

Interior Castle.Sixth Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paragraphs 1 & 2

In 1569 when Teresa herself was living these sixth dwelling places she wrote her *Exclamations* or *Soliloquies* and this prayer from No 17 of this work gives us an insight into the prayer of a person entering the depths of these dwelling places: *“That this I [the Ego/false self] may now die and **The Other** [Christ] live in me who is greater than I and for me better than me, that I may serve Him; that He may live and give me life; that He may reign and I be his slave, that my soul does not desire another freedom. How can it be freedom if one is distant from the Most High?”*

In the sixth dwelling place the Lord answers this prayer, only He can bring this about and Teresa is going to explain some of the signs or evidence that He is doing it and give us some guidance for living through the challenges of this experience. Entering these dwelling places is total gift of God [a person can do nothing to bring it about] and the correct response is service: *“You must note that greater glory is not merited by receiving a great number of these favours; rather, on the contrary the recipients of these favours are obliged to serve more since they have received more – there are many holy persons who have never received one of these favours and others who receive them but are not holy”.*

Teresa prays that *His Majesty* and the *Holy Spirit* may move her pen so that she may explain something of these dwelling places. Here God lavishes his greatest gifts on the soul and completes his work of healing and transformation so as to prepare the person to enter the seventh dwelling places [the fullness of human and Christian maturity]. This is a long, painful and mysterious stage of the journey of growth and so the person needs wise guidance and encouragement. She sets the scene for us in her short opening paragraph .

1. *“Let us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, speak of the sixth dwelling places”.* Teresa clearly wants to speak of these dwelling places, in fact she is very determined to speak of them, we could even say that the rest of the book is a preparation for speaking about these sixth dwelling places – because from her experience this is what her readers most need. These chapters will give testimony to the deepest, most

mysterious, most fruitful and at times most painful gifts that the Lord bestows on his most favoured souls on the spiritual journey.

2. *“The soul is now wounded with love for its Spouse”*. We are at the stage of total commitment but not yet complete union: *“Now the soul is fully determined to take no other Spouse”* - *“He still wants it to desire more”*. In these words we can feel the soul’s pain and get a sense of her feeling of total helplessness.
3. *“The soul strives for more opportunities to be alone”*. This does not necessarily mean places of solitude, peace, tranquillity and no disruptions – though this would be great! It is the solitude of the heart, no other love but God alone. In the midst of greatest noise, suffering, work, etc. the heart is always desiring God alone.
4. *“In conformity with its state”*. This means that the sixth dwelling places must be lived in conformity with whatever ones state in life is [marriage, priesthood, religious life, single life, parenthood, etc.] and committing oneself to the obligations and responsibility of one’s life. It also means that one’s obligations and responsibilities are no obstacle to the gifts and blessings God wishes to give here.
5. *“To rid itself of everything that can be an obstacle to this solitude”*. Only the grace of God working in the soul can do this. The obstacles are now very deep within and the process of healing, liberation and transformation will be painful and misunderstood. In this chapter Teresa gives examples or symptoms of this work of God and the challenges they bring: False praise or adulation, blame or accusations, illness, anxiety about past sins, feeling of distance from God.

Through any, or all, of these God can bring about his work but the challenge and pain facing the soul can be unbearable: *“Many are the things that war against it with an interior oppression so keen and unbearable that I do not know what to compare this experience to if not to the oppression of those who suffer in hell for no consolation is allowed in the midst of this tempest – our great God wants us to know our own misery and that He is King and this is very important for what lies ahead.”*

For reflection and discussion:

What do you understand by Mysticism?

What does it mean to be “Christian” according to the teaching of Teresa?