection and proceed on the road to union with God: They must have a great and very determined determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses (Way 21.ii). “This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer, of reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees. Keeping Christ present is what we of ourselves can do” (Life 12.iii-iv). What we do, then, is quite simple: keep Christ present all the time in our spiritual journey even at the advanced stages of our relationship with God.

Practical Conclusion

In the Book of Her Life, chapter 22, Teresa approaches the same problem that she does in IC VI, Chapter 7 we have been dealing with in this section. With regard to the 12 years existing between the two writings, we can ask ourselves if Teresa reveals any change of thought in her teaching about the place of the humanity of Christ in the spiritual life. After reading both texts one can only conclude that Teresa, in both texts, has a decisive message about the radical centrality of the humanity of Christ for the entire Christian life. What is humanity of Christ? Just being human, loving, caring, providing, forgiving, being compassionate, showing mercy and laying down one's life. Jesus lived an intense life of service, charity and solidarity. Teresa in her experience of highest mysticism at this point turns back to humanity of Christ and searches to find opportunities to serve others. This is called real practical mysticism at the highest level.

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