

Teresa of Jesus (Avila) 1515-1582



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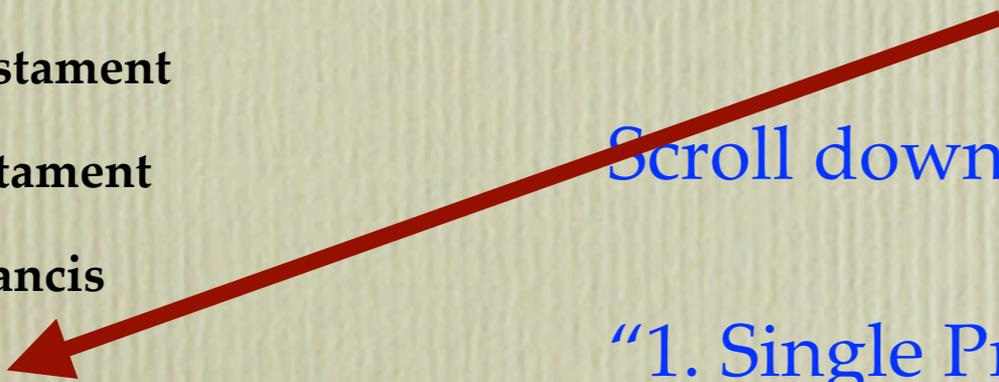
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"1. Single Presentation on Teresa: mystic"



Teresa 1515-1582

1535 entered convent in Avila. Professed 1537

1554 (aged 39) Experience of Christ's presence and love

Her mystical experience began with a feeling of the presence of God that 'would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was with me or I totally immersed in Him' (*Life* 10.1).

1557 Experience of Jesus speaking to her

1559 Experience of Jesus being at her side

1561 Vision of the Risen Jesus (*Life* 28.3).

She experienced a wound in her heart

1562 First Foundation. Convent of Saint Joseph

Teresa 1515-1582

1562 First Foundation. Convent of Saint Joseph

1562 (aged 47) Experience of the Indwelling Trinity (*Interior Castle* VII.I.6-10)

Transforming Union

1562-1565 *Life*

1566 *Way of Perfection* (completed 1569)

1567 Authorised by Carmelite General to work for Reform

(14 foundations in next 15 years). Met John of the Cross (1542-1591)

1571-1574 Prioress of Avila Convent (150 nuns)

Experienced Spiritual Marriage

1573-1582 *Foundations*

1575 denounced to the Inquisition (*Life* in secret archives till 1588).

1576-1582 Most of her 440 extant *Letters*

1577 (aged 62) *Interior Castle*

Prayer

Prayer for Teresa is essentially something very simple.
She speaks of it as ‘an exercise of love’ (*Life* 7.12).

‘an intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with God who we know loves us’ (*Life* 8.5).

‘The soul is a paradise where the Lord finds his delight’
(*Interior Castle* I.I.I).

‘In its centre very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place’ (*Interior Castle* I.I.3)

‘It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, without coming to know ourselves’ (*Interior Castle* II.I.II).

We must ‘set our eyes on Christ’ (*Interior Castle* I.2.II).

‘Look on Him and reflect’ (*Interior Castle* II.I.II)

‘Care only about moving quickly so as to see the Lord.’

(*Interior Castle* III.2.8).

'It is for you to look at him; he never takes his eyes off you' (Way of Perfection, 26.3).

Prayer is essentially a welcoming of God's mysterious presence.

We each have to find our own unique way of responding to God's loving invitation to communion. We each have to find our own way of praying.

At the same time there are some general principles that can guide us in our response, and we can learn much from the teaching of those, like Teresa, who have journeyed in prayer and who have given expression to what they have learned along the way.

I. Reciting Prayers

‘If you are to recite the Our Father well, one thing is necessary: you must not leave the side of the Master who taught it to you’ (*Way of Perfection* 24.5)

‘While you are repeating some vocal prayer, it is possible for the Lord to grant you perfect contemplation ... You are enkindled in love without understanding how. You know that you are rejoicing in the one you love, but you do not know how. You are well aware that this is not a joy which you can attain through understanding. You embrace it without understanding how, but you do understand that it is a blessing you are receiving ... This is perfect contemplation ... In contemplation we can do nothing. God does everything. The work is God’s alone and far transcends human nature’ (*Way of Perfection* 25).

2. Reflective Meditation

‘I spent over fourteen years without ever being able to meditate except while reading’ (*Way of Perfection* 17)

‘These souls work almost continually with the intellect, engaging in discursive thought and meditation.. And they do well because nothing further has been given to them, although it would be good if they engaged for a while in making acts of love, praising God, rejoicing in his goodness, that he is who he is, and in desiring God’s honour and glory. These acts should be made as far as possible, for they are great awakeners of the will. Such souls would be well advised when the Lord gives them these acts not to abandon them for the sake of finishing the usual meditation’ (*Interior Castle* IV.1.6).

3. Be with Jesus

‘It is well to reflect for a time ... but we must sometimes remain by his side with our minds hushed in silence. If we can, we should occupy ourselves in looking upon him who is looking at us; keep him company; talk with him; pray to him; humble ourselves before him; have our delight in him’ (*Life*, 13.22).

‘You need never withdraw from this loving communion ... Go within yourself even during your ordinary occupations. If you can recall the companionship which you have within your soul for as much as a moment it will help you greatly’ (*Way of Perfection* 29.5).

‘Do you think the Lord is silent? Even though we do not hear Him, he speaks to the heart when we beseech him from the heart’ (*Way of Perfection* 24.5).

‘Since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to picture Christ within me, and it did me greater good - in my opinion - to picture him in those scenes where I saw him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as someone in need, He had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these. The scene of his prayer in the garden, especially, was a comfort to me. I strove to be his companion there. If I could, I thought of the sweat and agony He had undergone in that place. I desired to wipe away the sweat He so painfully experienced, but I recall that I never dared to actually do it, since my sins appeared to me so serious. I remained with him as long as my thoughts allowed me to, for there were many distractions that tormented me’(*Life* 9:4).

‘I am not asking you now that you think about him, or that you draw out a lot of concepts, or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I am not asking you to do anything more than look at him. Who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul towards the Lord? ... In the measure you desire him you will find him... He never takes his eyes off you’(*Way of Perfection* 26.3).

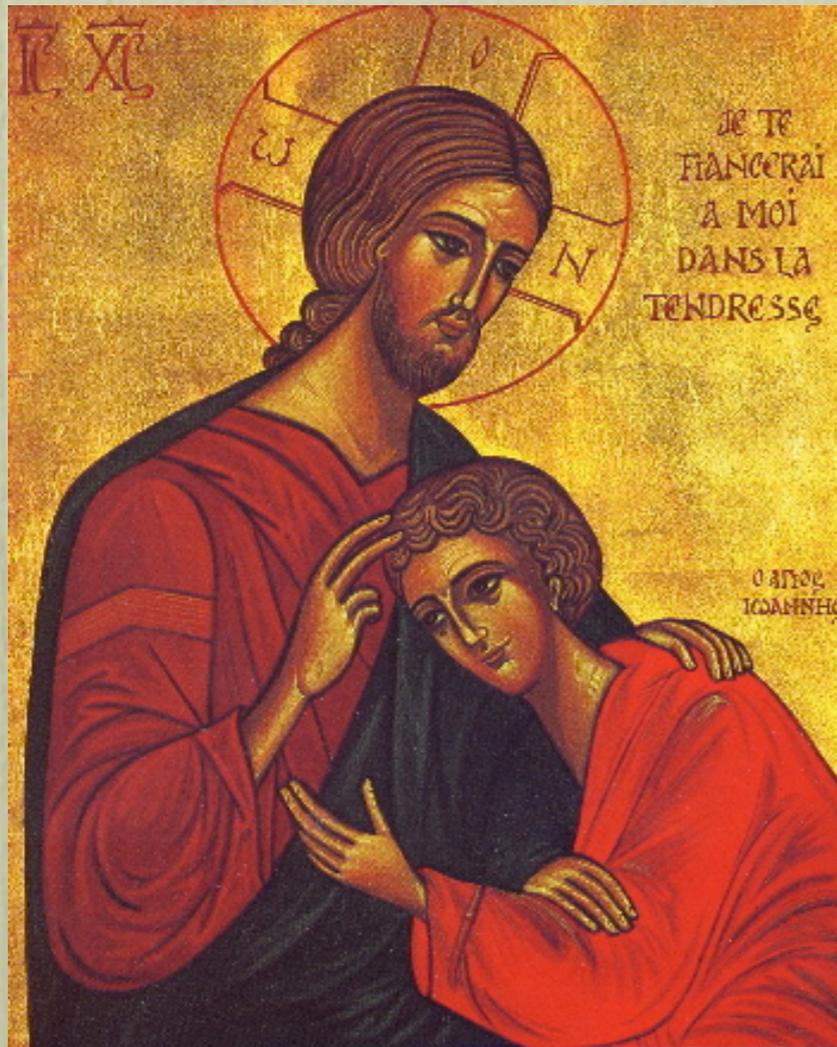
‘There is nothing to hinder you and your Spouse from remaining alone together, when you desire to enter within yourself, to shut the door behind you and to dwell in that Paradise with your God ... Remember this is not a supernatural state. It is something you can do if you resolve to do it’(*Way of Perfection* 29).

4. Indwelling Trinity

1562 Experience of the Indwelling Trinity (Interior Castle VII.1.6-10)

‘Don’t try to hold me within yourself.

Try to hold yourself within me’ (Spiritual Testimonies 14).



John 1:18

‘No one has ever seen God. It is God’s only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made God known.’

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
And I will ask **the Father**, who will give you
another **Advocate**, to be **with you forever**. This is
the **Spirit** of truth, whom the world cannot receive,
because it neither sees him nor knows him.
You know him, because he abides with you.
The **Spirit** will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; **I am coming to you ...**

If you love me you will keep my word,
and **my Father** will love you, and **we will come to you
and make our home in you** (John 14:15-18, 23).

Jesus dwells in us.

He shares with us his prayer
his communion with God, his Spirit
his divinity

‘I live, no longer I, Christ lives in me’(Galatians 2:20).

‘All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’(2Corinthians 3:18).

‘It seemed to me that, like a sponge all penetrated and saturated with water, my soul was filled with the divinity, and that it was truly enjoying, in some way, the presence of the Three’ (*Relations XI*, June 1571).

5. The Gift of Contemplation

Teresa compares the soul to a garden. In pre-contemplative prayer we go out to a well, as it were, and do our best to draw water up from it, which we then bring to the garden to water it as best we can. In contemplative prayer we experience water gushing up from within.

We receive contemplation ‘from the spring which is God himself, who produces delight in the very interior part of ourselves ... This delight fills everything, overflowing through all the dwelling places and faculties and reaching the body. It begins in God and ends in ourselves, and our whole exterior enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness ... This is not something we can imagine for ourselves, and no matter how hard we strive, we cannot acquire it.’

(Interior Castle IV.2.3-4).

In can happen that while we are praying in our accustomed way ‘we sense a gentle drawing inward’ (*Interior Castle* IV.3.3). The garden of our soul is refreshed from a spring hidden in the depths of the garden itself. These are the first experiences of infused, supernatural or contemplative prayer.

‘The first prayer that I experienced that in my opinion was supernatural (a term I use for what cannot be acquired by effort or diligence, however much one tries, Although one can dispose oneself for it, which would help a great deal) is an interior recollection felt in the soul’ (*Spiritual Testimonies* 59.3).

Her mystical experience began with a feeling of the presence of God that ‘would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was with me or I totally immersed in Him’ (*Life* 10.1).

‘When God grants this favour it is a great help to seek Him within where He is found more easily and in a way more beneficial to us than when sought in creatures, as Saint Augustine says after having looked for God in many places. Do not think that this recollection is acquired by the intellect striving to think about God within itself. Such efforts are good and an excellent kind of meditation because they are founded on a truth, which is that God is within us. But this is not the Prayer of Recollection because it is something which each of us can do - with the help of God, as should be understood of everything. What I am speaking of comes in a different way. Sometimes, before even beginning to think of God ... one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward ... This does not come when we want it, but when God wants to grant us this favour’ (*Interior Castle* IV.3.3).

Teresa offers advice for us when we first experience being drawn into moments of contemplation.

1. It is foolish to try to bring about contemplation (*Interior Castle* IV.3.5).
2. We should simply leave ourselves in God's hands (*Interior Castle* IV.3.6).
3. We should continue to meditate (imagine and think and respond) until God draws us into communion. It is not for us to suspend the activity of the mind ourselves (*Interior Castle* IV.3.6).
4. We won't advance in prayer by neglecting to reflect on Jesus. Move away only when God moves you away (*Interior Castle* V.6.12).
5. Don't use techniques to suspend the mind and achieve a 'dreamy state' (*Interior Castle* V.1.3).

We should not adopt a passive state in an effort to induce contemplation by our own efforts.

‘What I say we must not do is to presume or think that we can suspend the activity of our faculties ourselves; nor must we allow it to cease working’ (*Life*, 12; see *Interior Castle* IV.2).

‘Without hiding our legitimate desires for close union with God, we should submit ourselves to the humble labour of our faculties (imagination, memory, understanding and will) until God stoops down to raise us to loving passive attention.’

(Marie-Eugène, page 84)

There is much for us to do.

It is up to us to clear debris that is blocking a spring,
but then we have to wait for the water.

The silkworm spins the silk, but then has to wait
for the time for the emerging of new life.

A sailor must unfurl the sail, but then must wait for the wind.

A surfer has to struggle out to the deep beyond the breakers,
but once there s/he must wait for the wave.

So it is with prayer. Ultimately it is a process of waiting, but in
prayer we know in faith (even if we do not experience it) that
God is certainly offering Himself to us.

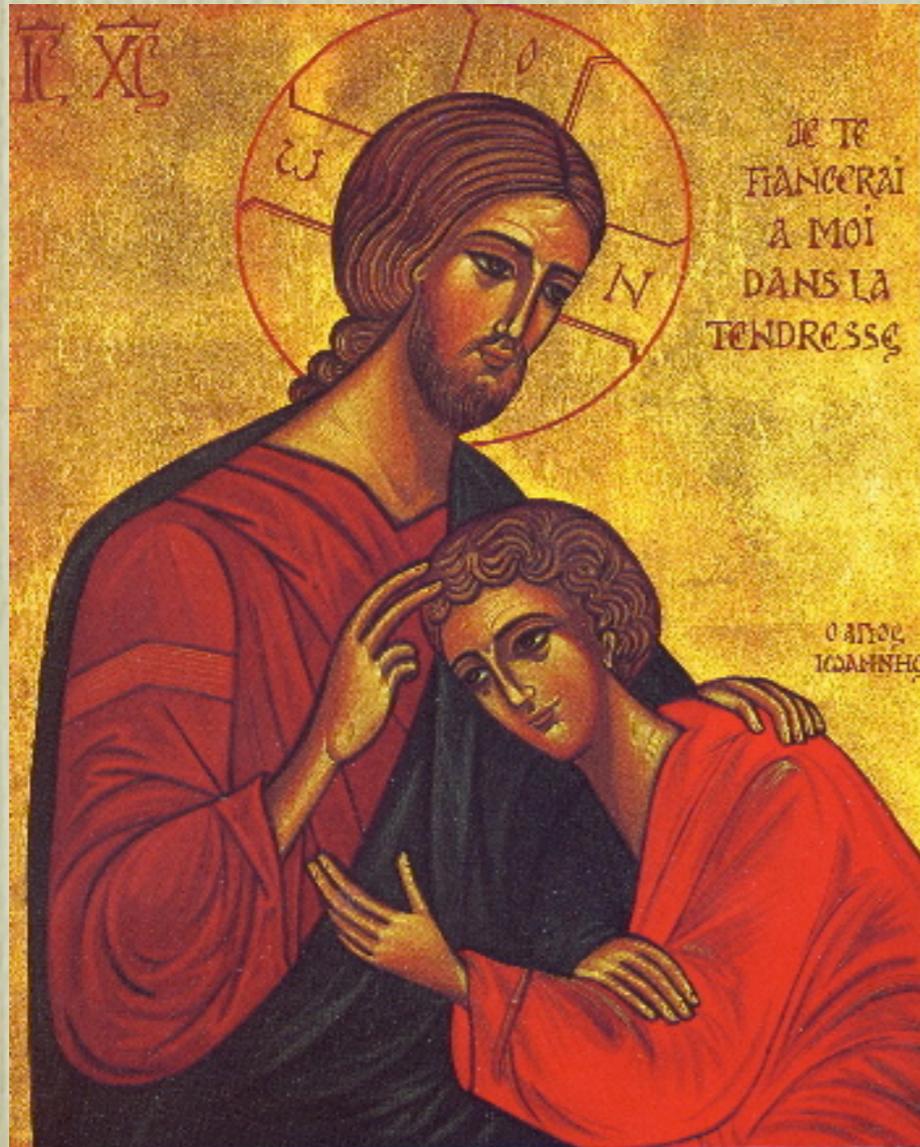
If we are serious about prayer we must be resolute in turning away from sin, for it blocks out the light of God and opens our souls to darkness.

We will need a resolute will to detach ourselves from whatever is cluttering up our lives and holding us back.

This will vary from person to person, and according to each one's state of life.

If we are serious about prayer we must try to live virtuous lives in obedience to God's will as revealed to us through the ordinary means of God's providence.

6. A Deepening of Contemplation: Transforming Union



‘The union is as if the ends of two wax candles were joined so that the light they gave is one. The wicks and the wax and the light are all one. Yet afterwards the one candle can be perfectly well separated from the other and the candles become two again’ (*Interior Castle VII, 2*).

7. A Deepening of Contemplation: Spiritual Marriage

‘In spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river. All is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river. Or it is like what we have when a little stream enters the sea. There is no means of separating the two. Or, like the bright light entering a room through two different windows. Although the streams of light are separate when entering the room, they become one’ (*Interior Castle* VII.2.4).

Obedience

‘Want only what God wants’(*Interior Castle* II,1,7).

‘The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer – and do not forget this because it is very important – should be to prepare oneself with determination and every possible effort to bring one's will into conformity with God's will. The greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. ... In perfect conformity to God's will lies all our good’ (*Interior Castle* II,1,8).

‘Obedience brings us the sooner to perfection and is the best means of attaining it’ (*Foundations* 5).

‘The highest perfection consists not in interior favours or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our souls so closely into conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realise that he wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might’(*Foundations*, 23.2)

‘The soul has now surrendered itself into God’s hands and God’s great love has so completely subdued it that it neither knows nor desires anything save that God shall do with it what God wills’(*Interior Castle* V.2.12)

‘The surest sign that we are keeping the two commandments of love is that we are really loving our neighbour ... Be certain that the farther advanced you find yourself in love for your neighbour, the more advanced you will be in your love for God’(*Interior Castle* V.3.8).

‘It is in the effects and deeds following afterwards that one discerns the true value of prayer’ (*Interior Castle* IV.2.8).