

2. ENTERING THE CASTLE

Tools, Resources and a Map

When we start any adventurous journey it is necessary to equip ourselves with the tools, resources, documents and carry in hand a map that will help us to go towards the right direction to reach the right spot. The first step in this journey through the IC is to recall the *gifts of our life*: our birth, baptism, family, children, redemption, grace, qualities, and talents—anything and everything we have to be grateful for. In gratitude for these gifts that God has given us—and that includes the Divine himself—we offer it all, including ourselves, back to God. The second step is to ponder that the *Divine is in every creature* by its essence, power, and presence, and *especially in us*, the temple of the Holy Spirit, made in the likeness and image of the Divine. We are the temple of God's spirit. Scripture says it clearly: God dwells in us. We are God's image and divine likeness.

Way to God

The IC is neither a prayer book nor one of academic theology. It represents an attempt on Teresa's part to give her readers a glimpse of the kinds of prayer they might experience as they make their *way to God*.

When we begin to read the IC, we will certainly find it interesting but we should keep in mind that this is not a novel or any other spiritual book that can be read just in a go. We require to have an idea of the whole thought of Teresa and then we will cherish reading it as it progresses in its richness.

Teresa's own Experience

Teresa speaks of her castle on three levels: *experiential*, *symbolic*, and *theological*. With regard to the first, this castle belongs to the author herself. Although she wants to hide her identity and refers only to “a person,” “a certain person,” or to “that person” who experienced the graces she is

speaking of in her book, she obviously is referring to herself. The reader can be sure that it is Teresa passing through the rooms of her interior castle into its deepest and most intimate depths. Secondly, it was natural for Teresa to choose a symbol, or symbols, to express what was in reality inexpressible and awaken in the reader a certain sense of her own experience. Finally, Teresa wishes to explain to herself and to the reader the profound meaning of her experiences, to investigate the development of her spiritual life and the life of grace in general.

The Essence

The *First Mansion*: prayer, humility, chaos, and divine seduction;
The *Second Mansion*: God, inner vision, soul companions, commitment.

The *Third Mansion*: surrender, the defeat of reason, the desert;

The *Fourth Mansion*: the heart, receiving God, the prayer of recollection;

The *Fifth Mansion*: holiness, mystical experiences, mystical marriage;

The *Sixth Mansion*: essential wisdom and the final fire, room of gifts, meaning in suffering;

The *Seventh Mansion*: divine marriage, healing, and re-entering the world.

Castle with a Single Diamond

IC is one of the most celebrated books on mystical theology in existence. It is the most sublime and mature of Teresa's works, and expresses the full flowering of her deep experience in guiding souls toward spiritual perfection. In addition to its profound mystical content, it is also a treasury of unforgettable maxims on such ascetic subjects as self-knowledge, humility, detachment, and suffering. But above all, this account of a soul's progress in virtue and grace is the record of a life — of the interior life of Teresa, whose courageous soul, luminous mind, and endearingly human temperament hold so deep an attraction for the modern mind. In its central image and style, IC, like so many works of genius, is extremely simple. Teresa envisioned the soul as "*a castle made of a single diamond . . . in*

which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions." She describes the various rooms of this castle — the degrees of purgation and continual strife — through which the soul in its quest for perfection must pass before reaching the innermost chamber, the place of complete transfiguration and communion with God.

Probably no other books by a Spanish author have received such wide popular acclaim as the Life and IC of Teresa. It is remarkable that a woman who lived in the sixteenth century, who spent most of her life in an enclosed convent, who never had any formal schooling and never aspired to any public fame, should have won such an extraordinary reputation, both among scholars and among the people.

It must not be forgotten that, notwithstanding the mystical character of the greater part of the IC, it is also a treasury of unforgettable maxims on such ascetic themes as *self-knowledge*, *humility*, *detachment* and *suffering*. The finest of these maxims alone would fill a book, and it would be as invidious as self-indulgent to quote any of them here. Yet many have supposed the IC to be concerned solely with raptures, ecstasies and visions, with Illumination and Union; or to be a work created by the imagination, instead of the record of a life. There is no life more real than the interior life of the soul; there is no writer who has a firmer hold on reality than Teresa the great mystic and prophet. When we read her IC from today's theological, philosophical and psychological point of view, we will certainly appreciate this great spiritual classic containing immense treasure for ones journey to God.

Practical Conclusion

When reading the IC, we must also take into account Teresa's strong, spiritual combative posture toward the world. The reasons for this attitude go deep into roots of European culture during that time. Part of it has to do with an antagonistic understanding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, a current that goes back to the origins of

Christianity itself. It concerns a deep suspicion of the material world and the temptations of the flesh, which manifested itself in a desire to flee from the influence of the world, lest it could have an inordinate influence in the day to day experiences of life. Another reason looks to the philosophical and theological underpinnings which support a vision of reality promoted by St. Paul and St. Augustine where the “world of spirit” is constantly at war with the “world of the flesh.” All of these reasons (and many more) can help us to appreciate why Teresa often presents the world in a considerably suspicious light. If that is not enough, theology now provides us with not one but a variety of different models through which we can understand the relationship between Christ and culture. Today we have a different outlook at the world from theological, philosophical and spiritual perspectives. If we attempt to enter the IC with these modern views we would certainly appreciate the spirit of Teresa who has given us the best way to enter the dwelling of God.

Teresa's position is clear: God offers human beings a gift more precious than they could ever imagine. God, the Majestic King and Creator of the Universe, wishes to make his abode deep within the human soul. Teresa's spousal mysticism is centered on both Christ and, since he shares everything with the Father and the Spirit, the Most Holy Trinity. When going through the Interior Castle, readers should keep in mind this underlying desire of God. If God did not wish to relate to the soul in this way, Teresa's teaching would be seriously undermined.

We need to ask ourselves a few questions before we enter into this sublime doctrine: Do we believe that all of our gifts and talents come from God? If so, do we readily acknowledge this belief to others? Do we believe that God teaches us things about life and about your relations to others? Do we believe, like Teresa, that he leads and guides us? If so, does he do so only in general or in very specific ways? Do we actively seek guidance from God?

Can we think of any instances in our life when God has pointed out the way for us?

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