

7. FOURTH MANSION – (i)

When a farmer has completed the job of tilling the field, clearing it of stones, thorns and thistles he has accomplished what we call the first stage of his work which is important. Now he has to wait for the rain and then he will sow the seed and then wait for it to sprout and give fruit. This is same with our spiritual life. Teresa leads us now into the Fourth Mansion helping us to understand how God works in our soul once we have prepared it for the next shower of graces with works of penance, charity humility and detachment. This is the time when God takes control of the movement of the soul towards the inner mansions and leads it through His power and grace.

God's Initiative

This Mansion has three chapters. In the previous mansions, the person praying was the principal actor, and the Holy Spirit provided the additional help of divine grace. Now the Holy Spirit takes on a more prominent role. In addition to grace, he now takes possession of the soul and becomes the primary agent of prayer. This does not mean, however, that the person praying becomes completely passive before God. On the contrary, through the power of the Spirit, he or she is gradually becoming more and more himself or herself. While the power of the divine predominates, it does not overwhelm or cancel out the unique contribution of the human effort and initiative.

The Sketch

Teresa describes two closely related types of mystical prayer that a person experiences in these mansions: the prayer of quiet (chapter two) and the prayer of infused recollection (chapter three). Although she treats the prayer of quiet first, possibly because it is the deeper and more sublime of the two, it normally comes after the prayer of infused recollection. The

difference between these two forms of mystical prayer is primarily one of intensity and the powers of the soul most affected.

The Beauty of the Mansions

Teresa says that the mansions of mystical prayer are very beautiful and very difficult to describe to those who have not experienced them for themselves. She also says that one usually must dwell in the earlier mansions a long time before finding one's way into them, although the Lord can dispense his gifts at any time and to whomever he pleases. She makes the interesting remark that temptations are rare in these mansions and that those that do arise actually benefit the soul by giving it the opportunity to cooperate with God's grace. "Since these dwelling places now are closer to where the King is, their beauty is great. There are things to see and understand so delicate that the intellect is incapable of finding words to explain them, although something might turn out to be well put and not at all obscure to the inexperienced; and anyone who has experience, especially when there is a lot of it, will understand very well." (IC IV,1,ii).

Natural and Supernatural

In the prayer of infused recollection, one's understanding is flooded with a divine light and the person praying has an intense awareness of God's nearness to it. In the prayer of quiet, that light penetrates the soul even more deeply and takes possession of the person's will. In keeping with her simple and pragmatic style, Teresa uses a variety of images to explain the difference between natural and supernatural prayer, as well as between infused recollection and the prayer of quiet.

The Satisfaction

Teresa's main purpose in this first chapter is to draw some distinctions. In the first place, she explains the difference between sweetness in prayer and

spiritual consolations. The first, she says, flows naturally from a person's virtuous actions. It is a natural satisfaction arising from a work well done. It is very similar to the delight one feels when something good happens in one's life. In this case, it comes not because one has acquired a piece of property at a good price or has met a good friend, but because one has performed a good action. The soul is happy because it has done something for God's sake "Poisonous creatures rarely enter these dwelling places. If they enter, they do no harm; rather, they are the occasion of gain. I hold that the situation is much better in this stage of prayer when these creatures do enter and wage war, for the devil could deceive one with respect to the spiritual delights given by God if there were no temptations, and do much more harm than when temptations are felt" (IC IV,1,iii).

Love much and not think much

Teresa teaches that in order to profit by this path and advance to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much, but to love much, and so to do that which best inspires you to love. Love, she says, doesn't consist in great delight, but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything. She thinks becoming a little distracted shouldn't disturb us. "The important thing is not to think much but to love much, and so do that which best stirs you to love. Perhaps we don't know what love is. I wouldn't be very surprised, because it doesn't consist in great delight, but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything, in striving, insofar as possible, not to offend him, and in asking him for the advancement of the honor and glory of the Son and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love. Don't think the matter lies in thinking of nothing else, and that if you become a little distracted all is lost" (IC IV,1,vii). Often in our life we become victims of thinking much and lose the quality of love in our reasoning process. That is why she recommends strongly that people of great spirituality must know

that it is only through love that we make progress in our relationship with God and neighbour.

Prayer of Recollection

This manner of prayer she called “the prayer of recollection.” “This prayer is called ‘recollection’ because the soul through its own efforts collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God. And its divine Master comes more quickly to teach it and give it the prayer of quiet than he would through any other method it might use” (Way 28,iv). This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer, of reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees. The prayer of recollection, keeping Christ present is what we of ourselves can do. Whoever would desire to pass beyond this point and raise the spirit to an experience of spiritual delights that are not given would lose both the one and the other, in my opinion. (Life 12,11-iv). Thus everyone, no matter what stage they are in or how far advanced, can best begin their prayer with this prayer of recollection, keeping Christ present. “Let's leave aside the times when our Lord is pleased to grant it because he wants to and for no other reason. He knows why; we don't have to meddle in this. After you have done what should be done by those in the previous dwelling places, humility! Humility! By this means the Lord allows himself to be conquered with regard to anything we want from him. The first sign for seeing whether or not you have humility is that you do not think you deserve these favors and spiritual delights from the Lord or that you will receive them in your lifetime” (IC IV,2,ix).

Practical Conclusion

When we make a reflection on our journey towards the centre of the Castle we need to keep in mind that everything that we come across in our life is a

means to draw closer to our King. At times bad things help us grasp better the complexity of human nature that requires a long period of purification for illumination and union. Spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with others, but he must also enter into his bedroom to pray with his father in secret (Mt 6.6); furthermore, according to the teaching of the apostle, he must pray without ceasing. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*12).

As we have reflected in Chapters 28 and 29 of the Way, Teresa explains there the dynamics of the Prayer of Recollection in greater detail. This recollection begins with recognizing where God is. We have a tendency to think of heaven, and therefore also of God, as being far away, but Teresa points out that heaven is wherever God is. If God is everywhere, including in our soul, then we need look no further than within ourselves to find him. Recognizing this fundamental truth is the key to recollection. Teresa uses beautiful imagery to convince us of this. She suggests imagining our soul as an exquisite palace adorned with precious stones. It is within such a palace that Our Lord dwells, “seated upon a throne of supreme price—namely, your heart.” She says that remembering this would make it “impossible for us to abandon ourselves to *vanities and* things of the world, for we should see how worthless they are by comparison with those which we have within us.” When we want to advance to contemplation we would rather keep in mind what Teresa warns us regarding God’s pedagogy of leading us deeper into this Castle. I end this article with a long quote from Teresa that summarizes her doctrine: “*First*, because the initial thing necessary for such favors is to love God without self-interest. *Second*, because there is a slight lack of humility in thinking that for our miserable services something so great can be obtained. *Third*, because the authentic preparation for these favors on the part of those of us who, after all, have offended him is the desire to suffer and imitate the Lord rather than to have spiritual delights. *Fourth*, because His Majesty is not obliged to give

them to us as he is to give us glory if we keep his commandments. (Without these favors we can be saved, and he knows better than we ourselves what is fitting for us and who of us truly love him. This is certain, I know. And I know persons who walk by the path of love as they ought to walk — that is, only so as to serve their Christ crucified; not only do these persons refuse to seek spiritual delights from him or to desire them but they beseech him not to give them these favors during their lifetime. This is true.) *The fifth* reason is that we would be laboring in vain, for since this water must not be drawn through aqueducts as was the previous water, we are little helped by tiring ourselves if the spring doesn't want to produce it. I mean that no matter how much we meditate or how much we try to squeeze something out and have tears, this water doesn't come in such a way. It is given only to whom God wills to give it and often when the soul is least thinking of it" (IC IV,2,ix).

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