

Interior Castle: Second and Third Dwelling Places

Text: **The Third Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paras 6 & 7** [Matthew 19:16 – 22]

Having lived in the first dwelling place for a time the person feels the call of God to a deeper commitment. These two dwelling places could be called the “vocation stage”. Looked at from the perspective of the Gospels, this is the call of the first disciples and their commitment to living with Jesus and accompanying him in his ministry. The characteristics of the second dwelling place are: prayer, sacraments, Christian living, vocation, fight against temptation and sin, struggle for detachment, etc. In other words the second dwelling place is the time when the person makes a deep commitment to the following of Jesus Christ and does all the “right Christian things”.

In the third dwelling place all starts to change. Teresa uses the gospel story of the rich young man to illustrate this stage of the Christian journey.

1. The rich young man has done all the “right things” throughout his life but is unhappy. He cannot go on living as he is but does not know what to do. This is the stage when marriages and/or relationships break up, people give up on their faith, leave priesthood or religious life, become disillusioned with vocation or Carmelite Order, etc. It is a pattern well known to us all.
2. What is really happening here is that the person is being called to a deeper level of commitment. The rich young man in the gospel cannot see this: he relies totally on externals – his wealth to give him happiness in this life and his “good living of his religion” to give him happiness in the next life.
3. Jesus is calling the rich young man to something “new” and “different” – relationship, a relationship not based on externals [in my control!] but one based on love. The young man misinterprets what Jesus is saying and “walks away sad”.
4. This is the stage when we often misinterpret what Jesus is saying. The third dwelling place is “crisis time” and we fall into the trap of seeing it

as negative. Jesus is asking the rich young man to trust Him but trust implies the letting go of some control and the young man cannot do this.

5. In the third dwelling place Jesus is detaching us from the control we like to exercise over our spiritual lives – the closer we come to Him the more we must hand over. Jesus is taking over and drawing us closer to Him and we are resisting and protesting.
6. The most important virtue at this stage is humility – the humility to accept life as it really is; not how I would like it to be or think it should be or had planned it to be. God is closer but it feels like he is further away, progress is being made but it seems like I have gone backwards, Jesus is inviting me into a closer relationship with Him but it seems like He is not helping or has rejected me.
7. This is a critical time in the work of formation and spiritual guidance. Now is the time for perseverance and courage. This is the time to take a radical decision to follow Jesus and to stick to that decision and never be swayed by circumstances, events or set-backs.
8. “Thy will be done not mine” this is the prayer of this 3rd dwelling place.

Points for discussion

- a. This is the critical stage in the development of human relationships and also in our relationship with God. How can Teresa’s wisdom be best used to help us?
- b. Can you identify the “3rd dwelling place” in your own life? What are its challenges?
- c. Teresa’s teaching here is vitally important and could change many peoples’ lives. How can we explain it well and make it better known?
- d. Many peoples’ spiritual lives have become trapped or imprisoned somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd dwelling places: good people but have become sad, disillusioned or angry, and are at best just going through the motions of their religious lives or at worst have given up altogether – how can they be helped?

- e. A misinterpretation or misunderstanding of this stage of human and spiritual development is the cause of so much bad decision making. Wise decision making is so necessary for progress in spiritual life!
- f. Our image of God and how we think He works in our lives is challenged here. Can we accept this new, incomprehensible and disconcerting image of God?