

26. One with the Father

Truly Christians are called to be one with the Father. It is our prerogative to call God our Father. Being adopted sons and daughters we are privileged to experience the immense love of the Father. That is what Teresa repeatedly confirms in this Second Chapter of the Seventh Mansion. “Thus, the soul could be joined in this heavenly union with the uncreated Spirit. For it is very certain that in emptying ourselves of all that is creature and detaching ourselves from it for the love of God, the same Lord will fill us with himself. And thus, while Jesus our Lord was once praying for his apostles – I don't remember where -- he said that they were one with the Father and with him, just as Jesus Christ our Lord is in the Father and the Father is in him.” (IC VII,2,vii).

The Center that does not Move

Teresa in her eagerness to express the status of the union of the soul with God affirms that the deep center the soul finds itself with God does not move and is motionless like the heaven. “Well, to return to what we were saying, the Lord puts the soul in this dwelling of his, which is the center of the soul itself. They say that the empyreal heaven where the Lord is does not move as do the other heavens; similarly, it seems, in the soul that enters here there are none of those movements that usually take place in the faculties and the imagination and do harm to the soul, nor do these movements take away its peace.” (IC VII,2,ix). It is true that an experience of such great intensity makes Teresa wonder how she will be able to explain. She dwells on this very centre of the soul that is very close to God: This center of our soul, or this spirit, is something so difficult to explain, and even believe in, that I think, Sisters, I'll not give you the temptation to disbelieve what I say, for I do not know how to explain this center. That

there are trials and sufferings and that at the same time the soul is in peace is a difficult thing to explain. I want to make one or more comparisons for you. Please God, I may be saying something through them; but if not, I know that I'm speaking the truth in what I say.” (IC VII,2,x). When there is a union experience the whole being is fixed on the other and there is no movement experienced.

Faith in Pain

Despite being in the center the soul can still feel pain of the creatures that can torment it. It is virtually impossible that a soul can be totally free from such pain as it still dwells in the body. That is the reason Teresa finds herself in a fix in narrating the status of the soul but not getting to understand clearly what that state in which the soul finds itself. Here is the need for faith. When we do not understand what is really happening within our soul the most immediate help and strength we can draw is from faith that will never fail us. Faith is how union with Christ becomes operative and powerful in your life. Faith is a God-given gift that allows you to take hold of God's having taken hold of you. If you are in Christ, this is now the defining truth of who you are. Your life, your story, becomes enfolded by another story—Another's story. That's one way to define faith: faith means finding your identity in Christ.

Safe in Christ the King

To be found in Christ means you don't have to prove yourself anymore. Your frantic attempts to find or craft an acceptable identity, or your tireless work to manage your own reputation—these are over and done. You can rest. In Christ. You don't have to be intimidated by anyone, ever. Who are you? You are in Christ! And you no longer need to fear the judgment of God (1 Jn 4.18). When God looks at you, he sees you hidden in Christ.

This is freedom. This is confidence. This is good, and real good news. Teresa affirms a state of the King who is engaged with many affairs but who protects His own: “The King is in his palace and there are many wars in his kingdom and many painful things going on, but not on that account does he fail to be at his post.” (IC VII,2,xi) Jesus the King in the centre is the one who will see that the soul at this stage is safe. When he was physically present here on earth he sought the safety of his apostles and disciples. He always risked his life to defend them and protect them.

No One Enters that Center

Teresa has a surety that there is a place in the centre of the soul that cannot be penetrated by the creatures when it is secured by the King: “no one enters that center dwelling place and makes the soul leave.” (IC VII,2,xi) In the gospel of John, as Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, he called this group of grown men “little children.” “Little children, yet a little while I am with you ... ‘Where I am going you cannot come’” (John 13.33). This would be shattering news to these men who had left everything to obey Jesus’s call to “follow me,” now to be told that they could follow him no further. Yet Jesus continued, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14.1). How could their hearts not be troubled when Jesus had just told them he would be going away? A few verses later, Jesus picked up the children metaphor again and surely confused his friends: “I will not leave you as orphans” (Jn 14.18). And “orphans” must have felt like the appropriate word to them, the epitome of one alone. If you leave us now, Jesus, who else do we have? And what are you saying? Are you leaving us, or will you never leave? Even more baffling, in this same conversation Jesus said, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away” (Jn 16.7). How could this be true? What could possibly be better than having Christ beside them, day after day? Jesus told them, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

even the Spirit of truth ... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14.16–17).

Practical Conclusion

The only thing that could be better than having Jesus with you, beside you, would be having Jesus within you, wherever you are and wherever you go. And that is what we have, those of us who are united to Christ. You have “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1.27). This was how Jesus could truthfully promise his disciples, “I am with you always” (Mat 28.20) right before he ascended to heaven and disappeared from their sight. It was why he could tell them, “Let not your hearts be troubled.... I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14.1, 18) on the very night he announced his departure. Then he told them this: impossible, “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (Jn 14.12).

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