

25. Participation with God

If we are united to Christ, then we are united to him in all that he has done for us. Christ represents those who come to be his so thoroughly that we are said to have been “crucified with Christ” (Gal 2.20), “buried ... with him” (Rom. 6,4), and “raised with Christ” (Col 3.1). We are even “seated ... with him in the heavenly places” (Eph 2.6) now as we walk about with both feet on the ground. Paul invented new words to describe this new reality. The phrases “crucified with,” “raised with,” “buried with,” and “seated with” are each a single word in Greek beginning with the prefix *syn*, meaning “with.” Those words didn’t exist before Paul coined them. But something so unique had happened that there were no words for it! A new vocabulary was necessary. It was the only way he could describe who he had become because of Jesus. When we are in Christ, every part of Christ’s life, not only his death, has significance for us. We share in his life and obedience, his death and his resurrection, even his ascension! We participate in another’s victory.

Spiritual Betrothal and Marriage

Teresa writes a great deal about her own personal union experience in the Second Chapter of the Seventh Mansion. She elaborates on this topic and at times finds it difficult to express what she wants to explain. Primarily she speaks about the difference between the stages of union experienced by the soul. She affirms: “You must understand that there is the greatest difference between all the previous visions and those of this dwelling place. Between the spiritual betrothal and the spiritual marriage the difference is as great as that which exists between two who are betrothed and two who can no longer be separated.” (IC VII,2,ii) Teresa’s argument is that when we are in Christ, every part of Christ’s life, not only his death, has

significance for us. We share in his life and obedience, his death and his resurrection, even his ascension! We participate in another's victory. We live the life of the one with whom we are united sharing every bit of the joy we get from the one with whom we are united.

In and Through Christ

When we are in Christ, every part of Christ's life, not only his death, has significance for us. We share in his life and obedience, his death and his resurrection, even his ascension! We participate in another's victory. All that is his becomes ours. If the presence of Jesus is what makes heaven, heaven, and if union with Christ means that you can have the presence of Jesus dwelling within you now, then do you see what this means? Union with Christ means the reality of knowing God and living in communion with him doesn't begin when you die. Eternal life begins in this life when Christ joins his life to yours (John 17.3). We can have fellowship with God through Christ (1 John 1.3). We can begin to experience heaven in our lives here and now. That is what Teresa insisted in her *Life, Way of Perfection* and in this treatise that participation with God begins right here and we don't need to wait until we pass away from this world.

Spiritual Marriage and Participation

Teresa argues that "in the spiritual marriage there is still much less remembrance of the body because this secret union takes place in the very *interior center of the soul*, which must be where God himself is, and in my opinion there is no need of any door for him to enter." (IC VII,2,iii). This is real participation with God in every bit of one's experience of life. As Jesus entered the upper room when the disciples were together for fear of the Jews, and said 'Peace be with you' is a powerful indication how God can penetrate the center of the soul without use of any other passage.

Union is death in Christ

There is no place in the Bible that captures union with Christ more succinctly than Galatians 2.20. Listen closely to what Paul says of himself here, because if you are in Christ, you too can say with him: “I have been crucified with Christ.” Notice the verb tense “have been” is present perfect—something that happened in the past with continuing present effect. If you are in Christ, then you are united to him in his death and crucifixion. When he died, you now share in that death. “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”

Joined or United

Teresa often quoting St. Paul says, “Perhaps this is what St. Paul means in saying “he that is joined or united to the Lord becomes one spirit” with him, and is referring to this sovereign marriage, presupposing that His Majesty has brought the soul to it through union. And he also says: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” The soul as well, I think, can say these words now because this state is the place where the little butterfly we mentioned dies, and with the greatest joy because its life is now Christ” (IC VII,2,v). Christian life is not a self-improvement project. It’s not about reforming the old self. We are talking about a new self. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (II Cor 5.17).

Looks like others in the Castle

When we read this second Chapter of the Seventh Mansion we get an impression that there are others who dwell as well in this Castle. It is not the soul alone, but others too participate. But the joy of this great experience of union so great that there are a few exclamations that are

indescribable. “The soul feels them very clearly even though they are indescribable. But the feeling is so powerful that sometimes the soul cannot avoid the loving expressions they cause, such as: “O Life of my life! Sustenance that sustains me!” and things of this sort. For from those divine breasts where it seems God is always sustaining the soul where flow streams of milk, bringing comfort *to all the people of the castle*. It seems the Lord desires that in some manner *these others in the castle* may enjoy the great deal *the soul is enjoying* and that from that full-flowing river, where this tiny fount is swallowed up, a spurt of that water will sometimes be directed toward the sustenance of those who in corporeal things must serve these two who are wed.” (IC VII,2,vi). The experience here Teresa has personally cannot be fully understood. But one thing seems very clear that the one who experiences God’s great love and generosity develops the capacity to help others around him/her.

Practical Conclusion

As we draw closer to the end of the IC, we notice focus shifting from personal union with God to catering to the needs of others. Virtually an expression of the greatest commandment: “love your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22.36-40).

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