

23. God Alone Dwells Here

Seventh Mansion

The Seventh Mansion is the culminating experience of mysticism. Teresa affirms: “the greatness of God is without limits, his works are too” (IC VII,1,i). There is a sort of awe and inspiration in the tone of Teresa as she begins to venture into this section of the IC. She has been always grateful to God for all the marvelous experiences in this journey. There is such a lot to discover and relish in this experience of the interior graces that are a part of this encounter. Here at last the soul reaches the Spiritual Marriage. Here dwells the King -- “it may be called another Heaven”: the two lighted candles join and become one, the falling rain becomes merged in the river. There is complete transformation, ineffable and perfect peace; no higher state is conceivable, save that of the Beatific Vision in the life to come.

Greatness and Goodness of God

Teresa praises the greatness of God and we who have a soul can certainly understand this greatness, but often there is a kind of indifference that does not allow us to understand God’s goodness and greatness: “Each one of us has a soul, but since we do not prize souls as is deserved by creatures made in the image of God, we do not understand the deep secrets that lie in them” (IC VII,1,i). The indifference is often caused by our attention to worldly things than seeing things around us through God’s eyes.

Teresa reaches the last mansion with all kinds of experiences that preceded and she affirms vehemently that everything has been said and explained and practically she does not have adequate words to give explanation about it: “You will think, Sisters, that since so much has been said about this

spiritual path it will be impossible for anything more to be said” (IC VII,1,i). Spiritual life often cannot be explained as one experience. This has been the experience of many who ventured into such spiritual journey. Ultimately the great mystics have taught that man should have no burdens, and would have none, if he turned to "The One." "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." As Jesus must have known that it would be impossible for all men to come unto Him as a Personality, He must have meant that we should come into His understanding of Life and Reality; that is, to come unto the Great God. Some day we will learn to lay our burdens on the Altar of Love, that they may be consumed by the fire of faith in the Living Spirit. Man would have no burdens if he kept his "High watch" toward "The One"; that is, if he always turned to God. Teresa rightly has crafted well this path towards God Almighty through a love relationship, to unburden oneself on to Him to experience His pure love forever.

God Alone dwells here

In this place God dwells alone; Teresa calls it another heaven. After saying that it is important not to think of the soul in grace as something dark, Teresa is reminded of the contrary – the condition of souls not in grace. She says we should pity them and pray for them. But she returns then to her main topic of souls in grace who are favored with the spiritual marriage. She believes this union is different from previous unions in which the soul felt great delight but did not understand anything (cfr. IC, VII,1,iii-iv). The Seventh Mansion is a place where communication between the soul and God is intense and deep. In this place God dwells alone; Teresa calls it another heaven because that is love, intensity and freedom. After saying that it is important not to think of the soul in grace as something dark, Teresa is reminded of the contrary – the condition of souls not in grace. She says we should pity them and pray for them. But she

returns then to her main topic of souls in grace who are favored with the spiritual marriage. She believes this union is different from previous unions in which the soul felt great delight but did not understand anything. Teresa explains that in the analogy of being God's bride, the soul and her Lord are now wed, and He is preparing to take her into His chamber to consummate their love. The soul being filled with light, getting progressively brighter as she nears His most intimate chamber, Theresa reminds the soul to remember to pray for those who are still shackled, blind, deaf and living in darkness. In the same way it would be cruel to leave a man standing blindly amid a great fast to starve, it is cruel to leave a soul unaware of how to gain nourishment without the knowledge of how to get it.

Practical Conclusion

How can we virtually take this experience in our daily life as a part of our spiritual journey? Mysticism and spiritual marriage is not just a state reserved for saints. Even sinners are called to experience periodic union with God in spite of their sinfulness or unworthiness. What is important is to relish God's presence even in our sinful experience. Well, we always need to keep ourselves away from mortal sin or serious sin that blocks our relationship with God and neighbor. Teresa in her own words explains that we all are unworthy of this experience, but God allows all of us to have a glimpse of this heaven here on earth: When our Lord is pleased to have pity on this soul that he has already taken spiritually as his betrothed, because of what it suffers and has suffered through its desires, he brings it before the spiritual marriage is consummated, into his dwelling place, which is this seventh. For just as in heaven, so in the soul His Majesty must have a room where he dwells alone. Let us call it another heaven. (IC VII,1,iii). Spiritual betrothal is a state and spiritual marriage is a prolongation of the same experience. Sinners are those who have lost it but

they are not in any way far from it. Well, this requires cooperation with the grace of God and sinners can return to the father's home when they enter into themselves as it happened in the life of the Prodigal son. When Jesus affirmed very clearly to his disciples that they should not look for God's kingdom here and there, but the kingdom of God is with in us (Luke 17.21) it was a call to all to affirm this rich experience. When we know that such a kingdom is within us, there is always a glimpse we get even if we are in deep sin as our God wants to give us now and then a spark of that heavenly experience here on earth. At times God may give this sporadic experience, to attract the sinner towards heaven. Teresa knows that God alone is holy and that all possible human holiness is derived from communion in Christ's sanctity. For the Christian, this communion carries the Trinitarian seal. From the moment of Baptism the believer is sealed with the grace of the Trinity. As for the fullness of this grace, Jesus makes the supreme promise of the indwelling: if anyone is faithful to me in life, "we will come and make our dwelling in him." Well, it all depends on us to make efforts to experience this rich grace within us. At this point it is also noteworthy to meditate on the role of Samaritan woman at Jacob's well with Jesus, Zacchaeus at his home with Jesus, and the sinful woman at the feet of Jesus anointing his feet.

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