

3. THE FIRST MANSION

When we enter a palace or a house normally we start with the ground floor entrance or if there is a basement, we would start from there the “lowest floor”. Taking an ordinary scenario at that juncture we find scarcity of light and good ventilation. Of course if we take into account the basement of a house or palace, it should be known that such place is a dwelling of insects and other creatures if not dangerous ones. Teresa affirms that in this mansion are those of good desires, those who pray. However, they are still absorbed primarily in their possessions, honors and business affairs.

The Beauty of the Castle

Teresa explains that the idea for the castle came into her mind as she prayed for the Lord to speak for her in the challenging task of writing about prayer. She asks us to consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of diamond or very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms. She marvels at the beauty and value of our souls, created in the image and likeness of God (IC I,1,i-ii).

In this castle that is our soul, there are many dwelling places and in the center is the place where secret exchanges between God and the soul take place. Teresa states her purpose in writing – to explain the various favors God grants to souls (IC I,1,iii).

In explaining that we are made in the image and likeness of God, Teresa points out how we have a capacity for God that transcends the human person. Not only are we called to communion with God, but we are structured in such a way that God lives in his own dwelling place within us, more so than he does in the whole cosmos. Teresa, in choosing the symbol of a castle to express this deep truth, reveals as well its roots in her own mystical experience.

Alongside her symbol of the castle, Teresa sought support in the Word of God. She drew from it three affirmations: “In my Father's house there are many dwelling places” (Jn 14.2); “I found my delight in the human race” (Prov 8.31); “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness” (Gn 1.26). She finds her authority for her symbol of the castle in these biblical texts and evaluates the human person in a Christian perspective.

The Castle and Soul

Teresa begins on a positive note, speaking of the beauty and dignity of our souls. Actually, “soul” and “castle” are the same in the symbolic language of the work. And in our language today, the soul refers to the human person. So Teresa begins by speaking of the beauty and dignity of the human person (IC I,1,iii). She affirms: “For if this castle is the soul, clearly one doesn't have to enter it since it is within oneself. How foolish it would seem were we to tell someone to enter a room he is already in. But you must understand that there is a great difference in the ways one may be inside the castle” (IC I,1,v).

Trapped

This is exactly how Teresa portrays the first mansion of the IC. People are so caught up with worldly cares that they are content simply with remaining in the outer courtyard of the castle and do not desire to enter into the soul's first interior mansions.

Unfortunately, when they finally enter these rooms, many distractions and worldly allurements get in with them and can create great havoc and confusion for them. “During the period of a month they will sometimes pray, but their minds are then filled with business matters which ordinarily occupy them. They are so attached to these things that where their treasure lies their heart goes also. Sometimes they do put all these things aside, and the self-knowledge and awareness that they are not proceeding correctly in order to get to the door is important. Finally, they enter the first, lower

rooms. But so many reptiles get in with them that they are prevented from seeing the beauty of the castle and from calming down; they have done quite a bit just by having entered” (IC I,1,viii).

Types of Souls

According to Teresa before beginning the entire dynamic of the entry into IC she explains two types of souls that are on the way to the IC. The most impaired, those who have focused on *external matters* to such an extent that they have completely neglected prayer and the interior life, can no longer do anything to help themselves change; they need help from the Lord himself. She says she is not writing for such persons. Instead she addresses her work to persons who, though involved in the world, have good desires and make occasional efforts at prayer. They eventually enter the first lower rooms of the castle, but so many reptiles (worldly concerns) enter with them that they cannot appreciate the castle. Teresa assures the Sisters that they are not among those in this least prayerful group, but asks their patience as she tries to write about this difficult topic. (Cfr. IC I,1,viii-ix).

Teresa mentions three biblical types who remain outside the castle and are invited to enter: the wife of Lot, who in turning to look at the burning city is turned into a pillar of salt (Gn 19.26); the paralytic at the pool in Bethesda (Jn 5.2-8); and the man born blind, who begins to see through his meeting with Jesus (Jn 9.1-7). Each of them was handicapped in some way and prevented from entering the castle and beholding the treasures that are there.

Key to Enter

It may seem strange that the castle can only be entered *through prayer*. Couldn't a psychologist, for example, enter it by studying the psyche? But for Teresa, human interiority contains something sacred. The castle is inhabited by God. To enter it is to enter into relationship with God, who dwells in its inmost dwelling place. Not a profane, but a religious gesture is

necessary. To pray is to enter into personal relationship with God. 'Prayer' She says a wise man once told her soul without prayer is like a person whose arms and limbs are paralyzed. Without it, the soul is limp and unable to move along in its spiritual journey. Prayer, for Teresa, is the door and point of entry into the castle. Those who pray can gain access to the first interior mansions of the soul. She reminds her readers that there are many ways of "being" present in a place. Through prayer, a person can be interiorly present to his or her soul. Vocal prayer and meditation are the main ways of prayer for those at this beginning stage of the spiritual life. For Teresa, there is a close connection between the two. Vocal prayer that does not include some modicum of quiet reflection is not really prayer at all.

Practical Conclusion

This initial level of spiritual self-awareness is very fragile and easily lost. Those who refuse to enter the soul's interior castle through the door of prayer live in great danger. Those who make it into these outer rooms are still very much concerned with worldly affairs, but have good intentions and commend themselves to constant prayer as far as possible. But they need determination to do so. In our life we always are enthusiastic to begin a journey; but the fervour quickly dies out. This has been a normal phenomenon among people. We witness that people go for retreats, prayer sessions and meditation workshops with the real intention to continue; but when the initial fire dies out they give up. For any success spiritual or material one needs to be on a horseback and take that ride till the end. That is what Teresa insists in the initial mansion of the IC.

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