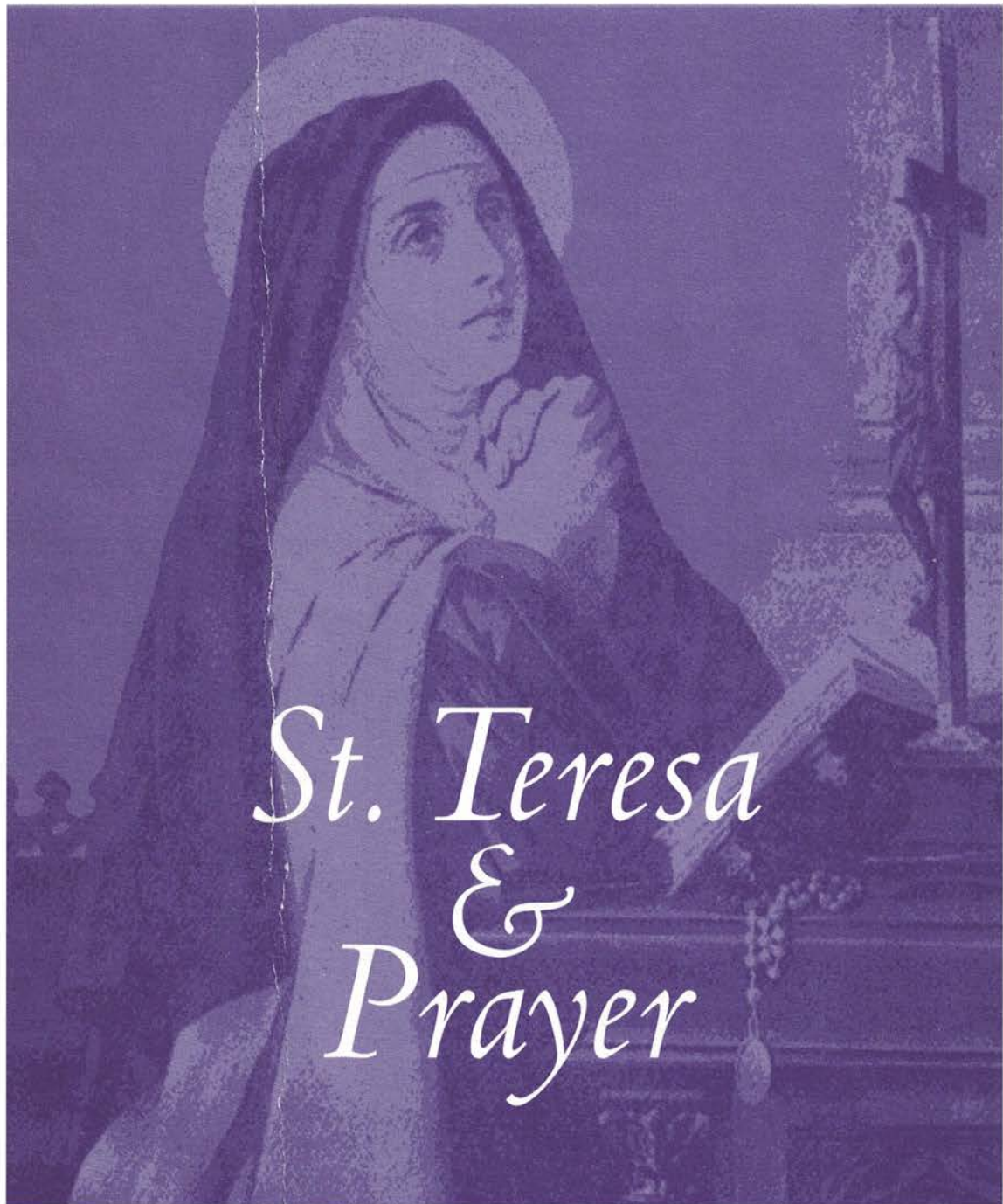


CARMEL CLARION

January - February 2006 Volume XXII No. 1



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Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

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Editorial

First of all I want to wish you a very blessed and happy New Year.

For the coming year we have decided to concentrate on providing material which will assist in the study of Carmelite spirituality. We begin with our Holy Mother St. Teresa. For the next several issues, each issue of the *Clarion* will contain articles by various Carmelites on some aspect of St. Teresa's teaching. We hope in this way to enable each communi-



ty to build up a body of material to use both for the community at-large and those in formation in particular. Our hope is that by the end of the year each community will have a small volume of introductory and supplemental material to St. Teresa's works and teaching.

We also realize that beginning in June, 2006, the Order will be celebrating the centenary of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity's death. In order to commemorate her life and teaching beginning in the May-June issue and continuing until the following year each issue will have an article on her teachings.

Beginning in the March-April issue of the *Clarion* we would like to bring to the attention of the entire Province the recently deceased of each community. Please make an extra effort to inform us immediately upon the death of a member of your community. In doing so include along with the name of the deceased, the number of years he or she was a member of your community. Be sure to tell us where your community is located rather than the name of your community. We have so many communities with similar names that we keep our records by the city or town where a community meets. This applies for all communications with the OCDS Main Office.

Fr. Regis

Friendship with Christ: Teresa of Avila's Way of Prayer

Mary Pia Taylor

"God...never fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." (L 8:5)



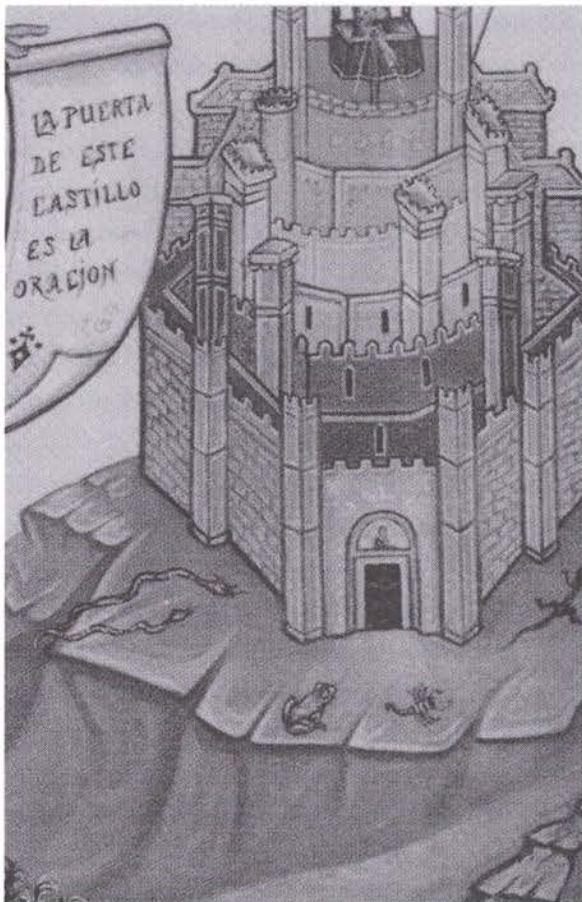
We know these words of Teresa so well. But what do they really mean? She is not speaking about a method, obligation or rule, but about *relationship*: one of friends. So, what does this involve? Friendship involves trust: not fear or excessive awe. It demands reciprocity: deep listening and a genuinely simple, open sharing. We must be ourselves and God will be himself: a God of love, of mercy, of surprises! He is a God who takes the initiative and expects our daring cooperation. Friendship demands fidelity, or else it will fizzle out. It is a project for life, not just a matter of set times. God, our Friend, wants to give himself to us totally. He therefore wants—indeed needs—a total self-gift from us too.

Expressions of One Great Friendship

Teresa came from a loving family and was one of twelve children. She had special friendships with some, especially her brother Rodrigo: we remember their Moorish escapade and playing together as hermits. The gap left by her mother's death led Teresa to a special relationship

with our Lady. But there were also harmful relationships with some of her cousins. It is interesting to read the view of Sr. Maria de San Jose Salazar, in her *Book for the Hour of Recreation*, that the harm lay not in deeds but in attitudes. It was a question of choosing frivolities over God-centeredness; Teresa would regret these frivolities all of her life.

At school, Teresa had good friendships, especially with one of the nuns, which led to her own choice of becoming a religious. When she eventually entered Carmel, she found good friends there and experienced a time of joy and fervor. Then she fell severely ill and St. Joseph came to her rescue. This cure was followed by a period when



Teresa gave up serious prayer: the biggest mistake of her whole life, she so often says. She began to pray again after the death of her father, but was caught up in parlor visits, both pious and frivolous, as well as a really harmful friendship. All this tore her in two for the next twenty years.

Finally came the day when Teresa encountered the statue of Christ at the pillar and begged for his help. Wise and gentle spiritual direction enabled her to break the chain of harmful friendships and to turn wholeheartedly to her true Friend: Christ. From now on, she tells us, she was living a new life, the life of God in her (cf. L 23:1). So, friendship proved to be both her strength and her weakness.

Right to the end of her life, she remained an intensely relational woman with deep and very human friendships, but these were now always centered on God. We may recall in particular Gracian, Maria de San Jose and Anne of Jesus; in fact, the list of her friends is almost innumerable! Yet it was her friendship with Christ that was everything for her. The other friendships, we could say, were expressions of that one great friendship with the Lord.

The Friend Beyond All Friends

Teresa thought of her life as a story of the mercies of the Lord. She felt that more than once, she had turned her back on God and let him down. She had been ashamed even to come near him—out of a woefully false humility. So, she was amazed to find that the Lord did not just forgive her: he overwhelmed her with his grace and his love. “Oh, what a good friend You make, my Lord!” she writes. “How You proceed by favoring and enduring. You wait for the others to adapt to Your nature, and in the meanwhile You put up with theirs!... [To] any of those who trust in You and desire You for friend... You give life to the soul” (L 8:6). The soul’s faults are repaid with favors. As Teresa expresses it: the soul is ‘chastised with glory’ (L 19:2).

Yet Teresa was also deeply aware of God’s majesty and grandeur. She records a vision she had of the sacred humanity, beginning with just Christ’s hands—a vision

that overwhelmed her by its majestic beauty (L 28:I-2). In her now-famous image, she was given to see the soul, made in God's likeness, as a crystalline diamond castle where the King of glory dwells (IC I:I:1). True prayer, she tells us, brings with it an increasing knowledge of the grandeur of God (IC VI:5:10).

Absolutely central to Teresa's prayer life was Christ's humanity. In Spain at that time, mysticism was in vogue: there was much about going beyond his humanity to the divinity. Teresa explored this for a while, but experience soon tempered her view: "I see clearly...that God desires that if we are going to please Him and receive His great favors, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ" (L 22:6). She knew a Jesus who even needed to be consoled—as with the agony in the garden, one of her favorite scenes for drawing near to him (cf. WP 26:5.6). She knew a Lover who longs to give himself wholly to us yet can do this only in the measure that we genuinely strive to give ourselves wholly to him (cf. WP 26:6). She knew a Friend who is playfully, tenderly intimate, who could say to her: "Why are you disturbed, little sinner? Am I not your God?" (Sp Test 23). She knew a Christ who walked always at her side, sharing her daily activities and occupations (cf. IC VI:8:2). Through him she experienced the Blessed Trinity dwelling in her soul and in the souls of all the baptized (cf. IC VII:1:6).



Prayer - An Encounter Between Friends

As Teresa discovered, the all-important aspect of prayer is relational. Her personal experience of God and how he dealt with her were what we might call the matrix of her prayer. Although profoundly aware of the importance of sound doctrine, she also knew that in prayer "the important thing is not to think much, but to love much" (IC IV:1:7). In sixteenth-century Spain, 'mental prayer' was supposed to be fraught with dangers, especially for women: there were too many false women 'mystics' around! From her own experience, Teresa ridiculed these ideas and insisted that mental prayer – silent, interpersonal prayer—was the gateway to friendship with the Lord. She regarded the habitual neglect of it, or a turning back from it, as nothing short of a disaster.

Teresa recommends thinking of gospel scenes. She especially loved the episode of the Samaritan woman at the well. We should, she says, frequently call to mind the passion of Christ; she herself used to think of the agony in the garden before going to sleep at night. Yet, interestingly, it was usually the risen Christ who appeared to her in visions (L 29:4); the paschal mystery meant so much to Teresa. She also had great love for Mary and Joseph—the human family of the human Christ; and for Martha and Mary, his friends and hostesses. In this intimacy with the Lord, she suggests that we say the Our Father—gently, slowly, one phrase at a time.

Teresa felt no attraction for thinking things out in prayer, but instead turned to the presence of the Lord within herself. Here, she says, a little fire of divine love is quickly enkindled. She writes: "You already know that God is everywhere... Do you think it matters little for a soul with a wandering mind to understand this truth and see that there is no need to go to heaven in order to speak with one's Eternal Father or find delight in Him? Nor is there any need to shout. However softly we speak, He is near enough to hear us... All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself... with great humility speak to Him as to a father... tell Him about your trials; ask Him for a remedy... Don't be foolish; take Him at His word. Since He is your Spouse, He will treat you accordingly" (WP 28:2.3).

The Inner Fire Of Love

We must approach God interiorly in this way, and not only during the time of prayer: "even in the midst of occupations [we must] withdraw within ourselves. Although it may be for only a moment" (WP 29:5). Teresa tells us that she never knew what it was to pray with satisfaction until she discovered this way of praying: turning to the presence of the Lord within. It may take a little time and perseverance to get used to it, or it may come easily. We have to make room for the Lord. But, as Teresa tells us, this prayer is a treasure-trove (cf. WP 29:7).

Pope John Paul II Cultural Center *Spirituality Lectures*

Commemorating 100 Years of the Discalced Carmelite Friars in the United States (2006)

A Living Charism: Carmelite Spirituality for a Second Century

Presented by the Institute of Carmelite Studies

February 25, 2006, 3 p.m.

Liturgical Spirituality

George Mangiaracina, OCD, S.L.L.

March 25, 2006, 3 p.m.

**True Peace: St. Teresa of Avila's
Meditations**

on the Song of Songs

Kevin Culligan, OCD, Ph.D.

April 29, 2006, 3 p.m.

Edith Stein and Renewal

John Sullivan, OCD, STD

May 13, 2006, 3 p.m.

Carmel and Mary

Emmanuel Sullivan, OCD, Ph.D.

September 30, 2006, 3 p.m.

Père Jacques' Retreat

Salvatore Scieurba, OCD, MA

October 28, 2006, 3 p.m.

Elizabeth of the Trinity and Silence

Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, S.T.L

November 25, 2006, 3 p.m.

**Elizabeth of the Trinity & Baptismal
Spirituality**

Daniel Chowning, OCD, S.T.L

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3900 Harewood Road, NE Washington, DC 20017 202-635-5400 www.jp2cc.org

God himself backed this up, as it were, (calling her quietly to recognize his inner presence. Teresa tries to describe this in various images: the call of a shepherd's pipe (IC IV:3:2), bees homing to the hive (WP 28:7), and above all that beautiful image, seen earlier, of the soul as the crystal castle in which the King of glory dwells. Teresa had one overwhelming experience of the inner love when the seraph seemed to pierce her heart with a burning lance and set a great blaze of love aflame within her. Although this latter experience was uniquely her own, as John of the Cross assures us (cf. LF 2:12), it was also for her spiritual sons and daughters—for us. Jesus 'came to cast fire upon the earth' (Lk 12:49), and we cannot doubt that the flames of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were the first fruits of that fire of love which continues to be poured into the hearts of all who open themselves to God's gift.

But Teresa warns us that love may not be what we imagine. Certainly, it is not a matter of experiencing untroubled consolation and peace. Rather, it means 'being determined to work and to suffer, and to do so when the occasion arises... And in matters touching on obedience He doesn't want the soul who truly loves Him to take any other path than the one He did: *obediens usque ad mortem*. (F 5:3).

Twofold Love

At the beginning of *The Way of Perfection* and again at the end of *The Interior Castle*, Teresa stresses the need to combine prayer and life. She frequently reminds us that the two great commandments—love of God and love of neighbor—are essentially one. These two loves include, especially, prayer for the church; this, Teresa tells her nuns, is the very purpose for which the Lord called them together (WP I.3).



Mary and Martha must always go together (cf. IC VII:4): that is, prayer and its practical expression. This means love, forbearance and service of those around us — not just great projects! Loving our neighbor, Teresa says, will be surprisingly costly. We have to be ready to put ourselves on the line in small ways as well as great. We have to try to be pleasant, gentle and agreeable, even when we may feel the opposite. We have to let go completely of our so-called 'need' for others to think well of us—what Teresa calls our 'honor'. She tells us to be courageous and very determined! Jesus, she teaches us, is a true Friend. He wants to give himself to us—and he will help us give ourselves to him.

Reprinted from: Mount Carmel: A Review of the Spiritual Life, Vol. 53/54, October - December 2005

St. Teresa: Teacher Of Prayer

Jerome Lantry, O.C.D.

Once, perhaps in envy of the two disciples walking to Emmaus, the thought came to me that it would be a real treat to be able to walk a mile with a saint. Not a living saint, but one from heaven. To my surprise, two saints quickly came to mind: St. Peter the Apostle and St. Teresa of Avila. I had to ask myself why these two and came up with two likely reasons. I imagined both of them as being very tolerant of non-saints (I wouldn't mind them knowing the kind I am) and as having a special love of Jesus Christ that I would hope to learn from them.

Convictions

St. Teresa was one of the great mystics in the history of the church and the first woman to be declared a doctor of the church. Almost all her books were written at the request of someone else. The very first things she wrote were accounts of her experiences in prayer. They were requested by a director who was trying to understand her. This may have influenced her style because so much of her writing seems to flow out of her relationship with God. St. Teresa confesses she had a problem with meditation. Instead of writing about it, she advised her Sisters to read some of the many good books written on this subject. But we can see in her writings the strong basic convictions we seek to form in meditating on life or from lectio divina. Recall her bookmark:

Let nothing disturb you;
Let nothing dismay you;
All things pass;
God never changes.
Patience attains all that it strives for.
He who has God finds he lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

These few maxims contain the kind of conviction that leads us to dedicate ourselves to God and put all our trust in him. It is important to realize that Teresa did



not bypass meditation even though she could not do it methodically. Her insights were more intuitive and they were very profound, very strong.

Self-knowledge

Our basic contact with God is that of the sinner seeking salvation. We see this in the penitential rite and so many of our liturgical prayers. This point of contact is very important to St. Teresa. This is what she is talking about when she speaks of self-knowledge, something she comes back to regularly. In the introduction to the *Interior Castle*, Fr. Kieran Kavanaugh paraphrases her this way. "Their need, (beginners in prayer), as is true of everyone, is for self-knowledge, and for knowledge of the beauty of a soul in grace and ugliness of one in sin" (CW, Vol II, p 270). In the *Way of Perfection*, we find Teresa saying, "however sublime the contemplation, let your prayer always begin and end with self-knowledge" (W.P.39:5). Her purpose in having us recall our sinfulness is not to have us dwell on our sins, rather she wants to save us from repeating them and to rely on God's mercy as the only way past them.

The Savior not only forgives sin, but also prevents it. I would like to include here a quotation from St. John of the Cross that tells us how important this self-knowledge is. He says:

The first and chief benefit this dry and dark night of contemplation causes, is the knowledge of self and of one's own misery. Beside the fact that all the favors God imparts to the soul are ordinarily wrapped in this knowledge, the aridities and voids of the faculties in relation to the abundance previously experienced and the difficulty encountered in the practice of virtue make the soul recognize its own lowliness and misery, which was not apparent in the time of prosperity. (D.N.I.12:2).

The meeting of the humble, contrite person with the loving, merciful God is the foundation on which the spiritual life is built, the good soil in which the seed grows. Teresa knew this well. She did not dwell on her weakness but recognized it and learned to rely on God's goodness, not her own. In the book of her *Life*, she tells us that mental prayer is relating many times, from friendship, with Him "Who we know loves us" (L8:5). This was her way of thinking of God and her prayer was her response to his love.

Three Virtues

A simple overview of Teresa's life lets us see how she put the practice of interior prayer before everything else. And her guidance in prayer always leads to the practice and habit of what she called recollection. This recollection was not to be confined to a scheduled prayer time but to permeate the entire day. For me, this is a loving companionship with Jesus, our Savior, and a strong commitment to his mission: the salvation of all people. In the *Way of Perfection*, the little book Teresa wrote

for her first community of nuns at Avila, she initiates us into this loving companionship with the Lord through the practice of three virtues. She must have learned the value of these virtues through her own prayer life and personal relationship with Christ, because she says they are necessary preparations for the gift of contemplation:

Before I say anything about interior matters, that is, about prayer, I shall mention some things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer; so necessary that even if these persons are not very contemplative, they can be far advanced in the service of the Lord if they possess these things, and if they do not possess them, it is impossible for them to be very contemplative... The first of these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is humility, which, even though I speak of it last, is the main practice and embraces all the others (W4:3,4)

Love One Another

In the gospel Jesus speaks of each of these virtues as something personal to himself. He tells us that love of one another is the sign by which all will recognize us as his followers. His impact on us will be clear. People will know it was from him we learned it. So through this practice, our friendship with him grows. It is not always easy for us to love one another but when we imagine ourselves in his presence, moods change and good will prevails. We have only to recall what he did with our faults. He took them on himself and died for us while we were still sinners. When Jesus is present, good will prevails. When he is forgotten, it soon fades.

Dying to Selfishness

The second virtue Teresa recommends to us as a way of bonding with Jesus Christ is the virtue of self-denial. This is not a denial of self but of selfishness. The normal, healthy way is to recognize the gifts God has given us: life, opportunity and talent. We should be grateful to God and rejoice in who we are. St. Augustine said: "Because you love me, Lord, you made me lovable." If we do not love ourselves then it becomes very difficult for us to believe God loves us. This belief is the very basis of a loving relationship with God. Remember St. Teresa's description of God: "Who we know loves us." Selfishness is a departure from do-

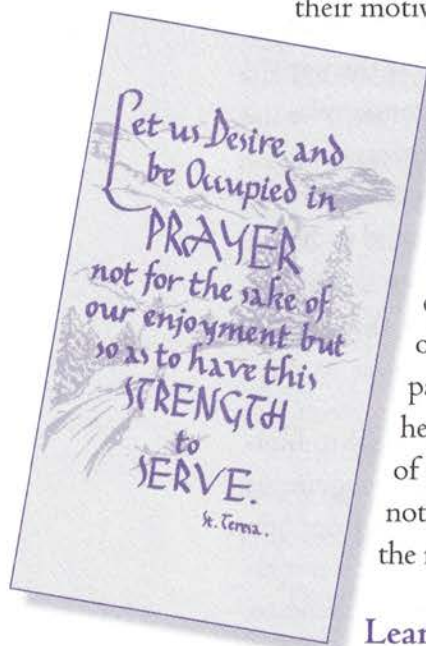


*Monument to St. Teresa in
Beas de Suegura Spain.*

ing God's will to seek for ourselves praise, pleasure or power. It is very easy to fall into this and once we do, our motives become selfish. We can see this in the apostles during the life of Christ and when he was taken away and put to death. Following Pentecost, they were totally different, rejoicing when found worthy to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit, the Love of God, was now their motivator. St. Teresa says: "If we embrace the Creator and care not at all

for the whole of creation, His majesty will infuse the virtues" (WII:1).

Jesus tells us that if we want to be close to him we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and join him. He is only too ready to give us the strength we need. In fact, he helps us to carry our cross. The saints centered their attention on the Crucified until they became aware that this was the greatest expression of love in the history of the human race. This love inspired their response in a longing to be part of it. St. Teresa once said she would worry that God did not love her if he stopped sending her crosses. How different from what most of us think. Crosses are so frequently interpreted to mean that God does not like us. It takes patient reflection on the passion of Jesus to come to the right understanding.



Learn of Me

The third virtue that Teresa wants us to work on is the one that really opens the door to prayer. It is humility. This brings us back to self-knowledge again. Humility can be learned, up to a point, by honest reflection on our own weakness. It becomes much deeper as we grow closer to God. Jesus was closest of all to the Father, so was completely humble in his humanity. This is the lesson he calls us to learn from him, that he is meek and humble of heart. The closer we come to him the better we learn his great lesson, and as the lesson sinks in we come closer still to him. Teresa is explicit: "There is no queen like humility for making the King surrender... the one who has more humility will be the one who possesses Him more; and the one who has less will possess Him less" (WI(3:2)). For her, humility is the avenue to the *Interior Castle*, the prodigal's road home to the Father's house.

Prayer

Although Teresa writes at some length about these virtues before giving us instruction on how to pray, she is not saying that they are to be separate in our lives. The opposite is true. It is when we are trying to bring God into our lives through the practice of virtue that he can come close to us in prayer. If we keep trying, within our limits, to please God during the day: to keep alive in our occupations the love and self-denial and humility Jesus is trying to teach us, then we are making our preparation for the time allotted to prayer. When we come to prayer, we

have a lot to talk to Jesus about. This talking to God is the way Teresa leads us into prayer. She never did a course of studies, so she writes from her own personal experience. She did not get the help she needed from reasoned meditation or imagined scenes, but in saying vocal prayer with attention; being more aware of God, of self and of what she was saying. In this kind of prayer, our attention to God can grow to a point where we no longer need the vocal prayer. It may then wander again so that we need to go back to vocal prayer. Or we may depart from set prayers and speak to God in our own words.

In prayer we are never looking for experience but just trying to communicate with God. We endeavor to focus on him rather than on ourselves, even when prayer leads to a new experience of God. He is the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. We draw on his love and goodness. This closer communication with God makes us truly humble, aware that we have nothing we have not received, that all virtue is on loan from him.

It is when we are trying to bring God into our lives through the practice of virtue that he can come close to us in prayer.

Contemplation

St. Teresa believes that once companionship with Jesus has become a habit, then God can give us the gift of contemplation if he so wishes. He can lead us to sanctity without this gift, but Teresa believes he wants to grant it, at least in some degree, because contemplation does us so much good in such a short time. The first sign of this grace, this God-given form of communication, is that the previous ways we found successful do not avail any longer and we are left in a dark dryness accompanied by a strong desire to pray and a real anxiety lest we have caused God to turn away from us.

St. John of the Cross goes into this in detail and recommends that we do not try to force the ways that do not work, but remain in “a loving, general attention” to God. Then comes the first inkling that God is in the dryness. Teresa calls this inkling “the shepherd’s whistle,” letting the lost sheep know it is not lost... She goes on from there to cover in detail the changes liable to be experienced once we are given the gift of contemplation. She did all this mainly because she was told to do so, but also to ensure that others would have the guidance it took her so long to find.

Where to Begin

In chapter 26 of the *Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa sets about teaching prayer. She tells us to begin with the sign of the cross. This brings us face to face with God’s mercy and compassion, his relentless search for us. Next, she tells us to say the Confiteor. This reminds us of who we are before God. Then she says we need a companion and the Lord Jesus is the very best one to have. So we should picture him

standing beside us lovingly teaching us to say the prayer he gave us, the Our Father. She keeps on telling us to get into the habit of keeping him close to us. She tells us just to look at him with eyes of faith until his presence becomes a part of our prayer and of our lives. In reading this chapter you get the feel for her own prayer. After life itself, God's love was her most precious gift. The presence of God in Teresa's own life draws us to desire to pray. She not only tells us to imagine the Lord closer to us, her words make her seem close and she brings him to us.

Represent the Lord 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, as they say, 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?

For Teresa, prayer was the way to change the world and she loved to teach it to others. Because she believed so strongly in the global influence of prayer, she recommends repeatedly that we approach prayer with determination and practice it with perseverance. Reading her writing and paying special attention



to her relationship with God has been for years a sure way to grow in prayerful companionship with Jesus. Her Way is our road to Emmaus.

*Teresa gives
Fray A. Mariano
the rules of the reform.*

Taken from *Mount Carmel*, vol. 49, July-September, 2001.

St. Teresa's School of Prayer

Tomas Alvarez, OCD

For St. Teresa of Avila, prayer is an interpersonal and real relationship where the important thing is not how one speaks or what one speaks about, but who the person is to whom we speak. "Mental prayer, in my opinion, is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us" (L8, 5).

A Personal Encounter

Christian prayer is a mystery. Hence it is very difficult to define; perhaps every definition clarifies just one aspect of it. Or in most cases, one definition leaves open the possibility of further definition. If we look at it from an intellectual point of

view, we can regard it as "an elevation of the mind (soul) to God." Commonly and rather simply, it is thought to consist in "asking God for all that is necessary for us." One could go on. In this article, we should like to ask St. Teresa what she understands by "prayer." Better, let us pay attention to her definition that perhaps we have heard many times but whose profound meaning may have remained foreign to our own prayer life.



The Word of God

Teresa's encounter with God in prayer was based on the solid rock of the word of God, which John the Evangelist in his Gospel and his letters offers to our hunger for the knowledge of God: "God is love" (I Jn 4, 7). "In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that God has first loved us" (I Jn 4, 10). At the last discourse, in an atmosphere of love, Jesus asks us to be trustful: "Your heavenly Father loves you" (Jn I6, 27). Hence we have to keep in mind and emphasize that the term "friendship" chosen by Teresa as the context of prayer has a specific theological connotation. God is a protagonist with the human person in that loving encounter

which cannot be limited to mere human or psychological categories, since it transcends the human to immerse itself in the divine.

Faith in God, in the divine life that God communicates to the person through the gift of baptism, was for Teresa an existential faith that never had known the slightest doubt. If her journey towards God had been long, wearying, not always coherent in the beginning, it was always a journey bright and clear to an internal truth and reality. Teresa never doubted the existence of God and her creature-hood. She was willed by him, loved, redeemed, called in this life to live the very life of God. She had ignored for a time that calling. But once she discovered the living water, she never again hesitated or drew back from the difficulties involved; she drank from the fountain of God in abundance. Knowing that she was loved, Teresa

*If all of us are not capable of meditating
or engaging in thoughtful reflection, at
least we are all capable of loving*

learned to love, to rest with him who loved her in conversation and listening that is in prayer. The realization of being God's creature, sharing in his divine life, is what defines

every Christian, everyone who has attained divine adoption through baptism. In the Son, all love and are loved by, the Father, and enter into communion with him.

Teresa's experience, her "mental prayer," is possible for everyone and within the capacity of everyone. She says, "If all of us are not capable of meditating or engaging in thoughtful reflection, at least we are all capable of loving" (Cf W 5, 2). Therefore, emphasis is not on how or what to say, but on the person whom we encounter. In prayer, that person is God present in us and awaiting us. When the encounter is between two persons, everything is significant. Think of a little child coming out of school and running to meet its mother—two lovers in an embrace. When there is no meeting between persons, everything is banal. Between a business agent and buyer stand the merchandise, the price, and the end of the transaction. For many years, we dedicate ourselves to practice prayer, such as the rosary, the way of the cross, etc., without ever becoming people of prayer. The more we pay attention to the definition of Teresa the more we realize that what is specific is the fact that God and the human person here and now seek one another in friendship and encounter one another in love.

For the saint of Avila, the method of prayer is simple: "Mental prayer means being aware of and knowing what we are saying and to whom we are speaking; who am I to speak with so great a Lord ... that is to make meditation. Do not think we have to speak gibberish with him" (Teresa uses here a word signifying an inscrutable mix of Spanish and Arabic). In the original, there is an ironic tone joined to a special feminine and light touch. In this way, she sometimes causes over-ponderous problems of theology to fall like a house of cards. Thus she overcame the thousands of problems that theologians and others, doctors and inquisitors constructed in relation to prayer.

Rest in Friendship of God

To pray is to place oneself before God, or to try to do so, and to rest in his good friendship. Thus one rests within oneself where every personal contact is realized, in the presence of a friend. We gaze on him whose gaze is on us, in the very center of our soul.

For Teresa, it is important to seek that encounter and that company. To seek God is already to pray, because he acknowledges and rewards the effort we make to come to him. It is therefore at the moment of meeting that the praying person and God look at and contemplate one another. To look, to contemplate, are words that express an encounter of friendship and love. The response of the person to God—prayer—is this habitual seeking of the presence of God within self and thus to see and be seen. It is through prayer, which Teresa compares to a gate, that God enters the soul to rejoice with it. God in fact loves the human person and his delight is to live with him, to dwell in intimacy with him, to fill the person with himself—infinite joy.

Certainly it is not easy to arrive at that loving encounter. It requires strong and constant effort. But let us not tire in seeking the presence in us of the Friend. Teresa often recommends that we never cease to enter into ourselves and seek the Lord. Because “it is through the efforts that we make to seek and be in the Lord’s loving company” that God strengthens us and makes us more and more capable of resting in his presence.

Annual Summer Seminar on Carmelite Spirituality

Theme for Year 2006 -

TRANSFORMATION IN CARMEL: HOW GENTLY YOU WAKE IN MY HEART

June 18 - 24 , 2006

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Possible Dangers on the Journey

Is it right to speak about Teresa and prayer without reference to the possible “dangers” on the journey? To do justice to Teresa, we ought to refer to these also. She certainly speaks a lot about dangers that may be encountered on our prayer journey to God. Hence we ask ourselves: does the way of prayer today continue to have its dangers as of yore? It would surely be a delusion to think that life could be lived without risk. Or that achieving a high ideal, a work of the spirit, is possible without meeting the demon of deceit. With certain adjustments, the dangers that we encounter are much the same as those pointed out by Teresa.

One of the most common dangers Teresa mentions is narcissism: that is, instead of speaking with God, one holds dialogue with the folds and creases of the self. Then there is the pride of believing that we are something, one of the “elect,” distinct from the normal run of people. There is the awful danger of not “walking in the truth”; a certain tendency in people of prayer that they must step aside from daily living. “No, sisters, the Lord wants works. He wishes, for example, that if you see a sick person to whom you can bring relief, you should be ready to set aside your devotion and exercise compassion.”

Prayer Techniques

Teresa criticizes a tendency that besets us today, a belief that by means of certain “psycho-oriental” techniques, we can achieve experience of God. For Teresa, there is no human technique that can capture God; experience of him is purely grace. He has said, “Come to me and I will give you to drink.” Teresa loved to say that she preferred the water given by him to all that we could draw from our own well.

I believe that Teresa, open to all that is good, would be the first to say that “everything helps.” That however would be on condition that techniques do not promise what they cannot deliver. She was aware of, and tried in her time, a type of yogic technique to control the mind and halt the thinking process. This was supposed to introduce the person to a profound experience of the immensity of God, even to be “absorbed in him.” But in time, she turned aside from this and, for the rest of her life, regarded it as a mistaken idea. She also disapproved of techniques of “emptying the mind,” “thinking of nothing,” or “suspending the intellect.”

On the other hand, in the *Way of Perfection*, she does teach and hold to a wonderful discipline that helps us to focus attention, to psychosomatic relaxation, to the peaceful integration of the human person.

Let us be clear. Teresa was above all and first of all a contemplative, a mystic. Overflowing with the mystery of God, she was capable of that prayer of deep recollection and silence in which the whole being is transformed into doxology and Eucharist—silent music of adoration and contemplation—but all supremely gifts of God.

This article is reprinted from the magazine, *Il Messaggero*, and is translated from the Italian by Fr. Michael Buckley, OCD. Appeared also in *Carmelite Digest*, Winter, 2004.

St. Teresa as a Writer

Eugene McCaffrey, O.C.D.

Uniqueness

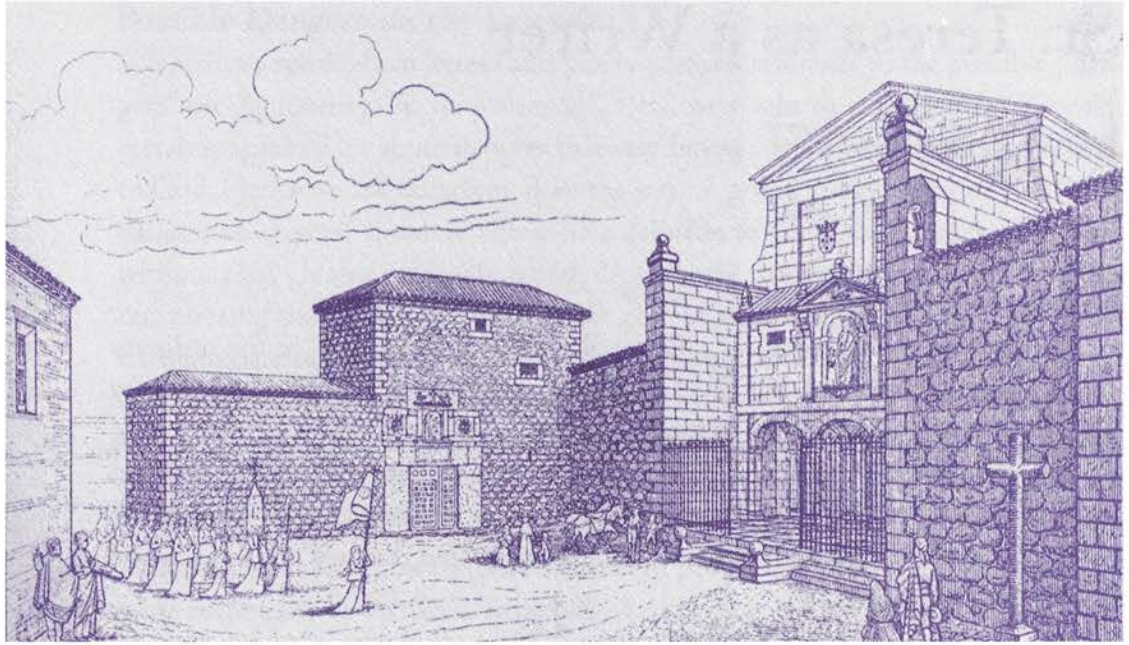
As a writer St. Teresa was unique. She was not an 'author' in the ordinary sense of the word. She never set out to 'write a book' or compose a literary work. Except for her Spiritual Testimonies and her Letters, all her writing was done under obedience or at the request of her own sisters. Her main concern was to describe her own experiences in prayer for her confessors or to instruct her sisters in the way of perfection. Once she had completed this task she felt she had fulfilled her obligation.

Nevertheless, St. Teresa seems to have belonged to that privileged few who can truly be called 'born writers'. Endowed by nature with a keen intelligence and a creative imagination, she had that feeling for life and that insight into people and events that is the quality of all great writers. Above all else she was rich in human qualities—compassion, humor and a sanctified common sense—and she could express the deepest human as well as divine truths in a language that was clear, colloquial and unaffected. And it is this human and universal quality that has endeared her to the hearts of so many of her readers down through the centuries.

Teresa was an almost careless writer of prose and she certainly never adopted a literary 'style' as such. Indeed, her particular gifts and originality lie precisely in the fact that she wrote exactly as she spoke—spontaneously and without any literary pose. Hence the epistolary and conversational tone of all her writings. Perhaps the modern 'interview' would come closest to describing the literary genre of her writings, which so often read like the unedited transcript of a recorded interview. It is this quality of spontaneity that gives the feeling of intimacy to so much of her writing, as well, of course, as explaining her tendency



*St. Joseph
Monastery, the first
monastery founded
by St. Teresa.*



to digress or to repeat herself. While never dull or boring, she can, at times—and she herself would be first to admit it—be difficult to follow.

With some writers it is possible to separate their teaching from their personality. No so with St. Teresa. To read her writings is to come to know the person. Practically every page bears the impress of her forceful and vivid personality. She wrote out of her own experiences and the unique validity of her writings is that they reflect in such a personal way the richness of her own interior life. Her writings are her life, a faithful testimony of her own dynamic spirit. She was not concerned with spiritual theology as such, but with the life of the spirit as she herself experienced it. For her 'theologizing' was always secondary; her writings are neither systematic nor scientific. Nevertheless, they have a universal validity about them and in their directness and in their humanity have spoken to countless men and women down through the centuries. Seekers of truth in every age have found there the clearest and most helpful expression of central and eternal truths to direct their faltering steps towards God and have found in St. Teresa herself one of the best and surest guides in the way of the spirit.

Preparation

St. Teresa had very little preparation as a writer. Basically she knew how to write and little else. She was able to construct clear, straightforward sentences and express herself in language that was simple and direct. But she knew practically nothing of the art of writing. She was totally ignorant of the rules of grammar and syntax. Very seldom did she use capital letters, question marks, signs of interrogation or full stops. Her writings are almost completely without divisions or headings. She wrote in the Castilian dialect of the time, which she spelt phonetically, and her vocabulary was that of common usage.

Teresa simply wrote sentences. Her manuscripts are a mass of straightforward, continuous writing. Quite literally, she produced 'writings' rather than books.

From the aspect of formal training—the ability to coordinate ideas and express them in logical sequence—St. Teresa was again almost totally unprepared. From her earliest years she had a great love for books and as a teenager read the romances and tales of chivalry of the day. But she seems to have had no formal training for any sort of serious writing.

This is especially true of her preparation for any really serious writing on spiritual subjects. Though she read a number of good spiritual books, it is difficult to assess to what extent they influenced her understanding of the spiritual life. Much of what she read was stylized and unintelligible to her and a lot of it quite out of keeping with her own character. Perhaps the exceptions were *The Moralia of St Gregory*, *St Augustine's Confessions* and the *Letters of St Jerome*. Certainly *St Jerome's* vigorous and direct style would have appealed to her, a style found later in her own letters, and the *Confessions of St Augustine* must have influenced her, consciously or unconsciously, when she came to write her own *Life* six years later.

Yet the basic fact remains that St. Teresa had very little, if any, formal preparation as a writer. To be a great writer something more than reading, even good reading, is necessary. This is all the more so in St. Teresa's case, for she did not write from memory of things heard or read, but from the book of her own living experience. She did not turn to books for ideas or for inspiration and seldom quotes or refers to other writers. All of which makes her greatness as a writer all the more extraordinary, for not only were her ideas and experiences uniquely her own, so also was her expression and formulation of them.

Nevertheless, we can well understand her reluctance to write. In one way or another, nearly all her writings came under the influence of obedience. She herself had no aspiration to be a writer. She often expressed a deep-rooted repugnance to doing so and constantly refers to the many obstacles and problems in the way—the noises in her head, poor memory, lack of learning, etc. Yet whatever the pressure and anxiety she herself experienced from her lack of training or formal preparation, it did not hinder the ultimate perfection of her work. Indeed, in some way, more than any other factor, it has contributed to one of the most endearing characteristics of her writing—its total freedom and spontaneity. For not only was she free from the constriction of grammar and syntax, she was, much more importantly, free from any pre-conceived systems of ideas or particular schools of spirituality. Unspoiled and unfettered, she could express her own individual ideas and experiences creatively and in her own unique way with an independence and originality that is the hallmark of genius.

Composition

Without dealing with the composition of each of her books individually we can formulate the general circumstances and conditions under which St. Teresa wrote.



Teresa generally wrote in her cell, not at a table or a writing desk, but squatting on the floor at a small ledge under the window. She wrote with a quill pen and used a very good quality ink and paper—a fact that has contributed greatly to the excellent condition of her manuscripts. Much of her writing was done late at night with poor lighting and quite often after a busy day of work or travel. Many witnesses attest to the fact that she wrote with great speed and with tremendous intensity. She was constantly interrupted in her writing and often there were long intervals, weeks, sometimes months—between writing.

She never re-read what she wrote and hardly ever deleted or corrected anything.

We must remember, too, that, for the most part, she wrote without adequate time for the formulation of her thoughts and her ideas. She had no outline or plan, only the general argument of what she wanted to say—to try to explain her own experiences in prayer for her confessors or give some general instructions to her sisters on prayer or community life. Her material was organized as she wrote and flowed automatically from the general thrust of what she wanted to say. With Teresa the ground plan is apparent after the work is completed not before. Often enough she herself was unaware, except in a general way, of the overall structure of the book.

Once she had finished writing, however, Teresa realized the value of what she had written. She had a great writer's sense of achievement and a sense of pride and joy in her work; hence her maternal solicitude for all her writings. She became the editor—and quite a critical one—of her own writings and undertook the task of transforming her 'writings' into books. These were divided into chapters, titles and headings added, corrections made and mistakes removed. She even rewrote completely two of her major works, her *Life* and *The Way of Perfection*. It is important to stress the value and validity of the headings and titles given by St Teresa to each of the chapters, for they represent her own reflective judgment on the relative value of any particular chapter or section of the book.

Quality

Without doubt one of the most characteristic qualities of St. Teresa's writing is its spontaneity. She wrote exactly as she spoke. There is a conversational tone about

all her writings and a quality of dialogue—as she talks with her sisters, with God or with the reader in general. Letters were her natural medium and we can see this epistolary style characterizing all her writings.

Her style is clear, distinct and imaginative. There is a complete absence of artificiality or self-consciousness and she is able to combine a great ardor of spirit with utter simplicity and candor. Her quickness of mind and sensitivity of soul join with a brilliant common sense and a rich humor to make her an intensely human writer and one of the most approachable of all Christian mystics.

Teresa's writings are essentially concrete and practical. One's first impression in reading her writings is surely just what a sensible woman she is and how well she could say necessary things in simple and plain language. She abhors abstractions and technical terms. All her descriptions of spiritual realities are direct and down-to-earth—whether it be of prayer as a heart-to-heart conversation with God or humility as walking in the truth. And she is a persuasive writer, with the rare ability of making the difficult seem possible and even easy. Though the ultimate demands of her 'way of perfection' are as equally pressing as those of John of the Cross in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, she combines these with a gentle and motherly patience, making allowance for all the fragile weakness and inconsistency of human nature.

As a help in the expression of her ideas Teresa often resorts to the use of comparisons. Her writings teem with hundreds of homely and vivid illustrations and apt and graphic metaphors. In fact there are over four hundred of these scattered throughout her writings. They help her to organize and explain her thoughts, they add body and color: and so often a touch of humor to many of her ideas. Some, like the great allegories of the way, the castle or the garden, provide the essential structure for her major books. Others, more casual and throw-away, are sprinkled across almost every page adding wit and sparkle to so many of her comments and observations—St. Peter of Alcantara, for instance, is like a man made out of the roots of trees, too many nuns in a convent and they are like lizards in a hole, the passing things of this world are no more than a sprig of rosemary, distractions in prayer worse than a pack of wild horses, while in prayer itself we hide within ourselves like a tortoise or a hedgehog.

But the real greatness of Teresa, of course, is not in her style or in her wit but in her sanctity. Ultimately it is the genius of her own life, a life lived wholly and totally for 'His Majesty', that transforms every page of her writings. Undoubtedly Teresa would have made her mark as woman and as a writer in whatever walk of life she had chosen, but that life would not have been transformed with the brilliance of her sanctity or the radiance of her intimate friendship with God. And, in

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the final analysis, it is this that matters. She was privileged as few have been to live and move in the presence of the living God revealed in the hidden depths of her own soul; to speak with him there, hear divine secrets and share the intimate communion of divine life. Her writings are great, not for what they tell us of Teresa, but for what they tell us of God and of his dealings with men. For Teresa was given the grace, not only to experience divine mysteries, but, in a sense, to stand back from them and to record and express in her writings what she had seen and heard. In revealing the secret depths of her own spiritual journey to God she had unwittingly charted for others a pattern



of divine intimacy that has guided souls, in every age since, in the ways of the spirit. As she struggled to understand the things she herself experienced she was able to record, with deep psychological insight, the moods and patterns of the human response under the direct action of God's guiding hand. The supports, the pitfalls, the dangers, the signs, the lessons so painfully learned and so masterfully recorded of her spiritual journey, have now become the principles of discernment for all who walk the inner path of prayer and contemplation.

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