

Interior Castle. Seventh Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paragraph 6.

The 7th dwelling place is Teresa's explanation or description of Christian Holiness or to put it in Teresa's own words the "mercies" and "grandeurs" of God – a God whose greatness is without limits and whose works are also without limits [see paragraph 1]. She gives us four images of holiness:

1. Knowledge of the living and active presence of God; Father, Son and Spirit, in the deepest centre of the person – Chapter one.
2. Transformation through relationship with Jesus – Chapter Two.
3. The fullness of human maturity – Chapter Three.
4. A life of service – Chapter Four.

This paragraph makes it clear that the holy person knows God in a new way. The person does not know more about God [in other words the person does not have secret revelations or superior knowledge] rather what has changed is the "knowing". Teresa, struggling for language, describes it as "an admirable knowledge" or a knowing "through sight" [though not with the eyes of the body or of the soul!]. We must ignore our confusion and incomprehension and hear Teresa's awe and conviction. Teresa is filled with "amazement" at what she now knows and speaks about it with total conviction.

Teresa is bearing witness to this truth: *"Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments".* Teresa goes on to attempt to explain herself in paragraph 7: *"Oh, God help me! How different is hearing and believing these words from understanding their truth in this way! Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for the three persons never seem to leave it anymore, but it clearly beholds, in the way that was mentioned, that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it does not know how to explain, because of lack of learning, it perceives this divine company".*

The essential points Teresa wants us to remember are the following:

- This is total mercy of God. It is proof of how merciful and generous God is. God reveals Himself through mercy and generosity. The title of the

Chapter is significant: “Treats of the great favours God grants souls that have entered the seventh dwelling places”.

- The God that one now knows is the God of scripture, of the Gospels – the same God we learned about in the catechism.
- “The essential part of the soul never moves from this room” [par. 10]. Teresa lives the last ten years of her life from this blessed place. Four years later she writes: *“The presence of the Three Persons is so impossible to doubt that it seems one experiences what St. John says, that they will make their abode in the soul. God does this not only by grace but also by His presence because He wants to give the experience of this presence.”* [Palencia 1581]
- The person is not living “outside of themselves” or in some heavenly world. “On the contrary, the soul is more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God”. [par. 8]. Any account of the last ten years of Teresa’s life will prove this!
- Awe, amazement, wonder, worship, praise, is the correct human response to this.

For a fuller understanding of Teresa’s personal experience of the Trinity read her spiritual testimonies of May 29th 1571, June 30th 1571 and Sept. 27th 1572 [No 13, 14 & 29 Kieran Kavanagh edition, other editions vary]. The dates of these experiences are important. Teresa’s full awareness of the 7th dwelling place begins with her experience of the Spiritual Marriage November 18th 1572 [7th dwelling place chapter 2]. Therefore the first two chapters of the 7th dwelling place follow the chronology of Teresa’s own life experience. She is witnessing to the “grandeurs” and “mercies” of God in her life and how God gradually, in His time, made her aware of these.

For reflection:

What does it mean to live a mature, holy, Christian life?

The relationship between “*spirituality*” and “*everyday living*”.

The relationship between “*God as experienced in our spiritual lives*” and “*God as we learned about him in catechism*”.