

## St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1583) Introduction First Talk/Discussion

St. Teresa burned with God's love. This love-fire overflowed into everyone around her. Even now, we catch fire by reading her work. Her teaching in prose and poems has never been equaled, much less excelled. Fr. Jordan Aumann notes this in *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, p 190. Like all great mystics, Teresa learned from Jesus, Who is Love. She took His statement seriously: "**I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!**" Lk 12:49 {All Scripture quotes are from the New American Standard version.} God's love is Eternal Fire. Love is Fire Himself, as Jesus revealed to us. We catch some sparks of Eternal Fire from Him. We want more. If we gain our heart's desire, we ignite in Christ. Our destiny is to join the Ultimate Holocaust of Love. Then we will be satisfied, and become one with our Beloved in Everlasting Love. That's Teresa's message in modern terms. Review her life and person.

Fr. Thomas Dubay's *Fire Within*, develops this love theme for both St. Teresa and her inspired friend St. John of the Cross. Fire represents love very well. Love is like fire because it illuminates, warms, and attracts. However love is the opposite of fire because it does not burn us away, eliminate us, or even reduce us. Instead, it consumes our false selves, and liberates our true selves. Love's fire expands each lover. Natural love extends humans beyond all expectation. Supernatural Love is even more expansive. Eternal Fire expanded Teresa into one of history's greatest persons. Our short review of her life shows only a few of her great achievements. So we see only a bit of her full size. If you relate everything we consider to her inner love of God, then you will grow to understand that her love-life was the Love-Life.

Fr. Kieran Kavanaugh & Fr. Otilio Rodriguez translated *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, to show more completely how Love enlivened her. It is the most modern standard English translation. An older standard is Alison Peers': *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Avila*. Wherever you look in Teresa, you find fire. She was a fiery woman whose flames of love flash out to us. If you catch fire, you find your true future. That's Teresa's message to all of us.

It's encouraging for us to know that Teresa did not start life at full blaze. Instead she converted in several stages. First she advanced from ordinary life to a nun's consecrated life. Then, from being a lax nun, she flamed up into fervent life with Christ. As this fire grew, she renewed her personal religious life. Then she re-founded, the Carmelite order. Carmelites had abandoned poverty so much that they wore shoes. Teresa's return to poverty earned her group the name "without-shoes" or Discalced. We wonder how her weak body could sustain her hardy acts. Quite simply, her spirit caught fire. In this blaze, she was just like the tiny Teresa of Calcutta. Each overcame physical weakness because God, or Love, or Fire, erupted in them. Eternal Flames activated them. Mother Teresa of Calcutta's letters reveal how God strengthened her. See the book: *Come Be My Light*. Eternal Fire provides great Light, as we shall see with St. Teresa of Avila.

Her work is so rich and varied that we cannot cover it. So we will consider only parts of two of her books, and a few poems. Her *Way of Perfection* describes in great detail how to be more like Christ. His Love inspires us to love Him. Love unites, so He unifies us with Him. We will never equal Him, but the more we strive, the closer we get. The closer we get, the more we want to strive. Fire is that way: the more it blazes, the more it wants to blaze. If we do not strive, we do not arrive at Christ. But the more we arrive, the more we want to strive. To strive is to pray. Teresa's *Interior Castle* tells how to pray, especially how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He guides us to improved prayer. These books show Teresa's mystical mastery, and inspire us to follow her excellent example. Her poems launch from her prose, and fly free into unfathomable God. We will examine some of them to see how love frees each beloved soul. Teresa caught fire. We earnestly desire to enflame in Love, our Source and our Destiny.

St. Teresa wrote these books and poems for her nuns. They were contemplatives, sheltered from life's millions of distractions. Our Carmelite convent continues Teresa's loving work. Though we can't live such sheltered lives, we still profit from her instruction, because it fits everyone, everywhere. Her wisdom and love lead us where we really want to go. So let's begin with love's freedom to choose what's best for us: God.

### Teresa's Teaching

To get to God, everyone must do 3 things: 1. love each other, 2. detach self from creatures, 3. become truly humble. Teresa notes these three steps in the *Way of Perfection*, ch 4. In the Kavanaugh edition by International Carmelite Studies, you find this on p 53. All page references will be to this three-volume collection, appearing: in 1976, 1980 and 1985. Teresa lists these three things in 4:4, which is on page 54. She gives a practical account of what it means to love our neighbor. Like St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa identifies several steps in love, from a rather selfish love, on into increasingly pure love of the other for the other's sake. Notice how Teresa expresses this. Selfish love is love of another for **my** sake. Pure love is love of the other for **his** sake. Teresa shows us the real difference between impure love and pure love. She calls impure love "excessive love", 54, and pure love "spiritual love", 57.

Naturally, we must start with impure love, because we're just beginning our journey to Love Himself. Teresa shows that I love all creatures, at first, for **my** sake. This I-trouble blinds each of us to true love. I-trouble blinds us to the reality of the other. All I see is myself. What I love in you isn't **you** at all. It's how good I feel when I "love" you. It's all tangled up in feeling good. These feelings jerk me back and forth. They attach me to created things. But I really want to be attached to the uncreated God. So Teresa provides ways to become increasingly detached from creatures and attached to God. Creatures compete for our attention and love, but only God is worthy of both. Her way to say I-trouble is "vanity", 58. Because she lived such a flame of love, she recognizes how dangerous "vanity" is. It prevents our advance to God. In

our tepid times, we think hardly anything of such I-trouble. After all, we are immersed in it, so it can't be that bad. Teresa identifies it as great harm caused by the devil, 58. She sees the devil as liar and hater, opposed to love in all forms.

The love worth having is "purely spiritual". At this point, Teresa makes one of her most famous statements: "I don't know if I know what I am saying", 62. Everyone who experiences God's love must say the same. What God does by loving us is so much more than anything we could comprehend, much less say, that it surpasses knowledge. Perhaps it's better to say that what Teresa knew about God's love is that it's infinite. That's how it escapes our complete knowledge. Though it extends beyond our knowledge, we do know that it's infinite. As we probe it to find its end, we sink ever more deeply into it. Instead of tailing off, as creatures do around their edges, God's love becomes more intense the more we experience it. Everlasting, Unending, Love can't be known as we can know creatures. It's past knowing. It's profoundly beyond any human capacity to know. That's what's satisfying about it, since our need is Infinite, and so is God, or Love.

Teresa says that another reason for saying little about God's love is that "few have it. Let the one to whom the Lord has given it praise Him very much, because such a person must have reached the highest perfection", 62. She explains love in simple terms. "May it please God that I understand this love, and even more, that I know how to speak of it. For I don't think I know which love is spiritual, or when sensual love is mixed with spiritual love, nor do I know why I want to speak about this spiritual love. My situation is like that of one who hears others speaking in the distance, but doesn't understand what they are saying. So it is that sometimes I don't think I understand what I'm saying, but the Lord wills that it be well said. If at other times what I say is nonsense, that is what is most natural to me – not being correct in anything." Teresa shows her profound humility here. Few people knew more about Love Himself than Teresa. But she can not express it because Infinite Love will not fit into human terms. Everyone fails to express what God's love is for us.

But Teresa speaks wonderfully well in her very next sentence: "Now it seems clear to me that those whom God brings to a certain clear knowledge, love very differently than do those who have nor reached it", 62. Here we have the key to her life. When God loves her, He establishes her. Her existence is proof positive that God loves Her. Her response to God's love was primarily prayer. In prayer God's love infused her. Thus infused, she existed even more. Most important of all her ways to exist was her knowledge. Accepting God's love clarified that knowledge. She rejoiced that she emerged from darkness into light. This process continued as she responded to God's love more completely. No longer confused as she had been, her clear knowledge enabled her to decide more correctly. This union of knowing and choosing expanded her being even more. She cooperated with God's love by adding her own little improvements. She became more herself because of God's love and her personal efforts to love Him more. Naturally, her love for Him improved markedly beyond those who had not responded so enthusiastically to God's love. Once she saw this difference, she noticed that it must exist. This is the way of Love, to expand everything without end. Infinite Love expands infinitely.

"This clear knowledge is about the nature of the world, that there is another world, about the difference between the one and the other, that the one is eternal and the other a dream; or about the nature of loving the Creator and loving the creature (and this is seen through experience, which is entirely different from merely thinking about it, or believing it); or this knowledge comes from seeing and feeling what is gained by the one love and lost by the other, and what the Creator is, and what the creature is, and from many other things that the Lord teaches to anyone who wants to be taught by Him in prayer, or whom His Majesty desires to teach." 62. We shall break this lengthy sentence into several clearer parts.

Behind Teresa's words are some everyday experiences. Everyone knows a lot about the world. But the lot we know falls apart. This world doesn't make sense. This "nature of the world" points to another world, which does make sense. Behind this confused world is an orderly Source. This Source is Sense Itself. So the difference between these two worlds is massive. Teresa's descriptions strike us: the Source is "eternal", and the observable world is a "dream". This is necessarily so, because the "dream" is so disorganized that it could not exist alone. When we consider Teresa's sentence, we notice that it's loaded with meaning and value. Expressing this insight in many ways helps us to focus on it with the attention it deserves. Though creation is large, it is largely empty. It can't supply what we truly desire. So "loving the creature" is a waste of our time. "Loving the Creator" is proper use of our time. Experience wasted on creatures shows us this truth. Experience expended on the Creator shows us His ultimate value. What does Teresa mean by experience?

As she emphasizes in the next sentence, experience is "entirely different from merely thinking about it, or believing it". Experience is somehow being what we experience. By comparison, thinking and believing are vague and remote. Experience is definite, determined, and therefore clear. Experience is more real than theorizing. Experience is direct, right there, instead of remote. This is clear when we compare someone describing a person with actually meeting that person. Descriptions are general and removed from experience. When we see and feel what's happening, we identify with what happens to us. Teresa was truly present to what happens. She was "with it", right on top of events. Before her conversion, she wasted enough time with creatures to know the empty feeling they produce. After, she enjoyed enough time with the Creator to know how full He is, and how He fills us. She knows what's gained and lost by loving the one and the other.

To round out this account, Teresa shows that prayer is being real, because prayer shows the difference between creature and Creator. Having loved us into existence, our Creator loves to expand our existence. So He loves to teach us in prayer. Because He is the Real Being, our Creator loves to expand our reality-contact. He wants us to be increasingly real. So he wants us to "pray always", Luke 18.1. Because Teresa is so real, she sees everything in reality-context. Her view of reality is vast and coordinated. She sees everything as it fits together. Unfortunately, most people see only fragments.

These fragments frighten them. Fragments are grotesque, and upset us for many reasons. Teresa attracted people precisely because she was integrated. She saw reality more completely. When we unpack her sentences, look for these riches. She says much more than we can comprehend at first. So we need to reflect on what she says, finding the many parts that fit together into her expression. The examples given in these few remarks show some of the treasures in her words.

Because God is infinite, we will never finish enjoying Him. Because His creation is vast, we will never finish exploring it. Because love expands to Love Himself, we will never finish loving. Teresa realized all that, and delighted in the never-ending divine romance. For her, God is His Majesty, or the Greatest Being, the Provider, Organizer, and Disposer of all creatures. God does all this because He is Love. His being is One, or totally integrated. Teresa experiences this Unity so clearly that everything else fits into perspective. Her view is more vast than ours. So we must stretch to catch up with her. The simplest way to stretch is to accept God's teaching. Our acceptance is prayer. In other sections of her book, Teresa developed what prayer is. For now, let's note that prayer is a way to exist. It's not merely reciting words, or concentrating, or meditating. To pray is to open up entirely to what is, which is ultimately God. Once we're open, we receive increasing reality, until we reach God. Later, we will see how Teresa develops the prayer process.

Meanwhile, she explicitly states that we can call something love which is not really love. She emphasizes it, in her fiery way: "Now, note well that when we desire love from some person, there is always a kind of seeking our own benefit or satisfaction", 63. This is the I-trouble we reviewed a few moments ago. It is exactly what a person must get rid of, or renounce, or detach self from. Teresa reminds us that "perfect persons have already trampled underfoot all the good things and comforts the world has to offer them," 63. This is her second point on the way to perfection. As long as we seek satisfaction from creatures, we distract ourselves from Real Satisfaction, Who is God. Creatures clog us up with partial goods, so that we cannot accept Good Himself. To make way for God, we must let creatures go.

Your own experience shows that creatures fail to satisfy you. They arouse your interest, then they let you down. You anticipate getting some creature, your desire for it melts you; you expect great results. After exhaustive emotion, pursuing that creature, you attain it. You want it to satisfy you entirely. But it fails. Often you become angry because another creature has fooled you again. You exhausted yourself for nothing. Must every creature betray you? These lively impressions overwhelm you. Teresa embraces these feelings in her fiery way. But her fire burns beyond betrayal. She decides that creatures waste her time. Instead, she should use creatures to attain God. God satisfies. That's why in every age, some people renounce creatures to grasp God. These people live in poverty because creatures distract them from God. Poor people concentrate more completely on God. Only God satisfies. So Teresa dis-calced her Carmelites, freeing them to return to God. She got them away from shoes, and other creatures that kept them from God. More on detachment later.

Now we turn to her third main step to perfection. Humility is truth, as St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us. So we are humble if we are exactly accurate about what is happening. It is not humility to exaggerate our goodness, nor is it humility to underestimate our goodness. Humility is truth. As we approach God, who is Truth, we must be truthful. When we detach from creatures, we struggle, and fail often. Why? Because we tell ourselves lies. We say that creatures will satisfy us, in spite of millions of creatures that failed to satisfy us. Perfect detachment is renouncing the false self which we imagine we are. Teresa summarizes our advancement in chapter 10 of this book. "Once we have detached ourselves from the world and from relatives, and have enclosed ourselves here ..., it seems that we have done all there is to do, and that we don't have to struggle with anything. ... [Actually, we still have to renounce ourselves.] ... this turning and being against ourselves is a difficult thing because we live very close together, and love ourselves greatly. Here true humility can enter the picture because this virtue and the virtue of detachment, it seems to me, always go together. They are two inseparable sisters. These are not the relatives I advise you to withdraw from. Rather, you should embrace them, and love them, and never be seen without them." 76-77. So my greatest lie is that I am the greatest being. I try to make myself God: Greatest.

Of course, I fail. My failure is ludicrous. But I insist on being the Greatest. This false self must go. I must speak the truth about my own being. I am not Greatest. I am very small. But God wants me to unite with Him. He is Greatest. So I am destined to be united with the Greatest eventually. I must get the timing right. I am not Greatest right now. If I tell myself this truth, then I am humble. Teresa realized this clearly, and expressed it quite well. Because she was writing for nuns who concentrated on renouncing creatures, she could go directly to this conclusion. We may have to strive harder and longer to understand. We must give the false self away to find the real self. Then we tell ourselves the truth about ourselves. Then we unite with God, because we have put all false gods aside. With hearts free of false goods, we can accept Real Good. This completes the simple set of three steps toward God that Teresa recommends in *The Way of Perfection*.

#### St. Teresa of Avila Develops Her First Step: Love Second Presentation

In chapters 6 and 7 of *The Way of Perfection*, [Kavanaugh & Rodriguez] Teresa specifically shows how to love one another. Given today's misuse of that word "love", we need to concentrate on her advice. One misuse of love describes frequent attempts to increase love by our own acts. People pander to each other, constantly milking each other for affection. Teresa noticed that, and inveighed against it. Framing this problem, she begins: [You tell me]... "perfect persons do not know how to love or repay the love others have for them – at least they care little about being loved. At times nature suddenly rejoices at being loved, but then, when these persons return to themselves they see that this is foolish, unless the souls of the others will benefit either by doctrine or by prayer. All other affection wearis these persons, for they understand that no benefit comes from it, and that it could be harmful. But this does not make these persons ungrateful or

unwilling to repay the love of others by recommending them to God. They entrust to the Lord the care of those who love them, for they understand that the love comes from Him,” 63. How wonderful this is! Teresa shows the difference between fake and true love. Fake love extracts crumbs from others by exchanging favors. Fake love hopes that the others mistake these favors for real love. Fake love worries that people will see: to get an affectionate gesture, I must give one.

People who advance into real love do not play this game. They do not exchange tit for tat. They look beyond the tatters of pay/repay. They look to Love’s Source. By comparison, they “weary” of the fake game. They return compliments if this exchange helps people advance toward Love. But they see that the game itself wastes time. “No benefit comes from it, and it could be harmful”. The genuine lover repays love from others by recommending them to God, entrusting to the Lord the care of those who love them. Why? Because He is Love, and they understand that love comes from Him. This is the real thing. This is authentic love, related directly to Love Himself. On the one hand, people who love like Christ do not play tit for tat. But on the other hand, they provide real love for everyone. They do not do what “everyone” claims is love, but we notice that “everyone” is mistaken by playing the love-game, without really loving.

Teresa loves more than most people who ever lived, but she does not fake love. For her, it’s the real thing or nothing. We admire her, and try to imitate her, as she imitates Christ. Teresa identifies another important factor for the genuine lover. “It doesn’t seem there is anything within themselves to love, and they immediately think they are loved because these others love God,” 63. This expresses the humility, or truth, of real life. When I follow my fake self, I imagine that I am very admirable, that everyone should pay me honor. I define love as how good I feel when I do something. But that something may be good or evil. Most people go through life doing a few good things, and many bad things. By contrast, real love is doing good things for good reasons. One step toward true love is to realize how my false self seeks adulation which I do not deserve. My real self dispels these illusions. Then I see myself as good because of God’s gift. When I eliminate my false self, so eager for undeserved admiration, there seems to be nothing left. I fail to find anything in myself to love. This is the difference between habitual self-seeking and newfound God-seeking, as Teresa describes it.

Advancing in love enables me to suppose that others love me because they love God. If we unpack Teresa’s words to identify their meaning, we find great wisdom here. The next love-step is: “They leave it to His Majesty to repay those who love them, and they beg Him to do so. In this way they remain free, for it seems to them that repaying the love is not their business”, 63. Leaving repayment to His Majesty is totally honest, so it’s high-order humility. It is also high order love, because it is loving as God loves. It frees us because we do not enslave ourselves to the tit for tat game. Teresa finishes: “And, in fact, I think at times that if love does not come from those persons who can help us gain the blessings of the perfect, there would be great blindness in this desire to be loved”, 63. Teresa reminds us that people more perfect in love lead us from selfishness disguised as love to the blessings of true love. They help us escape the blindness of our counter-productive desire for love. Yes, it’s good to desire love. But we often misdirect that desire to produce just the opposite of love. Our own experience shows that tit for tat games betray love. So we move past betrayal to real love.

If we eliminate our selfish substitute for love, we can skip even divine consolation. At lower love levels, we love feeling good about something. This is consolation. Eventually, we learn that this consolation is not enough. It is a poor substitute for personal love, especially of the Person Love. As Teresa affirms: “Their consolations are of a kind that even though they may desire them, so to speak, they cannot tolerate having them apart from God... For what benefits can come to them from being loved?” 63-64. We must advance a few steps in love to see the difference between loving consolation, and loving God because He consoles us. One saint admonished a monk: You love the consolation of God more than the God of consolation. This is backwards love. Consolation can be useful to urge us on, but we must abandon it for God.

Teresa provides excellent images to refresh these ideas. “Since this truth is made known to them, they laugh at themselves because of the affliction they once suffered as to whether or not their love was repaid. ... our affection is good, the desire that it be repaid is natural. But once we receive the payment, we realize that the pay is all straw; it’s all air and without substance, so that the wind carries it away. No matter how much we have been loved [falsely], what is there that remains for us?” 64 Teresa reminds us of our fundamental experience: tit for tat tokens are fake. No matter what fuss someone makes over us, the fuss dies away, leaving nothing. Real love is far superior. She describes real love: “... yes, they do love, with a much greater and more genuine love, and with passion, and with a more beneficial love; in short, it is love. And these souls are more inclined to give than to receive. ...this attitude merits the name ‘love’, for these other base attachments have usurped the name ‘love’, 64. Teresa’s fiery devotion to truth shines forth here, for our benefit. Where else can we get such clear truth about such important things?

Teresa knows that her nuns will whine that this true love is way beyond their sensations. “You will also wonder what they have affection for, if they do not love because of the things they see. It is true that what they see, they love, and what they hear, they become attached to; but the things that they see are stable. As soon as these persons love, they go beyond the bodies, and turn their eyes to the soul, and look to see if there is something to love in the soul”, 64. Indeed, advanced lovers look beyond sensory surfaces, or bodies. They look with the mind’s eye into the soul. Bodies change very fast, leaving hardly anything behind. But souls are stable. Advanced lovers see, listen to, and love stable goodness in the soul. If a soul is soiled by sin, it is not as lovable as if it were cleansed in Christ. Advanced lovers do love sinners, but it’s hard, and can become impossible. Perhaps “these persons understand that the other does not love God, and that the two must then go to their different destinies. ... in the case of perfect love, if a person loves, there is the passion to make the

other soul worthy of being loved, for ... this person knows that otherwise he will not continue to love the other. It is a love that costs dearly. This person does everything he can for the other's benefit; he would lose a thousand lives that a little good might come to the other soul. O precious love that imitates the Commander-in-chief of love, Jesus, our Good", 65.

Teresa extends our understanding of love by showing that perfect human love imitates Jesus perfectly. Perfect love gladly dies that the sinner may live. Perfect love sheds its blood to wash the sinner clean. Naturally, we want to become perfect in love. It's fair to say that our efforts up to now have not met our expectations. So Teresa provides advice on perfecting love. Perfect love is impassioned. "It is not happy unless it sees that [beloved] person make progress", 65. If that beloved person does not progress, "It is always fearful lest the soul it loves so much be lost, and the two be separated forever. ... All that it desires or wants is to see the other soul rich with heavenly blessings", 66. This is the love of God, manifest in Jesus. "This spiritual love is the kind of love I would desire us to have. Even though in the beginning it is not so perfect, the Lord will gradually perfect it", 67-68. Teresa identifies Jesus as the perfecter of our souls. He definitely is, but only if we do our part. "Let us begin by using suitable means...", 68. These means ramble through many details, the gist of which is to love people around us. Even if these people can't handle "trifles", and misinterpret many events, we must love them as God loves them, entirely. Steps along the way include tolerating others, loving something good about them, then advancing to love all of them. Eventually we can: "know... how to sympathize with your neighbor in his trials, however small they may be", 68. Other examples show this basic action: serve others instead of yourself. Others need more than we can list. How to serve these needs also varies. So we must adapt these service-steps to shifting conditions.

Teresa crystallizes all this advice in this sentence: "Oh, how good and true will be the love of the sister who can help others by setting aside her own advantage for their sake. She will make much progress in all the virtues, and keep her rule with great perfection. Better friendship will this be than all the tender words that can be uttered...", 69. "For, if you do what lies in your power, the Lord will make you so strong that you will astonish men. And how easy this is for His Majesty, since He made us from nothing", 70. Each person advances from his present place. If he steps toward God, he accepts more of God's love, and becomes a more perfect lover. God does all the heavy lifting, but each person does his utmost. This cooperation perfects love. Ultimate love identifies with the beloved. Since the beloved is Love, His love transforms us into Love. This union can't be achieved bodily. It is purely spiritual. Bodies alienate each other. Souls unite. Teresa affirms: "When the Lord grants [contemplation], and we do not fail on our part, I hold as certain that He never ceases to give until we reach a very high degree. When we do not give ourselves to His Majesty with the determination with which He gives Himself to us, He does a good deal by leaving us in mental prayer, and visiting us from time to time, like servants in His vineyard, Mat 21:3. Ultimate love is contemplation, or loving interaction with God. He looks at me, and I look at Him. Our looks lock. Mutual looking is a fair estimate of spiritual integration, of persons interlocking.

This "lock" points to loving union. Contemplation is union. Spirits contemplate each other in two ways: knowing and loving. When spirits combine these ways, they contemplate perfectly. God is perfect. So He contemplates us perfectly. No improvement is possible for His spiritual action on us. By contrast, we are far from perfect. Teresa tells us that if we do our best to contemplate God, then He will draw us ever more into His perfection. Starting in recited prayers, we advance to meditation. There we more perfectly know and love God. Then He infuses contemplation into us, if we freely accept His gift. His gift is Himself. Love loves us. Love urges us on to become Love. That's the activity we love to lock on to. That lock satisfies. That lock loves ultimately. That lock unites perfectly. That lock unites us with His Majesty.

Teresa sparkles when she describes this lock: "Oh, blessed care, my daughters! Oh, blessed renunciation of things so small and so base that reaches so high a state. What would it matter, when you are in the arms of God, if the whole world blamed you! He has the power to free you from everything, for once He commanded that the world be made, it was made. His will is the deed. ... Well why ... shouldn't we show our love for Him as much as we can? Behold it is a beautiful exchange to give our love for His. Consider that He can do all things, and we can't do anything here below but what He enables us to do. Well, what is this that we do for You, Lord, our Maker? It amounts to almost nothing, just a little determination. Well, if from that which is nothing His majesty desires us to merit everything, let's not be foolish", 97. Her lyrical expression glides into the glory of contemplation. Almighty Creator wants to unite with puny creature. Go for it! Don't be foolish by holding back. He offers us Good Himself. Why would we prefer some small and base creature? All we have to do to obtain God is let go of false gods. If we let go of false love, we attain Real Love.

Teresa admits that we often fail to let go of creatures. But this attachment hurts us. "O Lord, how true that all harm comes to us from not keeping our eyes fixed on You. If we were to look at nothing else but the way, we would soon arrive. But we meet with a thousand falls and obstacles, and lose the way because we don't keep our eyes ... on the true way. It seems so new to us that you would think we had never walked on it. It's certainly something to excite pity", 97. Here Teresa insists that steps toward Love will not be perfect. We will fail often. Falling is no problem if we rise up again to advance. Each rise detaches us from a creature we once preferred to God. Each creature betrays us. Each creature offers unfulfilled hopes. Only God fulfills our hopes. Only God is enough for us. Only God unites with us in Perfect Love.

Fire is Teresa's main metaphor for God's love. But Love Himself also nourishes us with Love. This reminds her of water. Water quenches our bodily thirst in pale imitation of Love quenching our spiritual thirst. Naturally, these metaphors clash, because bodily water extinguishes bodily fire. But Love, which both enflames and nourishes us, does not clash. So Teresa ends up mixing these metaphors. "Water has three properties ... applicable to our subject... The first is that it re-

freshes ... no matter how much heat we may experience, as soon as we approach the water, the heat goes away. If there is a great fire, it is extinguished by water – unless the fire burns from pitch; then it is enkindled more. [Water splashing on the fire spreads flames to more pitch, or pine sap.] Oh, God help me, what marvels there are in this greater enkindling of the fire by water when the fire is powerful ... For this water doesn't impede the fire, though it is fire's contrary, but rather makes the fire increase! Those of you, sisters, who drink this water and you others, once the Lord brings you to drink, will enjoy it and understand how the true love of God, if it is strong, completely free of earthly things, and if it flies above them, is lord of the elements and of the world. ... don't fear that it [water] will extinguish this fire of the love of God; such a thing does not lie within its power", 107-108. Her point is that Love transcends creatures. To keep track of Infinite Love, we poor creatures use metaphors, or analogies, or images. But none of these artificial tracking devices can limit Love. God's water refreshes His fire of love in us. Far from extinguishing it, God's refreshing act of love enflames our love precisely by refreshing it. Water also washes clean, as God's love does, and water satisfies to the full, like God's love does. Metaphors enable us to escape language's limitations. Then we can accurately apply words to spiritual acts.

Teresa is all about love. So we can't cover everything she said about it. Instead, we profit from these snippets from her rich treasury of prose and poetry about Love. In our partial approach to her Love-story, we notice more than we can comprehend. So it's helpful to summarize what Teresa taught us so far in different words. Dubay, in *Fire Within*, devotes hundreds of pages to his summary of Teresa's love. I quote a few to conclude our review of Teresa's view of Love.

Love of God predominates, naturally. Teresa transformed into God, as she described above. We will review this transformation into God again, because its infinite treasures fascinate us. For now, Dubay intrigues us with: "The transforming union is in its basic essence neither vision nor revelation. It is communion come to maturity, a communion that brings along with it the culmination of a slow growth in holiness that has been taking place all through the development of infused prayer. At this summit the unforced divine invasion reaches its fullness; the knowing-loving-delighting fusion between God and man reaches its nonpantheistic consummation. This new creation is found not only in prayerful solitude, but also in the multiplicities of daily life; there is in both action and contemplation a remarkable newness of goodness, strength, freedom and delight", 175-176. This vast description covers so much that we wonder where to begin. Infinite Love is that way. There's no end to Him. As we grow into God, he transforms us into Himself, into Love. Because there is no end to God, there is no end to describing how He transforms us into Him. Therefore, different descriptions are necessary to expand our experience toward Infinity. We are not surprised that mystics provide different descriptions. Instead, we enjoy each one, delighting in differences that illumine growth into Infinity. Probe these words, and you find Openness.

Dubay's insights into divine love go on and on, beyond our limits. But he devotes another chapter to Teresa's human loves. She's so famous for loving God that we tend to forget her expansive love of us. She thus fulfills Christ's commandment: "Love God with your whole soul, and your neighbor as yourself", XXXX. Teresa told us in the quotes we noted above that love enkindles love. That's why she loved everyone, to arouse Love in them. Each person, loved into existence by Love Himself, is made of love. Teresa was so warm to everyone for that very reason. She saw Love in each one, and Loved Him there. As Dubay notes: "There is no doubt that the saint's fondness for and closeness to special people was the divine in them, and she gives us some insights into how she translated this into practice. ...tells us explicitly that she conceived a special love for those who were generous with God, and detached from the world, those whom in her own terminology she called 'spiritual people'. ... We might say that for her a person's degree of immersion in God was the degree of her love for that person", 273. This is a fine way to say that Teresa understood Love to be One. If we love Love, then we are one with One. He is one with other people, so the more we are one with One, the more we are one with all, in One. These considerations launch us into Teresa's many fine expressions of the Love that saturated her.

### **Teresa's Second Step toward God: Detachment from Creatures** Third presentation

Teresa devotes several chapters to detachment, because we cling so tightly to creatures. She launches chapter 8 with reasons to detach. "Now let us talk about the detachment we ought to have, for detachment, if it is practiced with perfection, includes everything. I say it includes everything because if we embrace the Creator, and care not at all for the whole of creation, His Majesty will infuse the virtues. Doing little by little what we can, we will have hardly anything else to fight against; it is the Lord who in our defense takes up the battle against the demons and against the world", 71. We can put creation in the Creator's way, when we mis-love creatures. We frequently mis-love creatures. Right-love is loving God above all else, and all else in God. That puts everything in true order. Teresa expression is: "Do you think, sisters, it is a small blessing we receive in obtaining this grace to give ourselves to the All entirely and without reserve? And since in Him are all blessings, ... let us praise Him very much, ... for having brought us together here where the only concern is to give ourselves entirely to Him", 71. This giving all for All detaches us from mis-loving creatures, and makes us real.

In chapter 9, Teresa considers the harder detachment from family and from friends. After all, people are the best of all creatures, so they are the ones to which we most strongly attach. As Teresa reminds us regularly, if the creature is so good, God Who made it must be much better. So every creature should be a launch pad to God. However, many of us hang on to the launch pad for dear life. So Teresa admonishes us: "Oh, if we religious could understand the great harm that comes from having too much to do with relatives, how we would flee them!" 73. Teresa's letters refer regularly to agonies her nuns endured over their beloved relatives, and the mutual ties that bound them. In that light, she says: "I am astonished by the harm that is caused from dealing with relatives. ... great care should be taken to recommend them to

God; that is right. As for the rest, we should keep them out of our minds as much as possible, because it is a natural thing for the will to become attached to them more than to other persons”, 74.

Difficult as it may be to keep the proper distance from relatives, they and the nun are much better off with proper balance. Teresa learned that to her great sorrow. “I have been much loved by my relatives – according to what they have said – and I loved them so much that I didn’t let them forget me. But I know through my own experience as well as that of others that in time of trial my relatives helped me the least. It was the servants of God who helped me”, 74. The help she needed was to move on to God. Relatives confine their care to what they know best. They know best how to use creatures. Nuns need the opposite: detachment from creatures. So relatives often interfere with nuns attaining their spiritual needs.

So Teresa recommends: “Believe, sisters, that if you serve His Majesty as you ought, you will not find better relatives than those He sends you”, 74. Teresa means both blood relatives and spiritual sisters in the convent, assisted by brother priests who minister to their souls. Of these she insists: “Believe that you can trust those who love you only for His sake more than you can all your relatives, and that these former will not fail you. And you will find fathers and brothers in those about whom you had not even thought. For since these seek to be repaid by God, they do things for us. Those who seek to be repaid by us soon grow tired, since they see that we are poor and unable to help them in any way”, 75. This illustrates Teresa’s great practicality. She was bodily removed from the world, but she was spiritually united. It was clear to her that most people interact with each other for mutual benefit. Even family members have this profit motive. But religious strive to replace that motive with loving service. On the average, they do. So her prosper spiritually in the measure that they detach from family, and rely on religious servants. This dynamic works for everyone.

“The world” neatly summarizes all the creatures we should detach from. Teresa notes: “All that the saints counsel us about fleeing the world is clearly good. Well, believe me, our relatives are what clings to us most from the world, ... and the most difficult to detach ourselves from. ... I don’t think it helps to flee bodily; rather what helps is that the soul embrace the good Jesus our Lord with determination, for since in Him everything is found, in Him everything is forgotten. Yet, it is a very great help to withdraw even bodily until we have come to know this truth. For afterward it may be that the Lord will want us to have dealings with them, giving us a cross where we used to find pleasure”, 75.

In this quote, Teresa sketches our development from relying on relatives, to leaving them, to be closer to God. Once we clarify that purpose, and advance toward God, that progress so delights us that any distraction is a trial for us. Teresa calls that trial a cross. Notice how Christian vocabulary permeates our language. Clearly, cross stands for trial on the way to God. Everyone catches this meaning. People who devote themselves to contemplation as well as workers in society understand this word. Workers in the world, whether married or single, discover that relatives are indeed a cross. This is another example of Teresa’s eminent practicality. After recommending detaching from creatures in general, and relatives in particular, she turns now to the most difficult of all detachments: from the self.

Self refers to two very different things: true self and false self. Our true self is such a blessing, a God-given gift, that we never want to reject it in any way. But our false self, the one we’re most likely to call our very own self, is the one that wrecks our journey to God. It is the imposter we must depose. We noticed earlier that Teresa insists that detachment from false-self is difficult. In her own words: “Once we have detached ourselves from the world and from relatives, and have enclosed ourselves here, ... it seems we have done all there is to do, and that we don’t have to struggle with anything. Oh, my sisters do not feel secure, or let yourselves go to sleep! By feeling secure you would resemble someone who very tranquilly lies down after having locked his doors for fear of thieves, while allowing the thieves to remain in the house. And you already know that there is no worse thief than ourselves. For if you do not walk very carefully, and if each sister is not alert in going against her own will, as though she was more important than all else, there are many things that will take away this holy freedom of spirit by which you fly to your Maker without being held down by clay or leaden feet”, 76. This fine set of recommendations and allusions deserves an expanded account.

Teresa describes our development accurately. First, we give up those creatures which more obviously betray us. Second, we release relatives who less obviously distract us from God. Finally, we detach from our greatest enemy, who is well hidden deep inside. He disguises himself as myself. He is my false self. He is an image of who I want to be, but am not. He is a lie. This false self deceives me mightily. Teresa warns against him with her vivid image of the hidden thief, waiting for the owner to go to sleep, then robbing him blind. All the owner’s efforts to lock thieves out fail because of the unnoticed inner thief. Most people fail to identify him. If we can ID him, we catch the culprit who plagues us the most. This false self is our ultimate enemy. He’s the one, like lead feet, who fastens us to our God-forsaken exile. My false self fixes me in falsity. My false self confuses and frustrates me so often that I should learn to kill him, and free my true self.

It is “our own will” that locks us into ourselves. Unless we go against our own will, we will remain God-forsaken. Our very own will insists that we are more important than all else. This false decision enslaves us to the last un-detached creature in our lives. So detaching from this false self, with its false choice of self over God, is our most difficult detachment. God help us to achieve it. Then we can fly to our Master. Then we dis-alienate ourselves from God. Our most alienating choice is self instead of God. That was Adam’s original sin. He rejected God’s help to divine union. He chose to do his own thing instead. He ate the apple. Naturally, the apple is mere metaphor. But Adam chose himself over God. All his children are stuck in that choice. Jesus washed that original sin away. When we accept Baptism, we escape most of the consequences of Adam’s revolt. But its effects remain. Its effects devastate us in body and soul. The worst effect of all is

our false self. Detaching from it is our most difficult task. Teresa provides effective help in this strenuous struggle.

"A great aid in going against your will is to bear in mind continually how all is vanity, and how quickly everything comes to an end. This helps remove our attachment to trivia, and center it on what will never end. Even though this practice seems to be a weak means, it will strengthen the soul greatly, and the soul will be most careful in very little things. When we begin to be attached to something, we should strive to turn our thoughts from it, and bring them back to God – and His Majesty helps. He has done us a great favor because in this house most of the work of detachment has been done – although this turning and being against ourselves is a difficult thing, because we live very close together, and love ourselves greatly", 76. Every creature passes away. None will remain forever. So creature-vanity is a great way to see how wasted all creature-loves are. If we try to use this argument of short-existence against loving ourselves, we see that it does not work. It fails because we are eternal, once created. But it works for trivial passing creatures. When we confront self-love, we need the big gun: God. Obviously, God is greater than my self, whether the false or the true one. Obviously, God is better. So obviously I should prefer God to my false self. If I detach from my illusory self, God develops my real self more fully. I can even recognize my true self, and discover that he's a great improvement over my false self. This is easier said than done, because I love myself greatly. It is my last hold-out against God. If I lose it, I seem to lose everything.

But I only seem to lose everything. Actually I gain Everything. This is the truth. The truth is humility. So Teresa acknowledges: "Here true humility can enter the picture", 75. Her account of humility is complicated because she sees everything so clearly that she unites many things clearly in her mind. But we do not see how they unite. She sees humility and detachment as mutually reinforcing virtues. Virtue means strength or power. If we practice an act, it becomes powerful. If we practice truth, truth becomes powerful. Humility is truth, so humility becomes powerful. By humility we identify false values. If we reject these false values, then true values emerge, as if from shadows. When we detach from false values, we naturally attach to true values. Teresa sees all this working together into one. That's why she provides such striking images, in figures of speech that we treasure. The two sisters becoming so powerful that they can vanquish hell, 76-77 describes humility working with detachment to release our souls from creatures. Then we can fly to God.

Teresa gives us simple steps to self-detachment. "Now, then, the first thing we must strive for is to rid ourselves of our love for our bodies, for some of us are by nature such lovers of comfort that there is no small amount of work in this area. And we are so fond of our health, that it is amazing what a war our bodies cause," 77. The first step to getting rid of self is to detach from the bodily part of self. Teresa gives many humorous examples of this detachment, 77- 80. But we advance to detaching from the soul part of self. This is the final battle. It is most difficult because the soul is so active that we can't pin it down. Teresa comes close to pinning it: [detaching from self is] "losing concern about ourselves and our own satisfaction", 82. Ultimately, we must give God our own will. "So let us try hard to go against our own will in everything. For if you are careful ... you will gradually, without knowing how, find yourselves at the summit. But how extremely rigorous to say that we shouldn't please ourselves in anything, when we do not also mention the great delight this going against or will carries in its wake, and what is gained by it even in this life", 82. Teresa's terminology directly addresses our selves. If we shift this term to false-self, we understand that we refuse to please our false selves. That enables our real selves to delight in going against our false wills. That's a great achievement for this life, and for eternity.

Our false will definitely desires personal honor. Teresa daggers directly to the heart with this: "It will be due to your vain esteem of honor that you will not be honored. Moreover, you will lose the benefit you could have otherwise gained; thus dishonor and loss will be joined together here", 83-84. This frontal attack on false honor is marvelously well phrased, and very helpful to everyone. It is so true that it rings like a fine bell. It reminds us that the sisters humility and detachment join forces in love. Love is so powerful that it derives good from evil. Teresa learned this from Jesus, whose detaching from divine honor to take the form or a slave brought the good of salvation out of the great evil of death on the cross. "Take this advice from me, and do not forget it: do not strive only in an interior way – for it would be a very great loss if we did not derive some benefit from these acts of humility – but strive also in an exterior way that the sisters derive some benefit from your temptation [to false honor]. If you wish to take revenge on the devil, and free yourself more quickly from temptation, ask the prioress, as soon as the temptation comes, to order you to do some lowly task, ... if possible, do it on your own, and ... study how to double your willingness to do things that go contrary to your nature. The Lord will reveal these things to you, and in this way and as a result the temptation will last only a short while", 84.

Great wisdom radiates from these sentences. Teresa shows that seeking honor backfires. In that explosion, many benefits blow away. So the honor-seeker loses much more than his desired honor would have gained. Rather than suffer this double loss, Teresa shows how to extract good from evil. Temptation is evil, and yielding to it is worse. But we can gain interior and exterior benefits by proper use of temptations. When tempted to rip off (arrogate) honor, ask your superior to assign you a humiliation. You can even do this yourself, thus turning the temptation to benefit. God shows how to counter your will, and thus eliminate your false self, making way for the real you. In her phrase, "you take revenge on the devil. The soul ends up with so much gain that the devil doesn't dare return another day, lest he get his head crushed", 84.

Teresa's way to say "eliminate your false self" is to kill it. This mortification, or killing, vitalizes the true self. If you want the "real you" to emerge, you must reject lies, or false images of yourself. Similarly, you must reject false ideals like becoming rich and famous. Teresa gives many examples, including false injuries, 85. The "oppressed" show how claiming false injuries poison many lives. If we chose truth, then we distinguish between the false self and the real one.

Mortifying the false one makes sense, so that the real one can flourish. Remember, that's how Teresa became a shining example of being real. Her reality was "right down to the ground", blending theory with practice into a complete person. She is the finest example of mortifying the false self, so that her true self could scintillate.

The false self imposes itself upon you and upon others. So its favorite expression is "I was right". Unfortunately, the false self is often wrong. Teresa states this problem well: "... you should run a thousand miles from such expressions as: 'I was right.' [and] 'They have no reason for doing this to me' [or] 'The one who did this to me was wrong'. God deliver us from this poor way of reasoning. Does it seem to have been right that our good Jesus suffered so many insults, and was made to undergo so much injustice? ... Could you by chance suffer as much as you deserve? What kind of reasoning is this? I certainly don't understand it", 85-86. Teresa stabs directly to the heart of selfishness here. The false self always aggrandizes, always bloats, its goodness. It's false because it claims what it does not have. Jesus did the opposite. He hid his divinity in His humanity. He took our sins to His sinless being. His good example inspires us. We deserve much more suffering than we will ever get. To be more real, we need to kill our false self. We need to get rid of self-inflated lies.

Because our false self is so close to us, because we mistake it for our real self, we strain to see it. Maybe we get a peek at it now and then, when its lies collapse in chaos. This collapse devastates us. We can't imagine what went wrong with our plans. Surely we deserved much better than that. We begin to blame as many people as we can imagine. We want to distract folks from our grotesque gaffe. Teresa recommends that we kill this false self before it imposes its lie upon us. She shows us how to do that in chapter 15. Recognizing her fiery pursuit of each topic that comes up, she says: "But what disorder in the way I write! Really, it's as though the work were done by one who doesn't know what she's doing" 90.

For sure, her writing is poorly organized. She does ramble off into side issues. She even jokes that the fault is "yours, sisters, because you are the ones who ordered me to write this. Read it as best you can, for I am writing it as best I can. And if you find that it is all wrong, burn it", 90. In spite of all the details that apply only to her convents, Teresa gives so many universal truths, that no one burned her writings. She does not present all her insights to detachment in one place, or in an orderly sequence. But she gives such gems of wisdom that we rejoice in them as we find them. To summarize, she insists that detachment is "not paying attention to what does not bring us closer to God", Dubay 150. More precisely, detachment is "never indulging our own will and desire, even in small things", 150. Dubay reminds us that this is classical Christianity, mentioned memorably in Titus 2:12, and 1 Cor 10:31. Jesus teaches us our real self, and asks us to discard our false self. That's how we grow into reality, by rejecting the old man, and rejoicing in the new, 2 Cor 5.17.

It is hard to mortify my false self. But if I do it, then my real self will flourish. Because my false self is so close to me, I seldom distinguish it from my real self. When I do, I must quickly reject that lie. Teresa did a fine job, but found her efforts lacking: "For even though You gave me the natural temperament to abhor the lie, I myself in dealing with many things, have lied. How do You bear it, My God", Dubay 151. Let's keep trying, because God bears it lovingly.

#### St. Teresa of Avila's Third Step: Humility Fourth Presentation

Teresa was so devoted to truth that she naturally loved humility, which is truth. Usually, we use the word humility to mean selling ourselves short. It's popular and can be productive. "Humility with a hook" can extort complements. But it's a misuse of the word. Humility is actually what's happening. If we describe what's going on as it goes on, we are humble. Teresa learned humility from Jesus. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.* Phil 2:5-8 God Himself, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity did not stand on His dignity, but emptied Himself of His glory. So we should empty ourselves of our false pride. God Himself took the form of a slave to sin, like humans, and be born in human likeness. So we should serve others likewise. If God Himself could take on the limitations of human form, and die for us, we should live the truth in full humility.

Teresa uses more earthy images: "Either we are brides of so great a King, or we are not. If we are, what honorable woman is there who does not share in the dishonors done to her spouse ... ? Now then, to enjoy a part of His kingdom, and want no part of His dishonors and trials, is nonsense. May God not allow us to refuse the latter...", 86. Her position is so truthful that it hits us hard. If Jesus endured insult and death for us, why would we hesitate to do as much for Him? It is all so clear. Naturally, my false self tells me that I am too good to suffer insult, much less death. But these are the lies we want to exterminate. Then we're on the way to reality. If we reach reality, we become our true selves.

Teresa's second example is Our Lady, Mary our mother. "Let us, my daughters, imitate in some way the great humility of the Blessed Virgin, whose habit we wear, for it is embarrassing to call ourselves her nuns. However much it seems to us that we humble ourselves, we fall far short of being the daughters of such a mother, and the bride of such a spouse", 86. Mary is God's mother. But she never sought honor. She kept her secret in perfect truth, or humility. Imagine what a mother of so prominent a man as Jesus might have done, if she had been proud. The airs she could have put on would embarrass even Hollywood. The proud mother would self-congratulations us to death. But because Mary was humble, she left all false pride behind, and loved perfectly. She continues to inspire us to be real, as she inspired Teresa.

When life is comfortable, and no trials strike us, we seem to be humble, because it's easy to act humble. Everything is going our way. False humility disappears when we're stressed. Teresa notes: "Thus even though we are blamed for

faults we haven't committed, we are never entirely without fault, as was the good Jesus. O my Lord, when I think of the many ways You suffered, and how You deserved none of these sufferings, I don't know what to say about myself, nor do I know where my common sense was when I didn't want to suffer, nor where I am when I excuse myself. You already know, my Good, that if I have some good, it is a gift from no one else's hands but Yours. Now, Lord, what costs You more, to give much or little? If it is true that I have not merited this good, neither have I merited the favors You have granted me. Is it possible that I have wanted anyone to feel good about a thing as bad as I, after so many evil things have been said about You, who are the Good above all Goods? Don't allow, don't allow, my God – nor would I ever want You to allow – that there be anything in Your servant that is displeasing in Your eyes. Observe, Lord, that mine are blind and satisfied with very little. Give me light, and grant that I may truly desire to be abhorred by all, since I have so often failed You Who have loved me so faithfully", 92. What passion! What fire! What love of Love in the flesh, Who teaches Love!

Perhaps she deals too great a dose of truth. If her message shakes us, we need to be more founded upon Truth. It's good exercise to follow her excursions into Truth. Practice strengthens us. We have suffered fake offenses to our fake selves, sunk in pride. We can overcome them. But what of real offenses? What of blame for uncommitted faults? Unless we are firmly founded in truth, we fall apart. So each real offense is valuable. It helps us grow more truthful, more humble. Everything that Teresa mentions in that paragraph fits us so well that it could have been written just for us. If we dwell on this set of truths, we recognize our need for humility. Let us advance in truth to become ever more humble.

Are you worried that if you're humble, people will run all over you? Teresa considered that possibility. "And do you think, daughters, that when you do not excuse yourselves, there will be lacking someone to defend you? Observe how the Lord answered for the Magdalene, both in the house of the Pharisee, and when her sister accused her, Lk 7:36-40; 10:38. He will not be as harsh with you as He was with Himself, for at the time that one of the thieves defended Him, He was on the cross, Lk 23:41. So His Majesty will inspire someone to defend you; and when He doesn't, the defense won't be necessary. I have seen this, and It is true", 93. Truth clears confusion away. Her encouraging word is: when we need defending, God will do it. If He does not defend us, we don't need defending. Check your experience to note this truth.

She continues: "But I wouldn't want you to be thinking about being defended, but that you rejoice in being blamed; and time will be the witness to the benefit you will see in your soul. For one begins to obtain freedom, and doesn't care whether they say good or evil of him, but rather thinks of what is said as though it were another's affair. The situation is like that in which we have two persons talking together, but not to us; we then don't care about answering. ... it doesn't seem they are speaking to us. This will seem impossible to those of us who are very sensitive, and little mortified. In the beginning it is difficult, but I know that such freedom, self-denial, and detachment from ourselves can, with God's help, be attained", 93. Teresa zooms right into the main benefit of humility. Humility **frees** us from a raft of false ideas and ideals. These fakes can drag us down. But truth delivers us from them. Once delivered, we are free as birds. A super-sensitive person is dying for fear that someone will say something offensive. A truthful person isn't worried what people say. It's as if those sayings were said to someone else. That's the freedom we want. How can we be humble?

"...it is only right that you should try to understand how to train yourselves a great deal in humility. In fact, this is an important aspect of prayer, and indispensable for all persons who practice it. How could a truly humble person think he is as good as those who are contemplatives? Yes, it is true, God can make you a contemplative – through His goodness and mercy; but ... one should always take the lowest place, for this is what the Lord told us to do, and taught us in deed, Lk 14:10. Prepare yourself so that God may lead you along this path if He so desires. When He doesn't, you can practice humility, which is to consider yourself lucky to serve the servants of the Lord, and praise His Majesty because he brought you among them... God doesn't lead all by one path, and perhaps the one who thinks she's walking along a very lowly path, is in fact higher in the eyes of the Lord", 99. Teresa reminds us that God's ways are not ours, Rom 11:33. She gives these examples about prayer. But we recognize the truth that we do not need to excel at any activity, including prayer.

Some people enjoy prayer, deriving many delights from it. Others discover no delights at all. Teresa noted: "Those who do not receive these delights walk with humility, suspecting that this lack is their own fault, always concerned about making progress. They don't see any one shed a tear without thinking that if they themselves don't shed any, they are very far behind in the service of God. And perhaps they are much more advanced, for tears, even though they be good, are not all perfect. In humility, mortification, detachment, and the other virtues, there is always greater security. There is nothing to fear; don't be afraid that you will fail to reach the perfection of those who are very contemplative. St. Martha was a saint, even though they do not say she was contemplative. Well now, what more do you want than to be able to resemble this blessed woman, who merited so often to have Christ our Lord in her home, give Him food, serve Him, and eat at table with Him [and even from His plate]? If she had been enraptured like the Magdalene, there wouldn't have been anyone to give food to the divine Guest", 100. Nuns devoted to contemplation need this kind of profound humility, which admits failure to contemplate. This honesty leaves personal condition entirely in God's hand. We imitate their great humility in our activities. If we do our very best, and leave the results entirely to God, we're humble.

Teresa emphasizes "do our very best": "I don't say that we shouldn't try; on the contrary, we should try everything. What I am saying is that this is not a matter of your choosing, but of the Lord's. If after many years, He should give to each a certain task, it would be a nice kind of humility for you to want to choose for yourselves. Leave it up to the Lord of the house; He is wise, He is mighty, He understands what is suitable for you, and what is suitable for Him as well. Be

sure that if you do what lies in your power, preparing yourselves for contemplation with the perfection mentioned, and that if He doesn't give it to you (and I believe He will give it if detachment and humility are truly present), He will save this gift for you so as to grant it to you all at once in heaven", 101. Teresa insists that we "try everything". This means that we try one way, then another, then yet another, until we succeed, or until we die. Then we surely will attain contemplation all at once in heaven. Her sarcasm shows when she says it "would be a nice kind of humility" to reject what God chooses, and "choose for yourselves". Of course, she intends that we do just the opposite. Humility is truth, and the truth is that whatever God provides for us is exactly what we should accept. He chooses, so we should choose the same. Teresa knows that He knows better what's right for us. We usually haven't a clue. His choice will be better than ours, so choose His choice. Contemplation is every person's destiny. Exactly when we attain it in life varies. So God may provide it "at once in heaven". Since He knows best, we try our utmost, and leave the results to Him. That is truth, and that is humility.

Teresa notes: "He [God] wants to lead you as if you were strong, giving you the cross here below, something that His Majesty always had. What better friendship than that He desire for you what He desired for Himself? And it could be that you would not have received so great an award in contemplation. The judgments are His. There's no reason for us to become involved in them. It is good that the choice is not up to us, for then – since contemplation seems a more restful path – we would all be great contemplatives. O Wonderful gain, not to want to gain from following our own judgment, lest we suffer any loss! God, in fact, never permits any loss to come to a person truly mortified, save for a greater gain", 101. Here Teresa reminds us that God loves us so much that He treats us the way He treated Himself. He suffered for love of us, and asks us to imitate Him by suffering. This is the union that love is. If He wants us to have obvious results from contemplation, we love to accept His will. If not, we love to accept His will. Because contemplation is so delightful, we would all choose to be perfect contemplatives, if the choice were up to us. Since it's not, our choice is to accept what God provides. All human experience agrees with Teresa's that "God never permits any loss ... save for a greater gain". Since God wants the best for us, He provides it. Our humility is to accept His gifts, whatever they are.

Teresa sprinkles her writing with gems about humility, like: "You see, humility doesn't consist in refusing a favor the King offers you, but in accepting such a favor, and understanding how bountifully it comes to you, and being delighted with it. What a nice kind of humility! [Sarcasm again] I have the Emperor of heaven and earth in my house (for He comes to it in order to favor me, and be happy with me), and out of humility, I do not want to answer Him, or stay with Him, or take what He gives me, but I leave Him alone. Or, while He is telling me, and begging me to ask Him for something, I do not do so, but remain poor; and I even let Him go, for He sees that I never finish trying to make up my mind. Have nothing to do with this kind of humility, ... but speak with Him as with a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another; He will teach you what you must do in order to please Him. Don't be foolish; take Him at His word. Since He is your Spouse, He will treat you accordingly. Consider that it is well worthwhile for you to have understood this truth: that the Lord is within us, and that there we must be with Him", 141. His word, and His deed, is that He loves us perfectly. So humility means trusting to accept His every gift. Teresa emphasizes that we ought to accept His love, rather than reject it because of false humility. Again, humility is truth.

The truth is that God loves us without end. If we acknowledged that truth, then we would absorb all His loving gifts. We would take everything that flows from His hand with the very love He gives it. Yes, this is quite different from our ordinary experience with humans. They never love completely, so we need to protect ourselves from them. But God's love is Entire. We never have to protect ourselves from Him. If we accept this truth, then we take Teresa's advice: be humble enough to accept all His gifts. He is Gift Himself, given to us Entirely. That's why Teresa can exclaim: "For I have felt, and have had, great experience of the gain that comes from freely abandoning my will to Yours. O friends, what a great gain there is here!", 161. Words fail her to describe that great gain. Words also fail me, but the gain is so great that I must try to point in God's direction. If I give my will to God, abandoning it entirely, to be united with His will, then He gives Himself. He is His will. I can stretch words to say He is Will Himself. When I abandon my false will, I get real. This real is true, so I get true. Truth is humility, so I get humble. Humble is accepting, so I accept Will. Will is Love, so I accept Love. I'm made for Love. So I finally do what I'm made to do. That makes me happy. What a great gain!

This gain is God. God is all Good. So I finally end up with Infinite Good. All I have to do is give away my false will. False will chooses creatures. Choosing creatures instead of God, deprives me of God. The creatures I chose instead are not worth having. So I have cheated myself all these years. If I finally choose truth, then I get Truth. Truth is also Good. So I finally get Good United with Truth, or God. If I am humble, I accept all these benefits that God offers. I get them all in One. No wonder Teresa prizes humility. No wonder she strains words to make them scream truth to us. Words don't point to Infinity unless we torture them. That's why Teresa turns to poetry, as we shall examine in our next session.

Meanwhile, Teresa explains that our prayer must inform our acts. The more we pray, the more we unite our wills with Will Himself. In practice, "All we can do is know ourselves, and what we are capable of, which is to give our will, and give it completely. Everything else encumbers the soul brought here by the Lord, and causes it harm rather than benefit. Only humility can do something, a humility not acquired by the intellect, but by a clear perception that comprehends in a moment the truth one would be unable to grasp in a long time through the work of the imagination about what a trifle we are, and how very great God is", 165. Uniting our wills with Will is not our own activity. God unites. His activity achieves this union. But we must agree with God. We must accept His Love, Which is His Will. He is utter simplicity. He is the

being that makes sense. He is the not-schizophrenic-being. All creatures are split into several pieces. Only Simplicity Himself can hold them together for a while. Simplicity simply loves us together into unity. Simplicity loves us so much that He will hold us together for eternity. If we quit inventing lies, quit trying to unite with fragmenting creatures, then we let Him unite with us. Then we achieve Union by allowing Him to unite us. Union Himself wants us to be one. If we let Him, He Unites us. This is our destiny. Teresa recommends that we know ourselves, or know our destiny in One. Then we know that we must give our wills to Will. If we do, we act truly, humbly. Because we are so fragmented now, we need to give our wills often, and more completely every time, until we allow Completeness to complete us.

As Teresa affirms, “everything else encumbers the soul”. Why is everything else a burden? Because it is false, chosen by my false self. It is false because it is not Real Good Himself. My false self chooses it falsely, as if it could satisfy me. But it can’t. It merely betrays me. Then I try to force my choice to be true. This more-false choice further fragments me. I can spiral down toward more lies. More lies are less reality. I can spiral down to nothing. This is the famous choice mentioned in Deuteronomy: ***I have put before you life and death. Choose life.*** God wants us to live, to be true, to be humble. If I cooperate in His Will, then my true self emerges from hiding. Then I become real. This is the great gain Teresa mentioned. It’s a step toward the Great Gain for which I’m made. Humility gets me there by getting me past creatures, and into Will. The truth is that God does most of this work, if I really agree. That fits the truth I discovered long ago: God is great. I am small. Teresa calls herself a “trifle”. The great gain is that God loves each trifle, each of us.

Teresa speaks to everyone, at every time. Here’s a fine example: “Self-esteem is far removed from these persons [advanced lovers: mature people]. They like others to know about their sins, and like to tell about them [sins] when they are themselves esteemed. ... So it is to those to whom God grants the grace of this humility, and great love for Himself”, 181. As we advance, we become more virtuous, more integrated. This is God’s grace of advanced humility, which opens us up to advanced love of God. ***Everything works together unto good***, Rom 8.28. Because Teresa saw unity in Unity, she works words into fine expressions of reality. Here she shows us that truth, or humility, acknowledges how sinful we are, and how false self-esteem is. This is a fine way to apply all her teaching on humility to today. Pray that our humility grow.

#### **Teresa of Avila: Poem: *Coloquio Amoroso*, Loving Colloquy Fifth Presentation**

Kavanaugh, in Volume 3 of Teresa’s *Collected Works* gives us the main reason why we don’t know her poems. She separated her poetry from her teaching. Her great friend St. John of the Cross did just the opposite. He connected his poems to his teaching, making them integral parts of his doctrine, 371. Teresa explains her impulse to write poetry: “Oh, help me God! What is the soul like when it is in this state! It would want to be all tongues so as to praise the Lord. ... I know a person who though not a poet, suddenly composed some deeply-felt verses well expressing her pain. They were not composed by the use of her intellect: rather, in order that she enjoy the glory so delightful a distress gave to her, she complained of it in this way to God”, 371. Teresa knew that person well, because she felt that pain herself. She tells us that her poems are complaints to God. What is this fiery soul complaining about?

One complaint is her inability to express her profound experience of God. Her passion to love as God loves explodes in her poems. Kavanaugh puts this explosion well: “The impulses of love, pain over the absence of the beloved, joy in His presence, longings for death, and even a certain hatred of life, these are the common themes of lovers, and especially of mystics, the great lovers of God. In her ardent moments of love, Teresa was not interested in writing poems for their own sake; she wrote them as a release for the mystical fire she could no longer contain in her heart” 371. There are other reasons why Teresa wrote poems, but we will concentrate first on this passionate impulse to relieve her loving heart.

Perhaps her best known poem is precisely about that loving release. See called it *Coloquio Amoroso*, or Loving Colloquy. Because neither work, in Spanish or English, completely says what her heart experienced, she poured out the poem you can read here. Spanish is more expressive with fewer words than English. I hope you enjoy both versions.

Teresa used poems because prose fails to express her mystical experiences. Poems spring forth from feelings and images which resonate with one another to convey meaning that prose can't produce. If you read this poem a few times, images will spring up for you. If you entertain these images and emotions, you will get some of the benefit Teresa meant for you to have. There is no single interpretation to end all interpretations of her poems. Instead, there are personal reflections of great value. Most of these reflections can not be verbally expressed. Intricate combinations of image and emotions communicate messages poetically. No doubt, you have felt strongly about some impression you derived from a poem, only to discover that others disagree with your interpretation. Not to worry. Poems are valuable precisely because they affect people differently. In fact, they affect you differently, at different times. Agreement is not required for a poem. Poems escape agreements, and emerge into variation. Their value is precisely their ambiguity.

Please take time to let this poem sink in. Then you can tell us what impression it made on you. I will outline some impressions it made on me.

Teresa begins where we all start. Each of us has experienced love for God. It is the greatest experience we have. None of us have experienced being God. So we do not know what it's like for God to love us. However, we suspect that love is love. In some ways, it's the same for each lover. We would never suppose that each lover loves the other in exactly the same way. But generally the most important patterns of love, are the same. Teresa leaves it up to our imaginations when she asks the question "what detains me?" But we jump to the conclusion that she refers to our desire to unite with God. Her ambiguity artistically attracts our images. Union-desire is not the only aspect of love we could imagine. We review the several aspects that arise as possibilities. Eventually we see from the next two lines that union fits best.

Teresa images God speaking to her soul. How amazing it is that God deals with us at all. More amazing is that He deals so respectfully. He treats us as persons. His friendly interaction is familiar to us. When we let go of details, to live a poem, all these parts of our experience mix and mingle. Long-forgotten images bubble up. Delightful or dreadful, these images impress us. Moreover, we can enjoy playing with them. That's a great way to relate to poems, through play. Free images sprout forth from ambiguities artfully arranged by the poet. Play with the poem until it speaks to you.

Unresolved questions abound in life. Poems rouse them again, often in haunting images. Every one of us desperately wants to behold God. God asks Teresa what her soul desires of Him. The poem is not clear who is talking to whom until Teresa addresses the Who as God. This clarity-lack is appropriate for us because life is largely unclear. One poetic expression of this condition is: "Life is making adequate decisions with inadequate information". All that inadequacy bothers us because we want God, Who is Adequacy Himself. Lacking God is so painful that we want Him above all else.

So Teresa answers: I want nothing other than to see You. When we're playing with a poem, we realize that "see" is not eyeballing God. It transcends vision. It means spiritual union, which is much more united than our vision of any creature. Whatever we see with our eyes unifies the seer and the seen. The seer becomes the seen. This is marvelous. But spiritual union is even more marvelous. God becomes me, and I become God. Here on earth, I become God only partially. But I want to become God completely. So I want nothing other than to see Him. He is my all, because He is All.

God asks Teresa: What is it that you fear more than self? She replies: loss of You. Prose is prosaic. But poetry strikes powerful chords on the piano of our heart. Our images fail to fire us up into the heights of love. But Teresa aligns words that burst forth into a heavenly chorus of praise. All souls want to dissolve in God, to be hidden in Him. She breaks into Love-flame in union with Him. She desires nothing but to love more and more, and in love all hidden, again and again to love God. Teresa asks God for one all-possessing love, centered in Him, making a delightful nest, the best possi-

ble resting place. Love-to-love speaks this way; person-to-person. Poetry comes closer than prose to saying what happens.

This poem is too passionate for many English speakers. It is too familiar with God. But it's just right for Spanish souls. It is the proper blend of passion and familiarity. They understand that God loves them more than they can tell, and that they ought to return that love enthusiastically. They expect to be excited by God, and to long for Him painfully. They expect personal interactions with God. As Frances Parkinson Keys put it, Spain is the land of stones and saints. Life is hard, and people must be tough to survive there. Because there are so many fervent souls there, they most earnestly desire to excel in love. Nothing satisfies any human more than intimate love with God. He Who is Love loves completely, and we who are in His image strive to return His love completely. So this poem expresses the most complete life possible.

Fr. Adrian Cooney translated these verses with an ear to balancing accuracy with lyrical beauty. You notice that something is lost in translation. There is no way to avoid that loss. An example is *mi alma os tenga*. Literally it's: my soul takes you. He renders it as: my soul centered in You. Matters of taste in lyrics do not impede the overall meaning Teresa conveys. It is clearly a love-dialog. That's the most important point. A tiny detail is the use of *os* for *vos*, standing for you. Spanish says a lot with few words because it uses prefixes and suffixes to express meanings. English is less inflected, so it requires more words to say the same thing. E.g.: *que temes mas de ti*, in English is: what is it that you fear more than self? These 5 Spanish words translate to 9 English words.

None of these details make much difference. What counts is that we hear Teresa's message, that we imitate her love. She loves God so much that she inspires us to love Him more. We pray that she assist us toward loving colloquy.

**Teresa of Avila: Poem: *Buscando a Dios*, Seeking God Sixth Presentation**

After some reflection, what are your impressions?

A more literal translation of the first two lines is: Soul, you have sought yourself in Me, and have sought for me in you. This intriguing arrangement of words provokes profound thought. Each of us ponders how God is within us, and we are within God. Rich benefits flow from our consideration. The more we dwell upon this, the more it grows upon us. This reality rewards contemplation. We will dwell in this indwelling of God in us, and we in God, for eternity without exhausting its truth and goodness. Teresa's surpassing poetic skill shines forth in this versicle. Poets would die to craft it. Poets turn green with envy when they behold these two lines. And the poem has just begun. Teresa expands on this opening couplet with an image of God painting the soul's portrait so well that the soul exists. God creates the soul more completely than any painter creates an image. The soul is a person, transcending varying images as its body develops/decays.

The person is ultimately lovable, because God fashioned it for love. But the person is free. So no matter how beloved it is, it can refuse love. God fashioned it into a beautiful being, but it can make itself ugly. It can use its freedom to betray itself and God Who loves it so much. Therefore God can lose it, and it can lose God, but not if it seeks Him in it. The human soul, the person, loses track of God. Wondering where to seek Him Whom the soul desires, the soul should look into itself. There the Creator is in His creation. The Artist painted Himself into the soul He painted, which becomes the beloved person. Saying it this way is clumsy. Saying it as Teresa does in this poem is artistic. The poem is delightful to play with, and to contemplate. We derive great benefit from this play of images and emotion.

In the next stanza, Teresa moves from painting to dwelling. If we open the door to our soul, we allow God to enter His home. He built this room, or house, or castle to live in. But we, distracted, lock Him out. When we do, God forgives us, if we freely call Him to come to His home. Each image works because what God wants is beyond images and feelings. What God wants is real union. Only spirits unite, but images help us concentrate on our spiritual acceptance of our Creator, Painter, Architect. He created, painted, and built us for Himself. If we freely invite Him, He delights in His creation, His portrait, His castle, which we are. This poem released Teresa's great love for us to enjoy and join.

She also wrote teaching and devotional poems. These enrich her production, and our profit. She was so alive to all that happened, so receptive of every event, that she burned to share her perceptions with others who sought God through what's happening. As Kavanaugh points out in volume 3, p 371, these additional reasons provide us with many poems that help us come alive. Teresa captures rhythms of life and rhymes of language which relieve our grey days with delight.

Most critics declare that her poetry is excellent, though some disagree. Most critics agree that St. John of the Cross was the better poet. Records from her time indicate that many of her poems were never recorded, and that many recorded poems were lost. Some autograph fragments have recently been found, so hope springs up that more will be discovered. As scholars consider her work, a critical edition of her poems will be produced. Meanwhile, here's another.

**St. Teresa of Avila: Devotional/Teaching Poems: Abrazadas A La Cruz; El Camino de la Cruz** Seventh Presentation

## St. Teresa of Avila: Prayer 1 Eighth Presentation

Prayer is so important that we will devote three sessions to Teresa's way to pray. Her most famous statement about prayer is that it is friendly conversation with God. Because God has come to us by taking human nature in Jesus, he begins the conversation. He urges us to reply, and tells us such loving and consoling things, that at first prayer delights us. Once we discover that we must detach from creatures, prayer disappoints us. It least it is more difficult. But if we love God just a little like He loves us, then we face these more difficult things gladly, with light heart. As Teresa says, "If ... you are careful about your prayer, you will soon find yourselves gradually reaching the summit of the mountain without knowing how". The difficult task of detaching from creatures is like climbing a mountain. It is a strain. We must make efforts. But if we keep going, we gradually get to the summit. Then we rest, enjoy the view, and are glad we got there.

In her *Way of Perfection*, Chapter 19, Teresa gives us a great summary of prayer. In Kavanagh, this starts on page 106. First, she addresses beginners: "There are some souls and minds so scattered they are like wild horses no one can stop. Now they're running here, now there, always restless. ... This restlessness is either caused by the soul's nature, or permitted by God. I pity those souls greatly, for they seem to be like very thirsty persons who see water in the distance, but when they want to go there, they meet someone who prevents their passing from the beginning through the middle to the end. It happens that after they have conquered the first enemy through their labor – and through a great deal of labor – they let themselves be conquered by the second; they would rather die of thirst than drink water so costly. Their efforts cease, their courage fails. And when some have the courage to conquer the second class of enemy as well, their strength gives way when they meet the third, and perhaps they were no more than two steps from the fount of living water, of which the Savior said to the Samaritan women, 'whoever drinks of it will never thirst', Jn 4:14. How right and true, as words coming from the mouth of Truth Itself, that such a person will not thirst for anything in this life – although thirst for the things of the next life increases much more than can ever be imagined through natural thirst! How thirsty one becomes for this thirst! The soul understands the great value of this thirst, and even though the thirst is a most painful, wearying one, it brings with it the very satisfaction by which it is assuaged, in such a way that it is a thirst unquenchable except in earthly things. Indeed, this thirst slakes in such a way that when God satisfies the thirst, the greatest favor He can grant the soul is to leave in it this same need – and a greater one – to drink the water again", 107.

This description shows the way to overcome scatterbrain distractions: persist. Keep trying. Never give up, and God will reward our efforts. Scattering my brain does not gather it together. Only gathering it reduces scatter. Yes, I have a long history, with many instances of scattering. But I have a few successes. I have taken two steps in the same direction. Now I want to take three, then four... This persistence is what Teresa means by being careful. Then we find ourselves at the summit of the prayer-mountain. Getting there is mostly God's fault, but He won't lift us unless we let Him. Images tumble from Teresa's mind. This wild horse figure of speech is quite appropriate for beginners. They suffer a buzz of conflicting images until they practice orderly steps. Then they get somewhere, and enjoy the resulting benefits. Taking orderly steps towards God gets us closer. Since God is our ultimate desire, getting closer satisfies us more.

At that point of satisfaction, Teresa changes her image to water. Indeed, we need water, and water satisfies. So in a small way, water represents God. At the start, we have to have water, and we try to get to the source just a few steps away. But we don't take those steps in order, so we don't get there, even though we can see the desired water. Picture the obstacles as enemies. If we overcome the enemy of laziness, then we take a step, but another enemy arises, perhaps distraction. We're back to scatterbrained behavior. The third enemy is pride: I'd rather die than drink. And we were so close!

Then Teresa switches to spiritual thirst. Just as Jesus said: whoever drinks from Him will never thirst again. That is how it works ultimately. But proximately, or right now, thirst for Jesus increases, as Teresa describes so passionately. Spiritual thirst for God increases without limit. God is infinite, and so's our thirst. But God is also infinitely satisfying. Teresa experienced anguished thirsting for God here below. Here we're separated from our Beloved, but grow more thirsty from quenching our thirst. How's that? Our thirst on Wednesday is, let's say, one gallon. God provides that gallon. Our thirst for that gallon is satisfied. But we grow by that gallon of God. We are now bigger, and can easily consume two gallons of God. By spiritual growth, we have doubled our capacity for God. So Thursday we need twice the gallons.

This does not sound good to us. We worry about prayer if it makes us more thirsty for prayer. This seems to be a losing proposition. Consider whether we're losing. As Teresa understands it, we're gaining. So she's happy to gain more gallon-capacity. Gallons of God are wonderful. Yes, we desire more. But God is infinite, so this process continues for all eternity. But on the other side of death, all is delight. There's no pain because in heaven we are not out of joint. Here on earth, we're out of joint, or crippled, or otherwise defective. If we pass our entrance exam, and get to heaven, we will be

in excellent shape, painless. Even beginners increase their capacity by drinking gallons of God. And the beat goes on.

Teresa then goes into the properties of water, comparing it to fire. We're already considered this relationship, so we move on a few paragraphs. Remember that water represents prayer: "By means of this living water, the Lord Himself takes up these cares [which once distracted us], for He doesn't want to entrust them to us. He so esteems our soul that He doesn't allow it to be occupied with things that can harm it during the time He wishes to favor it. Rather, He immediately places it near Himself, and shows it, in an instant, more truths, and gives it clearer understanding of what everything is, than we could have here below in many years. For our eyes don't see clearly; the dust blinds us as we walk. By this living water, the Lord brings us to the end of the journey without our understanding how." This living water cures our ills. It washes away our cares. God's love flows upon us in prayer, cleansing us in many ways. One way is to wash dust from our eyes. Then we see truths we greatly desire to know. After He washes us, we know more than scholars learn in many years. Though we don't know how God does it, we're glad he did it. Prayer increases our reality-contact, making us truly real.

The more real we are, the more we see that God is Love. The more we drink Love, we more we can drink Love, and the more thirsty we become. "... the love of God and desire for Him can increase so much that the natural subject is unable to endure it, and so there have been persons who have died from love. I know of one who would have died if God hadn't succored her immediately with such an abundance of this living water, for she was almost carried out of herself with raptures. I say that she was almost carried out of herself because in this water the soul finds rest. It seems that while she is drowning from not being able to endure the world, she is revived in God; and His Majesty enables her to enjoy what in herself she couldn't without dying", 111. It is as if, guzzling gallons of God splits us. We could die of Love. But Love loves us, and prevents that disaster. Instead, our capacity expands exponentially, as Teresa describes.

"It should be understood here that since there can be nothing imperfect in our supreme Good, everything He gives is for our good, and however great the abundance of this water He gives, there cannot be too much in anything of His. If He gives a great deal, He gives the soul ... the capacity to drink much; like a glassmaker who makes the vessel a size he sees is necessary in order to hold what he intends to pour into it", 111. The Glassmaker expands the vessel immensely.

"In desiring this water, there is always some fault, since the desire comes from ourselves; if some good comes, it comes from the Lord Who helps. But we are so indiscreet that since the pain is sweet and delightful, we never think we can have enough of this pain. We eat without measure, we foster this desire as much as we can, and so sometimes it kills. How fortunate such a death! But perhaps by continuing to live, we can help others die of desire for this death. And I believe the devil causes this desire for death, for he understands the harm that can be done by such a person while alive; and so at this stage he tempts one to perform indiscreet penances, so that one's health will be lost, which would be no small gain for the devil", 111. In prayer, we fail to unite our wills perfectly with God's. So we desire too much consolation.

"I say that anyone who reaches the experience of this thirst that is so impelling should be very careful because I believe he will have this temptation. [To prefer consolation to God.] And although he may not die of thirst, his health will be lost, and he will give exterior manifestations of this thirst, even though he may not want to; these manifestations should be avoided at all costs. Sometimes our diligence is of little avail, for we will be unable to hide everything we would like to hide. But when these impulses that so greatly increase this desire to die come, we should be careful not to add to the desire, but gently cut the thread with another consideration. For our nature at times can be as much as work as the love; there are persons who will vehemently desire anything, even if it is bad. I don't believe these persons will be very mortified, for mortification helps in everything. It seems foolish to cut short something so good; but it isn't. For I do not say that the desire is taken away, but that it is cut short, and perhaps by another desire as meritorious as the former", 111-112. Teresa warns against pigging out on prayer's delights. We can neglect our duties, especially our duty to stay healthy.

"I wish to say something in order to explain myself better; a great desire is given to see oneself with God, and to be loosed from this prison, like the desire St. Paul had, Phl 1:23. Pain for a reason like this must in itself be very delightful; no small amount of mortification is needed to break it off, and one will be unable to do so completely. Sometimes the pain is seen to afflict so much that it almost takes away one's reason. Not long ago, I saw a person of an impetuous nature who, even though she was experienced in going against her will – I think she had already lost it, as was seen on other things – was deranged for a while by the great pain and the effort that was made to conceal this pain. I hope that in so extreme a case, even though the experience may come from the Spirit of God, the humble thing is to be fearful, for we shouldn't think we have so much charity that it will put us in such straits", 112. Pain is often all we feel of growth.

"Why do you think, daughters, that I have tried to explain the goal, and show you the reward before the battle, by telling you about the good that comes from drinking of this heavenly fount, of this living water: So that you will not be dismayed by the trial and contradiction that is along the way, and advance with courage, and nor grow weary. For, ... it can happen that after having arrived, you will have nothing left to do but stoop and drink from the fount; and yet you will abandon everything, and loose this good, thinking that you have not the strength to reach it, and that you are not meant for it. Behold, the Lord invites all. Since He is truth itself, there is no reason to doubt. If this invitation were not a general one, the Lord wouldn't have called us all, and even if He called all, He wouldn't have promised: 'I will give you to drink', Jn 7:37 and Mt 11:28. ... I hold as certain that all those who do not falter on the way will drink this living water. May the Lord, because of Who He is, give us the grace to seek this living water as it should be sought, for He promises it", 113. Teresa's organization first encourages, then supports us along the difficult path of prayer. Jesus calls everyone to follow

Him along this path. Everyone is made to be a mystic. Some, like Teresa, are major mystics, but we are minor mystics.

The Lord will surely give us grace to seek the living water of prayer, but He awaits our agreement. We must pray for it.

#### St. Teresa of Avila: Prayer 2 Ninth Presentation

Teresa clarifies what she said: “It seems I contradicted in the previous chapter what I had said before. When I was consoling those who were not contemplatives, I said that the Lord had different paths by which to go to Him, just as there are many dwelling places. So I repeat it now. Since His Majesty has understood our weakness, He has provided after the manner of Who He is. But He did not say: ‘some come by this path, and others by another’. Rather, His mercy was so great, He excluded no one from striving to come to this fount of life to drink. May He be blessed forever! And how rightly might He have excluded me! Now since He didn’t stop me when I started to walk along this path, nor order me to be thrown into the abyss, surely He excludes no one; Rather, He calls us publicly, crying aloud, Pr 1:20; Jn 7:37. But since He is so good, He does not force us; on the contrary, in many ways He gives drink to those who wish to follow Him so that no one will go without consolation, or die of thirst. Rivers stream from this overflowing fount, some large, others small; and sometimes little pools for children – for that is enough for them, and moreover it would frighten them to see a lot of water. These children are the ones who are at the beginning. So, sisters, do not fear that you will die of thirst on this road. Never is the lack of consoling water such that it can not be endured. Since this is so, take my advice, and do not stop on the road, but, like the strong, fight ever to death in the search, for you are not here for any other reason than to fight. You must always proceed with this determination to die rather than fail to reach the end of the journey. If even though you do proceed, the Lord should lead you in such a way that you are left with some thirst in this life, in the life that lasts forever He will give you to drink in great plenty, and you will have no fear of being without water. May it please the Lord that we ourselves do not fail, amen” 114.

This prayer pulses with passion. Just reading it reveals Teresa at her fiery best. She was so humble that she corrected any false impressions she made. In this case, she said in one place that not every nun should contemplate, than in another that contemplation is the only way to be. Here, she distinguishes the timing. God calls each and every person to contemplate Him for all eternity. There is no other ultimate destination. The road to that destination is the same. But some people stay close to the start most of their lives, while others make great progress. The timing makes the difference.

“Now that you might so walk along this path of prayer that you do not go astray at the beginning, let us deal a little with how this journey must begin; for the beginning is the more important part – indeed it is the most important part for everything. I don’t say that if a person doesn’t have the determination of which I shall speak here, he should stop trying; for the Lord will continue perfecting him. And if that person should do no more than take one step, the step will contain in itself so much power that he will not have to fear losing it, nor will he fail to be very well paid. This situation can be compared to that of a person who uses beads to count indulged prayers. If he uses them once, he gains the indulgences; if he uses them more often, he gains more; but if he never uses them, keeping them rather in a chest, it would be better for him not to have them. So it is here; even though afterward a person may not continue on the same road, the little progress he may have made on it will have provided him with light so that he may walk well on other paths; and the greater the progress, the more light. In sum, even if later he gives up, he may be certain that it will not have done him any harm to have begun; for good never produces evil”, 115. Because prayer is friendly conversation with God, or Love, His love improves us every minute. So beginning to pray makes a huge difference in us, a great improvement. It may not look that way to us, but it is so. One reason we don’t notice improvement is that God is so much better. He’s infinite. Even a bit of exposure to Him, the merest glimpse, alters our perspective. The tiny bit we know of God, dwarfs all creatures, even us.

Teresa warns her sisters: “God is your business, and language. Whoever wants to speak to you must learn this language, and if he doesn’t, be on your guard that you don’t learn his; it will be a hell”, 116. Naturally, Teresa is not referring to the Spanish language. Instead, she means commitment. If we are not committed to God, but commit to whatever “everyone” is talking about, then we desecrate our devotion to God. We put strange gods in His place. This self-destructs. Self-destruction is hell. Teresa is way ahead of us, so we scramble to catch up with her understanding.

“Do not be frightened, daughters, by the many things you need to consider in order to begin this divine journey which is the royal road to heaven. A great treasure is gained by traveling this road; no wonder we have to pay what seems to us a high price. The time will come when you will understand how trifling everything is next to so precious a reward. Now returning to those who want to journey on this road, and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from the water of life, I say that how they are to begin is very important – in fact, all important. They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don’t have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses. You will hear some persons frequently making objections: ‘there are dangers’; ‘so-and-so went astray by such means’; ... ‘they don’t need these delicacies’; ‘the Our Father and the Hail Mary are sufficient’, 117-118. Wishy-washy approaches are doomed to fail. Be determined, stick with prayer, whether consoled or desolate.

Teresa knew that saying the Our Father was enough prayer, but we must say it with profound attention. To help us pray this way, she explains mental prayer. “Realize, daughters, that the nature of mental prayer isn’t determined by whether or not the mouth is closed. If while speaking I thoroughly understand and know that I am speaking with God, and I have greater awareness of this than I do of the words I’m saying, mental and vocal prayer are joined. If, however, others

tell you that you are speaking with God while you are reciting the Our Father, and at the same time in fact thinking of the world, then I have nothing to say. But if you are to be speaking, as is right, with so great a Lord, it is good that you consider whom you are speaking with as well as who you are, at least if you want to be polite”, 121. In short, don’t recite mere words. Instead, consider the meaning and value of what you recite. Otherwise it’s automatic mouthing of nothing.

“I shall always have to join mental prayer to vocal prayer”, 122. She insists on this because we must pay attention to the words we say. Attending to our words is mental prayer. “You are right in saying that this vocal prayer is now in fact mental prayer. But I tell you that surely I don’t know how mental prayer can be separated from vocal prayer, if the vocal prayer is to be recited well, with an understanding of whom we are speaking to. It is even an obligation that we strive to pray with attention. Please God that with these remedies we shall recite the Our Father well, and not end up in some other irrelevant thing. I have experienced this sometimes, and the best remedy I find is to strive to center the mind upon the one to whom the words are addressed. So be patient, and strive to make a habit out of something that is so necessary”, 130.

“To keep you from thinking that little is gained through a perfect recitation of vocal prayer, I tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father, … the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation. By these means His Majesty shows that He listens to the one who speaks to Him. And it is His grandeur that speaks to the soul, suspending one’s intellect, binding one’s imagination, and as they say, taking the words from one’s mouth; for even though the soul may want to do so, it cannot speak unless with great difficulty”, 131. Teresa distinguishes between merely vocal prayer, vocal plus mental prayer, and contemplative prayer. Merely vocal prayer is saying one thing while thinking another. Vocal plus mental prayer is coordinating what I’m saying with what I’m thinking. Contemplative prayer is God raising us up from our activities to participate in His activity. When God raises us up, He involves us in His act, which is so far above our acts that our acts must cease. This is what Teresa calls suspending or binding or taking from. God must stop those lesser activities in order to infuse the higher activity of doing what God does. This is Love, to unite in act.

“The soul understands that without the noise of words, this divine Master is teaching it by suspending its faculties, for if they were to be at work, they would do harm rather than bring benefit. They are enjoying without understanding how they are enjoying. The soul is being enkindled in love, and it doesn’t understand how it loves. It knows that it enjoys what it loves, but it doesn’t know how. It clearly understands that this joy is not a joy the intellect obtains merely through desire. The will is enkindled without understanding how. But as soon as it can understand something, it sees that this good cannot be merited or gained through all the trials one can suffer on earth. This good is a gift from the Lord of earth and heaven, who, in sum, gives according to who He is. What I have described, daughters, is perfect contemplation”, 131.

Perfect contemplation is the ultimate goal of prayer. When God raises us up to Himself, and unites with us, we achieve heavenly bliss. Unfortunately, it’s only for a time, but it’s a good reminder of our ultimate destiny. Obviously, our sensory and intellectual acts work on creatures. So if they continued to act in contemplative prayer, they would distract us from our Creator. God must suspend them, to keep them from interfering in uniting to Him. It’s a great trade.

“Now you will understand the difference that lies between perfect contemplation and mental prayer. Mental prayer consists of what was explained: being aware and knowing that we are speaking, with whom we are speaking, and who we ourselves are who dare to speak so much with so great a Lord. To think about this and other similar things, of how little we have served Him, and how much we are obliged to serve Him, is mental prayer. … To recite the Our Father … is vocal prayer. But behold what poor music you produce when you do this without mental prayer. Even the words will be poorly pronounced at times. In these two kinds of prayer, we can do something ourselves, with the help of God. In the contemplation I now mentioned, we can do nothing; His Majesty is the one who does everything, for it is His work, and above our nature. ”, 131-132. Keep going until God raises you up to infused contemplation. See also her *Life*, chs 14-31.

Teresa notes that we pray best alone, without distractions. She recommends: “… since you are alone, strive to find a companion. Well what better companion than the Master Himself, who taught you this prayer? Represent the Lord Himself as close to you, and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you. Believe me, you should remain with so good a friend as long as you can. If you grow accustomed to having Him present at your side, and He sees that you do so with love, and that you go about striving to please Him, you will not be able … to get away from Him; He will never fail you; He will help you in all your trials; you will find Him everywhere. Do you think it’s some small matter to have a friend like this at your side? O sisters, those of you who cannot engage in much discursive reflection with the intellect, or keep your mind from distraction, get used to this practice! Get used to it! See, I know that you can do this, for I suffered many years from the trial … of not being able to quiet the mind in anything. But I know that the Lord does not leave us so abandoned; for if we humbly ask Him for this friendship, He will not deny it to us. And if we cannot succeed in one year, will succeed later. Let’s not regret the time that is so well spent. Who’s making us hurry? I am speaking of acquiring this habit, and of striving to walk alongside this true Master. … I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him. For who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord, even if you do just for a moment, if you can’t do more? You can look at very ugly things; won’t you be able to look at the most beautiful thing imaginable?”, 133-134.

### **Teresa of Avila: Prayer 3: Tenth Presentation**

Prayer is personal interaction with God, through Jesus, Who came to us so that we can go to God. Teresa calls this looking. “… daughters, your Spouse never takes His eyes off you. He has suffered your committing a thousand ugly offenses and abominations against Him, and this suffering wasn’t enough for Him to cease looking at you. Is it too much to

ask you to turn your eyes from these exterior things in order to look at Him sometimes? Behold, He is not waiting for anything else, as He says to the bride, Song 2:14, than that we look at Him. In the measure you desire Him, you will find Him. He so esteems our turning to look at Him, that no diligence will be lacking on His part”, 134. Teresa affirms that Jesus always attends to us. We drift away from loving union. He waits for us to return freely. He wants to unite with Him.

Uniting with Him means that we want to be what He is. He wants to be what we are. He wants us to improve, so that we will become Him. So we want to identify with Him, as best we can. One way is to unite our emotions. His emotions are completely integrated, but ours are split up. So our emotions need to be stabilized by His. Teresa recommends: “if you are experiencing trials, or are sad, behold Him on the way to the garden: what great affliction He bore in His soul: for having become suffering itself. He tells us about it, and complains of it. Or behold Him bound to the column, filled with pain, with all His flesh torn in pieces for the great love He bears you: so much suffering, persecuted by some, spit on by others, denied by His friends, abandoned by them, with no one to defend Him, frozen from the cold, left so alone that you can console each other. Or behold Him burdened with the cross, for they didn’t even let Him take a breath. He will look at you with those eyes so beautiful and compassionate, filled with tears; He will forget His sorrows so as to console you in yours, merely because you yourselves go to Him to be consoled, and you turn your head to look at Him. … Let us walk together, Lord. Wherever You go, I will go; whatever you suffer, I will suffer”, 134-135.

“What you can do as a help in this matter, is try to carry about an image or painting of this Lord that is to your liking, not so as to carry it about on your heart, and never look at it, but so as to speak often with Him; for He will inspire you with what to say. Since you speak with other persons, why must words fail you more when you speak with God? Don’t believe they will; at least I will not believe they will if you acquire the habit. Otherwise, the failure to communicate with a person causes both estrangement and a failure to know how to speak with him. For it seems then that we don’t know him, even if he may be a relative; family ties and friendship are lost through a lack of communication”, 136.

“It is also a great help to take a good book … in order to recollect one’s thoughts and pray well vocally, and little by little accustom the soul with coaxing and skill not to grow discouraged. Imagine that many years have passed since the soul left the house of its Spouse, and that until it returns to this house there’s a great need that it know how to deal with Him. For so we sinners are: our soul and our thoughts are so accustomed to wandering about at their own pleasure, … that the poor soul doesn’t understand itself. In order that it get to love remaining at home once again, a great deal of skill is necessary. If little by little this is not accomplished, we shall never do anything. And I again assure that if with care you grow accustomed to what I have said, your gain will be so great that even if I wanted to explain this to you, I wouldn’t know how. Draw near, then, to this good Master with strong determination to learn what He teaches you, and His Majesty will so provide that you will turn out to be good disciples. He will not abandon you if you do not abandon Him. Consider the words that divine mouth speaks, for in the first word you will understand immediately the love He has for you; it is no small blessing and gift for the disciple to see that his Master loves him”, 136-137.

“Our Father who art in heaven. O my Lord, how You do show Yourself to be the Father of such a Son; and how Your Son does show Himself to be the Son of such a Father? May You be blessed forever and ever! This favor would not be so great, Lord, if it came at the end of the prayer. But at the beginning, You fill our hands and give a reward so large that it would easily fill the intellect and thus occupy the will in such a way one would be unable to speak a word. Oh, daughters, how readily should perfect contemplation come at this point! Oh, how right it would be for the soul to enter within itself in order to rise the better above itself that this holy Son might make it understand the nature of the place where He says His Father dwells, which is in the heavens. Let us go forth from the earth, my daughters, for there is no reason that a favor like this should be so little esteemed, that after we have understood how great it is, we should still want to remain on earth”, 137. Teresa tells us in the next 11 chapters how to pray the Our Father. Jesus gave this prayer to us, so we know that it is the most perfect prayer. As Teresa unfolds it, we see that it is indeed the best of prayers. We see that Teresa prayed it thousands of times, and that God infused profound understanding of it in her soul.

Along the way Teresa identifies other prayer-stages. Striving to understand truths of salvation in our experience “is one of the ways of greatly slowing down the mind, and recollecting the soul”, 140. The prayer of recollection collects the fragments of our experience, and unites them into complete truths. This unites us with Complete Truth. “This prayer is called ‘recollection’ because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God. And the Master comes more quickly to teach it, and give it the prayer of quiet than He would through any other method… For centered there within itself, it can think about the Passion, and represent the Son, and offer Him to the Father, and not tire the intellect by going to look for Him on Mount Calvary… Those who by such a method can enclose themselves within this little heaven of our soul, where the Maker of heaven and earth is present, and grow accustomed to refusing to be where the exterior senses in their distraction have gone, or look in that direction, should believe they are following an excellent path, and that they will not fail to drink water from the fountain; for they will journey far in a short time. Their situation is like that of a person who travels by ship; with a little wind he reaches the end of his journey in a few days. But those who go by land take longer.”, 141-142. Recollection is a better method, faster and more accurate.

“Those who know how to recollect themselves are already out to sea, as they say. For even though they may not have got completely away from land, they do what they can during that time to get free from it by recollecting their senses within. If the recollection is true, it is felt very clearly; for it produces some effect in the soul. I don’t know how to explain

it. Whoever has experienced it will understand; the soul is like one who gets up from the table after winning a game, for it already sees what the things of the world are. It rises up at the best time, as one who enters a fortified castle to be safe from enemies. There is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things, and a renunciation of them in such a way that without one's realizing it, the eyes close so as to avoid seeing them, and so that the sight might be more awake to things of the soul. So anyone who walks by this path keeps his eyes closed almost as often as he prays. This is a praiseworthy custom for many reasons. It is a striving so as not to look at things here below. This striving comes at the beginning; afterward there's no need to strive; a greater effort is needed to open the eyes while praying. It seems the soul is aware of being strengthened and fortified at the expense of the body, that it leaves the body alone and weakened, and that it receives in this recollection a supply of provisions to strengthen it against the body", 142. Recollection frees us from bodily cares.

"Therefore, those who know how to recollect themselves are ... safer from many occasions. The fire of divine love is more quickly enkindled when they blow a little with their intellects. Since they are close to the fire, a little spark will ignite and set everything ablaze. Because there is no impediment from outside, the soul is alone with its God; it is well prepared for this enkindling", 143. Isn't this a fine way to describe this prayer that you have experienced?

"Well let us imagine that within us is an extremely rich palace, build entirely of gold and precious stones; in sum, built for a lord such as this [God]. Imagine too as is indeed so, that you have a part to play in order for the palace to be so beautiful; for there is no edifice as beautiful as is a soul pure and full of virtues. The greater the virtues, the more resplendent the jewel. Imagine also that in this palace dwells this mighty King who has been gracious enough to become your Father; and that He is seated upon an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart. ... [This is the] image I've used in order to explain recollection. ... [it] may be very helpful ... that we may truly understand that within us lies something incomparably more precious than what we see outside ourselves. ... I consider it impossible for us to pay so much attention to worldly things if we take the care to remember we have a Guest such as this within us, for we then see how lowly these things are next to what we possess within ourselves" 143-144. This is genuine self-esteem.

"So that the soul won't be disturbed in the beginning by seeing that it is too small to have something so great within itself, the Lord doesn't give it this knowledge until He enlarges it little by little, and it has the capacity to receive what He will place within it. ... The whole point is that we should give ourselves to Him with complete determination, and we should empty the soul in such a way that He can store things there or take them away as though it were His own property. And since His Majesty has the rights of ownership, let us not oppose Him. And since He doesn't force our will, He takes what we give Him; but He doesn't give Himself completely until we give ourselves completely", 145

"Well ... I want to explain this prayer of quiet. ... This prayer is something supernatural, something we cannot procure through our own efforts. In it, the soul enters into peace, or better, the Lord puts it at peace by His presence, as He did so to the just Simeon, Lk 2:29, so that all the faculties are calmed. The soul understands in another way, very foreign to the way it understands through the exterior senses, that it is now close to its God, and that not much more would be required for it to become one with Him in union. This is not because it sees Him with the eyes either of the body or of the soul. The just Simeon didn't see any more than the glorious little poor child. For by the way the child was clothed, and by the few people that were in the procession, Simeon could have easily judged the babe to be the son of poor people rather than the Son of our heavenly Father. But the child Himself made Simeon understand. And this is how the soul understands here, although not with as much clarity. For the soul, likewise, fails to understand how it understands. But it sees it is in the kingdom, at least near the King, who will give the kingdom to the soul. The state [of quiet] resembles an interior and exterior swoon; for the exterior man ... the body ... doesn't want any activity. But like one who has almost reached the end of his journey, he wants to rest, so as to be better able to continue; in this rest, his strength for the journey is doubled. A person feels the greatest delight in his body, and a great satisfaction in his soul. He feels so happy merely with being close to the fount that he is satisfied even without drinking. It doesn't seem there is anything else for him to desire. The faculties are still; they wouldn't want to be busy; everything else seems to hinder them from loving. But they are not completely lost; they can think of who it is they are near, for two of them are free. The will is the one that is captive here. If there is some sorrow that can be experienced while in this state, that sorrow comes from a realization that the will must return to the state of being free. The intellect wouldn't want to understand more than one thing; nor would the memory want to be occupied with anything else. Persons in this prayer see that only this one thing is necessary, and everything else disturbs them. They don't want the body to move because it seems they would thereby lose that peace...", 153-154.

#### St. Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle 1: Introduction & Structure* Eleventh Presentation

Teresa wrote this masterpiece as an extended analogy and image of the soul as a castle. She sketched this castle in the *Way to Perfection*. This castle is interior, as all souls are, and it has many qualities. We can't see spiritual qualities, so Teresa refers to them as rooms in the castle. This image allows us to track these invisible qualities. Teresa goes systematically through external qualities toward the central room, or our real self. Jordan Aumann summarizes this image, p 191, "Outside the castle there is darkness, and in the moat surrounding the castle there are loathsome creatures, crawling in the mud. Once the soul resolves to follow the path of prayer, and detaches itself from created things, it enters the castle, and ... prayer leads through three stages of active or ascetical prayer, and then through four stages of passive, or mystical prayer". This is the blueprint. It defines the structure that enables us to track our mystical life through its stages.

Fr. Dubay insists that: "The ... *Interior Castle* is not only her [Teresa's] most mature work; it is also the all-time

classic on the question of the development of prayer from its incipient beginnings to its mature fullness in the transforming union”, 73. This praise from an accomplished scholar means that Teresa surpasses many excellent spiritual writers. We see from the outline of her work that it covers the ground. The summary I will give does not reveal the sprightly way Teresa expresses these experiences, and the intriguing examples she provides. Subsequent presentations will quote Teresa to show these aspects of her work. Then you can see for yourself that Fr. Dubay was correct.

As we investigate the structure of Teresa’s masterpiece, remember that we’re delving into ***What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him*** 1 Cor 2:9. This introduction takes that statement seriously, and outlines Teresa’s account of what God has prepared for us. When we review her work in detail, look for these main themes: 1. everyone is born to be contemplative; we’re all mystics, and should enjoy working our way through the *Interior Castle*, first as a book, then as our life; 2. how can this account support and encourage me on the way to God; 3. how can I make the most of drinking the water of eternal life; when do I sip, when do I gulp, and when do I dissolve in it? In her autobiography, Teresa shows why she wrote this book: “I should like to explain this experience because we are dealing with beginners; and when the Lord begins to grant these favors, the soul itself doesn’t understand them, nor does it know what to do with itself. For if the Lord leads it along the path of fear, as He did me, it is a great trial if there is no one to understand it. To see itself described brings it intense joy, and then it sees clearly the path it is walking on. It is a great good to know what one must do in order to advance in any of these stages”, ch 14, #7, in Kavanagh, vol 1, p 136. Laying the groundwork is very important, the most important, for constructing the building. So Teresa devotes lots of time and energy to it. This is her 4<sup>th</sup> reason for the book. Her 5<sup>th</sup> reason is to provide mileposts, or markers along the way for others to gage their progress, as she says in *Way of Perfection*, p157. Her 6<sup>th</sup> and final reason is to make the best use of God’s gifts. They don’t come with printed instructions, so Teresa shows how to profit most from them. Without her advice, we might squander these gifts. Since God’s gifts overwhelm us, we can mistake what they are, and not even notice His benefits to us.

Fr. Dubay identifies these 6 reasons that Teresa gives. Then he appends two additional “motives for a careful study of the sevenfold development of contemplation” 75. 1. Knowing the stages increases our appreciation for each stage, because we see how it leads to the finished product. 2. The “splendor of contemplative fulfillment is a strong spur toward making all the sacrifices entailed in reaching it” 75.

Remember Teresa’s definition of prayer: “In my opinion, mental prayer is nothing else but friendly conversation, frequently talking alone with him whom we know loves us”, Aumann p 191. This conversation is not so much intellectual learning as it is loving. Nor is this conversation set in stone. There is no formula for it, though formulas may help at the start. Instead, the Holy Spirit leads the person through several formulas and a series of individualized activities. After all, God made each person to be unique, so He doesn’t treat any one the same as any other. Each soul can expect to travel through the 7 rooms of the castle at a different rate. The details of that travel will vary individually.

At first, each soul is so attached to creatures that God is not the first choice that each soul makes. Each soul in this stage of development can fall away into fatal sin. This first room is strange to us because it’s so different from the wilderness we lived in before. Some people fall into fatal sin, and exit this first room, returning to the wilds. In the second room, or mansion, (*morada* in Spanish), the soul begins to practice mental prayer intensely. But the person has many dry spells when the difference between delightful mental prayer and the present inability to attain that delight is painful. Teresa advises that those who have a hard time thinking consistently should repeat a vocal prayer slowly, and think about the words. But thinking is not the point. All our thinking should grow into loving. As we think about all that God has done for us, we should decide to love Him more. In the third, and last human-initiated prayer mansion, the soul advances as far as natural prayer can go. Everything that a person can do has been done. The person activated all his virtues to become recollected. So we call it the prayer of acquired recollection. In this state, the soul is so aware of God’s presence, that the soul is completely collected into attention to Him. This is living in the presence of God. With practice, we can extend this presence throughout the entire day. If we do, then this kind of prayer increases, and we submit more and more to God’s will. This submission is what love is. We want what God wants because we love God. We love God because He loves us first.

Teresa claims that mystical prayer, or passive-to-God prayer begins in the fourth mansion. It is the prayer of quiet because we are passive to God’s infusing Himself. God is so present to us that we have a vivid experience of Him. All that we want to do is enjoy His loving presence. Because He loves us so much, we want to love Him in return. There’s a lot of loving going on in this stage of development. While the intellect and will of the person are busy with God, the imagination and memory can still distract the person from God. Teresa noticed that possible distraction. She recommends remaining quiet, offering up images and memories to God, so that we grow strong in His loving presence. In her inimitable way, Teresa calls this “submitting oneself entirely to the arms of divine love”. If we do this, then we freely chose to give ourselves to God, and gradually unite imagination and memory with the rest of our abilities, fixing them on God. Since this is passive prayer, we can better express this process by saying that God captivates all our abilities. Naturally, we must agree to God’s love, and give him our abilities. God made us free, and will not have us any other way.

Teresa says that we advance to the more interior room of our castle when we enter the fifth mansion. Here, God unites with us more completely than ever before. We are never totally separated from God, since He creates us and keeps us in existence at every moment. But this quality of life is so united to God that we need to distinguish it from all the oth-

ers. So another mansion is a fine image to use. This mansion is simple union, which Teresa describes as: “when the soul turns in on itself, it cannot doubt that it is in God, and God is in it”, 339. There is a blending of the soul with God. The two become one in an extraordinary way. The soul knows this “not because of a vision, but because of a certitude remaining in the soul that only God can place there”, 339. This certitude makes magnificent difference to the blessed soul.

In the sixth mansion, Teresa notes that the soul and God engage to marry. It is the mystical espousal, or the out-of-self experience in union with God. This out-of-body experience sometimes can be visible. St. John of Capistrano levitated, or floated around during this experience. Often, there is nothing visible to others to indicate that this level of union is occurring. While this rapturous experience is very delightful, the soul also feels great pain as it detaches even further from creatures. Suffering is nearby, even if God and I are engaged. Much of that suffering is longing for God. Yes, I’m engaged to Him, but He’s in heaven, while I’m still stuck on earth. Separation is severe anguish.

Teresa calls the seventh mansion the top of living mystical experience. Here, the wish of Jesus is fulfilled: “That they may be one as I and the Father are one; I in them and Thou in me”, Jn 17:22. This is mystical marriage. This is transforming union. The human is transformed into God. God became man so that man could become God. In this stage, the soul achieves what Jesus came to accomplish. Most people never achieve this stage on earth, though we hope that their purgation prepares them to do so later. Many achieve it right before death. Some achieve it years before death. They are the ones who can tell us about it, as Teresa did. She tells us that the three Divine Persons communicate themselves so clearly that words cannot express either the intellect’s vision or the will’s love. Christ’s humanity is so present that the soul is more aware of Him than the apostles were during the Last Supper. How can this be? Consider what the apostles did just a few hours later: they all ran away. But the soul in transforming union will not run away. The difference is the interior presence of Christ. Transforming union makes the soul totally forgetful of self. Instead of attachments of creatures, the transformed self thirsts for suffering, to be like her beloved Christ. So the soul longs for persecution, for the salvation of souls. Perfect mystical life is apostolic life. As Teresa puts it, “Martha and Mary work together”, 448.

However, sanctity is complete conformity of the person’s will with God’s. As Teresa puts it, “as soon as we know that He wills a thing, we subject our entire will to it... The power of perfect love is such that it makes us forget to please ourselves in order to please Him who loves us”. How can we tell that we are doing God’s will? Obedience. If we obey legitimate authority, especially Church authority, then we can be sure that we are growing in love. Love of God is the very life of the soul, and the surest mark of holiness. Prayer gets us to this perfect love, since prayer teaches us to freely cooperate with God’s love. At this final stage of prayer, God tells the soul so much that there’s no end. As Teresa puts it: “Since the greatness of God is without limits, His works are too. Who will finish telling of His works and grandeurs?”, 427. With our wills completely united in this stage, God holds nothing back from us, and we nothing from Him.

As soon as God inclines such a united soul to do something, that soul does it. If you wondered how Teresa got so much done, this is the basic reason. In our times, consider Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or John Paul the Great. Their freedom through obedience, and their superhuman accomplishments tell us that they were in this culmination of prayer, the highest mystical state. In *Fire Within*, Fr Dubay relates this explosion of activity to our familiar Scripture quotes. Jesus insisted that He came not only that we might have life, but have it to the full (abundantly), Jn 10:10. St. Paul trumpets: *pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Eph 3:18-19. Teresa took these admonitions seriously, and strove to live them to the full. That brought her to the seventh mansion. One could never ask for a fuller life. All of us pray for such fullness. Let us pray that we attain it this side of death, or for sure on the other.

### St. Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle 2: First Room* Twelfth Presentation

In her prolog Teresa reveals her inner life, and intense union with God. Her will is God’s will. “Not many things that I have been ordered to do under obedience have been so difficult for me as is this present task of writing about prayer. First it doesn’t seem the Lord is giving me either the spirit or the desire to undertake the work. Second, I have been experiencing now for three months such great noise and weakness in my head that I’ve found it a hardship even to write concerning necessary business matters. But knowing that the strength given by obedience usually lessens the difficulty of things that seem impossible, I resolved to carry out the task very willingly, even though my human nature seems greatly distressed. For the Lord hasn’t given me so much virtue that my nature in the midst of its struggle with continual sickness and duties of so many kinds doesn’t feel strong aversion toward such a task. May He, in whose mercy I trust and who has helped me in other more difficult things so as to favor me, do this work for me” 281. She saw that obedience energized.

Teresa describes the “beauty and dignity of our souls... consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond, ... in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many dwelling places, Jn 14:2. ... the soul of a just person is ... a paradise, where the Lord says He finds His delight, Pr 8:31. What do you think that abode will be like where a King so powerful ... takes His delight? I don’t find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity. Indeed our intellects, however, keen, can hardly comprehend it, just as they cannot comprehend God; But He Himself says that He created it in His own image and likeness”, Gen 1:26-27, 283.

Teresa notes that most people do not notice their interior beauty. So she describes how to focus on God's gift of this wonderful soul, concretized as this castle. "... we must see how we can enter it. It seems I'm saying something foolish. For if this castle is the soul, clearly one doesn't have to enter it, since it is within oneself. How foolish it would seem were we to tell someone to enter a room he is already in. But you must understand that there is a great difference in the ways one may be inside the castle. For there are many souls who are in the outer courtyard, ... and don't care at all about entering the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, nor even how many rooms it has" 285-286. Teresa urges us to enter. "Insofar as I can understand, the door of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection. I don't mean to refer to mental more than vocal prayer, for since vocal prayer is prayer, it must be accompanied by reflection" 286. Prayer is being real, so that we can notice the reality of our souls. Unfortunately some souls sin.

"Before going on, I want to say that you should consider what it would mean to this so brilliantly shining and beautiful castle, this pearl from the Orient, this tree of life, planted in the very living waters of life, that is in God, to fall into mortal sin; there's no darker darkness, nor anything more obscure and black. You shouldn't want to know anything else than the fact that, although the very sun that gave the soul so much brilliance and beauty is still in the center, the soul is as though it were not there to share in these things. Yet it is as capable of enjoying His Majesty as is crystal capable of reflecting the sun's brilliance. Nothing helps such a soul; and as a result all the good works it might do while in mortal sin are fruitless for the attainment of glory. Since these works do not proceed from the principle, which is God, who is the cause of our virtue being really virtue, and are separated from Him, they cannot be pleasing in His sight. Since, after all, the intention of anyone who commits a mortal sin is to please the devil, who is darkness itself, not God, the poor soul becomes darkness itself" 288. Many of us today forget this dark side of man. If we regained our sense of sin, we'd improve.

Teresa describes her vision of souls in mortal sin. Throughout all this separation from God, chosen by man, God is faithful. He remains true to us, even if we betray Him. "It should be kept in mind here that the fount, the shining sun that is in the center of the soul, does not lose its beauty and splendor; it is always present in the soul, and nothing can take away its loveliness. But if a black cloth is placed over a crystal that is in the sun, obviously the sun's brilliance will have no effect on the crystal, even though the sun is shining on it. O souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ! Understand and take pity on yourselves. How is it possible that in realizing these things you don't strive to remove the pitch from this crystal? See that if your life comes to an end you will never again enjoy this light. O Jesus, how sad a thing it is to see a soul separated from this light! How miserable is the state of those poor rooms within the castle! How disturbed the senses are, that is, the people who live in these rooms! And in the faculties, that is, among the custodians, the stewards, ... what blindness, what bad management! In sum, since the tree is planted where the devil is, what fruit can it bear?" 289

Teresa shows that God gifted her with a negative and positive impulse. Her negative one was to fear sin like the plague. Her positive one was to beg Him to keep her from sin. Praying under these impulses freed her from her earlier life of negligence, and launched her into spiritual growth. "The time you spend in reading this, or I in writing it, sisters, would not be lost if we were left with these two blessings. ... May it please His goodness to give us grace to profit by them. These interior matters are so obscure for our minds that anyone who knows as little as I, will be forced to say many superfluous and even foolish things in order to say something that's right. Whoever reads this must have patience, for I have to have it in order to write about what I don't know. Indeed some times I take up the paper like a simpleton, for I don't know what to say, or how to begin. I understand well that it's important for you that I explain some things about the interior life as best I can. ... Little is explained about what the Lord does in a soul... By speaking about this heavenly interior building, and explaining and considering it in many ways, we shall find great comfort. It is so little understood by mortals, even though many walk through it. And although in other things I've written the Lord has given me some understanding, I know there were certain things I had not understood as I have come to understand them now, especially certain more difficult things. The trouble is that before discussing them, ... I will have to repeat matters that are well known; on account of my stupidity, things can't be otherwise" 290-291. Teresa accounts for our human defects, and goes forward anyway.

Back to the castle: "you mustn't think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other; but turn your eyes toward the center, which is the room or royal chamber where the King stays, and think of how a palmetto has many leaves surrounding and covering the tasty part that can be eaten. So here, surrounding this center room are many other rooms; and the same holds true for those above. The things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious, and large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine, and the sun that is in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back, and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such great dignity. Don't force it to stay a long time in one room alone. Oh, but if it is in the room of self-knowledge! How necessary this room is ... even for those whom the Lord has brought into the very dwelling place where He abides. For never, however exalted the soul may be, is anything else fitting for it; nor could it be even were the soul to so desire. For humility, like the bee making honey in the beehive, is always at work. Without it, everything goes wrong. But let's remember that the bee doesn't fail to leave the beehive and fly about gathering nectar from the flowers. So it is with the soul in the room of self-knowledge; let it believe me and fly sometimes to ponder the grandeur and majesty of its God. Here it will discover its lowliness better than by thinking of itself, and be freer from the vermin that enter the first rooms, those of self-knowledge. For even though,... it is by the

mercy of God that a person practices self-knowledge, that which applies in lesser matters applies so much more in greater ones, as they say. And believe me, we shall practice much better virtue through God's help than by being tied down in our own misery" 291. This lengthy account is essential to situate us properly. We start distracted and defective, and grow.

"Knowing ourselves is something so important that I wouldn't want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you may have climbed into the heavens. While we are on this earth, nothing is more important to us than humility. So I repeat that it is good, indeed very good, to try to enter first into the room where self-knowledge is dealt with rather than fly off to other rooms. This is the right road, and if we can journey along a safe and level path, why should we want wings to fly? Rather, let's strive to make more progress in self-knowledge. In my opinion we shall never completely know ourselves if we don't strive to know God. By gazing at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness; by looking at His purity, we shall see our own filth; by pondering His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble" 292.

"Two advantages come from such activity. First, it's clear that something white seems much whiter when next to something black, and vice versa with the black next to the white. The second is that our intellects and wills, dealing in turn with the self now with God, become nobler and better prepared for every good. And it would be disadvantageous for us never to get out of the mire of our miseries. As we said of those who are in mortal sin, that their streams are black and foul-smelling, so it is here; although not entirely – God delivers us – for we are just making a comparison. If we are always fixed on our earthly misery, the stream will never flow free from the mud of fears, faintheartedness and cowardice. I would be looking to see if I'm being watched or not; if by taking this path things will turn out badly for me; whether it might be pride to dare begin a certain work; whether it would be good for a person so miserable to engage in something so lofty as prayer; whether I might be judged better than others if I don't follow the path they all do. I'd be thinking that extremes are not good, even in the practice of virtue; that since I am such a sinner, I might have a greater fall; that perhaps I would not advance, and would do harm to good people; that someone like myself has no need of anything special"

Teresa expands upon the damage done to souls by bad advice and especially by bad example. She worries that those of us who go into the first room or self-knowledge can fall to temptations. "I could give some very good proofs from experience of the wiles the devil uses in these first dwelling places. Thus I say that you should think not in terms of just a few rooms, but in terms of a million; for souls, all with good intentions, enter here in many ways. But since the devil always has such a bad intention, he must have in each room many legions of devils to fight off souls when they try to go from one room to the other. Since the poor soul doesn't know this, the devil plays tricks on it in a thousand ways. He's not so successful with those who have advanced closer to where the King dwells. But since in the first rooms souls are still absorbed in the world, and engulfed in their pleasures and vanities, with their honors and pretenses, their vassals which are these senses and faculties don't have the strength God gave human nature in the beginning. And these souls are easily conquered, even though they may go about with desires not to offend God, and though they do perform good works. Those who see themselves in this state must approach His Majesty as often as possible. They must take His Blessed Mother and His saints as intercessors so that these intercessors may fight for them, for the soul's vassals have little strength to defend themselves. Truly, in all states it's necessary that strength come to us from God. May His Majesty through His mercy give it to us, Amen." 293.

### **St Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle* 3: Second Through Fourth Rooms Thirteenth Presentation**

The second stage "pertains to those who have already begun to practice prayer, and have understood how important it is not to stay in the first dwelling places. But they still don't have the determination to remain in this second stage without turning back, for they don't avoid the occasions of sin. This failure to avoid these occasions is quite dangerous. But these persons have received a good deal of mercy in that they sometimes do arrive to escape from snakes and poisonous creatures, and they understand that it is good to avoid them. These rooms, in part, involve much more effort than do the first, even though there is not as much danger, for it now seems that souls in them recognize the dangers, and there is great hope they will enter further into the castle. I say that these rooms involve more effort because those who are in the first dwelling places are like deaf-mutes, and thus the difficulty of not speaking is more easily endured by them than it is by those who hear but cannot speak. Yet not for this reason does one have greater desire to be deaf, for after all it is a wonderful thing to hear what is being said to us. So these persons are able to hear the Lord when He calls. Since they are getting closer to where His Majesty dwells. He's a very good neighbor. His mercy and goodness are so bountiful; whereas we are occupied in our pastimes, business affairs, pleasures, and worldly buying and selling, and still falling into sin and rising again. These beasts are so poisonous and their presence so dangerous and noisy that it would be a wonder if we kept from stumbling and falling over them. Yet this Lord desires intensely that we love Him, and seek His company, so much so that from time to time He calls to draw near Him. And His voice is so sweet the poor soul dissolves at not doing immediately what He commands. Thus, as I say, hearing His voice is a greater trial than not hearing it" 297-298.

The second dwelling places, represent souls more attached to the Loving Lord, more recollected at prayer, less sinful, and faster to repent. But they fail to avoid occasions of sin. Snakes represent sins. Thanks to the Lord of Mercy, forgiveness follows quickly upon their request for it. Prayer-practice enables them to hear God more often, and to speak to him more coherently. God consistently calls them. But they lag. Hence it's a trial for them.

"Ah my Lord! Your help is necessary here; without it one can do nothing. In Your mercy do not consent to allow

this soul to suffer deception, and give up what was begun. Enlighten it that it may see how all its good is within this castle, and that it may turn away from bad companions. It's a wonderful thing for a person to talk to those who speak about this interior castle, to draw near not only to those seen to be in these rooms where he, is but to those known to have entered the ones closer to the center. Conversation with these latter will be a great help to him, and he can converse so much with them that they will bring him to where they are. Let the soul always heed the warning not to be conquered. If the devil sees that it has the strong determination to lose its life and repose, and all that he offers it rather than return to the first room, he will abandon it much more quickly” 300. So many things can happen here that the battle is undecided.

A defining quality of this stage is: “...you are truly determined to undergo exterior trials, provided that God favors you interiorly. ... His Majesty knows best what is suitable for us. There's no need for us to advise Him about what He should give us, for He can ... tell us that we don't know what He should give us, for we don't know what we're asking for” 301. The objective to attain in this second stage is “The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer – and don't forget this, because it's very important- should be that he work and prepare himself with determination, & every possible effort to **bring his will into conformity with God's will**. Be certain that, ... the greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. It is the person who lives in more perfect conformity who will receive more from the Lord, & be more advanced on the road. ... in perfect conformity to God's will lies all our good”, 301.

The third dwelling places open “To those who through perseverance and the mercy of God have won these battles” 304. This third stage is set by “**Blessed is the man who fears the Lord**. Ps 112:1. His Majesty has done no small thing in giving me understanding right now of what this verse means in the vernacular, for I am ignorant in matters like this. Certainly we are right in calling such a man blessed, since if he doesn't turn back, he is ... on the secure path to his salvation. Here you will see, sisters, how important it was to win the previous battles. I am certain the Lord never fails to give a person like this security of conscience, which is no small blessing”. 304. This relative security can falter.

Loss of consolation (dryness) is the main obstacle to remaining on this path. Enjoyment of prayer stops. The soul experiences absence, where God's delightful presence had been. Teresa calls it a minor trial, but it looks to the soul quite major. “I have known some souls, and even many... who have reached this state, and have lived many years in this upright and well-ordered way, both in body and soul ... After these years, when it seems they have become lords of the world, at least clearly disillusioned in its regard, His Majesty will try them in some minor matters, and they will go about so disturbed and afflicted that it puzzles me, and even makes me fearful. It's useless to give them advice, for since they have engaged so long in the practice of virtue, they think they can teach others, and that they are more than justified in feeling disturbed. In sum, I have found neither a way of consoling, nor a cure, for such persons other than to show them compassion in their affliction, ... 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. There is no reason for us to be surprised at what they experience; although I do think the feeling stirred by such things should pass quickly. For God often desires that His chosen ones feel their wretchedness, and He withdraws His favor a little” 309-310. Withdrawing His favor is a fine way to say drying up consolation.

This condition usually characterizes this stage of prayer. However, not everyone experiences it. What definitely determines this stage is “surrendering our will to God in everything, in bringing our life into accordance with what His Majesty ordains for it, and in desiring that His will, not ours, be done” 310. Therefore, “they study diligently to be prompt in obedience”, 310. The trial is uniting wills, abandoning “my way” for His way. Each person has different particulars to surrender, until he surrenders his entire will to Will Himself. This is the culmination of the personal-decision way.

Souls abandoned to Will allow Will to Love them more completely than before. “in order to begin to speak of the fourth dwelling places, I really need to entrust myself ... to the Holy Spirit, and beg Him to speak for me from here on, that I may say something about the remaining rooms in a way that you will understand. For supernatural experiences begin here. These are something most difficult to explain if His Majesty doesn't do so... May His Majesty help me... 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 unexperienced; and anyone who has experience, especially when there is a lot of it, will understand very well. It will seem that to reach these dwelling places, one will have had to live in the others a long while. Although it is usual that a person will have to have stayed in those already spoken about, there is no certain rule... For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires. Since these blessings belong to Him, He does no injustice to anyone” 316-317. Some attain it after 50 years of preparation, some, like Therese of Lisieux, after only 10.

This stage begins when God tells the soul many delicate things, which the soul could never figure out by natural means. Another sign is that sin is rare here: “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. The soul would not gain so much; at least all the things contributing to its merit would be removed, and it would be left in a habitual absorption. For when a soul is in one continual state, I don't consider it safe, nor do I think it is possible for the spirit of the Lord to be in one fixed state during this exile” 317. This exile is, after all, a time of trial.

Teresa affirms that the difference between this stage and the third stage is the difference between consolation and delight. Her Spanish words are *contentos* and *gosos*. "...the term 'consolation' ... can be given to those experiences we ourselves acquire through our own meditation & petitions to the Lord, those that proceed from our own nature – although God ... does have a hand in them; for it must be understood...that without Him we can do nothing, Jn 15:5. But the consolations arise from the virtuous work itself that we perform, and it seems that we have earned them through our own effort, and are rightly consoled for having engaged in such deeds. But if we reflect on this, we see that we experience the same joyful consolations in many things that can happen to us on earth; for example: suddenly seeing a person we love very much; succeeding in a large and important business matter, and or which everyone speaks well... In sum, joyful consolations in prayer have their beginning in our own human nature, and end in God" 317-318.

"The spiritual delights [gosos] begin in God, but human nature feels & enjoys them as much as it does... [consolations, *contentos*], and much more. O Jesus, how I long to know how to explain this!" Psalm 119:32: "Expands my heart" expresses it, but until we have the experience, we confuse delights with sensory goodies. Whoever experiences spiritual delights knows the difference between them and consolations. Often, the gift of tears comes with these delights. "My experience of this state ... is that if I began to weep over the Passion, I did not know how to stop... Our Lord granted me quite a favor. ... they end in God..." 318. *Gosos* begin and end in God. In His mercy, He includes us in this divine activity. "... in order to profit by this path, and ascend to the dwelling places we desire, 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, ... not to offend Him, and in asking Him for the advancement of the honor and glory of His Son, and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love" 319. Teresa discovered the difference between imagination and intellect. This helps greatly as we understand that *gosos* are more spiritual than *contentos* because they transcend the imagination. Even severe headaches, and "turmoil in my head doesn't hinder prayer, or what I am saying, but the soul is completely taken up in its quiet, love, desires, and clear knowledge" 321. In chapter 2, Teresa develops this with pictures of two different water sources. One requires lots of engineering to get the water from afar. That's human activity. The other just wells up, a gushing spring. That's God's activity. We get water either way, but more by God's activity. From God, we attain living water by not seeking it. "...when He is pleased to grant some supernatural favor, He produces this delight with the greatest peace and quiet, and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves. I don't know from where or how, nor is that happiness and delight experienced, as are earthly consolations, in the heart. I mean there is no similarity at the beginning, for afterward the delight fills everything; this water overflows through all the dwelling places, and faculties, until reaching the body" 324.

#### **St Teresa of Avila: Interior Castle 4: Fifth and Sixth Rooms** Fourteenth Presentation

"Sisters how can I explain the riches and treasures and delights found in the fifth dwelling places? I believe it would be better not to say anything about these remaining rooms, for there is no way of knowing how to speak of them; neither is the intellect capable of understanding them, nor can comparisons help in explaining them; earthly things are too coarse for such a purpose. Send light from heaven, my Lord, that I might be able to enlighten these Your servants – for You have been pleased that some of them ordinarily enjoy these delights – so that they may not be deceived by the devil transforming himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor 11:14. For all their desires are directed toward pleasing You. ... There are various degrees, and for that reason I say that most enter these places. But I believe that only a few will experience some of the things that I will say are in this room. Yet even if souls do no more than reach the door, God is being very merciful to them; although many are called, few are chosen, Mt 22:14. ... Yet few of us dispose ourselves that the Lord may communicate it to us. In exterior matters, we are proceeding well, so that we will reach what is necessary; but in the practice of the virtues that are necessary for arriving at this point, we need very, very, much, and cannot be careless in either small things or great. So, my sisters, since in some way we can enjoy heaven on earth, be brave in begging the Lord to give us His grace in such a way that nothing will be lacking through our own fault; that He will show us the way, and strengthen the soul that it may dig until it finds this hidden treasure, Mt 13:44. The truth is that the treasure lies within our very selves. This is what I would like to know how to explain, if the Lord would enable me to do so" 335-336.

"Don't think that this union is some kind of dreamy state ... I say 'dreamy state' because it only seems that the soul is asleep; for neither does it really think it is asleep, nor does it feel awake. There is no need here to use any technique to suspend the mind, since all the faculties are asleep in this state ... to the things of the world, and to ourselves. As a matter of fact, during the time that the union lasts, the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves, or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all the operations it can have while being in the body. The death is a delightful one because in truth it seems that in order to dwell more perfectly in God, the soul is so separated from the body that I don't even know if it has life enough to breathe. ... Nonetheless, its whole intellect would want to be occupied in understanding something of what is felt. And since the soul does not have the energy to attain to this, it is so stunned that even if consciousness is not completely lost, neither a hand nor a foot stirs, as we say here below when a person is in such a swoon that we think he is dead" 336-337. So the distinguishing mark of this state is separation from bodily experience because of

spiritual focus on God. God focuses us upon Himself. We can't achieve this intense union.

"... even if the experience in the dwelling place... is abundant, the soul remains doubtful that it was union. It doubts whether it imagined the experience; whether it was asleep; whether the experience was given by God; or whether the devil transformed himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor 11:14. It is left with a thousand suspicions" 337. These doubts are good, because deception is possible, and harmful. Later, Teresa says that serving God's people proves union with God. "Thus the soul is left with such wonderful blessings because God works within it without anyone disturbing Him, not even ourselves. What will He not give, who is so fond of giving, and who can give all the He wants?" 338. So another sure sign of this intense union is super-abundant gifts. "God so places Himself in the interior of the soul that when it returns to itself, it can in no way doubt that it was in God, and God was in it. This truth remains with it so firmly that even though years go by without God's granting that favor again, the soul can neither forget nor doubt that it was in God and God was in it. This certitude is what matters now, for I shall speak of the effects of this prayer afterward" 339.

Teresa uses the silkworm as an example of our transformation in Christ. Who would believe that an ugly fat worm could become a beautiful butterfly, emerging from a simple cocoon? If God can do that for material things, He can transform a spiritual soul from natural into supernatural, from human to divine. "Therefore courage, my daughters! Let's be quick to do this work, and weave this little cocoon by getting rid of our self-love and self-will, our attachment to any earthly thing, and by performing deeds of penance, prayer, mortification, obedience, and of all the other things you know. Would to heaven that we would do what we know we must... Let it die; let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do! And you will see how we see God, as well as ourselves, placed inside His greatness, as is this little silkworm within its cocoon. ... When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth. Oh greatness of God! How transformed the soul is when it comes out of this prayer, after having been placed within the greatness of God, and so closely joined with Him for a little while. In my opinion, the union never lasts for as much as a half hour. Truly, I tell you that the soul doesn't recognize itself. Look at the difference ... between an ugly worm and a little white butterfly; that's what the difference is here" 343.

Teresa then notices that the butterfly flits about, doing things for God, much more sensitive to His will. The soul is so active, that one analogy is not enough. Teresa refers to the soul as butterfly, dove, and bride. Each highlights an aspect of the transformed soul that occurs, but all of them together to not add up to the fullness of transformation. The temptation is to stagnate in this advancement. "Well now let us get back to our little dove, and see something about what God gives it in this state. It must always be understood that one has to strive to go forward in the service of our Lord, and in self-knowledge. For if a person does no more than receive this favor, and if, as though already in possession of something, she grows careless in her life, and turns aside from the heavenly path, which consists of keeping the commandments, that which happens to the silkworm will happen to her. For it gives forth the seed that produces other silkworms, and itself dies forever. ... it is God's desire that a favor so great not be given in vain; if a person doesn't herself benefit, the favor will benefit others. For since the soul is left with these desires and virtues ... it always brings profit to other souls during the time it continues to live virtuously; and they catch fire from its fire. And even when the soul has itself lost this fire, the inclination to benefit others will remain, and the soul delights in explaining the favors God grants to whoever loves and serves Him" 348. Throughout life, we must decide to advance or not. Trials continue to the final decision in death.

Teresa distinguishes between the 4<sup>th</sup> stage of divinely induced union and the 5<sup>th</sup> stage, of betrothal. It's an advance is from profound friends to marriage-commitment. "It seems to me that the prayer of union does not yet reach the stage of spiritual betrothal. Here below, when two people are to be engaged, there is discussion about whether they are alike, whether they love each other, and whether they might meet together so as to become more satisfied with each other. So too, in the case of this union with God, the agreement has been made, and this soul is well informed about the goodness of her Spouse, and determined to do His will in everything, and in as many ways as she sees might make Him happy. And His Majesty, as one who understands clearly whether these things about His betrothed as so, is happy with her. As a result, He grants this mercy, for He desired her to know Him more, and that they might meet together ... and be united. ... In it there no longer takes place the exchanging of gifts, but the soul sees secretly how this Spouse is that she is going to accept. Through the work of the senses and the faculties she couldn't in any way, or in a thousand years, understand what she understands here in the shortest time. But being who He is, the Spouse from that meeting alone leaves her more worthy for the joining of hands... The soul is left so much in love that it does for its part all it can to avoid disturbing this divine betrothal [occurring in the 6<sup>th</sup> *morada*]. But if it is careless about placing its affection in something other than Him, it loses everything. And the loss is as great as the favors He was granting her, and cannot be exaggerated" 355.

"Let this, in sum, be the conclusion: that we strive always to advance. And if we don't advance, let us walk with great fear. ... Love is never idle, and a failure to grow would be a very bad sign. A soul that has tried to be betrothed of God Himself, that is now intimate with His Majesty, and has reached the boundaries that were mentioned, must not go to sleep. ... He desires to commune with and reveal Himself to some worms – and because we will have these eyes set also on His greatness, and thus run along enkindled in His love" 357-358.

"Well then, let us with the help of the Holy Spirit, speak of the 6<sup>th</sup> dwelling places, where the soul is now wounded with love for its Spouse, and strive for more opportunities to be alone and in conformity with its state, to rid itself of everything that can be an obstacle to this solitude. That meeting left such an impression that the soul's whole desire

is to enjoy it again. ... in this prayer, nothing is seen in a way that can be called seeing, nor is anything seen with the imagination. Now the soul is fully determined to take no other spouse. But the Spouse does not look at the soul's great desires that the betrothal take place, for He still wants it to desire this more, and He wants the betrothal to take place at a cost; it is the greatest of blessings. And although everything is small when it comes to paying for this exceptional benefit, ... for the soul to endure such delay, it needs to have that token or pledge of betrothal that it now has. Oh, God help me, what interior and exterior trials the soul suffers before entering the 7<sup>th</sup> dwelling place!" 359.

In current terms: "No pain, no gain!" But the pain of stretching toward God is often more than we can bear. At that point, ask the Beloved to bear it. He came to do just that. "Indeed, sometimes I reflect and fear that if a soul knew beforehand [the sufferings of stretching], its natural weakness would find it most difficult to have the determination to suffer and pass through these trials, no matter what blessings were represented to it ... closely joined to His Majesty ... from this union comes its fortitude" 360. Teresa lists some of these great trials, to prepare her sisters for them. But God loves the person so much that His mercy carries them through. "This action of love is so powerful that the soul dissolves with desire; and yet it doesn't know what to ask for, since clearly it thinks that its God is with it. ... Well if it knows this, what does it desire, or what pains it? What grater good does it want? I don't know. I do know that it seems this pain reaches to the soul's very depths, and that when He who wounds it draws out the arrow, it in deed seems, in accord with the deep love the soul feels, that God is drawing these very depths after Him. ... it's as though from this fire enkindled in the brazier that is my God, a spark leapt forth, and so struck the soul that the flaming fire was felt by it. And since the spark was not enough to set the soul on fire, and the fire is so delightful, the soul is left with that pain; but the spark merely by touching the soul produces that effect. ... This delightful pain – and it is not pain – is not continuous, although sometimes it lasts a long while; at other times it goes away quickly. This depends on the way the Lord wishes to communicate it, for it is not something that can be procured in any human way. But even though it sometimes lasts for a long while, it comes and goes. ... just as the fire is about to start, the spark goes out, and the soul is left with the desire to suffer again that loving pain the spark causes" 368. This back and forth experience defines betrothal. Perfect union is not consummated, but greatly anticipated. So much happens in betrothal that we must examine it more in the next presentation.

### St Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle 5: Finishing the Sixth Room, and the Final Room* Fifteenth Presentation

Teresa knows that betrothal involves the soul in so many activities, which are so different from natural life, that we can be terribly confused. Locutions are experiences with God that we interpret as speech. Naturally, God does not exhale vibrations. But He does inform us about Himself. When informed, we might as well have **heard** this information from God' lips. So we call these experiences locutions. Similarly, we can interpret God-experiences as visions. Most drastically, we interpret God-experiences as raptures. God does indeed rapt us out of our natural existence. He takes us up into divine existence. These three drastic experiences change us. They help us to divinize, or to become ever more like God. Teresa shows that we can also imagine these experiences, falsifying them to our peril. Moreover, our enemy, Satan, can produce false images to destroy us. Teresa shows how to distinguish among these three experiences, so that we can grow in God. She also considers suffering, which naturally accompanies all this growth. These discussions are too detailed for our survey, but I provide an example of her account of rapture, as a cure for suffering.

"One kind of rapture is that in which the soul even though not in prayer is touched by some word it remembers or hears about God. It seems that His Majesty from the interior of the soul makes the spark we mentioned increase, for He is moved with compassion in seeing the soul suffer so long a time from its desire. All burnt up, the soul is renewed like the phoenix, and one can devoutly believe that its faults are pardoned. Now that it is so pure, the Lord joins it with Himself, without anyone understanding what is happening except these two; nor does the soul itself understand in a way that can afterward be explained. Yet it does have interior understanding, for this experience is not like that of fainting or convulsion; in these latter, nothing is understood inwardly or outwardly" 379-390.

"What I know in this case is that the soul was never so awake to the things of God, nor did it have such deep enlightenment and knowledge of His Majesty. This will seem impossible, for if the faculties are so absorbed that we can say they are dead, and likewise the senses, how can a soul know that it understands this secret? I don't know, nor perhaps does any creature, but only the Creator. And this goes for many other things that take place in this state... When the soul is in this suspension, the Lord likes to show it some secrets, things about heaven, and imaginative visions. It is able to tell of them afterward, for these remain so impressed on the memory that they are never forgotten. But when the visions are intellectual, the soul doesn't know how to speak of them. For there must be some visions during these moments that are so sublime that it's not fitting for those who live on this earth to have the further understanding necessary to explain them. However, when the soul is again in possession of its senses, it can say many things about these intellectual visions" 390.

"...if afterward there is ... no remembrance of these sublime favors ... what benefit do they have? ... they are so great one cannot exaggerate! For even though they are unexplainable, they are well inscribed in the very interior part of the soul, and are never forgotten. But you will insist, if there is no image, and the faculties do not understand, how can the visions be remembered? I don't understand this either; but I do understand that some truths about the grandeur of God remain so fixed in this soul, that even if faith were not to tell it who God is, and of its obligation to believe that He is God,

from that very moment it would adore Him as God..." 380-381. Teresa gives Jacob's ladder as an example. God's secrets can't be explained, but can be roughly pictured as coming and going from heaven, like angels up and down a ladder. In the burning bush, Moses had exactly the same problem. "So, sisters, we don't have to look for reasons to understand the hidden things of God. Since we believe He is powerful, clearly we must believe that a worm with as limited a power as ours will not understand His grandeur. Let us praise Him, for He is pleased that we come to know some of them" 381.

"I have often thought that just as the sun while in the sky has such strong rays that, even though it doesn't move from there, the rays promptly reach the earth, so the soul ... could be like the sun and its rays. Thus, while the soul remains in its place, the superior part rises above it. ... What is true, is that with the speed of a ball shot from an arquebus, when fire is applied, an interior flight is experienced ... which, though noiseless, is so clearly a movement that it cannot be the work of the imagination. And while the spirit is far outside itself, from all it can understand, great things are shown to it. When it again senses that it is within itself, the benefits it feels are remarkable, and it has so little esteem for all earthly things in comparison to the things it has seen, that the former seem like dung. From then on, its life on earth is very painful, and it doesn't see anything good in those things that used to seem good to it" 389.

The basic way to know all these weird things are true is that they merge our wills with God's. "God gives these souls the strongest desire not to displease Him in anything, however small, and the desire to avoid if possible every imperfection. For this reason alone, if for no other, the soul wants to flee people, and it has great envy of those who have lived in deserts. On the other hand, it would want to enter into the midst of the world to try to play a part in getting even one soul to praise God more" 392. Teresa provides richness beyond description, but this summary is a start.

Such is Teresa's awe about the seventh dwelling places, that she begs God to help her account for it. From being promised in marriage, the soul advances to marriage, to complete union. "Now then, when His Majesty is pleased to grant the soul this divine marriage, ... He first brings it into His own dwelling place. He desires that the favor be different from what it was at other times, when he gave the soul raptures. I really believe that in rapture He united it with Himself, as well as in the prayer of union... But it doesn't seem to the soul that it is called to enter into its center, as it is here in this dwelling place, but called to the superior part. These things matter little; whether the experience comes in one way or another, the Lord joins the soul to Himself. But He does so by making it blind and deaf, as was St. Paul in his conversion, Act 9:8, and by taking away perception of the nature and kind of favor enjoyed, for the great delight that soul then feels is to see itself near God. Yet when He joins it to Himself, it doesn't understand anything; for all the faculties are lost.

"In this seventh dwelling place, the union comes about in a different way; our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes, and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor He grants it. When the soul is brought into that dwelling place, the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth. First, there comes an enkindling in the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor; and these Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge, the soul understands as a profound truth that all three Persons are one substance, and one power, and one knowledge, and one God alone. It knows in such a way that what we hold by faith [we see]... Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel; that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him, and keeps His commandments, Jn 14:23" 429-430.

"Oh God help me! How different is hearing and believing these words from understanding their truth in this way! Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never seem to leave it any more, but it clearly beholds, ... that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it doesn't know how to explain, because of a lack of learning, it perceives this divine company. You may think that as a result the soul will be outside itself, and so absorbed that it will be unable to be occupied with anything else. On the contrary, the soul is much more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God; and once its duties are over it remains with that enjoyable company. If the soul does not fail God, He will never fail, ... to make His presence clearly known to it. It has strong confidence that since God has granted this favor, He will not allow it to lose the favor. Though the soul thinks this, it goes about with greater care than ever not to displease Him in anything" 429-431.

"It should be understood that this presence is not felt so fully, I mean so clearly, as when revealed the first time, or at other times when God grants the soul this gift. For if the presence were felt so clearly, the soul would find it impossible to be engaged in anything else, or even to live among people. But even though the presence is not perceived with this very clear light, the soul finds itself in this company every time it takes notice. Let's say that the experience resembles that of a person who after being in a bright room with others, finds himself, once the shutters are closed, in darkness. The light by which he could see them is taken away. Until it returns, he doesn't see them, but not for that reason does he stop knowing they are present. It might be asked whether the soul can see them when it so desires, and the light returns. To see them does not lie in its power, but depends on when our Lord desires that the window of the intellect be opened. Great is the mercy He shows in never departing from the soul, and in desiring that it perceive Him so manifestly.

"It seems that the divine Majesty desires, through this wonderful company, to prepare the soul for more. Clearly, the soul will be truly helped in every way to advance in perfection and to lose the fear it sometimes had of the other favors He granted it... Such was the experience of this person, for in everything she found herself improved, and it seemed to her, despite the trials she underwent, and the business affairs she had to attend to, that the essential part of her soul never

moved from that room. As a result, it seemed to her that there was, in a certain way, a division in her soul. And while suffering some great trials a little after God granted her this favor, she complained that part of the soul, as Martha complained of Mary, and sometimes pointed out that it was there always enjoying that quietude at its own pleasure, while leaving her in the midst of so many trials and occupations that she could not keep it company” 431-432.

“Now then, let us deal with the divine and spiritual marriage, although this great favor does not come to its perfect fullness as long as we live: for if we were to withdraw from God, this remarkable blessing would be lost. The first time the favor is granted, His Majesty desires to show Himself to the soul through an imaginative vision of His most sacred humanity, so that the soul will understand and not be ignorant of receiving this sovereign gift. With other persons, the favor will be received in another form. . . . the Lord represented Himself to her, just after . . . Communion, in the form of shining splendor, beauty, and majesty, as he was after His resurrection, and told her that now it was time that she consider as her own what belonged to Him, and that He would take care of what was hers, and He spoke other words destined more to be heard than to be mentioned. It may seem that this experience was nothing new, since at other times the Lord had represented Himself to the soul in such a way. The experience was so different that it left her in deed stupefied and frightened; first, because this vision came with great force; second, because of the words the Lord spoke to her, and also because in the interior of her soul, where He represented Himself to her, she had not seen other visions except the former one. You must understand that there is the greatest difference between all the previous visions and those of this dwelling place. Between the spiritual betrothal and the spiritual marriage, the difference is as great as that which exists between two who are betrothed and two who can no longer be separated” 432-433. I pray that this slight introduction will urge you on.