

9. FOURTH MANSION – (iii)

In the Third Chapter of Fourth Mansion Teresa discusses the prayer of recollection, a state of mystical prayer that normally precedes the prayer of quiet. In her analysis in the IC she has explains the Prayer of Quiet first and then she begins to comment on the Prayer of Recollection. The inverted order in her treatment of these two forms of prayer may well be a consequence of her having to stop her writing for a time because of her business and poor health and the multiple tasks at hand during the reformation of the Order. It sometimes happens that, when a writer resumes working after an extended interruption, it is difficult to recapture the flow of one's thoughts and to maintain continuity with what went before. Teresa herself admits that she has a poor memory, is afraid of confusing her readers, and does not have the time to reread her previous chapters. The prayer of recollection is a form of infused prayer in which the divine light completely absorbs a person's understanding, thus giving him/her a deep sense and knowledge of God's presence within.

The Good Shepherd

Explaining the Prayer of Recollection she likens God's role in it to that of a good shepherd who gently calls his wandering sheep back to himself. Having taught them to recognize his voice and to follow his lead, he speaks so powerfully to them that they cannot help but return to him.

When the light of God shines on the soul, one begins to see how small one is before God and to recognize that the spiritual consolations of mystical prayer far exceed the attractions of the world. As a result, the soul becomes more and more detached from earthly things and more and more attached to the love of God.

Elsewhere in her writings, Teresa draws the distinction between acquired and infused recollection. The first is a simple resting in God's presence and

is often a naturally acquired outcome of meditative prayer. The second is a supernatural gift from God that precedes thought and penetrates the understanding. Does it arise out of fear of unnecessarily repeating herself? Could it be, once again, on account of the interruption in her writing schedule? Can you think of any other reason why this very beneficial distinction is not emphasized in her presentation?

We are not able to answer all these questions as we need to understand that Teresa was very busy in forming her sisters in spiritual life and at the same time busy in matters concerning the new foundations. She says: “It is a recollection that also seems to me to be supernatural because it doesn't involve being in the dark or closing the eye, nor does it consist in any exterior thing, since without first wanting to do so, one does close one's eyes and desire solitude.” (IC IV,3,i). To explain the prayer of recollection in another way is that “the soul enters within itself and, at other times, that it rises above itself” (IC IV,3,ii)

Wandering Sheep

Teresa asks us to suppose that the people of the castle (the senses and faculties) have walked for years outside the castle. Sometimes they enter, but they cannot remain, even though they see the dangers outside. When the Lord sees their good will, he desires in his wonderful mercy to bring them to himself. Like a good shepherd, he makes them recognize his gentle whistle in a subtle way and keeps them from going so far astray that they can't return to their dwelling place. This shepherd's whistle has such power that they abandon the exterior things in which they were estranged from him and enter the castle.

Not the result of Efforts

Teresa very clearly affirms that this type of recollection cannot be obtained by self-efforts. Souls that experience a gentle drawing inward that doesn't come from their own initiative. Teresa thinks God gives this gift to those

who are already beginning to turn away from worldly things. We all know that in the world there are so many meditation centres that train people to control their minds, thoughts and emotions for prayer. Here Teresa is very clearly distancing herself from such practices. This is purely as she says the gift of God and not the result of human efforts: “If His Majesty has not begun to absorb us, I cannot understand how the mind can be stopped. There's no way of doing so without bringing about more harm than good, although there has been a lengthy controversy on this matter among some spiritual persons.” (IC IV,3,iv). For such recollection “love must be already awakened” (IC IV,3,iv).

Necessary Steps

We can dispose ourselves for such an experience without desiring it or thinking that it can be obtained by our own efforts:

First of all what we must do is beg like the needy poor before a rich and great emperor, and then lower our eyes and wait with humility (IC IV,3,v).

Second reason is that these interior works are all gentle and peaceful; doing something arduous would cause more harm than good (IC IV,3,vi).

Third is that the very care used not to think of anything will perhaps rouse the mind to think very much (IC IV,3,vi).

The **Fourth** reason is that what is most essential and pleasing to God is that we be mindful of his honor and glory and forget ourselves and our own profit and comfort and delight (IC IV,3,vi).

Explaining how God wants to put the intellect to silence she gives the reason how it happens: “When His Majesty desires the intellect to stop, he occupies it in another way and gives it a light so far above what we can attain that it remains absorbed. Then, without knowing how, the intellect is much better instructed than it was through all the soul's efforts not to make use of it” (IC IV,3,vi).

Practical Conclusion

In this stage of prayer of Recollection we should not try to suspend either the intellect or the mind, but should try to focus the intellect, being aware that we are in God's presence and of who God is. If what the intellect feels within itself absorbs it, she says, that's well and good, but it should not strive to understand the nature of this recollection, for it is given to the will. She advises letting the soul enjoy this recollection without any effort other than some loving words is the best way to continue. Suspension of the intellect will follow without effort, if only briefly as it happens.

Concluding her journey through the Fourth Mansion she gives a few tips on how the soul feels in the prayer of delight in spite of giving a long description on the prayer of recollection. One of the prominent effects of the prayer of delight is *expansion or dilation of the soul*. She returns to the fountain metaphor but with a difference. Now she asks us to imagine a fountain constructed of a material that can expand so that the more the water flows, the larger the water trough becomes (this refers to our heart or soul that can spiritually expand). She says that in the prayer of delight, God prepares the soul so it can keep everything within itself. The soul has more freedom. The soul is no longer constrained by the fear of hell, although it has an even greater fear of offending God. The soul is left with great confidence that it will enjoy the Lord. Those who have experienced the prayer of spiritual delight have less fear of penance and trials. Sometimes they even *desire suffering in order to do something for God*. Worldly delights have no attraction, and there is improvement in all the virtues. If the soul does not turn back, it will continue to grow. She clarifies that these effects are not the result of only one or two instances of the prayer of delight. The soul must persevere in receiving and practicing these good effects, for in this perseverance has all our good.

According to Teresa in this progressively interior journey to our own centre, we become focused away from ourselves and directed towards God. St. John of the Cross substantiates her claim: “The soul’s centre is God. When it has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclination, it will have attained to its final and deepest centre in God; it will know, love and enjoy God with all its might. When it has not reached this point (as happens in this mortal life, in which the soul cannot reach God with all its strength, even though in its centre – which is God and His communion with it), it still has movement and strength for advancing further and is not satisfied. Although it is in its centre, it is not yet in its deepest centre, for it can go deeper in God” (St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love* 1,xi).

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