

6. THE THIRD MANSION

Gaining expertise and getting to top position is one thing but remaining humble with all the progress is quite another thing in life. It is true that when one gets into a formidable position and gets to know the art of success there is a tendency to grow proud and self-reliant. Teresa warns those who enter the Third Mansion that they should be humble and trust in God and have great fear of losing his friendship.

Fear of God

Those who have entered the Third Mansions deeply desire not to offend God. They seek to do good and avoid even the slightest of affronts to God. They discipline themselves through penance and spend extended amounts of time in prayer. They devote themselves to charitable works and are careful about their speech and deportment.

Many Enemies

Teresa interrupts the description of the Third Mansions to write about the human condition, which she believes requires constant vigilance against many enemies; these enemies, we infer, are sins and temptations. She says in the blessedness we must ask for is that of being already secure with the blessed – that is, in death, if we wish to find happiness. If our whole happiness lies in pleasing God, we can never be truly happy if we are fearful of losing God through our sins.

Self-Denial

Unlike the rich young man of the gospel story (Mt 19. 16-22), people in the Third Mansions must be ready to leave everything for the sake of Christ. They should be ready to face long periods of aridity in prayer and consider as fortunate to be humble servants of the Lord. Humility and the resolute

desire to follow God's will are what enable those in the Third Mansions to make progress in their spiritual lives.

Winning the Battle

Those who can enter the Third Mansion have done it so “through perseverance and the mercy of God” (IC III,1,i) and “have won these battles and have entered the rooms of the third stage” (Ibid). Spiritual life is a battlefield and one must live as it were the enemies are always ready to strike because “we must always walk like those whose enemies are at their doorstep” (IC III,1,ii). Teresa returns to her theme of fear of the Lord and cautions that living in enclosure and penance, and prayer, and being withdrawn from the world and holding worldly things in abhorrence are not sufficient reasons to stop fearing. No matter how holy we might be, we must still know that we can fall and keep often in mind the words: Blessed is the person who fears the Lord.

Our Own Weapons

Teresa strongly warns her disciples of their self-sufficiency: “Don't pay any attention to the enclosure and the penance in which you live or feel safe in the fact that you are always conversing with God and practicing such continual prayer and being so withdrawn from the world of things and, in your opinion, holding them in abhorrence.” (IC III,1,iv). This is a reminder to all that we cannot take pride in what we do in order to please God. All these efforts are useless if we do not trust in God's grace.

Genuine Love

All that is needed in spiritual life is love. Without deep convinced love of God and neighbour we are not able to progress in this journey to the centre of the Castle: “This love, daughters, must not be fabricated in our imaginations but proved by deeds” (IC III,1,vii). Accomplishing God's will through love is what leads one to the summit: “And believe me, the whole

affair doesn't lie in whether or not we wear the religious habit but in striving to practice the virtues, in surrendering our will to God in everything, in bringing our life into accord with what His Majesty ordains for it, and in desiring that his will, not ours, be done.” (IC III,2,vi)

Humility

Lack of humility can cause great harm as to think that all sufferings they endure are coming from God as it were they are perfect and they cannot suffer due their own selfishness “For everything in their minds leads them to think they are suffering these things for God, and so they don't come to realize that their disturbance is an imperfection. This is another mistake of persons so advanced” (IC III,2,ii) without great humility. “Be convinced that where humility is truly present God will give a peace and conformity – even though he may never give consolations” (IC III,1,ix). This humility leads one to take a good look at ones’ own sins and imperfections: “Let us look at our own faults and leave aside those of others, for it is very characteristic of persons with such well-ordered lives to be shocked by everything” (IC III,2,xiii).

Practical Conclusion

Teresa brings to a conclusion the ascetical section of her book which serves as a bridge to other Four Mansions. One should not conclude that in the spiritual life of the Christian there comes a moment when the task of personal effort comes to an end. Struggle and effort continue to be demanded to the final day of one's life, even in the final dwelling places of this Castle.

We have to see that the secret of our spiritual life lies in opening ourselves to the action of God and this happens gradually with God's grace and our efforts at co-operating with this grace. And God often desires that his chosen ones clearly see and feel their wretchedness and look toward him for any good they may come to possess.

Teresa wants to pass as quickly as possible to the other perspective: God's action in us. First, though, she gives some last touches to her description of people in this dwelling place. She has a great deal of experience with these persons who begin enthusiastically but get so caught up in themselves that they become unable to hand over the reins of their life to God. “When you find yourselves in this state, cease thinking, so far as you can, of your own wretchedness, and think of the mercy of God and of His love and His sufferings for us. If your state of mind is the result of temptation, you will be unable to do even this, for it will not allow you to quiet your thoughts or to fix them on anything but will only weary you the more: it will be a great thing if you can recognize it as a temptation. This is what happens when we perform excessive penances in order to make ourselves believe that, because of what we are doing, we are more penitent than others. If we conceal our penances from our confessor or superior, or if we are told to give them up and do not obey, that is a clear case of temptation. Always try to obey, however much it may hurt you to do so, for that is the greatest possible perfection” (Way 39,iii)

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