

Seeking Christ's Peace: On Contemplative Prayer

Talk 4d (03/13/24)

Today, we will touch upon St. Teresa's teachings on entry into contemplative prayer, the sort of prayer she calls 'the prayer of quiet', after following the path of 'the prayer of recollection'. This she treats in her discussion of the second water in her autobiography and the fourth dwelling in her Interior Castle doctrine.

(The following is from various Carmelite sources on the internet.)

The Second Water, while still strenuous, is not as labor-intensive as the First: the use of a water wheel with dippers attached. As the wheel turns, the dippers pour the water into a trench which in turn carries the water to the garden. Here, in this Fourth Mansion, we touch upon the supernatural, the beginning of infused contemplation, in which the divine light penetrates the understanding, whereas in the "prayer of quiet", it penetrates the will. Teresa describes this prayer as a bubbling fountain which brings with it a deep sense of peace arising from the deepest recesses of the soul. We cannot strive after this as it is a total gift of God. Our goal is love of God, not *[immediately]* consolation nor *[primarily]* self-interest. Although God gives this to whomever He wishes we can dispose ourselves through the practice of detachment, humility and obedience. With these dispositions we are becoming conformed to Christ.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-31)

Jesus was very direct in what He proposed to the young man. Before He invited him into participation of the Gift of Living Water, He pointed him in the right direction, "go, sell all that you have...". Teresa refers to those who make it thus far as earnest souls who have a well-regulated life, are zealous in keeping the commandments and avoiding sin and seeking to advance further in the spiritual life as shown by his question: *what must I do to inherit eternal life?* Jesus invited him to take the leap of faith by letting go, not only of his material riches but also of those spiritual riches he had zealously acquired through human effort aided by grace. The young man, although obedient to the commandments was not up to this further obedience. Jesus sadly watched him walk away enslaved by his attachments.

On the second water... (in her own words from her autobiography)

"Having spoken of the effort and physical labor entailed in watering the garden, and what efforts it costs to raise the water from the well, let us now turn to the **second method of drawing it** which the Owner of the plot has ordained. By means of a device with a windlass, the gardener draws more water with less labor, and so is able take some rest instead of being continuously at work. I apply this description to the prayer of quiet, which I am now going to describe.

"Now the soul begins to be recollected, and here it comes into touch with the supernatural, to which it could not possibly attain by its own efforts. True, sometimes it seems to have grown weary through turning the wheel, and toiling with its mind, and filling the buckets. But in this state, the level of the water is higher, and so much less labor is required than for drawing it from a well. I mean that the water is closer because grace reveals itself more clearly to the soul. This entails a gathering of the faculties within oneself so as to derive a greater savor from that pleasure. But they are not lost or asleep. The will alone is occupied in such a way that it is unconsciously taken captive. It simply consents to be God's prisoner, since it well knows how to surrender to One whom it loves. O Jesus, my Lord, how precious your love is to us then! It binds our own love so closely to it as to leave us no liberty to love anything but you!

"This water of great blessings and favors which the Lord now gives us makes the virtues grow incomparably more than they did in the previous state of prayer. Our soul is already rising from its wretched state, and receives some little intimation of the joys of heaven. It is this, I believe, that increases the growth of the virtues and brings them closer to God – that true Virtue, from which all virtues spring. For His Majesty begins to communicate Himself to the soul, and would have it feel how He is communicating Himself."

The second water is represented by the water wheel, whereby the gardener obtains more water with less effort. The soul begins to see beyond its own misery and gets glimpses of God's glory, which Christ uses to increase virtues within the soul. Prayer becomes more ... [*passive, with one being moved from being recollected into the gift of the prayer of*] quiet, though vocal prayer is not to be shunned, and may still be necessary and helpful to the soul. We continue learning detachment, even from the consolations we have already received, so that we will not be tricked by false consolations or fear that if we do not receive consolations that Christ has stopped working in us.

[The doorways I have offered and those from the 'Cloud of Unknowing' and the eastern Christian hesychast teachings are at the entry into this water or dwelling. St. Teresa's descriptions are very helpful, as well as the priorities she indicates in our maturing discipleship. If one is having significant difficulties entering the prayer of quiet, pray about her priorities in your life (i.e., recollection and holy detachment), and one might ask for a deepening sense of God's love in one's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacred Heart, the Holy Spirit, or the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that your interior life might be divinely illuminated and steadied, freed from graceless strain and turbulence, and poised in sure hope toward grace's deepest horizons.]