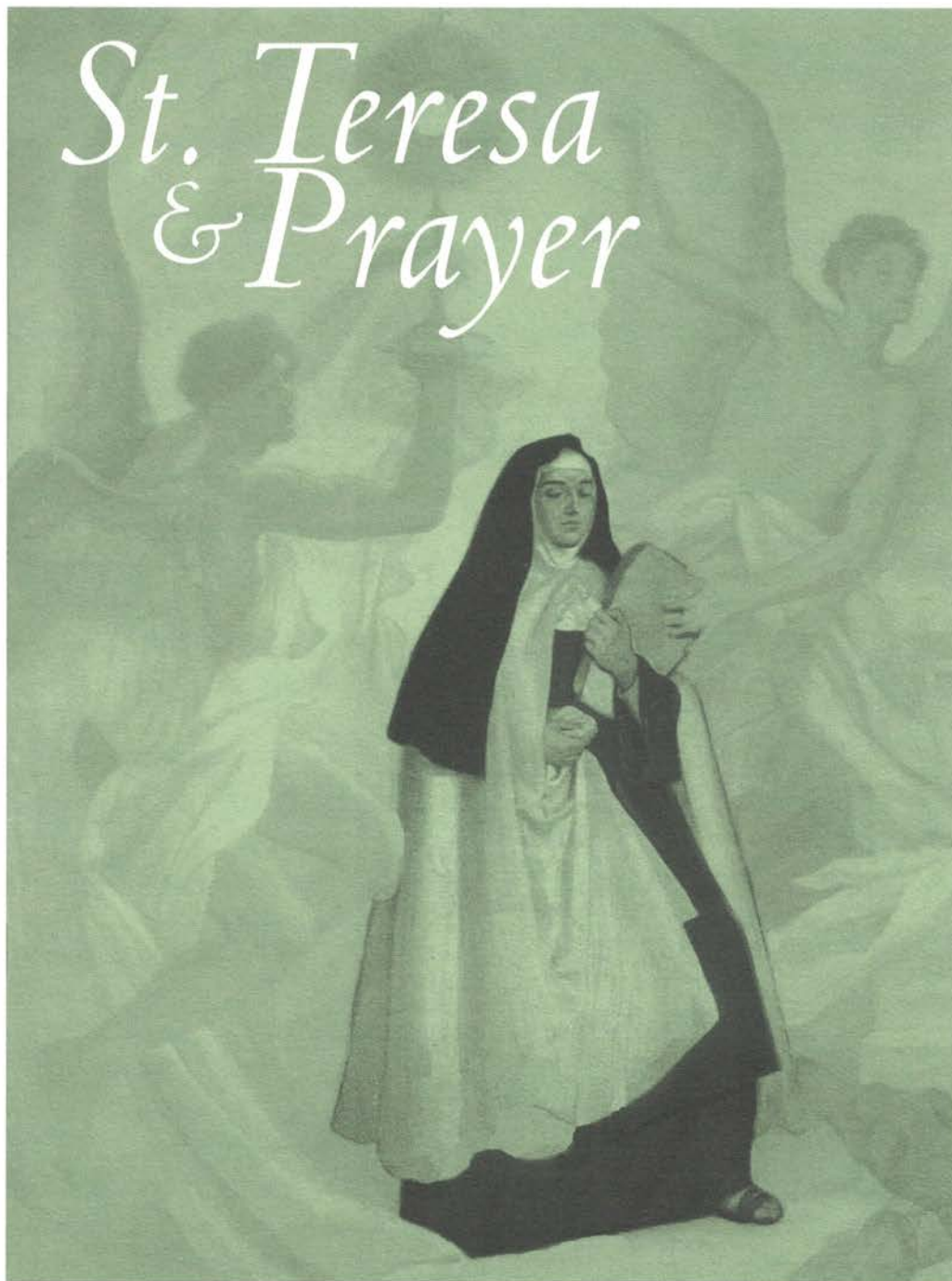


CARMEL CLARION

May - June 2006 Volume XXII No. 3

*St. Teresa
& Prayer*



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Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

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Editorial

This issue of the Clarion continues our focus on the teachings of our Holy Mother, St. Teresa. In his article "What is prayer?" Tomas Alvarez, O.C.D. breaks down for us the various elements found in Teresa's definition or description of prayer found in the *Life* (8,5): intimate conversation, friendship, frequency, solitude. He also explains how, despite her desire for intimacy with God, she maintains in her teaching on prayer God's transcendence, majesty and grandeur.

In another article Eugene McCaffrey, O.C.D. helps us to better understand the 'Prayer of Recollection,' which, as he says, is one of the most original and helpful contributions of Teresa's on the entire journey of prayer. He notes that what is most important is the attitude and awareness one brings to prayer.

Matthew McGetrick, O.C.D.'s article takes us through the first three mansions of Teresa's *Interior Castle*. He gives us insight into the prayer of those who are entering the Castle, and how all prayer, vocal as well as reflective prayer, is part of the process. He also has something to say about the Prayer of Recollection and how the various Gospel scenes from the life of Jesus were an important part of Teresa's journey along the road of prayer.

Finally, the centenary of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity's death (1906-2006) will be celebrated by the Order beginning on Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2006. To enter into this commemoration we are going to run a series of articles on Bl. Elizabeth and her teaching throughout this centenary year. In this way we hope that understanding of her Trinitarian teaching and devotion to this young Carmelite blessed may grow in each of us. The first article, by Daniel Chowning, O.C.D. certainly sets the tone for this.

On a more practical level, I would remind you to inform us any time your address changes in a timely manner. The Post Office does not forward bulk rate material such as the Clarion, nor do they return it to us with your new address. I would also ask the President or Secretary of each community to inform us of new members, and those making temporary or definitive promises by sending us a copy of the appropriate form. These forms are available for the asking.

Fr. Regis, O.C.D.



The Shepherd's Call: Teresa And The Prayer of Recollection

By: Eugene McCarthy, OCD



To the Living Water'

'Wandering mind', 'inability to meditate', 'cannot reason with the mind'... Does this all sound familiar? Certainly it was for Teresa of Avila, as we can see when she tells us, in *The Way of Perfection*, of her own efforts to pray. She also describes her distress in coping with distractions like living with a madman (L 30:16; W 31:8)! In fact, she admits that until the Lord taught her the prayer of recollection, she did not know what it was to get satisfaction or comfort out of prayer. For this reason, she is anxious to pass on her insights to others: she says it is a way of prayer that, once the Lord has granted it, we would not exchange for any treasure.

Teresa's teaching on the prayer of recollection is one of the most original and helpful contributions she makes to the whole journey of prayer: 'for many years I endured this trial,' she says, 'of being unable to concentrate on one subject, and a very sore trial it is' (W 26:2). She had no doubt about the importance and necessity of prayer. For her, it is not just one more thing with an outlandish name: it is a 'royal road' (W 21:1.5) along which we are all called to travel, a sure and safe way that will ultimately lead to the fountain of living water. But there are difficulties and hazards along the way and Teresa herself seems to have encountered most of them. Some, she acknowledges, were of her own making; others simply through lack of either experience or knowledge. Now, as she looks back, she wants to offer whatever help and guidance she can to others.

The Way of Perfection is Teresa's most accessible book. Written for her own sisters in the newly founded convent of St Joseph's, it has an easy and relaxed style, that of a mother talking lovingly and affectionately to her daughters. Despite her protests that she does not know where to begin or what she is going to say, the book falls easily into four clearly defined divisions. The first few chapters speak about the importance and value of prayer; the second and third sections discuss the nature of prayer and the foundations on which it is based; the final and longest section is built around her famous commentary on the Our Father. It is in these chapters, specifically 26-29, that she speaks about the prayer of recollection.

Prayer of Awareness

Teresa's teaching on the prayer of recollection must be linked to her understanding of prayer as she describes it a few chapters earlier: 'mental prayer,' she states quite

simply, 'has nothing to do with keeping the lips closed' (W 22:1). What is much more important is the attitude and the awareness we bring to it. Prayer, for her, involves most of all having 'a clear realization and full consciousness' (W 22:1) of what we are doing—an attention and awareness which, in her opinion, are much more important than the words we use. When you speak to God, she says, it is only right that you should think of who it is you are addressing, and what you are saying. And she assures her readers that, if they give due attention to these two points, they will be engaging in true prayer for a very long time. The whole dynamic of Teresian prayer is toward simplicity and a personal relationship with God—establishing an open and receptive heart, focused and attentive to his presence: 'do not, I beg you,' she writes, 'address God while you are thinking of other things' (W 22:8). And it is this 'thinking of other things' that ultimately opens the way for her to speak about the prayer of recollection.

Prayer of Companionship

The prayer of recollection can rightly be called the 'prayer of companionship'. Indeed, the first thing Teresa asks is that we seek the companionship of Jesus (cf. W 26:1; 29:4). Against the backdrop of the Our Father, she admits that the best remedy she herself found for distractions in prayer was to fix her mind on the person of Christ, present and close to her. This relationship with Christ is an essential quality of Teresian prayer and is beautifully captured in her reassurance: 'The Master is never so far away that the disciple needs to raise his voice in order to be heard' (W 24:5). 'Imagine,' she says, 'that this Lord Himself is at your side and see how lovingly and how humbly He is teaching you' (W 26:1). Practical as ever, Teresa suggests using whatever supports are helpful: a good book, 'simply as an aid to recollection' (W 26:10); or an image or a picture, 'not to wear round your neck and never look at, but to use regularly whenever you talk to Him' (W 26:9).

Here, Teresa is reiterating the famous description of prayer which she gives in chapter 8 of her *Life*: prayer as friendship with Christ, keeping him company, talking to him often, in a heart-to-heart conversation of love. 'If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, and if He sees that you love Him to be there . . . you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away, nor will He ever fail you' (W 26:1). And she adds, persuasively, 'Do you think it is a small thing to have such a Friend as that beside you?'

Personal Response

It is important to remember that, for Teresa, the prayer of recollection is something that is within our reach, and not something mystical or 'supernatural': it 'depends upon our volition, and . . . by God's favor, we can enter it of our own accord' (W 29:4). This is a prayer of faith, which can be achieved by our own efforts and faithfulness to grace. It springs from a faith-awareness of God's abiding presence in the soul and the knowledge that we already share his life through grace and the gift of the Spirit.

The whole dynamic of Teresian prayer is toward simplicity and a personal relationship with God—establishing an open and receptive heart, focused and attentive to his presence: 'do not, I beg you,' she writes, 'address God while you are thinking of other things'

And yet, for Teresa, there is an important similarity and an overlapping of experience. In fact, one of the main reasons she is so enthusiastic about the prayer of recollection is because of its openness to contemplation. In chapter 25 of *The Way of Perfection* she gives an almost poetical description of 'perfect contemplation': the soul is drawn 'without any sound of words' to the side of the Divine Master; it is 'enkindled in love' without knowing how and 'knows that it is rejoicing in the object of its love', again without knowing how. 'It is a gift of the Lord of earth and Heaven, Who gives it like the God He is' (W 25:2).

Despite the many extraordinary favors Teresa herself received, she is adamant that the essence of contemplative prayer is not to be found in them. The test—the only test—is the awakening of a true and genuine love for God, a deepening of friendship and intimacy with him, a detachment from all that hinders the soul's response; and all of this goes hand in hand with an unselfish generosity in the service of love. These are the qualities of contemplative prayer, gifts received sometimes in joy, more often in pain and dereliction of spirit: God molding and shaping the soul in the image and likeness of Christ.

The movement toward contemplative prayer is often so subtle and imperceptible that the soul itself is hardly aware of it.

Prayer of Presence

Teresa sees these very qualities coming into play in the prayer of recollection. This is why it can also be called a 'prayer of presence', an awareness in faith that God is within, close and personal; a prayer of friendship, open to and aware of the reality of this presence. It is a prayer of love, silence and listening, not a prayer of many words: 'the important thing is not to think much, but to love much' (IC4,I,7). The whole direction of the prayer of recollection is toward simplicity and attentiveness. There is nothing small or self-centered about it. It is a prayer that opens the heart in generosity of service, awakening compassion and love for others.

The movement toward contemplative prayer is often so subtle and imperceptible that the soul itself is hardly aware of it. 'These people,' Teresa says, who have heard the Shepherd's call, 'are sometimes in the castle before they have begun to think about God at all' (IC 4,3,3). Teresa also uses the image of the sea voyage when, with 'a little good wind' (W 28:5), the journey can be made much more quickly and directly than by land: a way, she suggests, by which the soul can travel a long way in a short time. She makes the same point with her favorite image of water, drawn from a well with 'great labor' (L II:7) or rising spring-like from within, flooding the soul with grace. 'It is called recollection,' Teresa says, 'because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God' (W 28:4), close to the fountain of living water. The prayer of recollection is the link, the bridge, that opens the heart to receive the greater and more purifying graces of contemplative prayer. In this prayer, the 'Divine Master comes more speedily to teach [the soul], and to grant it the Prayer of Quiet' (W 28:4). The heart is open and listening, ready for the Shepherd's call, however gently and quietly it is perceived.

Mount Carmel, Oct-Dec., 2005.

The Prayer of Beginner's (The First Three Mansions)

Matthew McGetrick O.C.D.

In this article we shall let St Teresa lead us into the *Interior Castle*, as we follow her description of the inward journey toward the center of the soul.

First of all she gives us a picture of the castle, as it were, from the outside. It is a castle made of clear crystal containing a great number of rooms divided into seven major areas, seven mansions leading inward to an inner chamber where the King dwells. She wants to tell us what a soul is like when it is in the state of grace, because her 'Interior Castle' is a symbol of the soul. There is very little one can say about the beauty of the soul in the state of grace. Teresa herself contem-



plated it in a supernatural vision, but how can one adequately describe such invisible beauty? All our concepts of beauty are derived from some visible expression of beauty; the beauty of the soul however, is invisible. Teresa can only tell us that it is a paradise in which God dwells and that its beauty increases accordingly as the virtues develop. We can observe a little of the beauty of virtue by seeing it in its various expressions in human lives, but the inner reality of the virtue escapes us. I am sure we shall have a great surprise when we enter heaven and see the radiant beauty of our souls. We shall be prompted to ask God, 'Lord, how did I come to possess this great beauty, this wondrous light?' God is likely to answer, 'It is because you loved me when you were on earth'.

Teresa next considers the opposite state of the soul, namely, when in a state of mortal sin. Just as the soul in God's grace is all light, the soul in mortal sin is enveloped in utter darkness—a heavy, dirty, evil-smelling darkness. She calls attention to the fact that all the good works performed by a soul in that state are useless in the sight of God: they are repellent to him because they do not come from the divine source. It is as though the actions of a person in God's grace come from a limpid spring of water, whereas the actions of a soul in mortal sin come from a dirty stagnant pool, and so even though externally they might seem good they have no value in the sight of God. Persons who are in mortal sin are outside the castle, living in the midst of poisonous and venomous creatures. In other words, they are

immersed in sin. Yet this may not be obvious because a person can be in a state of sin and yet externally seem to a very nice person.

Entering the Castle of Our Soul

We enter into the castle by repentance. Of course, the whole journey into and through the various mansions from beginning to end, is made by means of prayer and meditation: 'The door of entry to this castle is prayer and meditation' (IC I,1,7), and we must be faithful to these exercises at all times. But, first of all, there must be repentance: a turning to God, a turning away from sin. And so by repentance a person enters into the First Mansions, that first group of dwelling places within the castle. But even so, we are still in a very precarious situation because a lot of those poisonous creatures have entered in along with us. In other words, our sinful inclinations are still with us so that we can easily fall into mortal sin again. Teresa tells us that people in the First Mansions don't pray very much, perhaps, just two or three times a month, but for the most part, they are in the state of grace and if they do fall into sin again they repent. So there is a certain amount of stumbling backward and forward in the First Mansions.

Hopefully, these souls who have entered the castle of their soul, will progress further and move into the Second Mansions. Those who enter into the Second Mansions have really begun to practice prayer and meditation. They have really decided that this is something they must do, and they do it with a certain amount of consistency, but they have to struggle very much, because they are still firmly bound by their attachments and their interests in merely earthly things. They are caught up too much in the business of life and its pleasures, too much assailed by the various temptations which lead them away from God. But now because they have begun to practice prayer they begin to struggle. In the First Mansions there was very little struggle and so they frequently fell into sin.

In the Second Mansions, however, they do take up the struggle. It is a difficult warfare, and St. Teresa warns such people that just because they have begun to live a life of prayer they must not expect to receive extraordinary favors from God. They must not expect to receive spiritual comforts and consolations. No, what they need in the second Mansions is courage, courage to keep up the struggle, courage to battle against their worldly inclinations, courage to give to God a proper place in their lives. God will help them; he may not give them any extraordinary spiritual experiences (they have not gone that far yet), but he will give them many graces through various external channels (cf. IC II,1,7-8), These inspirations or graces may come through something they read in the Gospels or in some spiritual book, or through a spiritual conversation they have had with someone, or through some event in their lives. Teresa tells us that it is very important for people in the Second Mansions to be able to go to someone who can give them good advice, a spiritual director or a friend to whom they can confide their spiritual affairs and from whom they can receive encouragement, support and guidance, because the struggle here is far more intense than it was in the First Mansions (cf. IC II,1,10). In the First Mansions peo-

... what they need in the second Mansions is courage, courage to keep up the struggle, courage to battle against their worldly inclinations, courage to give to God a proper place in their lives.

ple do not worry very much if they fall into sin from time to time, but now, in the Second Mansions, because they are anxious to develop a life of prayer, they do worry. They do not want to fall into sin and so they put up a struggle. God, however, knows very well how they feel and he comes to their help, usually through books or through other people. So, if they persevere in this struggle they will move on into the Third Mansions.



Entering Still Deeper

In the Third Mansions there is a much greater sense of security. By the time people have arrived at this stage they have achieved a certain organization in their spiritual lives, they have succeeded in getting their priorities into right order. They give its due time to each thing; to prayer, to meditation and to spiritual reading. They keep their worldly concerns in their proper place. Their life becomes well organized on a spiritual basis and they become quite enthusiastic about it all. They feel they have gotten somewhere, and indeed they have; they have achieved a lot with the help of God and can experience great zeal, not only for their own spiritual development but for the development of other people.

In fact, this is often their weakness, for they are far too inclined to give advice to others and to expect them to be holy. However, their own spiritual life is still controlled by a certain 'common sense'. I am not referring now to 'common sense' insofar as it is good and very important, but common sense insofar as it is restrictive. In fact, should the Lord invite them to do something that does not seem to them to be quite sensible, they will hold back. They are controlled more by their own reason than by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and should the Holy Spirit lead them on, above and beyond reason, they will refuse to go. They have everything nicely organized, all nicely arranged and planned, and they want to stay within their secure and narrow framework, serving God in the way that they can control. This is very good as far as it goes, but unless they are prepared eventually, under the inspiration of God's grace, to break through that little shell they will never go further. We hope that many of them will break through and develop that surrender to God by which he leads a person on-never against common sense, never against right reason, but often above it: common sense illuminated by God's grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If these people are to be led further, their little shell will have to be broken down in order to allow them to enter into higher regions.

Basic Dispositions for Prayer

At present, we are concerned with the prayer of beginners, within the framework of these first three Mansions. St. Teresa gives certain dispositions of soul which are very necessary for beginners in the spiritual life. One of these dispositions is a



strong resolution or determination to persevere with prayer, to 'keep at it' (cf. IC II, I, 8; W 21). Teresa herself had great determination. This quality is very necessary, but unfortunately today the ideal of commitment, that is, taking up something and sticking with it and not giving up, is not valued very much. The attitude of many people is, 'I'll give it a try and if I like it I'll keep with it, but if not I'll give it up and try something else'. There may be valid reasons for giving up many things, but there is never a valid reason for giving up our search for God, never a valid reason for stopping on the way to holiness. St. Teresa insists that there should be a strong resolve, a firm resolution, that once we have begun, we persevere to the end. She laments about souls who have persevered for a long time, drawing gradually nearer to the spring of living water, namely, intimate union with God, and who give up the struggle just before reaching the goal, 'perhaps they were no more than two steps from the fount, of living water' (W 19,2). So from the very beginning, one needs a strong resolution to persevere to the end.

There is another disposition that St. Teresa requires: we might call it discretion, common sense, good judgment, or a certain balance of mind. In fact, she insisted that prospective novices should have this quality. When people would praise a novice simply for her spirit of prayer, Teresa would not be particularly impressed because, as she would insist, we can teach them how to pray, but we cannot teach them common sense. People in the Third Mansions are inclined, in their zeal and enthusiasm, to go to extremes. They generally give too much time to formal prayer, do excessive penances and have too much zeal for helping other people. When people overdo it like that there is always a reaction. They come to the conclusion that it is all too much for them, that their health cannot stand up to it, and so they give up the whole thing. Therefore, not only should there be firm resolution, but there should also be good judgment and prudence.

A third requisite for beginners is to have great desires. St. Teresa herself was a person of great heart, and she asks those who follow her path to have similar desires. By this she means the desire for holiness; not just the willingness to go half-way, or three-quarters of the way, but the readiness to go the whole way. We must have the will to be holy. The word 'holy' is a word that many people dislike. It has unpleasant associations for them, but it is a good word. It is a word that is used in the Bible and it simply means having the life of God developed within us. Holiness is godliness. To develop the life of grace to its full perfection, that is holiness, we must have deep desires for all the holiness that God wills to give us, desiring that our soul be widened and deepened. We should be consumed with a great longing to receive everything that God wants to give us, not putting any limitations on it. We have nothing to fear, because it is to God that we are giving ourselves; he loves us and will take care of us.

These are the three basic dispositions that Teresa asks of us if we are to set out on the way of interior perfection: a strong resolve, discretion and great desires.

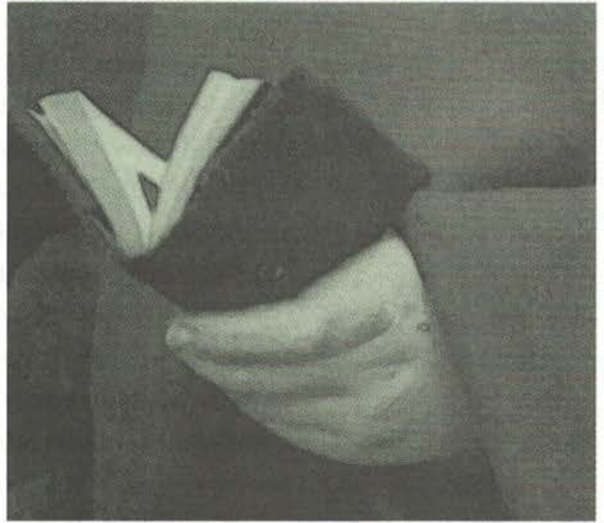
The Prayer of Beginners

We shall now consider certain elements in the prayer of beginners. First of all, there is vocal prayer. The important thing about vocal prayer is to say it meaningfully, and not to rush through it. One 'Hail Mary' said calmly and devoutly is far better than ten 'Hail Marys' that are rushed through. To say our vocal prayers gently and calmly can really put us in touch with God. We must not be concerned about getting through a certain number of prayers; what we do say should be said well, and in that way we shall often be drawn by God into contemplation. A certain elderly sister once came to Teresa, telling her that she was not able to meditate. She could make nothing of meditation.

All she could do was to repeat the Our Father. St. Teresa questioned her and discovered that while saying the Our Father this sister was frequently drawn into contemplation: 'She spent several hours reciting a certain number of Our Fathers, in memory of the times our Lord shed his blood, as well as a few other vocal prayers . . . I saw that though she was tied to the Our Father she experienced pure contemplation' (W 30,7). Therefore, it is important to say our vocal prayers well, never feeling that we must get through a certain number and consequently be obliged to recite them hastily.

Next, there is discursive meditation. By discursive meditation we mean thinking over a spiritual subject and drawing conclusions from it and trying to apply these conclusions to our own lives and, of course, making it a subject of conversation with our Lord. St. Teresa admires those who are able to practice discursive meditation. Usually, they seem to be learned men whose minds are very well stocked with ideas, but she warns them to be careful not to spend all their 'time intellectualizing, nor to turn discursive meditation into a purely intellectual activity. It is of no use at all unless it leads to Jesus, unless it leads a person to converse with Jesus and love him. That is the whole purpose of discursive meditation: it should lead us to intimate conversation with our Lord.

A third form of prayer is meditative reading. This is the way that many people will practice their discursive meditation because they do not feel able to think in a very logical way on any spiritual subject, but find it very helpful to take up a spiritual book and let the author of the book do the thinking, while they simply absorb what he says. Teresa herself found immense benefit from the use of spiritual books. She says she sometimes read just a little, sometimes a great deal according to how the Lord inspired her, but it gave her great confidence because she was not able to think out subjects for herself. But with the help of a book she was nearly always able to turn to God with devotion. Sometimes, she tells us, just having the book beside her gave her confidence. So, for a great many people, meditative reading supplies the need for discursive meditation (cf. L 4,8-9; W 19,I;26,10).



Teresa was keenly aware of her own sinfulness, although it is generally believed she never committed a mortal sin; yet for a saint all sin is serious and deserves lifelong repentance and atonement.

There is also the kind of prayer which is particularly characteristic of St. Teresa. It is hard to put a name on it. You might say 'the prayer of recollection' or, as she calls it, representing Jesus to herself. You see, St. Teresa tells us that she was never able to use her mind discursively in meditation nor was she able to make use of her imagination, She could not even see the form of Jesus in front of her. She could not picture what he looked like (cf. L 9,6). Eventually she did not need to do this because our Lord showed himself to her, but before that, she could not form any vivid picture in order to help her in her prayer as St Ignatius advises, for example. We call it the composition of place: to picture the scene, to form a mental picture of Jesus, and to put ourselves into that scene in order to be with him. She simply could not use her imagination in that way. What did she do? She represented Jesus to herself. It is not easy to grasp precisely what she meant, However, by means of this inner representation she realized that Jesus was with her, that he was there by her side, and that she talked to him. It was a somewhat vague picture she had before her mind because she was unable to form any clear-cut images; however, she realized that Jesus was very near to her and lived within her soul.

Yet, in spite of that, she often used scenes from the life of Jesus. One scene she loved to contemplate was Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Her love of this scene began as a teenager when she came back from the year-and-a-half she had spent in boarding-school at the convent of Our Lady of Grace. She was ill and had to spend time in bed. In front of her, on the wall of her bedroom, was a picture of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman and underneath it were the words, Domine, da mihi aquam: 'Lord, give me water'. Day after day she would lie and look at that picture in front of her and the scene imprinted itself on her mind and stayed with her all of her life. She loved to think of Jesus in that scene and repeat very simply the words 'Give me water'. She did not work it out in any detail, she did not do a lot of thinking about it, she could not even see it vividly in her mind, but it helped her to be aware that Jesus was with her. It enabled her to talk to him, or sometimes not even to talk to him, but just to look at him and love him and know that he was loving her.

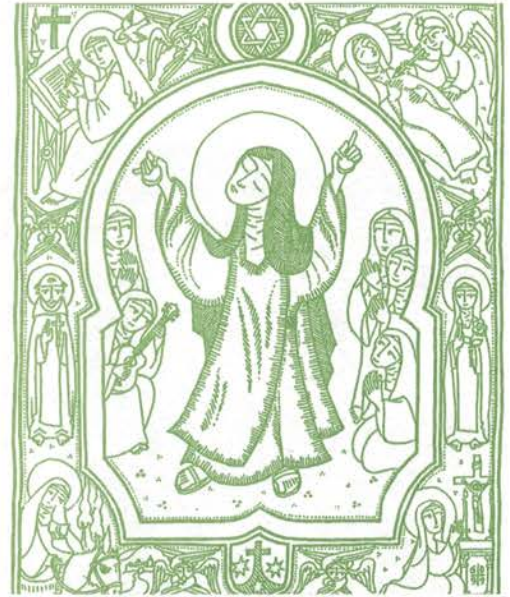
Another scene that she loved to contemplate was the agony of our Lord in the garden when he was all alone and suffering. She loved to keep him company in order to offer him some consolation and the support of her love. She felt that his sufferings were due partly to her sins-she was always very much aware of her sins-and she was interiorly urged to approach him and wipe his bloodstained face with a towel, but the thought of her sins held her back. At least she was in his company and she loved to remain there loving him and knowing that he was loving her.

She also loved to place herself in the scene where the Magdalene was at the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper, washing Christ's feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. Teresa was keenly aware of her own sinfulness, although it is generally believed she never committed a mortal sin; yet for a saint all sin is serious and deserves lifelong repentance and atonement. So she

loved to place herself with Mary Magdalene at the feet of Jesus and weep for her sins. This was not done in any introspective way; rather, going out to him in love, knowing that he had forgiven her, she expressed her love for him and opened her heart to receive the abundance of his forgiving love.

In such scenes as these, and there were also many others Teresa loved to be in the presence of Jesus. But it was not the scene that was important-this was usually rather vague-what mattered to her at all times was just to know that she was with Jesus and he with her. Her expression for this reads literally, 'representing Jesus to herself', being aware that he was there with her, without being able to visualize it in any particular way. Thus she could talk to him, look at him and love him. This was the essential aspect of Teresa's prayer as a beginner (cf. W 26).

We must remember that, in a sense, Teresa was a beginner until she was almost forty. A beginner on a very high scale, if you like, but still a beginner! From a natural point of view everything seemed to be against her. Her temperament did not easily bend itself to the requirements of a well-controlled and peaceful mind. She could not control her imagination, which was a source of countless distractions to her. But God is not conditioned by our temperament. We do not need a contemplative temperament in order for God to make us contemplatives.



Conclusion

St. Teresa's own life is an encouragement for all of us. She had to struggle for many years before she arrived at mature prayer. At times she had to summon up all her courage in order to force herself to enter choir and be faithful to prayer. What embarrassed her more than anything else was that God sometimes gave great consolations, and this overwhelmed her with shame because she thought herself so utterly unworthy of them. She describes it like this: imagine you are in the presence of a great King and he knows you are plotting treason against him. He knows it, and yet you keep coming into his presence. That is the way she felt toward our Lord. Nevertheless, she resolutely persevered in prayer, and her perseverance was eventually rewarded; her struggle bore fruit.

It happened suddenly. Glancing one day at a statue of the wounded Christ-the 'Ecce Homo'-she was touched to the depths of her being with sorrow for her infidelities. She threw herself down before him in tears and asked him to strengthen her once and for all. She promised there and then that her life would change (cf. L 9,1) and change it did. Teresa was no longer a beginner. She now began to scale the heights of mystical contemplation.

Lord, as you inspired St Teresa to write the *Interior Castle*, inspire us to understand what she says and resolutely follow her path. We ask this through the good Jesus whom she loved so much. Amen.

Elizabeth of the Trinity

Fr. Daniel Chowning, O.C.D.



Elizabeth of the Trinity stands as one of the staunchest witnesses to the transforming presence of God in the heart of the Christian and the world. Like the great prophet of Carmel, Elijah, she cries out: “the Lord of Hosts lives in whose presence I stand.” Her spirituality is rooted in our baptismal grace. In a letter to her friend Madame de Sourdon, she wrote: “One thing alone is necessary: Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her. This better part, which seems to be my privilege in my beloved solitude of Carmel, is offered by God to every baptized soul.” (L 129) This “better part” of Mary, the contemplative part, our call to union with God through love, is the call of every baptized Christian. The seeds of contemplation were planted in our hearts at our baptism.

In one part of her elevation to the Trinity, Elizabeth prays: “O consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, come upon me, and create in my soul a kind of incarnation of the Word: that I may be another humanity for Him in which He can renew His whole mystery.” We see from this prayer that Elizabeth understood well our baptismal grace. At our baptism we were plunged into the mystery of the life and death of Jesus Christ. We died with Christ so as to rise with him and live with him. Through the baptismal waters we began to live the mystery of the life and death of Jesus and began a journey of becoming transformed into Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, by our baptism we became temples of God. The Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit made their home within us imparting to us dignity and beauty.

St. Paul’s letter to the Romans profoundly inspired Elizabeth: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn in a large family.” (Rom 8:29) We are predestined by our very creation to be conformed to Christ. We are now beloved children of God.

The Trinity: A God who is all Love

We will be disappointed if we search for a theology of the Trinity in Elizabeth’s writings. She offers us no systematic theology of the Trinity. It is difficult to speak of the Trinity without falling into abstract theological language. For our Carmelite of Dijon, the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is not a dry and ab-

stract theological concept but a Person, a God of loving relationship who shares life and who longs for intimacy with us. One of Elizabeth's fundamental intuitions is that God is Love and that this God of Love desires to be in relationship with us. "There is a Being who is Love and who desires that we live in communion with Him." (L 327) St. Paul's words from Ephesians 2:4 indelibly marked Elizabeth's heart: "But God who is rich in mercy, because of the exceeding love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us back to life with Christ." In a letter written to her mother in June of 1906, she shared the importance of these words: "There is a phrase of St. Paul that is like a summary of my life and that could be written on every one of its moments: Propter nimiam charitatem." (His exceeding love.) Yes, all these floods of graces are because He has loved me exceedingly. Darling Mama, let us love Him, let us live with Him as with a loved one from whom we cannot be separated." (L 280) God's exceeding love summarizes Elizabeth's life; it gave meaning to every moment of her life.

Over and over in her writings she stresses to her family and friends the importance of believing in God's love. In her retreat, *Heaven in Faith*, she impresses upon her sister Marguerite that faith in God's love must penetrate her entire life.

"We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us." (I Jn 4: 16) This is our great act of faith, the way we repay our God love for love; it is the "mystery hidden" in the Father's heart, of which St. Paul speaks, which, at last, we penetrate and our whole soul thrills. When it can believe in this "exceeding love" which envelops it, we may say of it as was said of Moses, "He was unshakeable in faith as if he had seen the Invisible." It no longer rests in inclinations or feelings; it matters little to the soul whether it feels God or not, whether He sends it joy or suffering; it believes in His love. The more it is tried, the more its faith increases because it passes over all obstacles, as it were, to go rest in the heart of Infinite Love who can perform only works of love. So also to this soul wholly awakened in its faith the Master's voice can say in intimate secrecy the words He once addressed to Mary Magdalene: "Go in peace, your faith has saved you." (*Heaven in Faith*, 20)

This is a profound text worthy of much prayer and reflection. Elizabeth tells her sister that God's "exceeding love" must penetrate her entire life. It doesn't matter if she sensibly feels this love or not; the important thing is to trust this love. God's love is always at work, in joy as well as in suffering. To believe in this love, to root ourselves in the conviction of God's love, is the key to true peace of heart.

Our God, who is all love, abides in the deepest recesses of our being. Love dwells within us. Love is not some accident added to human nature, nor something we can earn or merit. Our very nature is love; it defines us as human beings; it reveals to us our divine vocation. The indwelling presence of the Trinity is Elizabeth's simple, stark, and profound message. In this sense, Elizabeth is a true prophet of Carmel for the mystical experience of our Carmelite saints is an increasing consciousness and awakening



of God's indwelling presence. This growing awareness of God's presence brings about a transformation of our person in the deepest part of our being.

"I feel so much love over my soul, it is like an Ocean I immerse and lose myself in: it is my vision on earth while waiting for the face-to-face vision in light. He is in me, I am in Him. I have only to love Him, to let myself be loved, all the time, through all things; to wake in Love, to move in Love, to sleep in Love, so my soul in His Soul, my heart in His Heart, my eyes in His eyes, so that through His contact He may purify me, free me from my misery." (L 177)



Throughout her letters Elizabeth impresses upon her correspondents the profoundly simple truth that God dwells within them. All of their happiness, richness, and beauty lie within their very hearts. They are never alone. God has taken up His abode within them and is drawing them into a communion of life. She reassures her friend Marie-Louise Ambry who is expecting a baby:

"My dear Louise, I rejoice in your hopes about the arrival of the little angel. Don't be afraid, be completely in God's peace; He loves you; He is watching over you like a mother over her little child. Remember that you are in Him, and that He makes Himself your dwelling here below; and then, that He is in you, that you possess Him in the most intimate part of yourself, that at any hour of the day or night, in every joy or trial, you can find Him there, quite near, entirely within you. It is the secret of happiness; it is the secret of the saints; they knew so well that they were the "temple of God" and that in uniting ourselves to this God, we become "one spirit with Him," as Saint Paul says." (L 175)

Shortly before she died she wrote to another friend, Madame de Bobet:

"My dear Antoinette, I leave you my faith in the presence of God, of the God who is all Love dwelling in our souls. I confide to you; it is this intimacy with Him "within" that has been the beautiful sun illuminating my life, making it already an anticipated Heaven; it is what sustains me today in my suffering. I do not fear my weakness; that's what gives me confidence. For the Strong One is within me and His power is almighty. It is able to do, says the Apostle, abundantly more than we can hope for." (L 333)

Elizabeth invites her friends and family to live from their depths, from their deepest center where God abides, to become aware of God's continuous loving presence. She reminds them of their baptismal grace, the grace of the indwelling Presence of Love. All their desire, joy and happiness remains so close to them. God is present as the strong one who helps them in all their trials.

Elizabeth reminds us of our dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Woven into the fibers of our being is an image of Love, an image

of a God of Relationship who has loved us into being and whose Love sustains us in life. There exists in every one of us a place of wholeness, peace and love regardless of our sinfulness, past actions, or emotional or spiritual wounds. We are more than the color of our eyes or hair, or how we dress. We are more than our family background, degrees or our bank accounts. We are loved in the depths of our being. God created us for intimate friendship and longs to satisfy our deepest desires for love and happiness with God's own Love!



A little note... Carmel Clarion is a welcomed guest, its pages filled with a wealth of spiritual food. How interesting, that there is extant, centuries later, writings and dated materials from another time, that find their way into the journey of the Carmelites and are found in the pages of the Clarion.

R.R., Youngstown, OH

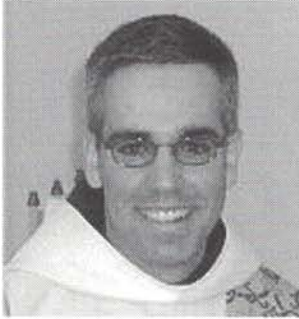
Thank you for sending the recent issue of the Clarion. It is a beautiful issue, I'm so glad to receive it. Thank you very much for all that you do for the Carmel family. Best wishes for the Easter Season.

Sincerely,
M.E.G., OCDS, Greenfield, MA

Thanks again for the Clarion and all the work that goes in to publishing it and adding to our insight/knowledge of our Saints and Blessed Mother. You are helping us draw closer to Jesus."

C.K., OCDS - Bucksport ME

The Ordination of Michael Berry, OCD to the Priesthood



Brother Michael will be ordained priest at St. Florian Church at 11 a.m. on Saturday, June 24, the Solemnity of the Birth of St. John the Baptist. Archbishop Timothy Dolan of Milwaukee will be the ordaining prelate. The newly-ordained will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Florian Church, West Milwaukee, WI at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, June 25, as well as a Mass of Thanksgiving at his home parish, St. Gregory Barbarigo Church, Garnerville, NY at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 2. All are invited!

Michael was born in Yonkers, New York and grew up in Haverstraw, NY, some forty miles northwest of New York City. His parents, as well as his sister (his only sibling) and her husband and two children, still live in that area.

Michael graduated from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA in 1992 with a B.A. in English. During college he was a javelin thrower for four years on the Varsity Track and Field team and he was heavily involved in the Catholic Student Association, organizing prayer groups, Eucharistic adoration, and statewide college retreats, spending a great deal of time in quiet prayer (having been given a key to St. Bede's Church on campus).

Following college graduation Michael decided to enter the Dominican Order, having also seriously considered the Trappists. However, after novitiate and two years of studies, he chose to leave the community and to continue vocational discernment as a layman. He spent three years working for the Church—one year as an administrative secretary for the Office for the Catechism at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and two years as the at-large field representative for the Office of Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

After again discerning with the Trappists, it became clear to him that, while longing for silent prayer and solitude, he also felt an “apostolic” desire. The Discalced Carmelites seemed to embody this “tension” while also fostering an intellectual tradition, promoting the works of Saints Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Edith Stein, and others.

Michael spent his postulancy in Brighton, MA and then lived two years at Holy Hill completing his novitiate during the Jubilee Year. He spent four years at the Edith Stein House of Studies in Chicago, completing his M.Div. degree at Catholic Theological Union as well as campus ministry at the University of Chicago and a unit of clinical pastoral education at Loyola University Medical Center. Since his solemn profession and diaconate ordination in August 2005 he has served as a deacon at St. Florian Church in West Milwaukee, as well as recently being assigned vocation director of the province.

The Carmelite Institute 2007 National Conference

July 25-29 in Rhode Island

The Prophetic Dimension Of Our Carmelite Rule

In the year 2007, Carmelites will celebrate the eight-hundredth anniversary of their origins in the Holy Land and their Rule of St. Albert. The order began in the thirteenth century when a small group of inhabitants of the Latin Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem began living as hermits on Mount Carmel near present day Haifa. Although we have no detailed documentation as to the precise motives that drew these men to a life of prayer and community on Mount Carmel, we believe it was principally due to their longing to follow Jesus Christ in the spirit of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, and a desire to take up an inner, spiritual warfare in order to promote God's kingdom. Our conference will celebrate this early history of the Carmelite order, endeavoring to show its relevance for life today in the United States.

KEVIN CULLIGAN, OCD

Keynote Address

Fr. Culligan will insist that the prophetic call of the Carmelite Rule today includes, in addition to prayer and interior combat with evil, following Jesus Christ's way of peacemaking. This includes confronting America's disordered attachment to military power that diminishes available resources for humanitarian development, promoting the Catholic Church's teaching on peace and justice, and calling people to moral and spiritual renewal.

Other themes of our tradition will include: Elijah, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, The Martyrs of Compiègne, Edith Stein, Titus Brandsma, and Jacques Bunel.

General Session Presenters:

Andrew Bacevich, Ph.D. (Boston University); John Haught, Ph.D. (Georgetown University);

Craig Morrison, O.Carm.; Vilma Seelaus, OCD; and John Sullivan, OCD.

An Evening of Musical Reflection:

Claire Sokol, OCD - Cello; Clorinda Stockalper, OCD - Piano; and Mary Margaret Yascolt, OCD - Flute

Workshop Presenters:

Michael H. Crosby, OFM Cap.; Peter Hinde, O.Carm.; and Edward McCormack, Ph.D. (Washington Theological Union)

What is Prayer?

Tomas Alvarez, O.C.D.

Part II

This is the second of a two part article by Tomas Alvarez, OCD. The first part appeared in the previous issue of the Clarion.

St. Teresa's conception of prayer stems from her experience of it; so it is not very speculative or theoretical. Consequently, it is a difficult conception to reduce to some basic line of thought. Yet it is worthwhile trying to do so, for it will give meaning and value to all those contributory thoughts of hers, the innumerable observations, words of advice, suggestions, etc. scattered throughout her treatment of the subject.



Let us take as our starting point that classic text, the so-called Teresian definition of prayer that is found in *Life*, 8, 5. Though it is only a description, and can lay little claim to be a definition in any strict sense, it is an accurate expression of the nucleus of the saint's teaching. An accuracy guaranteed by the typical way it is brought into the context in which it occurs: it appears spontaneously, and with little respect for grammar, as a doctrinal parenthesis in the middle of an autobiographical account. With it, Teresa breaks the line of thought she had just been following, passes from a general

and impersonal exposition to direct dialogue with the reader, and then goes on to pray directly to God, giving a practical demonstration of this definition which is theoretical only in appearance.

Here, then, placed fully in context, is the passage in question:

"In spite of any wrong he does, the person who has begun to practice prayer must not abandon it, since it is the means by which he can remedy the situation; and to remedy it without prayer would be very difficult.

Whoever has not begun to practice prayer, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good. There is nothing here to fear, but only something to

desire. Even if there be no great progress, or much effort in reaching such perfection as to deserve the favors and mercies God bestows on the more generous, at least a person will come to understand the road leading to Heaven. And if he perseveres, I trust then in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken him for a friend.

For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing but an intimate conversation between friends; it means conversing frequently and alone with him who we know loves us.

In order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord. . . And if you do not yet love him as he loves you. . . you will endure this pain of spending a long while with one who is so different from you when you see how much it benefits you to possess his friendship and how much he loves you.

O infinite goodness of my God, for it seems to me I see that such is the way you are and the way I am! . . . Oh, what a good friend you make, my Lord!

And her monologue continues, as she tells God what she has just told the reader: about friendship, how not all friends are the same, how well God does his part, and how prayer (what she is doing) is such a wonderful manifestation of friendship with him.

Just now we are interested only in the central part of that passage in italics. St. Teresa is about to tell us in no uncertain terms ('is nothing but'), barely softened by the addition of 'in my opinion', what she understands by private prayer or, more precisely, 'mental prayer'. The outstanding feature of her definition is surely its emphasis on the person praying. Prayer is reduced to an act in which man converses with God. The objective content of that act, the subject of the conversation, is relegated to the background as are any reasons for doing it (questions like 'Do we pray to acquire virtues?', etc). Prayer is presented as something good in itself and as its own justification; she always refers to it as 'a good'. What it is useful for is another matter and quite secondary, notwithstanding its undoubted importance. The quintessence of prayer is in the activation of the friendship between two persons who have succeeded in establishing this relationship; it is, therefore, 'to make friends' and to communicate at that level.

Teresa achieved the personal emphasis of this definition by using one of her typical literary devices: highlighting the most important element by the kind of progressive unfolding and repetition found in Jewish literature. The conversation element is first repeated, then intensified by 'frequency' (necessary to continuing friendship), 'alone' (to emphasize intimacy and face-to-face encounter), and 'someone we know loves us'.

It is love and friendship, then, that bear the burden of the relationship between the interested parties in the act of prayer, and both elements are neatly brought out in having friendship, and the awareness of the other's love. There is no mistaking her meaning: the cornerstone is charity, including and giving priority to the other's love, as he is the only one who cannot fail. On the other hand, her emphasis from

the psychological point of view, regarding the person's attitude that is, is on the will—the 'determination' necessary—as she would lose no time in showing.

Teresa's affirmation of prayer as 'an intimate conversation between friends' was not an invitation to dwell on that in prayer as something to talk or think about; it refers to one's behavior in prayer, not the content of it. The important thing is to activate this friendship, 'conversing frequently and alone' with one's friend. And that was the attitude she inculcated each time she got to the heart of the matter: 'The important thing is not a lot of thinking but a lot of loving; so do what best stirs you to love' (IC, 4, I, 7); 'it does not require much strength, just love and habit' (L, 7, 12); and to be a little more specific, 'speak with him as with a father or a brother or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes one way, sometimes another'



(W, 28, 3). She also speaks very concretely of 'enduring' the friendship, saying in effect: put up with yourself, put up with not being able to contribute more to the friendship than you are and endure having to draw near to the Friend in that state, just as he suffers us. 'How certainly you do suffer the one who suffers to be with you!' (L, 8, 6).

That this doctrinal version is a synthesis of the Saint's experience and previous spiritual

tragedy is clear: friendship requires one to be fully present, fully open to the other person, complete with one's burdens. That is why she became ashamed and embarrassed in God's presence. A tremendous weight burdens every word spoken in such conditions, yet spoken they must be if the friendship is to take place.

The predominance of the affective element, being the prime driving force in friendship, did not imply that prayer was emptied of intellectual content. Perhaps Teresa's 'definition' does not do full justice to the thinking of one for whom there was no prayer without 'truth'. She regarded truth as a prerequisite for anyone beginning prayer, and its achievement an indispensable part of the content of any prayer.

She had scarcely begun the little treatise on prayer for beginners, which she inserted in her *Life*, before she told them categorically: 'I would rather a spirit without prayer than one that has not begun to walk in the truth. . . When brought before the truths of Sacred Scripture, we do what we ought. May God deliver us from foolish devotions' (L, 13, 16). This advice sums up her wealth of experience and her convictions. The 'truth' in question is the truth of one's life: 'to walk in the truth before Truth itself' (L, 40, 3), not to pretend with God. Then there is God's truth: faith and the Scriptures, our essential mental luggage for drawing near to

God and speaking to him. Whenever she admonished her nuns at St Joseph's in Avila about the basic requirements of a life a prayer, whether private or communal, she always insisted on the need for the support of someone well-versed in the teachings of Scripture and of the Church.

As far as its content is concerned, therefore, prayer for Teresa is open to two fundamental truths: the truth of each of the partners in the friendship. In the human partner, not just self-knowledge but all that affects his salvation; in God, not only himself in Christ, in the Church, in his word, in his presence, but everything to do with him. St. Teresa never quoted St Augustine's 'noverim te noverim me', but she would have agreed with him fully.

An analysis of the various prayers with which she so unselfconsciously littered her writings shows that just about anything could be the subject matter of her prayer: matters divine or human, important or trivial, misery and glory, people and things. But in all of these we are only raw material; they acquired form and meaning only when they became part of God or herself: Christ's Passion or Teresa's sins, his eternity or her desires.

As in friendship, so with prayer: as it develops, the variety of things that claim one's attention gives way to concentration on the partner. Thus, meditation, a rudimentary form of prayer, ranges far and wide, dissipated in the minutiae of some subject barely affecting either person (though it can be given a personal orientation, and was by St. Teresa). But contemplation, or any more mature form of prayer, progresses quite differently: it concentrates on the other Person. Teresa says as much in one fascinating piece of advice to beginners: 'One should. . . just remain there in his presence with the intellect quiet. And if a person is able he should occupy, himself in looking at Christ who is looking at him' (L, 13, 22); or he can take in both persons in the same glance: 'consider whom you are speaking with as well as who you are' (W, 22, I).

This brings us to the most delicate point in Teresa's thinking. In her conception of prayer, such is the involvement of the two persons with one another that we could not understand it without asking the author herself what her concept of God is and how she sees herself on coming face to face with him. This is really a vast subject and Teresa's output on it is enormous. Our treatment of it will be very limited, confined, in fact, within the context of prayer.

Let us begin with the easiest aspect: her self-image. which she acquired in prayer. She is not what she or others see her to be, only what she is in God's eyes. That is her truth. And she presents herself before God with a twofold burden, so to speak: her own person and her life. By her person she means chiefly her soul: the nobility of the soul, the capacity of the spirit, the space of her inner world. That is the platform from which she speaks to God. No doubt, she can also speak to him from things, from her senses, from other people. . . But she prefers inwardness. That is where her contact with God developed. No understanding of the development of Teresa's prayer is possible without reference to this basic fact. Everybody's

prayer to God becomes more spiritual in proportion to the zone of spirituality it springs from.

St. Teresa was certainly not spiritual in a way that could imply any contempt for the body. Her attitude to Christ's humanity is ample evidence of that. As she said herself: 'We are not angels; we have a body. To desire to be angels while we are on earth. . . is foolishness' (L, 22, 10). Nevertheless, she did believe that Christian, even human, life was impossible unless one became aware of one's personal inner and spiritual dimension. Twice she called the lack of this 'great bestiality', a term that shocked the censor of the *Interior Castle*, but which in her vocabulary meant a form of spiritual atrophy or sensory depravity in which animal instincts are uppermost, causing people to be incapable of person-to-person relationships and even more incapable of friendship with the transcendent Person.

However, the dignity of the person is not the decisive element in prayer: the burden of one's own life has greater import. In the context of Teresa's 'definition' of prayer, which has been claiming our close attention, this aspect stands out. Remember, she placed that 'definition' right in the middle of the account of her own life and at the climax of the drama she was recounting in the first ten chapters. Chapter 8 is preceded by the story of her own miseries and weakness, reaching a climax in Chapter 7. The denouement comes in Chapter 9 with the events surrounding her definitive conversion, her encounter with the image of the Lord and her reading St. Augustine's account of his own conversion. Between these, Chapter 8 is devoted entirely to what proved to be the key to the solution of her problems: prayer. The title of the chapter announces that fact in her typically fulsome style: 'Treats of the great good it did her. . . the excellent means. . . it is so highly profitable.... there is great value in giving some time to so great a good.'

The 'eulogy' that followed was far from abstract; it was intimately linked with the preceding drama—that of her own life, fascinated alternatively by the attraction of two poles: God and the world. Teresa had succumbed to the latter. Charming in manner and speech, she did not resist human friendship. Hers were true friendships, consequently absorbing and incompatible with the absolute demands and requirements of that other friendship to which she felt called by her vocation, by her soul, and by God. Despite the colorful account, the whole drama can be reduced to one word: friendships. This includes all the accompanying manifestations: conversations, affection, presents, appointments, time . . . presence. Her conversion would be not only an overcoming of this dispersive situation, but a transportation of it all toward the new friend; a kind of spiritualizing of a human situation. So the reserving of her friendship for God, and her commitment to this, became the key to her whole life. That is why she had no need of abstract terms when she passed from autobiography to doctrine: her 'relating in friendship' summed up the whole burden of life and experience expressed in the preceding pages. Prayer became the channeling of life toward the person of God through friendship, with the wholeheartedness of a lover and the loyalty of a true and undoubted friend. Thus, what-

ever was said to God would be or not be prayer, and would be prayer to a greater or lesser degree, according to whether or not it sprang from the real life of the person initiating such dialogue with him.

When looked at in the context of her very human experience of friendship, Teresa's definition of prayer is rich in overtones. It takes what she has learned of interpersonal relations at the human level and transfers it to our relationship with God.

Having seen how Teresa regarded herself, we still have another, and more delicate, question to ask concerning the inclusion of God as a party to this conversation between friends.

For the present, there is no need to define his 'intervention' in the dialogue, even in the more advanced form which this assumes in mystical prayer. What interests us now is St. Teresa's 'image of God'. How could a mystic such as she write in a way that seemed to reduce the transcendence of God to the convenient and easy plane of friendship? Does not a prayer which is conditioned by the countenance of a divine friend push some fundamental elements of religion (fear, sense of transcendence, ineffableness) and essential Christian emphases (expiation, adoration, silence, faith) into the background? There are really two problems here: What is Teresa's God like, what is her idea of him and how does she relate to him?

The God of Prayer

It is not true to say that in St. Teresa's theological and religious perspective friendship acts as a kind of chemical solvent of transcendence; that the affective leveling disguises a God of personal service, almost bordering on the level of sentiment. Quite the contrary.

Let us return once more to the text that served as our starting-point: *Life*, 8, 5. Just after the equation of prayer with friendship, there is a faltering, a note of hesitation: 'In order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord. The will of the Lord, it is already known, cannot be at fault; our will is vicious, sensual and ungrateful. And if you do not yet love him as he loves you because you have not reached the degree of conformity with his will, you will endure this pain of spending a long while with one who is so different from you when you see how much it benefits you to possess his friendship.'

There is inequality between the persons, their natures, and their loves, therefore; an inequality that affects both the friendship and the prayer. Yet one thing must remain clear: the fact of God's being so different does not put him outside the bounds of friendship with us.

It will not be an easy task to reduce the different facets of the God who dominates Teresa's thinking and experience to a simple theological line. But, in any case, her sense of his transcendence is extremely keen. The theological category she made most frequent use of was that of Majesty, and it was reserved for God. God is His Majesty. He is described as King, Lord and Emperor, and usually becomes

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through friendship her Lord and King: 'My Lord, my Emperor. You are King, my God' (W, 22, 1). For Teresa, Majesty is not usually an attribute; it refers directly to the Person of God and she has plenty of attributes for the Person, which she delights in proclaiming. They are mostly of biblical lineage, but derived more from experience than from reading; for she has proved them: power, truth, light, just, faithful, eternal.

His Power - 'Just believing that you are all-powerful was enough for me to receive all the grandeurs that you work' (L, 19, 9). At Communion she remembered 'that extraordinary majesty I had seen. . . my hair stood on end; the whole experience seemed to annihilate me' (L, 38, 19). And, commenting on a phrase from the Song of Songs, 'How appropriate this name "powerful King" is, for the Lord has no superior, nor will his reign ever end.'

He is the Truth, the highest truth, source of all truth: 'This truth is. . . truth itself, and it is without beginning or end; all other truths depend on this truth, just as all other loves depend on this love, and all other grandeurs on this grandeur. . . O my Grandeur and Majesty!' (L, 40, 4).

He is the God of eternity, but an eternity felt and savored as the concrete form of his existence and his reign: 'O King of Glory and Lord of all kings! How true that your kingdom is not armed with trifles, since it has no end! How true that there is no need of intermediaries with you! Upon beholding your person one sees immediately that to be called Lord is no more than you deserve, such is your majesty. . . Here on earth, if a king were all by himself he would fail to be recognized. However much he would want to be recognized as king, he wouldn't be believed; he would have no more to show than anyone else. It is necessary that the reason for believing him to be a king be seen; hence the justification of these artificial displays. . . Appearing powerful does not come from himself; his authority must come from others. O my Lord! O my King! Who now would know how to represent your majesty! It's impossible not to see that you in yourself are a great emperor, for to behold your majesty is startling. And it is even more startling, Lord, to behold the humility and love you show to one like me. And yet, when we get over that first shock and fright at seeing your majesty, we can converse and speak with you as we like' (L, 37, 6)

'You are King forever, my God; and your kingdom is not a borrowed one. When the words of the Creed 'and his kingdom will have no end' are said, it is almost always a special delight for me. I praise you, Lord, and bless you forever; in sum your kingdom will last forever (W, 22, 1). This is a theme she has already developed at great length in her autobiography, and is always closely linked with her own life.

Recourse to images never dissolves the mystery or overcomes the barrier of ineffableness. God was 'much, much more': the mystery of him remained mind-boggling-Teresa spoke of her mind being 'overwhelmed' by it. But it thrilled her too: 'the less I understand it, the more I believe it and the more devotion it inspires in

me.' In God's presence all human knowledge only stammers: 'O my Lord and my God, how great are your grandeurs! We go about here below like foolish little shepherds, for while it seems we are getting some knowledge of you, it must amount to no more than nothing (IC, 4,I, 5).

Perhaps the most interesting point about Teresa's stammering is that every assertion she makes betrays something of her own attitude. In God's presence, she 'trembles', feels 'overcome with fear' and, sharing St. Peter's sentiments, tells the Lord to depart. Before His Majesty 'her hair stands on end', she is dazzled by his brightness, 'left totally blind, absorbed, frightened, and in a swoon from the many grandeurs' (L, 2I, 29); she feels annihilated, full of awe, sinful. She refers to herself as 'one like me', 'so womanish and lowly', 'so weak and unimportant', 'a mere nothing'. She would have gladly remained annihilated forever if it gave glory to God. Before his holiness she feels tainted by sin, 'weighed down by abominations', a worm, and 'foul-smelling'. She cannot help turning to God and reminding him to be careful of what he is doing when he communicates with her and offers her gifts: 'I often say: 'Lord, look what you are doing. Don't forget so quickly my great wickedness. . . Don't, my Creator, pour such precious liquor into so broken a bottle. . . Don't let your love be so great, eternal King.' (L, 18, 4)

Yet, in the midst of this explosion of reverential sentiments before the transcendence of God, there is a great outpouring of the intimacy, trust, tenderness, peace, faith and hope which express her friendship. Almost any passage from the *Life* could illustrate this aspect of Teresa's attitude in God's presence: 'Indeed, I took delight in the Lord today and dared to complain of His Majesty, and I said to him: "How is it, my God, that it's not enough that you keep me in this miserable life and that for love of you I undergo it and desire to live where everything hinders the enjoyment of you, in that I have to eat and sleep and carry on business and talk with everyone. . . how is it that when there is so little time left over to enjoy your presence you hide from me? How is this compatible with your mercy? How can the love you bear me allow this? I believe, Lord, that if it were possible for me to hide from you as it is for you to hide from me that the love you have for me would not suffer it; but you are with me and see me always. Don't tolerate this, my Lord! I implore you to see that it is injurious to one who loves you so much." Sometimes love becomes so foolish I don't make sense' (L, 37, 8-9).

But all those sentiments occasioned by the grandeur of God were only like looking at God against the light. St. Teresa discovered his true face in the mystery of his condescension: God in Christ. She had a realistic appreciation of God's 'lowering' of himself, and the constancy of her wonder, admiration, and love was surprising. Twice the words she used to express this aspect of the mystery or her graphic description of it gave offense to the theologians appointed to censor her writings.

In the *Life*, I5, 8, she wrote: 'Here there is no call for reasoning, but for frankly recognizing what we are and for placing ourselves with simplicity in God's presence, for he desires the soul to become ignorant in his presence, as indeed it is. His

*I believe, Lord, that
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Majesty humbles himself so much that he allows us to be near him in spite of what we are.' When Bañez revised the original, he substituted 'humanizes' for 'humbles'.

The censor of the Way of Perfection, on the other hand, crossed out the whole of the following passage: 'What a marvelous thing that he who could fill a thousand worlds with his grandeur would enclose himself in something so small [the human soul]! He did the same when he fitted into the womb of



his most blessed Mother. In fact, since he is Lord he is free to do whatever he likes, and since he loves us he adapts himself to our size. 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 has gradually enlarged it and it has the capacity to receive what he will place within it. For this reason, I say he is free to do what he wants since he has the power to make this palace a large one' (28, II-12).

Both passages reflect the two aspects of the mystery of God emphasized by Teresa: his self-abasement and disguise in Christ, and his person-to-person communication with us. She makes both observations without any dependence on metaphor, with the realism of one who makes no pretense of theologizing but keeps to what she has learned by experience. Thus, when speaking of Christ's 'emptying of himself', it is the personal subjection involved rather than any ontological considerations that she focuses on: he came to serve, he became a slave. Here are some examples: 'He came from the Father to become our slave' (F, 5, 17). '... What we owe him for his service to us. I say these words "his service to us" unwillingly, but the fact is that he did nothing else but serve us all the time he lived in this world' (IC, 3, I, 8). 'There is no slave who would willingly say he is a slave, and yet it seems Jesus is honored to be one' (W, 33, 4). In Jesus, God acquiesces in our friendship: 'Christ is a very good friend because we behold him as a man and see him with weakness and trials -and he is company for us. Once we have the habit, it is very easy to find him present at our side' (L, 22, 10). While nearer to the end of the book: 'A much greater love for and confidence in this Lord began to develop in me when I saw him as one with whom I could converse so continually. I saw that, even though he was God, he was a man who wasn't surprised by the weaknesses of men, that he understood our miserable make-up, sub-

ject to many falls. . . I can speak with him as with a friend, even though he is Lord. I know that he isn't like those we have as lords here on earth, all of whose lordship consists of artificial displays: they have to have designated times for speaking and designated persons who may speak with them. . . O King of Glory and Lord of all kings! How true that your kingdom is not armed with trifles, since it has no end!' (L, 37, 5-6).

St. Teresa's spiritual experience took her beyond the self-emptying of the Incarnation, and brought her face to face with the second aspect of the mystery of God, mentioned above: God's personal communication with man. For her, this is precisely what Christian life is all about; personal communication rather than endowment with graces. Through this she learned what God was really like. In her last book, the *Interior Castle*, this recurs like a refrain: not to be surprised that God should communicate so marvelously with us. And when she eventually introduces the symbol of the spiritual nuptials, the most expressive symbol of God's relationship with man, at the beginning of the seventh dwelling-place, she admonishes the reader to the same effect: 'Don't be surprised at what has been said or at what is about to be said. . . The more we are aware that he communicates with creatures, the more we will praise his grandeur.'

Union is the highest point of man's relationship with God; it leaves him overwhelmed and speechless: 'O my Lord, how good you are! . . . May all things praise you, my God, for you have so loved us that we can truthfully speak of this communication which you engage in with souls even in our exile! And even in the case of those who are good, this shows great generosity and magnanimity. In fact, it is your communication, my Lord; and you give it in the manner of who you are. O infinite Largesse, how magnificent are your works! It frightens one whose intellect is not occupied with things of the earth that he has no intellect by which he can understand divine truths. That you bestow such sovereign favors on souls that have offended you so much certainly brings my intellect to a halt; and when I begin to think about this, I'm unable to continue. Where can the intellect go that would not be a turning back since it doesn't know how to give you thanks for such great favors? Sometimes I find it a remedy to speak absurdities' (L, 18, 3).

How to Relate to God

In Teresa's opinion, we can relate to such a God. 'My God is not at all touchy; he doesn't bother about trifling things' (WP, 23, 3). It might seem superfluous to try to obtain any more specific information from her on this subject. We have already had to turn to her relationship with God to find out what she thought about him.

And yet one sometimes finds rather one-sided versions of this aspect of her person and teaching. On the other hand, her style of dialogue with God has been compared unfavorably with that of St John of the Cross. He used the familiar form of address spontaneously throughout his writings, while Teresa never let it slip once; neither in her 'absurdities' nor in moments of greatest intimacy.

On the other hand, much has been made (even to the point of caricature) of the familiar, and often humorous, way she turned to God in any and every situation in life. The best known of the stories that supposedly illustrate the incisive irony with which she chided God on his ways with man is the following, entirely apocryphal, little piece of dialogue that is supposed to have taken place when she fell off a cart and hurt her leg, as well as getting wet:

'Lord, after all I've been through, now this?'

'That is how I treat my friends, Teresa.'

'Yes, Lord, and that is why you have so few of them.'

Teresa did have a sense of humor, but she also had great respect. Both are typical of her, and neither was ever at the expense of the other.

Obviously, Teresa never took up the thorny problems that bother professional theologians. Even divine transcendence did not pose a problem: 'If you can talk to other people, why should you be at a loss for words when speaking to God? Don't believe it; at least I won't believe of you if you practice. 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 is a relative; family ties and friendship are lost through a lack of communication' (W, 26, 9).

So, practice and the struggle involved in learning are not excluded, as indeed we have seen in her own case. In fact, the only problem Teresa sees is at the level of the learning process. 'In a thousand lives we would never completely understand the way in which this Lord, before whom the angels tremble, deserves to be spoken to' (W, 22, 7).

It is not theology which will solve the problem of how to speak to God: 'He delights more in the unpolished manners of a humble shepherd whom he realizes would say more if he knew more than he does in the talk of wise and learned men, however elegant their discourse, if they don't walk in humility' (W, 22, 4).

In the final analysis, it is our lifestyle and actually speaking to God that solve the problem of how to relate to him; they will give the relationship the variety and flexibility needed to exploit all the possibilities; they will set our tongues free from inhibition: 'Fine humility indeed! 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' (W, 28, 3). 'Do you think it unimportant. . . to understand that there is no need to go to heaven in order to speak to one's Eternal Father?. . . Nor is there any need to shout. However softly we speak, he is near enough to hear us. Neither is there any need for wings to go to find him. . . Look at him within yourselves and do not turn away from so kind a guest. . . speak with him as with a

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spoken to'*



father, or a brother, or a lord, or a spouse; sometimes in one way, sometimes in another. He will teach you what you must do to please him. So stop being foolish and ask his permission to speak' (W, 28, 2-3).

It was this openness of Teresa's conversation to all the possibilities of life and the various facets of her own character that allowed her to be effortlessly jolly and humorous or daring in turn. The following passage is from a context in which she gently pokes fun at one of the men she wrote the book for: 'He asked me to pray. . . for him. . . I began to talk to the Lord in a foolish way, which I often do without knowing what I'm saying. It is love that is then speaking, and the soul is so transported that I don't notice the difference there is between it and God. Love that knows it possesses His Majesty forgets the soul and thinks it is in him and, as one without division, speaks absurdities. I remember saying to him: 'Lord, you must not deny me this favor; see how suitable this individual is to be our friend.' (L, 34, 8).

Her daring is even more striking. Her conversation penetrates to the heart of the mystery of God, to his arrangement of the history of salvation, to his graciousness toward her and others in the working out of that history. Frequently, the expressions she uses are barely permissible. Her prayers for Christ and for the Father are examples of this daring style of hers; they are daring almost to the point of what she calls 'madness and 'foolishness', yet intense and revealing examples of the power of Christian prayer. Here are both the prayers in question:

A prayer to the Father for Christ profaned in the Eucharist: 'Well, holy Father in heaven . . . there must be someone to speak for your Son, since he never looks out for himself. Let us be the ones, daughters, even though the thought is a bold one, we being who we are. . . Well, what is this, my Lord and my God! Either bring the world to an end or provide a remedy for these very serious evils. There is no heart that can suffer them, not even among those of us who are

wretched. I beseech you, Eternal Father, that you suffer them no longer. Stop this fire, Lord, for if you will you can. Behold that your Son is still in the world. Through his reverence may all these ugly and abominable and filthy things cease. In his beauty and purity he does not deserve to be in a house where there are things of this sort. Do not answer for our sakes, Lord; we do not deserve it. Do it for your Son's sake. We don't dare beseech you that he be not present with us; what would become of us? For if something appeases you, it is having a loved one like this here below. Since some remedy must be had, my Lord, may Your Majesty provide it' (W , 35,3-4).

Prayer to Christ in Favor of his Father:

'O Son of God and my Lord! How is it that you give so much together in the first words of the Our Father. . . You oblige him to be true to your word, which is no small burden since in being Father he must bear with us no matter how serious the offenses. If we return to him he must forgive us, as he did the prodigal son. . . Behold, my Lord, your Father is in heaven. You yourself said so. It is right that you look to his honor. Since you have vowed to undergo disgrace for us, leave your Father free. Don't oblige him to do so much for a people so wretched, like myself, who will not thank you properly' (W , 27, 2-3).

An analysis of the numerous prayers with which all her writings, especially the *Life*, are interspersed would show that Teresa's 'conversation between friends' develops quite naturally, and almost inevitably, along the usual lines of Christian prayer: praise, adoration, thanksgiving, glorification; acts of faith, hope, desire and love; as well as the humble prayers of sorrow for sin, petition (particularly for the Church) and self-oblation. All of them bear the stamp of deeply-felt dignity, for God 'is so great a friend to his friends, and so great a Lord to his servants' (W , 35, 2).

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