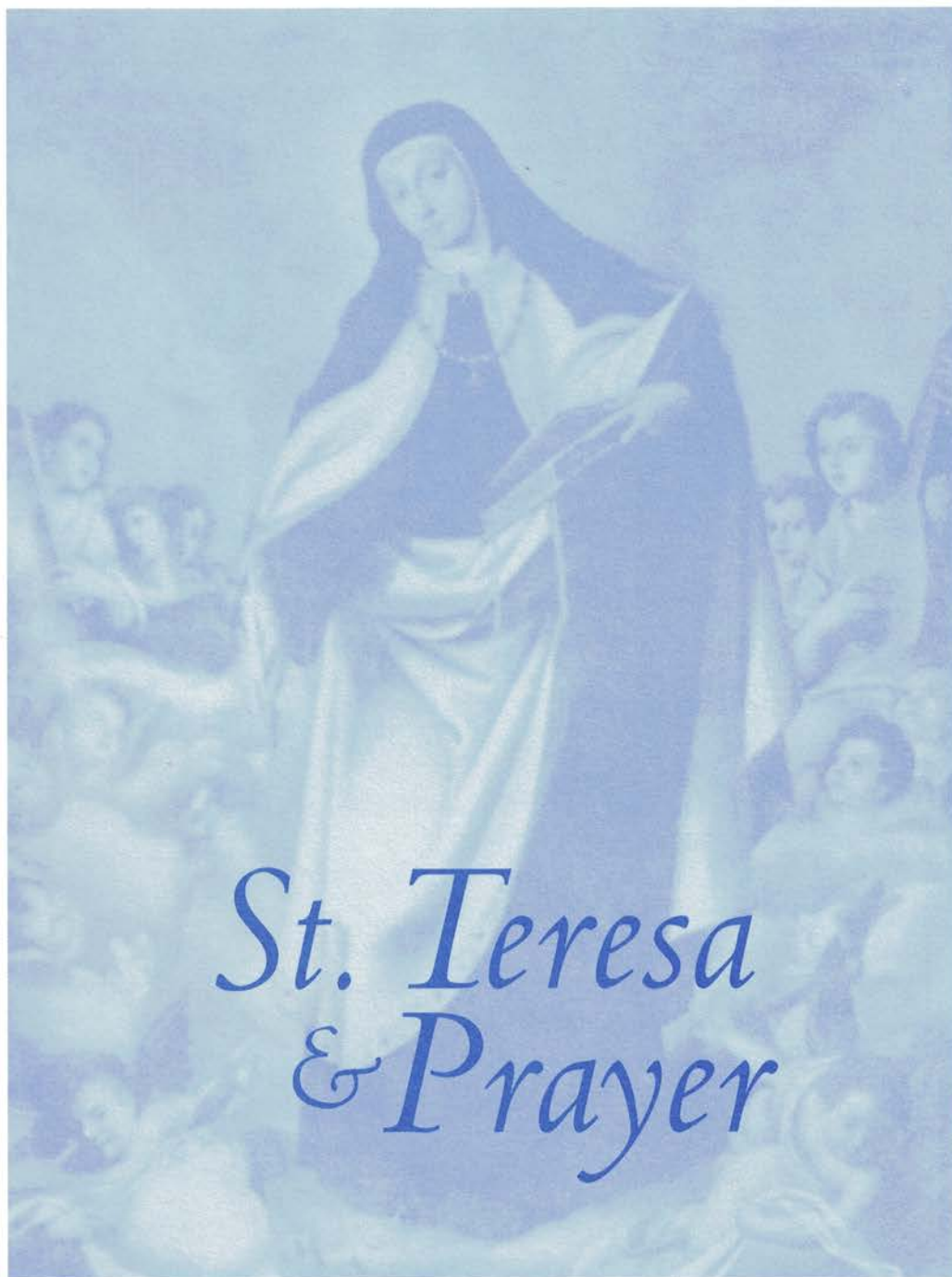


CARMEL CLARION

July - August 2006 Volume XXII No. 4



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Disalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

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Disalced Carmelite Friars
2131 Lincoln Road, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002-1151
Phone: 202-269-3792
Fax: 202-269-3792
E-mail: OCDSwash@juno.com

Editor

Fr. Regis Jordan OCD

Staff

Tony Holmes

Rosemary Moak OCDS.

Suzanne Treis OCDS.

Provincial Delegates

Fr. Regis Jordan OCD

Fr. Paul Fohlin OCD

Fr. John Grennon OCD

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Editorial

In this issue of the Clarion we continue to focus on the writings and teaching of our Holy Mother, St. Teresa.

Fr. Alvarez notes that while Teresian experts agree that Teresa had no specific method of prayer, she did have a method of teaching prayer to others. Over the course of her life, beside her own sisters, she taught many others how to pray, including her own father and brother as well as many theologians and religious with whom she came into contact. As Fr. Alvarez also points out, her teaching was based, not on theory, but on her own experience. Experience gained in the course of a very busy and often turbulent life. A life which included serious physical sickness, problems with the Inquisition, much travel founding her communities, etc. Finally, he points out that the *Way of Perfection* is Teresa's manual of prayer, a guide for those following the path of prayer.



Fr. Cummin's article takes us through the difficult "Fourth Mansions" of the *Interior Castle*. He provides guidance regarding the various terminology found in this Mansion as well as insights into passive recollection and the prayer of quiet and the signs of its presence.

Gillian Leslie's article on Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity explores in depth Elizabeth's "I go to Light, to Love, to Life." She considers each of the elements: light, love and life, by considering Elizabeth's entire life and body of writing and drawing out of her life and works the deeper meaning of each element.

Finally, we note the centenary of our monastery at Holy Hill, Wisconsin. Over the years Holy Hill has not only been a shrine to our Lady Help of Christians, but it has been the site of many other entities of the Province. Early on it became a parish; it was the site of the Province's minor seminary and also in the 50s and 60s a house of philosophy. Up until the late 60s or early 70s most of the friars spent at least three years at 'the Hill' as part of their formation. What the Bavarian friars undertook 100 years ago has influenced an entire generation of Carmelite friars. We ask each of you to pray that what began so many years ago may continue to serve God's people for many years to come.

Fr. Regis, OCD

'A Little Spark Of True Love'

The Prayer of Quiet in the Fourth Mansions

Norbert Cummins, OCD



When St. Teresa begins her account of the Fourth Mansions she wants us to realize that we are now entering a new world. She begs the light of the Holy Spirit 'to speak for me from this point onward, so that you may understand what I shall say' (IC 5,I,I). In order to reach these Mansions one must have spent a long time in the previous ones, particularly the Third. 'But there is no infallible rule about it, as you must have often heard, for the Lord gives when He wills and as He wills and to whom He wills and, as His gifts are His own, this is no injustice to anyone' (ibid. 2). The Lord's giving, not man's diligence or deserving, will henceforth be the rule. We are approaching what St. Teresa calls 'supernatural' prayer. This is the realm of God's special friends whom he now begins to draw close to himself in love by giving them some foretaste of eternal happiness.

It is as though a man promised a jar of wine to each of two friends, but also gave a glass of it to the second as a sample, which no doubt would have some effect on him. The first friend would not doubt the promise if the donor was an honorable man, but the second would

long more keenly for the gift.

God gives this foretaste of the paradise He promises to many of His special friends in order to withdraw them completely from the transitory joys of this life by a beginning of the joys of eternal life.

Early and Later Terminology

The mystical life is concerned with things which have no proper name. It is not surprising, then, that St. Teresa showed some hesitation in her choice of a suitable terminology. In her early writings she did not distinguish between the prayer of quiet and passive recollection, and she often used the word 'recollection' without the adjective, active or passive. The first time that she explicitly treats the prayer of quiet, in connection with the second way of 'watering the garden', she says,

This state, in which the soul begins to recollect itself, borders on the supernatural, to which it could in no way attain by its own exertions . . . This state is a recollecting of the faculties within the soul, so that its fruition of that contentment may be of greater delight (L I4,2).

The prayer of quiet has a more extended meaning here than we find in her later writings. In the *Way of Perfection*, written shortly after the *Life*, she gave her classic

account of the prayer of active recollection and went on immediately to the prayer of quiet without any mention of passive recollection (W 28-29). A few years later, in her meditation on the Song of Songs she observed how the soul feels within itself such great sweetness that it is well aware of our Lord's nearness to it. She calls this the prayer of quiet 'because of the tranquility which it brings to all the faculties'. It is obviously a passive prayer for 'it enters the soul with great sweetness, and brings it such joy and satisfaction that it cannot understand how or in what way this blessing is entering it.

It looks as if St. Teresa had been feeling her way unconsciously toward a more exact terminology. By the time she came to write the *Interior Castle* she had become more satisfied with her interpretation of her experience.

It may be that in writing of these interior things I am contradicting what I myself have said elsewhere. This is not surprising, for almost fifteen years have passed since then, and perhaps the Lord has now given me a clearer realization of these matters than I had at first (IC 4,2,7).

In the Castle, we have the mature St. Teresa choosing her terms after a lifetime of experience. In the Fourth Mansions she speaks at length about the prayer of quiet and then suddenly remembers another kind of prayer that almost always begins before this one . . . It is a recollection that also seems to me to be supernatural (IC 4, 3,1). She now distinguishes clearly between the prayer of quiet and the prayer of passive recollection and treats them in separate chapters.

Passive Recollection

Because of original sin we have to overcome many obstacles in our effort to get in touch with God. This labor of meditation is said to be 'noisy' in comparison with man's original state. God no longer walks with man in paradise, not because he does not want to, but because man's own house is in disorder. Man's power of thinking and loving, as well as his memory and imagination, which should have been like good servants in the house of his soul, now serve him ill and prevent him from enjoying the company of his God. Reflecting on this disability and observing the dispositions needed for the prayer of quiet, St. Teresa gives an account of passive recollection. She describes how the Good Shepherd very gently restores the lost order and gives the soul some share in the original integrity of man. He removes the obstacles that exist within the soul, preventing it from being so present to itself that it cannot be fully present to God.

"Let us suppose that these senses and faculties (the inhabitants, as I have said, of this castle) have come out of the castle, and for days and years, have been consorting with strangers to whom all good things of the castle are abhorrent. Then, realizing how much they have lost. they come back to it, though they do not as yet actually re-enter it. The great King who dwells in the Mansions within the castle, perceives their good will, and in His great mercy desires to draw them back to Him. So, like a Good Shepherd, He teaches them to know His voice and not to go



away and get lost but to return to their Mansion; and so powerful is this Shepherd's call that they give up the things outside the castle which had led them astray and once again enter it (IC 4,3,2)."

St. Teresa was pleased with her comparison, 'I don't think I have ever explained this so clearly' (ibid. 3). The gentle call of the Good Shepherd corresponded well with her personal experience of this new kind of recollection. She discovered that without striving she was already in the castle with the King. 'Without any labor of our own, the temple of which I spoke is built for the soul in which to pray. The senses and exterior surroundings appear to lose their hold while the spirit regains its lost sovereignty' (ibid. I). She emphasizes the passive character of this prayer. We are not to imagine that we can attain it by thinking of God within, or picturing him there. This habit she praises highly for it is founded on truth. But it is not the kind of prayer she now has in mind.

"What I am describing is quite different. These people are sometimes in the castle before they have begun to think about God at all. I cannot say where they entered it or how they heard their Shepherd's call: it was certainly not with their ears, for outwardly such a call is not audible. They become markedly conscious that they are gradually retiring within themselves (ibid. 3)."

The soul now becomes aware of a mysterious Presence within itself and its faculties are drawn inward to relish its sweetness. For this aspect of the prayer, St. Francis de Sales used the comparison of a magnet:

"A man, puts a piece of loadstone among several needles and sees them instantly turn their points towards their loved magnet and attach themselves to it. So too when our Lord makes his most joyful presence felt in the depths of the soul, all our faculties turn and point in that direction so as to come and join such an incomparable source of delight."

In the Mansions, St. Teresa recalls Osuna's comparison of the hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into its shell. 'The person who used that image,' she said, 'must have understood the experience well, . . . but these creatures draw inward whenever they want. In the case of this recollection, it doesn't come when we want it, but when God wants to grant us the favor'.

In passive recollection the soul is being drawn by God. He makes his presence felt with a certain plenitude. The powers of the soul are not suspended, they are recollected in unity so that they can be occupied more intensely with God. Techniques for silencing the mind could never bring about this kind of recollection. Peace and quiet of mind are always helpful in the spiritual life, but St. Teresa does not recommend any artificial stopping of the mind's activity.

"Some books advise that as a preparation for hearing what our Lord may say to us we should keep our minds at rest, waiting to see what He will work in our souls, but unless His Majesty has begun to suspend our faculties, I cannot understand how we are to stop thinking without doing ourselves more harm than good (IC 4, I,4)."

Of course, she does admit that we should strive to cut down the rambling of

the intellect in order to foster a more simplified form of prayer, but the purpose is to perfect rather than suspend its activity.

For St. Teresa, prayer was always something intensely personal. Her doctrine tended primarily to safeguard the inter-personal relationship, to deepen it and to guide our behavior accordingly. If we have not come into God's presence we cannot be said to be addressing him in prayer, and if God has not drawn us into his presence we should strive to approach him actively by our own efforts.

When He secretly shows us that He hears our prayers, it is well to be silent, as He has drawn us into His presence; there would then be no harm in trying to keep our minds at rest (that is to say, if we can). If, however, the King makes no sign of listening or seeing us, there is no need to stand inert, like a dolt, which the soul would resemble if it continued inactive. In this case its dryness would greatly increase and the imagination would be made more restless than before by its very effort to think of nothing."

The Prayer of Quiet

In the prayer of quiet God does not as yet manifest himself, but he makes his presence felt by sending out from the center of the soul, where he abides, a river of peace or an aroma which is said to have the taste of eternal life. This has the characteristic of satisfying all the soul's deepest tendencies and appetites, which unexpectedly enter into rest and quiet. There is question here of a new kind of awareness, a new 'sense' of the presence of God, an expression used first by St. Gregory of Nyssa to describe this experience. The Bride of the Canticle, he says, "is surrounded with the divine night in which the Bridegroom comes nearer without showing Himself, but by giving the soul a certain sense of His presence, while fleeing clear knowledge."



Nearly all the mystics appeal to the spiritual senses in an effort to describe their experience of heavenly realities. Their experience of something 'out of this world' seemed, by its very novelty, to require a breakthrough to a new anthropology, but the idiom is that of experience, not of philosophy. There is no question of new faculties in the way that philosophers understand them. The spiritual senses represent qualitative differences in the experience of a divine intimacy that lies beyond the reach of philosophical effort. In addition, it should be made clear that we are dealing with spiritual depth, not the realm of the subconscious.

According to St. Teresa, the happiness of the prayer of quiet does not have its source in the heart.

"It arises in a much more intimate part, like something of which the springs are very deep. I think this must be the center of the soul. As the heavenly water begins

to flow from this source—that is, from our very depths it proceeds to spread within us and cause an interior dilation and to produce ineffable blessings . . . The fragrance it experiences, we might say, is as if in these interior depths there were a brazier in which we cast sweet perfumes; the light cannot be seen, nor the place where it dwells, but the fragrant smoke and the heat penetrate the entire soul, and very often, as I have said, the effects extend to the body (IC 4, 2, 6).”

In her Meditation on the Song of Songs, she noticed that the text itself used the image of perfume and fragrance, ‘Your breasts are better than wine, and give forth the, most sweet fragrance’. However, what St. Teresa underlines particularly is the inwardness of the experience, ‘as if into the marrow of the bones had been poured the sweetest of ointments, resembling a fragrant perfume . . . only that we know that it pervades our whole being”. St. Bernard, commenting on the

same passage, remarks that it is the Bride’s ‘keen senses’ that have been quick to detect this perfume so eager is she to experience it in all its fullness. In other words, it is an awareness that comes through sleep and tender love.

St. Teresa strives for greater theological accuracy when she defines the prayer of quiet as ‘a little spark of true love for the Lord, which He begins to enkindle in the soul. This quiet and recollection—this little spark—if it proceeds from the Spirit of God is not a thing that can be acquired. She perfects the image later in the Man-

sions by comparing God to a burning furnace from which a small spark flies into the soul that feels the heat of this great fire. With the prayer of quiet, God is beginning here on earth to give the soul his kingdom, a kingdom of love. He is beginning to make it a ‘citizen of heaven’.

“The soul knows, in a manner very different from the knowledge gained by the exterior senses, that she is very close to her God . . . and she is filled with such reverence that she does not dare to ask for anything. Supreme delight is felt in the body and a great satisfaction in the soul. She is so happy to find herself close to the Spring that, even without drinking, her thirst is allayed. It seems to her that there is nothing left to desire (W 31,2-3).”

It is clear, then, that the term ‘quiet’ had a special meaning for St. Teresa. Spiritual writers sometimes use the word in a looser sense to signify a peace of soul that is appropriate for entering the presence of God, and the reference is usually to the attentive mind and the absence of distraction. The prayer of quiet, however, is not primarily in the attention of the mind, but in a disposition of the will, and it is a consequence of the presence of God in the soul, not a preparation for it. Quiet is a



condition of the will produced by the presence of eternal life now in some way anticipated in those whom the Lord begins to make 'citizens of heaven'. Far from being a quietistic, desireless state, the will is held in captivity precisely because of the intensity of its love, now centered on God alone. "The will alone is occupied, in such a way that, without knowing how, it becomes captive. It allows itself to be imprisoned by God, as one who well knows itself to be the captive of Him Whom it loves" (L 14,2).

Infused knowledge and infused love characterize the beginnings of contemplation, but the soul cannot have any distinct knowledge of the object of its love. In dark contemplation, knowledge is communicated to the intellect obscurely and love is communicated to the will confusedly.

With the prayer of quiet we enter the realm of clear or sweet contemplation. The soul is distinctly conscious of its infused love but the object of its love is still obscure to the intellect. For this reason there may be much wandering of the mind during the prayer of Quiet. Satisfaction resides in the most intimate recesses of the soul, and yet "the soul cannot tell how or whence it came; often it knows neither what to do, nor to wish, nor to ask. It seems to have found everything at once, yet doesn't know what it has found" (L 14,6).

The wandering of the mind troubled St. Teresa for many years. It became especially painful during the prayer of Quiet, for she thought at first that it would hinder the soul from loving God with full intensity. "In this prayer, the understanding may act as though it were not a guest in its own house at all. I sometimes long to die because of this wandering of the mind which I cannot cure" (W 31,8). Eventually she recognized it as a weakness of our fallen state. She recommends souls, in the prayer of Quiet to take no more notice of it or of what is going on in the mind than they would of a madman. In the Mansions she feels confident enough to identify the reason for this trouble and she advises the soul how to act.

"The soul does not understand what it desires and so the mind wanders from one extreme to the other. The will has such deep rest in God that the clamor of the intellect is a terrible bother to it, but one should let the intellect go and surrender oneself into the arms of love, for His Majesty will teach the soul what it must do at this point. Almost everything lies in finding oneself unworthy of so great a good and being occupied with giving thanks" (IC 4, 3,8).

Signs of the Prayer of Quiet

St. Teresa completes her account of the Fourth Mansions with a list of the signs or effects of the prayer of Quiet. The prayer of quiet is itself an effect produced in the soul by its new 'sense' of the divine presence within it. This is not a vision.



“The soul recognizes the presence of God by the effects He produces in the soul, for it is by that means that His Majesty is pleased to make His presence felt: but in a vision the soul sees” (L 27,4). St. Teresa therefore notes very carefully that in the prayer of Quiet “we seem to find Him whom we are about to address and we seem to know that He is hearing us by the spiritual feel-



ings and effects of great love and faith of which we become conscious” (ibid.). Thus God’s presence in the soul remains still unrevealed, but there is no doubt about the effects it produces.

The soul enters into peace. St. Teresa says that the Lord gives it peace through His presence “as He did to the just man Simeon” (W 31,2). This was the peace of eternal life for the old man, who discovered that his whole horizon had now expanded beyond the confines of national exclusivism, so that he went on immediately to speak of a Light of revelation for the gentiles. Indeed, it looks as if St. Teresa had ended her account of the Third Mansions purposely on the note of narrowness of spirit. For her first thought in the Fourth Mansions was the verse of the psalm she recited at Prime, “I have run the way of your commandments when you enlarged my heart” (IC 4,1,5). Under the divine action in the prayer of quiet the heart is deepened. It has a new, enlarged capacity for God and a consequent desire for the salvation of the whole world. God has begun to give the soul his kingdom upon earth that it may praise and hallow his name, “and strive to make others do likewise” (W 31,1).

The other disabilities of the Third Mansions are also removed. The soul is not as tied down as formerly in things pertaining to the service of God. It has greater freedom and readiness for action. As John of St. Thomas pointed out: “The first thing that the Spirit does upon entering a heart is to break the bonds of sin, with which a man is tied, and to crush the iron covering of his hardened heart. A man then feels as though he were relieved of a great weight and ready for action”. The ‘little spark’ of true love for God has driven out servile fear and there is a great desire to do something for God. Dread of penance or of loss of health are now no obstacle. The soul has such confidence in God that it feels it

can do all things. Knowledge of the greatness of God has increased and a corresponding realization of its own base condition. Divine consolations have shown it the worthlessness of all earthly pleasures and so it rises above them in a new self-mastery. "As soon as it arrives at this state, it begins to lose its covetousness for the things of earth. And small merit to it, for it sees clearly that on earth it cannot have a moment of this joy" (L 14, 5). All the virtues are increased, and the soul becomes like a watered garden in which God takes His delight, to the great benefit of the whole Church.

All these effects are not produced the first or second time the soul is favored with the prayer of quiet. It must be received continually. The soul is not yet perfectly mature. St. Teresa reminds us that it is still,

“. . . like a suckling child. If it turns away from its mother’s breasts., what can be expected for it but death? I am very much afraid that this will happen to anyone to whom the Lord has granted this favor and who withdraws from prayer . . . for he will go from bad to worse” (IC 4,3,10).

The reason for this is that in the Fourth Mansions the natural and the supernatural are mingled and so the devil can do more harm. In the Mansions that follow, “the Lord doesn’t give him so much leeway. May His Majesty be forever praised, Amen” (IC 4, 3,13).



I can't thank you enough for the Clarion articles, particularly the last three issues with a focus on St Teresa and prayer. These articles are great for beginning and ongoing formation! With clarity and simplicity they describe the profound insights of our holy mother, Teresa of Jesus. God Bless

G.R., OCDS Methuen, MA

I have been subscribing to the Carmel Clarion for a while now. The articles have helped me tremendously in my journey in Carmel. I found the article by Tomaz Alvarez O.C.D on our Holy Mother's teaching "What is prayer?" very good.

J.S., OCDS, Malaysia

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)

Learning to Pray

Tomas Alvarez, OCD

Part III

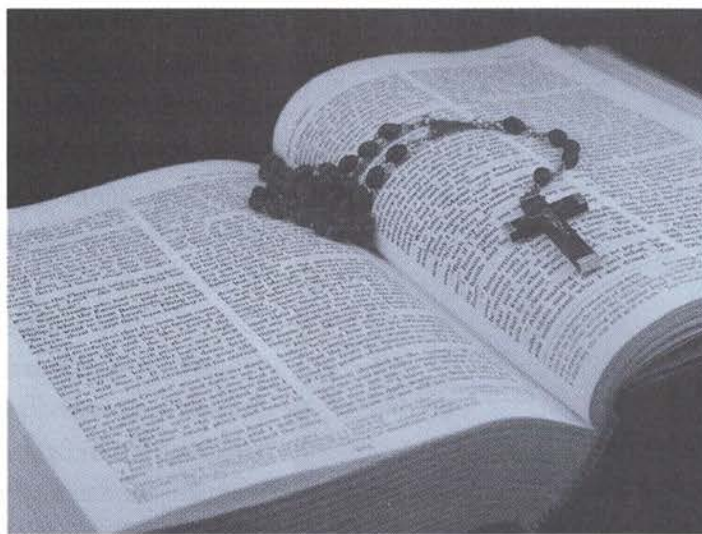
It is true, as writers have often told us, that St. Teresa did not have a method of prayer. But she did have a method of teaching it; a very personal and effective method that appears uniformly consistent throughout her major works. The efficaciousness of her method, as long as it was she who was using it, is well-documented in her own writings.

We know that from the time she first practiced her way of praying she succumbed to the temptation of teaching it to others. Initially, her success was rather limited (L, 7, 13), but as she progressed herself, her success rate showed a marked improvement (L, 13. 9).

Her *Life* was born of this later maturity in virtue and mastery of her own way of praying, and was written for what could be called her first school of prayer that small circle of friends that she set out to captivate. The group comprised two Dominicans, one or two Jesuits, a cleric, and two lay friends, a man who was married to a relative of hers and a woman. There may have been one or two more. By the time St. Teresa was writing the second version of her *Life*, all of these had made considerable progress. Of one she says: "One of the people who commanded me to write this book, whom the Lord has brought in four months to a point far beyond that which I have reached in seventeen years. He prepared himself better than I did so his garden . . . is watered by all these four means, though he still receives the last watering only a drop at a time. But such is his progress that he will soon be engulfed by it" (L, 11.8).

Her testimony concerning the most famous of this group the theologian Ibanez, a man who had given up his chair of theology for a life of prayer and died transformed by it, is quite moving: "His prayer had reached such a degree that at the time of his death when he wanted to avoid mental prayer because of his great weakness, he couldn't on account of his many raptures. He wrote to me shortly before he died asking what he should do" (L, 38, 13).

It was about this time, too, before she founded her first monastery, that she was successful with an even larger number of disciples in the monastery of the Incar-



nation. To quote a contemporary witness: "More than forty nuns are practicing great recollection in her house." But her greatest success came when she was at last able to have her own group of novices in the convent of St. Joseph in Avila, and subsequently in the other convents she founded. Her own estimate of the state of these was so favorable that a qualified censor of her manuscript, Fr. Jerome Gracian, felt it necessary to erase it as indiscreet. What she had written was: "So many are the favors which the Lord does in the houses that though there are one or two (nuns) in each whom God leads by way of meditation, all the rest attain perfect contemplation" (F. 4, 5).



Her father had been an early and successful disciple of Teresa's in prayer (IC 7. 10); later, her brother Lorenzo, a conquistador returned from America, joined the ranks and, as we know from her correspondence with him, made great progress in a very short time. Other letters show a like teaching mission to a variety of people, including the bishop of Evora, who was of Portuguese royal blood, and that faithful companion on many a journey and foundation, Fr. Antonio Ciayuin.

Indeed, on those very journeys through Castile and Andalusia who knows what other friends she may have attracted to prayer, for the covered wagons in which she and her companions traveled to new foundations were to some extent a traveling school of prayer. This is how an early biographer (Ribera) described such journeys: "They traveled in very well covered carts, and organized themselves on their journeys as if they were in the monastery. . . They always brought a little bell, which they rang for the regular times of prayer and silence, and a sand-glass to measure the time. On such occasions, all who accompanied them-whether friars, secular clergy or laity-even the muleteers, had to be silent. Afterwards, she rewarded their silence by giving them something to eat."

In order to follow the essential lines of Teresa's method of teaching prayer to people, we must go back to her starting-point: her own experience. She was convinced that her life really began only when she made it a life of prayer. From that moment on, she lived a life of friendship with God. Prayer activated the friendship and kept her in contact with him. In the hustle and bustle of convent life, of controversies and travels, she was always the nun who talked to God. That inner attitude enabled her to rise easily above any circumstance in life and colored her relationships with others. It influenced people who accompanied her on her foundations and was also applied at home- "The Lord is there among the pots and pans" (F.5). And when she took up her pen, she never failed to commend the subject in hand to the Holy Spirit "to ask him to speak for me from here on" (IC, 4, I, I), "because His Majesty and the Holy Spirit do not wield the pen, I know well the task is impossible" (IC, 5, 4, II). She felt he enlightened her mind, and would sometimes want to say things which she was incapable of (L. 18, 5). In St. Teresa's writings, prayer

is not just a subject to write about, or something that adds to their literary or spiritual worth; it is the determining factor, it transforms her way of speaking of it and turns her discourse into a means of communicating it by introducing the reader into the atmosphere of her dialogue with God.

She introduces God into the pages she is writing, but as a party to her conversation rather than as a subject. She writes as if talking to the reader, but alternates her conversation between the reader and God. Her dialogue with the reader is so simple and sincere, so unselfconscious and immediate that when she turns to God the reader cannot just look on like an outsider. She tends to bring him with her and involve him in the conversation. To read St. Teresa, one must go along on her terms. The reader must enter into her world and risk falling into her way of thinking and speaking and identifying with her feelings and imagery and that very life breath so redolent of God and the sense of his presence. Either the reader resists all this and refuses to communicate with her, or he enters into the book and then he cannot avoid the principal personage, which is clearly neither the author nor himself, but God.

The magic spell which St. Teresa's writings cast is no less than that of her presence and spoken word, especially if the reader extends his encounter over the course of a whole book, and not just a letter or a few pages. In chapter after chapter, all the rich variety of Teresa's psychology and spirituality open up before the reader; those traits that color and regulate her relationship with God, parts of her life that serve to tell the reader what vocal and mental prayer, or meditation and contemplation, are and that provide an opportunity for her to try and pray with him.

A typical example of this pedagogical approach is the *Way of Perfection*, a book in which she sets out to teach her own nuns how to pray. The very first chapter is a model of her technique of alternating dialogue: she is writing for nuns, but talks to them and to God alternately. Her avowed aim in the title ("The reason why I founded this monastery with such strict observance") was to tell them the reason for the life they were leading. She begins with a straightforward narrative concerning her own monastery (par. 1); passes rapidly on to the subject of the catastrophe that affected the whole of Europe and the Church, interrupting the narrative and indulging in an outburst of emotion (par. 2); she then breaks off, turns to God and leaves the problem with him. This is the first prayer in the book; she begins by praying for herself and goes on to include all the sisters. Just as suddenly, her prayer for the sisters turns to an appeal to them: "Help me, sisters. . . the world is burning. . . are we to waste our time?" (par. 5). She ends the chapter on a calmer, reflective note.

In one chapter the readers have heard a brief statement and its explanation, and have seen the author become moved and talking to the Other. They have been caught up and involved in that conversation, and, finally, have been appealed to personally and heard what St. Teresa had to say to them. From the very beginning of the book, therefore, God is present in it as one of the group. Nothing is discussed without him, and if you try to abstract from or ignore his presence, you cannot understand the book.

In the rest of the *Way of Perfection* the procedure is the same, especially when she comes to its central lesson: what prayer is, how to pray, how to grow in it, etc. Teresa, without any literary artifice, brings in that third party by simply introducing his word and declaring him the master. He is the author of the Our Father, and this is our prayer par excellence, the model and compendium of all Christian prayer. Both author and disciples can easily accept his word, interpret his sentiments as he addresses his Father, and make them their own; they can associate with him and pass from doctrinal exposition to personal prayer at any point in the book. Sometimes Teresa alone does this, at others it is the whole group; and in a way that makes it all real life drama and not just acting.

Anyone who reads the book can put it down assured that he has not understood all that St. Teresa had to say about prayer. But he will have to admit that he has been present at her prayer. If he has not been able to join in and share in her really lived prayer, then his reading has been a failure. His eyes have glided over the words without meeting the people present in them.

This way of combining communication of ideas with practice greatly simplifies the learning process. The reader does not have to know the various degrees of prayer or wait to understand their mechanics before making direct contact with them and using them. Saying prayers and thinking; thinking and loving; meditating and contemplating; recollecting oneself and listening . . . these are things which the book simply does as it goes on, and whoever reads it does them with it. The same is true of the different kinds of prayer-praise, worship, petition, etc. The way these succeed one another and combine in various ways is a practical demonstration that nothing is impossible or automatically out of anybody's reach, that if some things are not within one's grasp at the moment it is only because they have not yet become part of one's life. Because it is one's life that determines and orders these things; it is by relating to God that one's capacity for relationship grows. "The Lord invites everybody" He offers 'living water' to everybody. He excludes nobody from the Way (W 19; 20, 1).

Nevertheless, St. Teresa does not fall into the pedagogical error of abandoning her disciple to spontaneous or improvised prayer. She knows from experience that 'this way' is quite difficult, indeed practically impossible, to succeed in without solid support. She is convinced of the necessity for practical guidance and the efficacy of communicated experience. Hence the insistence in her teaching on sober and strong guidance.

In the *Way of Perfection*, her 'manual of prayer', two levels of initiation and training are distinguishable: one is personal and individual; the other is at group or community level. Here is the basic outline of each.

For Individual Training

St. Teresa requires certain predispositions in anyone about to set out on "this road of prayer". That is to say, they must meet certain requirements before she will give them

directions for the road ahead.

The requirements concern one's life, because it is one's life which must be converted into prayer. The ground of the garden of the spirit must be prepared, so that when it is watered it brings forth flowers, not weeds.

In the *Way of Perfection*, these requirements are expressed as follows:

"The first is a general one: to aim at having the Church as an ideal to serve and a reason for living. This is to avoid the trap of living as if only 'God and oneself' existed, a common trap for people who want to live face to face with God and think 'God alone is sufficient'. For such people spiritual narcissism and false eschatology are real dangers."

The second concerns sustenance for the journey: practical virtues that keep one's feet on the ground, such as brotherly love, detachment from material things, and humility to walk in the truth.

Her final and most insistent requirement, however, is 'a resolute determination'. Teresa pays a lot of attention to this, for she sees in it a key component of the whole operation.

You might think this 'resolute determination' is just another virtue to be added to the three just mentioned, that it is no more than fortitude in action or fortitude of spirit and action. But by her style of doubling up the virtue in question Teresa shows that it is not so much a virtue she is talking about as a fundamental firmness of purpose in life which typifies a conversion experience like the one she herself had.

Teresa has a very clear perception of this area of life. She is aware that her own courage "is not little; more than is usual in a woman" (L 8, 7); that she would be capable of confronting demons or facing the Turks; that, when she has to, she can channel all her strength into any undertaking, and that she often did so where prayer was concerned. She knows that a life of prayer pursued to perfection requires "more courage than the suffering of a quick martyrdom" (L 31, 17); so much courage, in fact, that she knows of nothing that requires greater (L 8, 2; 11, 4). She knows too that to the endemic weakness of every human being will be added external hostility or contempt, that one can even encounter systematic attack on the doctrinal front from those within the Church who reject a Christian life that is expressed in terms of prayer.

Both experience and doctrinal opposition are present in Teresa's lesson: the former as its basis, the latter coloring her exposition somewhat. In the *Way of Perfection* she adopts a slightly polemical tone at times, and she very definitely gives her basic requirement a military, even warlike, tone. From the start, she excludes all types of sweet and soft imagery, preferring military images instead. The 'bravery of a warrior' is what is required. Her immediate readers were women like herself, but Teresa does not want them to be womanish where courage is concerned: "I would not want you, my daughters, to be womanish in anything, nor would I want you to

*"I would not want
you, my daughters,
to be womanish in
anything, nor would
I want you to be like
women but like
strong men. . . so
strong that you will
astonish men"*

be like women but like strong men. . . so strong that you will astonish men" (W 7, 8). The sisters were there to fight, and must fight vigorously to the death.

It is precisely here at the beginning of her lessons on prayer that Teresa devotes two chapters (21 & 23) to sum up what she has been saying, and to spell out the kind of determination she has in mind and its importance for the road ahead. Speaking of those who set out in search of the water of life: "I say that it is very important-all-important indeed-that they have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until they come to it, come what may, happen what may, whatever the work involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or die on the road or just don't have the heart for the trials they meet, even if the world collapses" (21, 2).

In the second chapter she is still insisting on the same thing: "But this little bit of time that we resolve to give him out of what we spend on ourselves or on someone who will not thank us for it, let us give it to him, since we desire to do so, with our thoughts free of other things and unoccupied by them. And let us be wholly determined never to take it back from him, neither because of trials on this account, nor because of contradictions, nor because of dryness. I should consider the time of prayer as not belonging to me and think that he can ask it of me in justice when I do not want to give it wholly to him" (23,2).



These two texts, which have parallels in *Life*, 9 & 11, are enough to show clearly what Teresa thought; this determination is not a conversion to practice a few virtues; it is conversion to the Person of Christ, a turning of one's whole life in that direction, a definitive binding.

When it comes to introducing us to personal prayer, the Saint feels she has a simple and effective way, guaranteed by her own experience. She had never known "what it was to pray with satisfaction until the Lord showed her this way". She is convinced that anyone who tries it will succeed, though not without some trouble and care. In fact she gives us her word: "I know that if you try you will acquire it in a year, or maybe six months" (29, 8). She is equally convinced of the efficaciousness of her teaching method: her emphasis on avoiding stagnation and stimulating development toward more intense, even contemplative and mystical, forms of prayer. She speaks at once of both ends of the scale of prayer, but does not believe in teaching beginners about such distinctions as active and contemplative prayer. She accepts traditional categories and on the basis of these introduces a kind of rhythm in praying, alternating between vocal and mental prayer, between meditation and recollection, recollection and contemplation. But, as her aim is a practical one, such distinctions take second place.

Her 'way' dispenses with any methodical devices; she sets out quite simply to make use of her own experience and her personalized approach to prayer. She insists, as we have seen, that it is basically a matter of relating to God. The important thing is not so much the 'what' as the 'who is with whom'. It is a matter of "understanding and seeing that I speak to God with a greater awareness of him than of what I am saying", so that "you consider who you are talking to, and who you are." In other words, prayer is more of a conversation between two people than a conversation about something.

This is the mainstay of Teresa's way: emphasis on the primacy of the two persons involved, an awakening in the person praying of the twofold consciousness of himself and the other, or, more simply, the religious awareness that he is entering the sphere of the Divine Person and engaging him in conversation. This must make the attitude of such a person 'different'; the spirit and the whole person are in a posture which creates the space to pray and makes it possible really to speak to God, to say something that reaches him and is not like talking to yourself. This attitude gives support to the most fragile dimension of prayer, its duration.

Teresa gave this whole combination of awareness and spiritual posture a name that was very much of her time: 'recollection'. Today that word has lost most of the meaning it had for her, not only because it now means less than then, but because it does not fully convey that inner attitude, that spiritual posture, which Teresa was trying to convey. This in turn is because inwardness is neither emphasized in modern psychology, nor favored in contemporary spiritual writing. Hence the necessity of accepting it as a Teresian term, with the fullness of meaning which she gave it. A brief analysis of the central chapters of the *Way of Perfection* (chapters 26-29), which deal with recollection, will suffice for that purpose. In doing this, however, we will have to prescind entirely from the fact that she also uses this term in her *Life* and in the *Interior Castle* to denote a particular degree of mystical prayer.

The first two of the chapters mentioned deal with the most important aspect: introducing Christ into our prayer. The second two cover the other aspect: entering inside ourselves when we pray. These are the two elements that go to make up Teresa's concept of 'recollection'. Each concentrates on one of the two persons involved in the 'sharing in friendship'. Each element, as we shall see, has its own well-defined function. The first simplifies things as much as possible. The second serves to interiorize and spiritualize the act of prayer, thus saving the dialogue-encounter from the importunity of everything else within us. "Since you are alone (at prayer), daughters, strive to find a companion. Well what better companion than the Master himself who taught you this prayer? Represent the Lord himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly he is teaching you. Believe me, you should remain with so good a friend as long as you can" (26, 1)

The encounter with the Person is regarded as paramount. Hence the effort to simplify the act of faith by which the presence of Christ is made real and immediate. Hence, too, her reduction of the psychological mechanism to the most

elemental acts. All her guidance is aimed at avoiding the tangle of meditation, the distraction of too much thinking. The vocabulary she chooses in order to impress upon people the immediacy of their communication with the Other is sensory and very effective: Christ is really present; one has only to 'look' or 'see him looking at us', and to accept that he speaks as a teacher. The advice 'to look at him' is the center of her whole exposition. her intention clearly being to contain the whole grasp of his presence in this intuitive act: "Turn your eyes and look at him", "look at him on his way to Gethsemane. . . look at him bound. . . or look at him burdened; and he must look at you with those beautiful and compassionate eyes. . . just because you go along to comfort him and have turned to look at him" (W 26, 4-5).



This is something she had already impressed upon beginners, in her *Life*. "Returning to what I was saying about Christ bound at the pillar: it is good to reflect awhile and think about the pains he suffered. . . But one should not always weary oneself in seeking these reflections, but just remain there in his presence with the intellect quiet. One should if possible occupy himself in looking at Christ looking at him; he should speak to him, ask him for things, humble himself, and delight in the Lord's presence, remembering meanwhile that he is unworthy to be there. Whenever he can do this, even though it may be at the beginning of prayer, he will derive great benefit. The benefits of this kind of prayer are many; at least that is what I found" (L 13, 22). And her concluding remarks on the subject in the *Way of Perfection* are the same: "Draw near, then, to this good master with strong determination to learn what he teaches you, and His Majesty will see to it that you turn out to be good disciples. He will not abandon you, if you do not abandon him. Pay attention to the words that proceed from that divine mouth. . ." (W 26, 10).

'Entering into oneself' is the second beat of the rhythm imposed by recollection. This is what is also called 'recollecting oneself', and it implies a twofold effort: letting go the ties of external and sensory objects, which inevitably bind the spirit to the surface of its own life; and actively engaging the 'interior acts', those most intimately linked with one's person. "It is called recollection because the soul collects its powers and retires within itself with God" (W 28, 4).

This is also the starting-point of the *Interior Castle*, the door of which is prayer. To enter the castle is to pray; to continue on into the castle is progress through the various stages of prayer, the degrees by which prayer is intensified and purified.

Obviously, such a conception as this could only come from a contemplative who is determined to develop in her disciples those powers that are most suited to penetrate into the sphere of the divine. But it is equally the very human vision of someone who is deeply convinced of man's inner riches. That call to interiorize prayer bears no trace of prejudice against things or people as means of reaching God. On the contrary, it is based on the conviction that the inner world of each of us is more spacious than the whole world about us, and that what matters most

when it comes to meeting and speaking with God is the person himself; and the measure of any person is the depth of his inner life.

Group Training

With the formula of 'recollection', we have outlined only the program for the initiation of the individual into prayer. It is impossible here to enter into the lavish details which St. Teresa provides on this aspect. But there is one important complement to it in her overall teaching strategy, which we cannot overlook: namely, group training. By this we mean training a team of people called by God to live out the experience of prayer by walking the 'road of prayer' together in community.

In this area, too, Teresa has some radical convictions, sometimes little appreciated by her followers. Her early experience convinced her that on the difficult road of prayer the lone walker stood little chance of surmounting the difficulties. Hence the absolute necessity of finding people who will join him, people whose solidarity will provide mutual support. Without such company she would never have arrived at her destination herself. "Of myself I can say that had the Lord not revealed this truth to me and given me the means by which I could frequently talk with persons who practiced prayer, I, falling and rising, would have ended by falling headlong in hell. Because I had many friends to help me fall, but when I came to rising, I found myself so alone that it now amazes me that I did not remain fallen for ever" (L 7, 22).

The conclusions she drew from her own case made her feel very strongly about this, and she often repeated them: "It is a very hard thing for a soul to be alone amid so many dangers. For that reason I would advise those people who practice prayer, especially in the beginning, to seek the friendship and conversation of others who are doing the same. This is most important, even if all you do is help one another by your prayers; it is so important that I don't know how to emphasize it enough. Those who serve him must stand shoulder to shoulder if they are to advance. Until they are strong, they ought to seek companionship as a defense. . . otherwise they will be in dire straits. Charity grows by being communicated, and there are a thousand blessings I would not dare to speak of only that I have had a lot of experience of how important this sharing is" (L 7, 20-22).

This vision of friendship, or fellowship, at the service of prayer, cultivating and developing human communication to further communication with God, is beautiful: "Since friends are sought out for conversations and human attachments. . . so as to relax and better enjoy telling about vain pleasures, I don't know why a person who is to truly love and serve God is not permitted to talk with others about his joys and trials, for those who practice prayer have both" (L 7, 20).

Teresa's first group experience dates from before her first foundation and was due to this conviction: "I should like the five of us who at present love each other in Christ to make a pact. . ." (L 16, 7). This motley group, already alluded to above, were determined to en flesh an idea: the efficacy of the group in forwarding the ideal of prayer.

But this ideal was ultimately achieved only when Teresa had assembled a team bound by stronger bonds than a pact of friendship made on the basis of their relationship with God. The little group that was to found the Carmelite monastery of St. Joseph's in Avila had to respond to a set of basic ideas: prayer was the basis on which they were grouped; Christ was to be installed at the center of the group, to become the center of their lives as he already was of their individual prayer; their life style was to be extremely simple. Here is how Teresa sums it up shortly after making the foundation: "It is the most wonderful consolation to me to be able to live with souls so detached. Their whole object in life is to learn how to make progress in the service of God. Solitude is their comfort, and the thought of seeing others (when doing so is not a help towards enkindling within them a greater love of their Spouse) is a burden, even when those others are relatives. As a result, no one comes to this house save those who speak about this love, for otherwise neither are the nuns satisfied nor are their visitors. The only language they know is speaking about God, so they understand and are understood only by those who speak the same language" (L 36, 26).

The group's fellowship with God developed spontaneously into a 'language' which they used to communicate with God and man; a language which was expressed not only in words, but in their life and in everything that conditioned it: environment, means of livelihood, communal living (Teresa's greatest enjoyment).

This ideal picture is later given doctrinal form in the *Way of Perfection*. It is in one of the key chapters of the book and was prompted by the theme of the apostolate of prayer: "For the love of God I beg you that your conversation always be directed towards bringing some good to the one with whom you are speaking, for your prayer must be for the benefit of souls. . . Strive for this in every way. . . Let truth dwell in your hearts, as it should through meditation, and you will see clearly the kind of love we are obliged to have for our neighbor" (W 20, 3-4). It is these directives which were to oblige St. Teresa to define precisely the kind of life style the group should have:

"Your business is prayer. . . It is your business and your language. Whoever wants to speak to you must learn this language; and if he doesn't, be on your guard that you don't learn his; it will be a hell. If they should think you unsophisticated, what does it matter? If they take you for hypocrites, it matters even less. You will gain in that no one will want to see you except those who understand this language. It is highly unlikely that anyone who doesn't know the corrupt Arabic of our Moors would enjoy a long conversation with someone who doesn't know anything else. And so, neither will they make you weary or do you harm, for to begin to speak a new language would cause no small amount of harm, and all your time would be spent in learning it. And you cannot know as I do, for I have experience of it, the great evil this new language is for the soul; in order to know the one, the other is forgotten. The new language involves a constant disturbance from which you ought to flee at all costs, for what is best suited to this path which we are beginning to discuss is peace and tranquility of soul. If those who speak with you

wish to learn your language, while it is not your business to teach anyone, you can tell about the riches that are to be gained by learning it” (W 20, 4-6).

Dealings and language are seen as expressing a way of life, an indication of the spirit of the group, in a kind of citadel where relationship with God has been made the center and justification of life. Teresa was thinking of the mixture of languages spoken in Castile in her day. Spanish Moors had a corrupt form of Arabic; it was the language of the outsider, a language at variance with the circumstances and way of life in which they found themselves, far from their natural habitat. It belonged to people with different standards and a different way of life.

The whole thrust of a community life orientated towards the ‘road of prayer’ is to create within the group a spirit and channels of communication that would facilitate the vertical movement of fellowship with God in such a way as to be a normal extension of fellowship among themselves. Hence the one language for speaking both to God and man.

The kind of life that Teresa planned for her Carmelite monasteries makes sense only in this context. There were a few indispensable elements, such as enclosure, separation, real poverty; but even these had to have a spiritual function. They were preparatory: creating adequate space for prayer, a space suitable for turning the group into a prayer school and a community of praying people. They had solitude and privacy; enclosure and individual cells saw to that and the Rule imposed silence. But these things were relative. The solitude was to foster community as well as meeting God on one’s own. Silence intensified their language—the words they spoke to God, individually and together. So, in the group, apprenticeship to a life of prayer did not begin with the reciting of prayers; it began with speaking and listening in a fraternal environment.

A synthesis of St. Teresa’s twofold pedagogy of prayer—at individual and community level might be sought from the symbol of the castle, which she used in the two books most clearly educational in intent and content: the *Interior Castle* and the *Way of Perfection*.

The *Interior Castle* opens with an invitation to the reader to enter the castle of his own soul: synthesis of ‘recollection’. The *Way of Perfection* also opens with an invitation to a group of readers, Teresa’s first praying community, to enter the ‘little castle’ of their Carmelite monastery, seen as a miniature of Christ’s Kingdom, the Church, there to live the Christian life as intensely as possible, in the presence of God and of the Church.

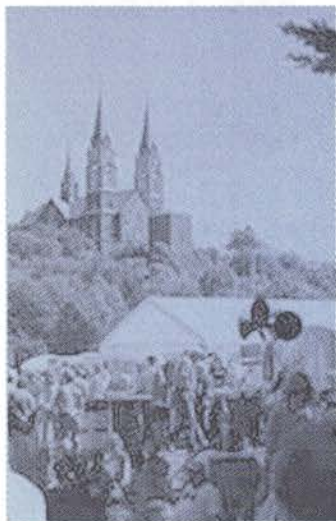


In Memorium

Marie Hastings, OCDS, a member of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Community of Amsterdam, New York, died on June 5, 2006.

Holy Hill A Place of Peace & Prayer

David Jimenez Herrero



On July 16th the Washington Province of the Discalced Carmelites will celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Bavarian Friars arrival at Holy Hill in Hubertus, Wisconsin. This article is to commemorate that event.

Dawn breaks and the light gently dissipates the darkness. The mist lifts little by little and reveals a clear summer day. Dew sparkles on the pastures of nearby farms. You can breathe the silence: it covers everything like a mantle adorned with the sparkle of the trills of birds greeting the morning. Suddenly, the peaceful ringing of bells comes as from nowhere and is carried off by the gentle breeze that plays among the trees. You turn to listen. A magnificent church rises valiantly and impassively from the top of a hill before you. Its style is somewhat Germanic neo-Romanesque, and its two slender towers dominate the whole area. They are like silent witnesses and seem to be trying to hold back the fleeting clouds. But they vanish and expose to our full view not only the towers but also the panorama of woods and broad plains dotted with houses that extend further than we can see, with Milwaukee barely a blur on the horizon.

As the rising sun paints the landscape with peaceful colors, small figures emerge from the woods at the foot of the hill and approach the church. They are local people coming to the first Mass at 6 a.m. entrusting the work of the day to the Virgin Mary who presides in the principal chapel of this National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians.

Beginnings

Holy Hill rises in Kettle Moraine country, near Milwaukee, as the highest point in southern Wisconsin. Soon after the area was settled, pioneers often came to its summit to pray. One story says that in 1847, a family came there in order to pray to the Virgin Mary for their sick daughter and that, in response to a cure, pilgrimages to the hill began. Whatever the origins, in 1857 a large wooden cross was erected on the summit and blessed the following year. On Good Friday of 1863, several farmers built a small sixteen-foot-square log chapel on the hill. It was replaced by a brick church that was dedicated on Sept. 8, 1881. Meanwhile at the Philadelphia World's Fair of 1876, a beautiful statue of Our Lady was on exhibit by the Munich firm of Pustet. It was bought for Holy Hill. The records tell us it was carried from the train station to Holy Hill by sixteen young girls on foot accompanied by 100 men on horseback. This is the statue that is now enthroned in the shrine chapel. The chapel's last service was held forty-four years to the day after the dedication of this church. It was then dismantled to make room for the present edifice. But we are ahead of our story.

In 1903, Pope Leo XIII gave Holy Hill the title of shrine, and the number of pilgrims grew every year. In 1906, the Discalced Carmelite friars of Bavaria were asked to come to attend to the needs of the pilgrims and foster their spirit of prayer and contemplation. They built the present church. The lower church now known as the chapel of St. Therese of the Child Jesus; and the upper church, with its soaring vaults and more than forty stained-glass windows of exceptional beauty, was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary on July 19, 1931. Opening off the right side of the nave is the shrine chapel. It was enlarged and dedicated on Dec. 8, 1956. The statue housed there depicts the Virgin Mary as a young mother with her son Jesus, who stands as a young boy in front of her, presenting him to all who come to kneel at his feet.

Welcome to Holy Hill

Today close to a million people from all parts of the world and from different cultures and religions visit this national shrine each year. Some of them come to admire the beauty of the church in its striking, natural setting. Others come on pilgrimage to adore and to meditate. But the immense majority of the pilgrims who come to Holy Hill do so in order to ask of Mary health and maternal protection.

In addition to all the visitors who come here, you also find the warm and fraternal welcome of a community of Discalced Carmelite friars who, as they live the life of prayer and apostolate set forth for them by St. Teresa, provide spiritual, sacramental, and human help. Among the services they render the pilgrims, the celebration of the Eucharist for the cure of the sick stands out. In addition, there is the possibility of participating in the Eucharist and of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation in both English and Spanish, the two languages most widely spoken in our country.

Postscript

Since the foregoing article was written, an important development has taken place at Holy Hill. Water damage in the church led to an inspection of the entire fabric, and an extensive program of restoration was initiated.

During the winter and spring of 2004-2005 the interior of the Church was refurbished. All of the pews were removed and were sent to be re-stained. The entire terrazzo floor was thoroughly cleaned and sealed. Finally, the entire church was painted in a new motif. In the spring of 2005 the church was reopened for services

Among other services to the pilgrims are the half-mile outdoor Way of the Cross with fourteen life-sized sculptures representing the passion of Jesus and a Lourdes grotto. There is also a gift shop well stocked with religious articles and books and a cafe. A simple but comfortable guest house is able to accommodate individuals and group retreats. Throughout the year, seasonal events occur including national pilgrimages, a live Nativity scene at Christmas, religious concerts, and a popular arts and crafts fair in the fall.

The original version of this article appeared in the Spanish Carmelite magazine Teresa de Jesus, May/June 2000.

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Elizabeth of the Trinity: An Exposition of Her Last Words

Gillian Leslie, OCD



PART I

When Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity came to die, she said a very beautiful thing: “I go to Light, to Love, to Life.” What we need to ask is whether this statement was nothing more than that—merely a beautiful combination of words—or whether it has some specific content to which Elizabeth herself applied her own unique and distinctive meaning.

Life

The word “life” is subject to a variety of definitions. It may, for instance, refer to a purely physical reality: life as opposed to death. It may have a moral element as when we speak of a “good” life or a “bad” life. It may also refer to the spiritual or psychological qualities by which it is characterized in a particular instance: a “full” life or an “empty” life, a life that is meaningful or a life that seems void of meaning. When we look, however, at what Elizabeth meant by life, we have to say that she

understood it to be defined in terms of eternity. Life is not only that which she believed to endure beyond the boundaries of physical death, but also that which participates in the undying existence of God.

From this point of view, Elizabeth’s understanding of the concept of life is a very fluid one. It cannot be categorized. Life stretches out ahead of her. She enters in and does not foresee that she will ever plumb its depths or reach its end. Indeed, it has no end. In this respect, she goes against the natural inclinations of human nature with its craving for security and certitude. She takes up life as one might take a leap into the dark, a leap that casts one into a great abyss, God himself is this abyss. This is one of her favorite images.

Mortal life, where Elizabeth is concerned, is characterized by suffering. Her view of life, which could seem so negative and pessimistic to us, is colored by centuries of profound distrust of a life that many felt to be defiled by sinfulness and shame. In Elizabeth’s thought, however, the suffering in question is not imposed on humankind by a grieving or wrathful God. It is the preliminary suffering of those who, “having passed through the great tribulation,” are now in a position to enjoy the abundance of a life in heaven that they did not know on earth. Suffering,

for Elizabeth, is an almost natural condition of earthly existence. More specifically, it was the physical pain she endured during her final illness.

Pain—whether bodily, mental or emotional—was the great crucible into which her soul was cast in order to form it for heaven. Indeed, both physical and mental pain played an increasing part in Elizabeth’s experience as death drew near. Its crushing burden profoundly affected her view of life at this time. She even spoke privately to Mother Germaine of her temptation to suicide, the very antithesis of the acceptance of life. Yet, it is into this situation that Elizabeth introduced a novel thought. She does not believe, she says, that suffering will ever lose its place in the life of the Christian, even in the life of eternity. By this she did not mean to suggest that suffering can ever be a part of the experience of the redeemed while they are participating in the state of those who have entered the heavenly kingdom. But while “that suffering passes away...the experience of having suffered endures for ever.” Even in heaven, we cannot forget the suffering that we endured on earth.

Elizabeth, unfortunately, never fully explained what she had in mind. Nevertheless, its theological rationale is not hard to find. It was by way of suffering, accepted as the will of the Father, that Jesus redeemed us. Therefore, it is by traveling the same road of suffering, in whatever form it may take, that a Christian not only enters into the redemption of Christ but even participates in some measure in that redemption. So the memory of having suffered becomes the joy and glory of the redeemed because suffering has made them more like Christ and because it has enabled them to become coworkers in his saving work. Elizabeth spoke often of this conformity to Christ, citing the works of her “beloved St. Paul.” As she drew closer to death, certain seminal ideas from this apostle seem to have been frequently on her lips: “for me to live is Christ,” “with Christ I am nailed to the cross,” “I die daily.” Such sentiments not only reveal her state of thought at this crucial moment but are a precious indication of how she understood the role of suffering in the life of the believer.

Elizabeth’s Carmelite Life

If suffering in its redemptive aspect appears to have been one of the most personally compelling reasons for drawing Elizabeth to Carmel, her actual experience of Carmelite life developed in her a heightened sense of what she believed to be a call to ever deeper interiority. “Interiority” in this context refers to communion with the presence of God within the soul that makes of it an “anticipated heaven” even here on earth. In Carmel, she believed, the life of heaven would already begin. Thus, the life of Carmel is already the threshold of that new life that we shall enjoy in the future. Similarly, the prayer by which Carmel is characterized and which is its vocation leads us, at least potentially, to a knowledge of that future life experienced as God’s complete possession of the soul.

Elizabeth’s mind dwelt often on the theme of that total and habitual conformity to God’s will that she described as living in communion with him. To live in communion with God is not only to fulfill God’s greatest desire for the human

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creature, but it is to enter into the exchange of love that marks the interior life of the Blessed Trinity. Nevertheless, such a communion is not to be discovered without a great deal of preliminary asceticism (self-discipline).

In the monastic tradition, the kind of asceticism that is required by this goal has always been sought in the silence and solitude of the cell. In silence and solitude, the monk or nun learns self-knowledge and acquires a taste for and yearning toward the things of God. Here is the tradition into which Elizabeth inserted herself in Carmel. The solitude of the Carmelite cell, as she perceived, is not intended to be merely an escape from the noise and distraction accompanying normal human activity. It is also the place where the yearning soul can apply its powers toward searching for and uniting itself to God.

Elizabeth's concept of Carmelite solitude was deeply marked by the quest for divine union. It is even said that she once refused an older nun who had asked her for help with work because the extra burden would have compromised her loving attention to God. Such a story, which now seems to us almost scandalous—a breach of charity, not to say an act of pride—needs to be seen in context as the response of one who placed ultimate value on this total union with the divine will. At the very least it raises the question as to what true charity really is. For charity is that by which we enter into the communication of love between the three persons of the Blessed Trinity and thus into the very life force of God. Charity, therefore, is seminal in any discussion of what that life of God might mean for the Christian believer.

Ultimately, we have to say that charity is that which expresses in concrete action here on earth what we believe about the inmost nature of God in heaven. What I do manifests what I think, and the way I show my love to others can only take the expression of how I understand the love that God shows to me. This is why our charity is so often imperfect: not because our intentions are wrong but because our knowledge of God is not rooted in truth. A useful comparison can surely be made here between Elizabeth and Thérèse of Lisieux. It was because Thérèse saw God primarily in terms of merciful love that merciful love became the characteristic of her exercise of love in community. It was because Elizabeth saw God primarily in terms of unifying love that the desire to nourish and draw others to the life-giving communion with him—that she herself enjoyed—became the characteristic of her charity in community. At the same time it would be a mistake to think that this difference in orientation implies that Elizabeth's interpretation of charity was somehow more idealized and less practical than that of Thérèse.

It is clear from personal testimonies that Elizabeth possessed a remarkable sense of tact and practical application to virtue, which infused her relations to others with charm and genuine concern. It is also clear that, in terms of action and what she actually did, she was not above pushing herself to the limit when it came to becoming the channel of God's love toward those whom she knew, both inside and outside the monastery, and to whom she became a mentor. For in the exercise of charity, all de-

depends on the situation within which it is exercised. Awareness of the existing context is what roots our charity in reality, not conformity to some preconceived idea. Take, for example, Thérèse's reaction to the nun who splashed her with dirty water during the community wash. We have to assume that Thérèse's loving sensitivity to the sister in question informed her that this sister would have been deeply hurt if attention had been drawn to her lack of care. In that particular circumstance, the loving thing to do was to ignore it and to continue quietly with one's work as though nothing were amiss.

Perhaps even, with the kind of generosity so characteristic of Thérèse, it would be possible to go beyond charity alone and seize the opportunity for an act of self-denial for God's sake and for loving self-oblation. In any case, the point is that under the same circumstances in a different context, a wholly different reaction might be called for—supposing my sister would have been more hurt by the discovery that I had been acting like the "Little Flower" than she would have been if I had teased her in front of everybody for the liberality of her splashing. In that case true charity would surely have demanded this more simple and spontaneous approach.

If we consider charity somewhat along these lines, we see that Elizabeth was someone who did not need to treat her sisters with quite the same kind of sensitivity with which Thérèse felt that she must treat hers. The Dijon Carmel was already well-founded in those fundamental elements of practical charity, the lack of which makes the Lisieux Carmel appear so uncouth in our eyes. What the Dijon Carmel needed was the drive to push that practical charity to its end in God. We do not have to be Christians to be kind, as the saying goes. What "divinizes" charity, as Elizabeth would say, what makes it truly Christ like is the purpose by which it is governed. And, in the last resort, this purpose is life and the communication of life to others. When, by our loving affirmation of another, we enable them to act in the confidence of being loved, we also enable them to live more fully at a human level. When this principle is activated in the divine sphere, then the life that is thus nourished is also divine.

Light

When it comes to discussing Elizabeth of the Trinity's concept of God as Light, we are faced with a problem. Light as an image of God poses a difficulty because we already know what light is. Light can be seen and known. We know that it can be seen and known because we know when it is absent. When there is no light, then we become aware of what it is that is lacking and of our dependence on it. The temptation,





therefore, is to think of God as the light we know, only more so. If light can be described as “bright” or “clear” or “pure,” then the temptation is to say that the light of God is “brighter,” “clearer,” or “purer.” Of course, this is by no means what the Light that is God means. Light, in the sense intended by theology, is no more than an analogy for something else. It is an image, and an inadequate one, for a deeper reality. To talk of God’s Light, then, is not to limit God to the level of human comparisons with the light that we know, but to talk of a completely different kind of light. Divine Light is not simply quantitatively different from material light; it is qualitatively different too.

Elizabeth made no attempt to define how she understood God’s Light. It was not at that level that she had anything particular to contribute to our knowledge. Her understanding, however, is mediated through the many things she has to say, not about what it is, but about what it does. For light is not something static, in her view. She does not endorse the classic concept of heaven as a place where God’s Light transfixes the ecstatic soul in immovable bliss. For Elizabeth, God’s Light is that which penetrates us from within the Godhead and transforms our perception of what we see here and now. It takes the form of an active communication to which we who receive it must actively respond. What I see and how clearly I see it will determine what, in fact, I will do. This means that Elizabeth’s concept of light, like that of life, is fundamentally practical. It is mediated, in the first place, through concrete events and situations.

She refers often to “lights” (in the plural), inspired in her by reading the epistles of St. Paul. It is through such “lights” that we are drawn into closer union with the Light itself. Herein is the principle behind her understanding of what it means to be transformed in Christ: Christ, the “radiant image of God’s glory,” is the reality to which God’s Light conforms us. By reading the Scriptures as the Word of God, Christ is revealed to us for our imitation, and the light of eternity is brought more fully into the world.

Light and Darkness

Following St. John of the Cross, Elizabeth often spoke of light in the context of darkness. As with St. John, this “darkness” is a metaphor for the life of faith. The

metaphor expresses the truth that not only are light and darkness diametrically opposite to each other but that, paradoxically, without each other they cannot exist. Without the darkness of faith, the Light of God would not shine; in the illumination bestowed by God's Light, the darkness yields its secrets. Darkness characterizes our life on earth—not in the sense that we are doomed to walk in habitual blindness, far from God and unable to know him—but in terms of our mental perception of how ignorant we really are and how dependent we are on God's Light to illuminate this ignorance. Yet, such a darkness is also "sacred," a place in which to "immerse" oneself. The path that it surrounds leads inevitably to the Bridegroom, the Master, and "the light that surrounds him will envelop me also," Elizabeth wrote. Thus darkness in itself and light in itself, as symbols of the soul's state, are not what is important. What is important is the transforming work that they are allowed to accomplish.

St. John of the Cross's language of light and darkness is primarily used in an ascetic context: darkness gives way to light as the soul that travels the way of self-denial experiences gradual illumination. We may surely assume that Elizabeth both knew and accepted St. John's approach. However, she does not advert to it very much, and the reason would seem to lie in the explanation that follows. Elizabeth saw that faith, although it is darkness to the soul in terms of felt experience, is nevertheless, in itself, light. It is the "beautiful light of faith." And it is light because it participates in the light of eternity just as life was said to participate in the qualities bestowed on it by eternity or as love can also be said to be characterized by eternal love. The divine Light of which Elizabeth speaks and to which she felt so intimately drawn is the light that is the "inheritance of the saints." It is that light that illuminates the blessed and gives them a share in the glory of God. It is, therefore, that which belongs to the state of heaven rather than to the state of earth. So great was the pull of heaven on Elizabeth's heart that to think of light under any other terms seems not to have played any great role in her spirituality.

Mary as Mirror of Light

God radiates light, transforming the soul and simultaneously purifying it. But the soul that is purified and transformed in this way also becomes a mediator of the light. It can be described as "pure." Elizabeth was fond of drawing attention to the living witness of this process and its result in the Blessed Virgin. "There is one," she wrote, "who is so pure, so luminous, that she seemed to be the Light itself." Her favorite title for this aspect of Mary was *Speculum Justitiae*: Mirror of Justice. Mary is the one among all human creatures who most adequately reflects, as in a mirror, the light of truth and love that belongs to the inmost nature of God. She can do this because she

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is so simple; that is, there is nothing within her to inhibit the work of God in her soul or prevent its mediation to others.

There is nothing, in other words, to block the illuminating stream of divine Light. "She seems to reproduce on earth," said Elizabeth, "the life which is that of the divine Being, the simple Being." For simplicity is, in fact, a divine quality. Only what is simple can become a channel of light to the world. In God nothing hinders the perpetual outflow of light that makes of us his image. In Mary nothing hindered the reception of that light. Simplicity here does not, of course, refer to a mental deficiency but to an attitude of complete and trusting openness to receive all that God has to give. It is because Mary can be described as simple that she can also be described as profound, as one who is in touch with her deepest self, rooted in God. Mary thus becomes the prototype of what Elizabeth herself desired to be.

In a remarkable passage in the long meditation written for her friend Françoise de Sourdon, Elizabeth wrote,

"It seems to me that I am like a mother bending attentively over her favorite child. I raise my eyes and look at God and then I lower them on to you, exposing you to the rays of his love."

This is a wholly Marian attitude. Emptied of self, the person can become one through whom God's love can pour out, radiating the illumination that only such love can bring. It is an attitude of motherhood as a nurturing of life, watchful and caring, concerned only for the best interests of the one it loves. In the same text Elizabeth also wrote, "If by chance, in the radiance of His Light, I see you leave that sole occupation (of love), I will come very quickly to call you to order." In the things of God there can be no compromise. Everything must be given to God; everything must be sanctified.

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