

18. FROM ECSTASY TO DAILY LIFE

Teresa was a woman of wisdom, understanding and discernment. When we speak of her life we always remember she being a very practical woman and down to earth in her dealings with her companion sisters and with the people in her society. As we progress in discovering a great wealth of experience through her mystical graces, we trace back to her own life where she struggled through every phase of her ongoing God Experience which she applied to her practical daily life. For he to live was to experience God and to experience God was to live her life.

Coming Out of Ecstasy

Looking at her daily life of prayer and mystical experiences, Teresa comes out of her ecstasy, having been brought from everyday life into the sphere of the divine, even though only for some moments, she returns to the daily round, wounded and longing for her Beloved Lord. In this chapter of IC V,6 she deals with the life of mystics when they return from the ecstasy to their ordinary life, of their internal tensions and their new manner of dealing with life. At all times she reminds her sisters that any experience of God in their prayer life must carry fruits in their life of community.

Torment of separation from the Beloved

It is always a painful experience when we leave our friends and go away. Take for example when we have a wonderful time with our friends and we at the same time anticipate that the moment will come we need to be separated at least for some days or months. There is a sort of torment a mystic undergoes as he/she advances towards union with God. This torment, though, in no way takes away the quiet and peace; in fact, it seems to increase them just

as it increases one's desire for God's will to be done and a tension of transit from life to being quiet in God's presence. And when the desires overflow into tears, the sign that the tears caused by these desires are authentic is that they bring peace, not disturbance. So, in regard to these desires and tears, let God give what he wants. He knows best what is suitable for us. We must set our hands to the tasks of hard work and virtue.

Delight and Joy never leaves

In the sea of mystical experiences there are moments one does not want to come out to the real world around and perhaps makes efforts to remain in that quiet experience. But Teresa insists that such souls must be ready for God's grace that flows in a different way rather than through contemplation alone: "There are some souls – and there are many who have spoken about it to me – who, brought by our Lord to perfect contemplation, would like to be in that prayer always; but that is impossible. Yet this favor of the Lord remains with them in such a way that afterward they cannot engage as before in discursive thought about the mysteries of the Passion and life of Christ." (IC VI,7,vii).

Similarity among the Married Couples

We can also imagine a situation of a married couple, they want to be together all the time, but on many occasions they need to be separated so that they can engage in many other activities of life which are essential for their survival. This is true of experience of love. Love is fire and the one who is in love wants more from the other. The soul that is on fire with God's love wants more and desires never to be separated from God. This is a kind of helplessness of the soul yet more precisely an invitation to work for God selflessly in its relationship with people and the world: "The soul desires to be completely occupied in love and does not want to be taken up with

anything else, but to be so occupied is impossible for it, even though it may want to; for although the will is not dead, the fire that usually makes it burn is dying out, and someone must necessarily blow on the fire so that heat will be given off' (IC VI,7,viii).

Immense Joy

There is another feature of this great state where the soul is keen on sharing the joy it has felt at the depths of the heart. This joy impels the soul to organize as many celebrations as possible to share this joy. Apart from not in any way willing to offend God, it has the desire to make his name known and to praise him immensely. This actually could be compared with the enthusiasm of real missionaries who are engaged in tireless efforts at proclaiming the name of the Lord and praise him with all possible might. We have examples of this kind of enthusiasm among great saints who were willing to die for the Lord and were working with that joy sprang from their hearts. "What I'm saying seems like gibberish, but certainly the experience takes place in this way, for the joy is so excessive the soul wouldn't want to enjoy it alone but wants to tell everyone about it so that they might help this soul praise our Lord. All its activity is directed to this praise. Oh, how many festivals and demonstrations the soul would organize, if it could, that all might know its joy! It seems it has found itself and that, like the father of the prodigal son, it would want to prepare a festival and invite all³⁰⁴ because it sees itself in an undoubtedly safe place, at least for the time being. And I hold that there is reason for its desires. The devil cannot give this experience because there is so much interior joy in the very intimate part of the soul and so much peace; and all the happiness stirs the soul to the praises of God." IC VI,6,x).

Teresa compares this experience of the sisters in convent where they are keen to live in this state of joy always: "Sometimes it is a particular joy for

me to see these Sisters gathered together and feeling such great joy at being in the monastery that they praise our Lord as much as possible. It is seen very clearly that their praises rise from the interior of the soul.” (IC VI,6,xii).

Practical Conclusion

On many occasions Teresa longed for death, or at least to go off to the desert in order to flee people, live apart from everything in this world, and avoid — if possible — every imperfection. In fact, she tells in her Life how she seriously considered transferring to another, far-away monastery of the order that was much more enclosed than the one she lived in. But at the same time she experienced the contradictory longing to enter into the midst of the world to try to play a part in getting at least one soul to praise God more. And this is the way her life actually played out. She became enmeshed in all the very human complications involved in her mission of founding discalced Carmelite monasteries of friars and nuns, a mission that turned out to be anything but a desert. This is the state of those who long for the Lord in the silence of their heart yet in their love for the Lord they also want to work hard to gain a soul or to make a soul sing the Lord's praises.