

8. FOURTH MANSION – (ii)

Prayer of Quiet

In our daily life we all expect appreciation, approval and acceptance. In spite of all our spirituality and spiritual intentions this is a fact that cannot be denied that we desire recognition of our life and works. The fact is that our life is full of opportunities and it does not actually matter if someone recognizes us or not; we all need to go on in spite of sheer indifference we face in our lives and at times by those who live just next to us.

Consolation and Delight

This sort of dynamic happens in our spiritual life too. There is going to be a tendency to give up because we do not get *consoled* or we do not experience a sort of *delight* in what we do. But according to Teresa we need to be on our guard regarding such expectations. She says the **consolations** (*contentos*) are sometimes mixed with our own passions and inordinate desires. They can be accompanied by physical phenomena such as sobbing, nosebleeds, and even uncontrollable bodily movements. Teresa says that she hasn't experienced these more extreme types of consolations and so can't say anything about them except that they must be consoling because the experiences end in the desire to please God. She contrasts these consolations with the experiences she calls spiritual **delights** (*gustos*).

Two Fountains

To explain the difference between spiritual sweetness and the prayer of quiet, Teresa asks her readers to imagine two fountains with basins that can be filled with water. The water comes to the first through a series of manmade ducts and conduits, but to the second through a flowing spring, the source of which rises up quietly at the very base of the fountain. She likens the first fountain to **spiritual sweetness**, which comes mainly through the **practice of meditation**— that is, discursive prayer involving

thoughtful reflection on the mysteries of the faith and sharing one's affections with God. The *second fountain*, by way of contrast, relates to the *prayer of quiet*— a mystical, supernatural prayer that comes directly from God and is accompanied by a deep sense of peace, quiet, and inner contentment. She also points out that, once this basin is filled, the water flows out into the other mansions of the soul and eventually even reaches the body. According to Teresa, this deep sense of happiness arises not from the heart, but from the deepest recesses of the soul, where the interior springs run very deep and ultimately find their source in the divine.

Aqueduct and Abundant Spring

She says consolations are like the water coming from the *aqueducts*; they require human effort in the form of meditation. “The water coming from the aqueducts is comparable, in my opinion, to the consolations I mentioned that are drawn from meditation. For we obtain them through thoughts, assisting ourselves, using creatures to help our meditation, and tiring the intellect. Since, in the end, the consolation comes through our own efforts, noise is made when there has to be some replenishing of the benefits the consolation causes in the soul, as has been said.” (IC IV,2,iii). Spiritual delights are like the *abundant spring*. They flow from God and are accompanied by peace, quiet, and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves. This spiritual delight is different from earthly consolations. The delight fills everything, overflowing through all the dwelling places and faculties, until reaching the body. She explains that because the whole exterior person enjoys this delight, we can say this spiritual delight begins in God and ends in ourselves.

Deep Secrets within

Writing about the spiritual delight it seems to her that the experience arises from something deep and even more interior than the heart, from what she thinks is the *center of the soul*. “It seems that since heavenly water begins

to rise from this spring I'm mentioning that is deep within us, it swells and expands our whole interior being, producing ineffable blessings; nor does the soul even understand what is given to it there.” (IC IV,2,vi). She marvels and praises God for what she calls the secrets within us; and for the greatness and grandeurs of God. Returning to the discourse, she says the idea of expansion of the heart helps explain spiritual delight. The experience that is deep within, like a deep spring of water, swells and expands our whole interior being, producing ineffable blessings, and the soul does not understand what is given to it there. “It perceives a fragrance, let us say for now as though there were in that interior depth a brazier giving off sweet-smelling perfumes. No light is seen, nor is the place seen where the brazier is; but the warmth and the fragrant fumes spread through the entire soul and even often enough, as I have said, the body shares in them” (IC IV,2,vi). The soul and even the body experience delightful effects without being able to perceive the origin of them (cfr. IC IV,2,v-vii)

Inadequacy

Teresa has a deep sense of her own inadequacy as an author and spiritual guide and of the limitations of human language to convey a sense of the infinite. Even the images she uses to explain the nature of the prayer of quiet conceal as much as they reveal, perhaps even more. Still, she affirms her conviction that *mystical prayer is a gift from God* and cannot be manufactured or induced in any way. She also admits the possibility that what she is writing about mystical prayer may contradict what she has already said elsewhere and attributes this to a deepening of her insights over time into the meaning of her experiences.

Criteria to Assess Experiences

Teresa gives five reasons for not striving after such spiritual experiences for the following reasons: (i) one's motivation in prayer should be love of God and not self-love; (ii) to think that God will convey a favor in return for

service reveals lack of humility; (iii) one should strive to embrace the cross rather than looking for consolations; (iv) the Lord is not obliged to grant mystical favors rather he is keen on saving someone who keeps the commandments; and (v) human effort alone will not produce fruit, for the water comes from a bubbling spring rather than through manmade conduits. Her point is that no amount of meditation, ascetical practice, or devotion can make the water flow in this way.

Practical Conclusion

Prayer, let us remember, is relationship with God. In her first book; *Life*, Teresa spoke of the “prayer of quiet.” Now she refers to this same experience as “spiritual delight,” the enjoyment of God. The “prayer of quiet” in her *Life* corresponds to the *second way of watering* the garden of which Teresa speaks in chapters 14 and 15. The prayer of quiet represented the *first form of mystical prayer*, a kind of passive-contemplative prayer in which God takes the initiative. Its agent of expression is the will, the heart of the whole of a person's life. Teresa got the term “prayer of quiet” from books of her times. The term is in contrast with the noisy activity and complexity of discursive thought. It represents the silence and rest experienced by the will in the exercise of love rising above the agitation of the other powers of the soul, the mind and fantasy, which are still active. At this beginning stage of mystical experience, only the will, according to Teresa, is touched by grace so as to place it in the prayer of love and unite it for some moments to the mysterious object of love who is God, radiating in Christ the mystery of his goodness and tender love toward humans. There are two sources of water. One is far away and requires human effort to obtain it. It corresponds to the ascetical life and the first three dwelling places. The other source is right there in the interior depths of the person. It corresponds to the experiences of the mystical life, the infused, passively bestowed (not acquired) prayer of the fourth and following dwelling places. This prayer or love comes from the

interior depth, precisely because the deepest part of a person in the last dwelling place of the castle is a kind of radical opening to God and to the divine. This action of God gives the soul the sense of expansion in proportion to the amount of water that flows forth from the depths.

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