

Interior Castle: Seventh Dwelling Place, Chapter 2

Read Teresa's Spiritual Testimony of November 18th, 1572 [No. 31, Kieran Kavanagh edition]. This is a very important experience for Teresa. She now becomes aware of the full reality of the "Seventh Dwelling Place" and everything she says, writes and does for the last ten years of her life is said, written and done in the light of this reality. Almost exactly five years later, November 1577, she is writing her account of the seventh dwelling place – once more she is in the presence of John of the Cross, who will be arrested and imprisoned only days after this book is finished.

We are now in the deepest and most mysterious dwelling place of the human soul – the place where God dwells and bestows his most profound graces and blessings. In the first chapter she has spoken about the indwelling of the Trinity in the human soul, now the focus is on Jesus Christ. The highest point of the spiritual life is the discovery or revelation that "our life is Christ" – the two lives become one, the life of Christ and the life of the person living the fullness of the life of grace.

This is what Teresa lives during the last ten years of her life. This is the closest we can come to understanding the inner life she is living. However we must never read it without remembering the external circumstances she is living at time of writing: the book of her LIFE is with the Inquisition, she has been ordered to stop her work of founding, she and her closest collaborators are suffering greatly from treats, uncertainty, opposition and false accusations. This is the context in which she writes the Interior Castle and especially this very important chapter.

How is Teresa going to speak about this? She will speak from personal experience, she is a witness to what Jesus is doing in her. She speaks with wonder and awe of the unfolding of this mystery in her. She uses the language and symbolism of St. Paul [Paul speaks of this from personal experience, he has no language to use, he is writing before the Gospels or any other part of the New Testament is written, so he must "invent" a language to speak of what Jesus Christ is doing in him]. Both Paul and Teresa are writing autobiography – autobiography that becomes theology, their personal experience becomes our language to express what cannot be put into words, God's mysterious presence

in the depths of human life and experience. That the **Life** of Jesus and the **Life** of a human being can become **One** is the most profound of all mysteries. This is Paul's discovery as he lives Christianity more and more deeply and he tries to express it to his Christian disciples in his letters – he sees clearly that they need to understand it because this is what being Christianity is all about.

Many times in her writings Teresa quotes or refers to these words of St. Paul: ***“I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me”***. [Gal 2:20] She is now living these words in their fullness and is trying to express this reality in words. She also knows that many of her sisters, and others who have shared their spiritual lives with her, are also living this; hence the great need to explain.

“Do you know what it means to be truly spiritual? It means becoming the slaves of God. Marked with his brand, which is that of the cross.” [chapter 4, no.8] We are now at the summit of the spiritual life. When Teresa wrote this, for greater emphasis, she drew the cross or nail – the gift given at the Spiritual Marriage, the sign of permanence! On the cross Jesus gives himself totally and permanently to humanity, now Teresa [and all truly spiritual people] give themselves totally and permanently to Jesus.

For reflection/discussion:

The term “Spiritual Marriage” is a difficult one for us. How do you understand the reality it is trying to express?

The “summit” of the spiritual life can only be understood and explained with reference to the cross. How do we explain this?

For Teresa **Prayer**, and one's relationship with **Jesus**, are the one reality [to grow in prayer is to grow in relationship with Jesus]. True Christian and Carmelite formation should help us see this – discuss!