

**Way of Perfection June 2011
National Secular Order Retreat
Fr Matt Blake OCD**

The Way of Perfection

Prayer of Pentecost

**Spirit of God on the waste and the darkness
Hovering in power as creation began,
Drawing forth beauty from clay and from chaos,
Breathing God's life in the nostrils of man,**

**Come and sow life in the waste of our being,
Pray in us, form us as sons in the Son.
Open our hearts to yourself mighty Spirit
Bear us to life in the Three who are One.**

1. Foundations

As you all know, The Way of Perfection is the book that the entire Order is reading, praying, spending time with over this year. I'll be looking at the chapters on prayer, the twenties leading to the commentary on the Our Father, over the next few days. This evening, however, I would like to lay a few foundations.

A retreat with Teresa is a time we spend with our mother, the person whom the Lord called to be the one in whom the charism, that gift of the Holy Spirit that we are all called to live, is to be found. So when we spend a retreat with Teresa we are going back to that well, that source of the life we live as discolored Carmelites. So this is a time when we are reminded again of who we are and the life we are called to live, and the sheer gift and privilege it is to be Carmelites. And when we come to the Way of Perfection, we're drawn into a very intimate conversation with Teresa. The Way of Perfection is an internal document; it is Teresa speaking to her sisters. The ones whom she shares *life* with—you can imagine her sitting down with her sisters and just talking to them about the lives they are living and particularly about prayer. So we are being taught by our mother in this book.

There are two things I want to draw your attention to this evening. (The details of our lives are inseparable from prayer and the purpose of prayer.)

The details Of our lives are inseparable from prayer

Teresa tells us that her sisters have asked her to teach them about prayer. She doesn't set out to speak specifically just about what they do in the chapel, she speaks about the *whole* of their lives. She tells us in the preface about the details, the little things.

We cannot speak about prayer and not speak about the whole of life. We cannot look at prayer in our own lives without looking at our whole lives. Every aspect of how we live, all the detail of how we live. That is what Teresa does in this book. It seems to take her ages to get to speaking about prayer, but she cannot speak about prayer without speaking about the whole of life. Because that is what prayer is. At the same time, she does speak very specifically about prayer. Prayer and life are inseparable and affect each other. That is important for us nowadays.

So often, from my experience, people want prayer to be good —if I am going to spend half an hour, an hour or whatever length of time on prayer, if I'm going to come on retreat, I want it to be good, I want it to be effective, I want it to do good, I want to feel good afterwards, etc, and then I want to get back to my real life. Prayer tends to be little slots in life.

But actually, if we want these times of prayer to be what they are meant to be, then we have to do what Teresa does and look at all the detail of the whole of life, how I am living my life. And so when one comes on retreat, a retreat is not a crash course in prayer, or an opportunity to get my prayer right or to have some really wonderful prayer, it has to start where Teresa starts, in the Way of Perfection, with the *detail* of life, in looking at the whole of life. Everywhere.

If there is something in one's life that is incompatible with one's prayer or vocation, then everything is affected by that. If there is a need for conversion and change or healing, everything is affected by that. We can't get to prayer without going there. So that is the first very important principle that the Way of Perfection sets before us.

The purpose of prayer is the service of the Church

The second principle I would like to put before you is that this life that we are looking at, with all its detail and aspects, has to have a *purpose*. For Teresa, the purpose is very important, it is not an end in itself, (and she makes this very clear in the Way of Perfection as she does elsewhere), it is the service of the church.

A Carmelite community exists for the service of the Church - not to become a wonderful community or holy people or anything like that. That is secondary; it is to serve the Church. For Teresa when teaching on prayer, that is very important. She tells the nuns, you have come to this house to serve the Lord, to do what can be done for the Church. Every Carmelite community lives its vocation at the service of the Church.

Every individual Carmelite lives their vocation at the service of the Church. To build up the Church, that's the purpose. It can never be an inward looking purpose. It can never be an end in itself or something for the benefit of the individual. Teresa is very strong on this. We are at the service of the church - that's the purpose of the life of prayer; to use Teresa's terminology, that there will be very good friends of Jesus. And these friends of Jesus will transform the Church. That was Teresa's vision for her communities. That is why she founded. That is why she responded to the call of God in the way she did. That is why she said on her death bed "I die a daughter of the Church".

And that is very important for us. Again, one of the problems so often people have with prayer is that it has become an end in itself: something I have to learn to do, that will do me good if I do it, or that I want to do for some rather vague motive. It cannot be that. For Teresa, that would be unheard of. For Teresa, to be a Carmelite is to live the whole of life for the service of the Church, to give oneself totally to the Body of Christ, building up the Body of Christ.

Both principles

I want to set before you these two principles because they underlie everything Teresa teaches on the Way of Perfection. The whole of our lives matters. Every detail is important. Everything has to be compatible with a life of prayer, with the vocation that we are called to live. And we have got to be clear of the purpose. God has called us to Carmel to fulfil a vital and urgent purpose in the Church and only when we are doing that are we fulfilling our vocations. Teresa does not write here for her sisters just so that they will be good at prayer, she writes this book so that they will serve the Church in the *way* they are called to serve the Church.

Outcome of living our vocation

When we think about those two principles, we are then drawn to the next logical development: the tragic consequence of this not happening. If we are not living our vocations, there are consequences that go way beyond the individual. The whole Church suffers. The whole Body of Christ suffers. Therefore for Teresa it is a major tragedy. We find this over and over again in her writings, her correspondence, all her books, in her contact with not just Carmelites but everyone.

Wherever somebody is not living their vocation, Teresa is so aware of the tragic consequences. For Teresa it is not a personal issue or a personal choice; it is a call of God. When it is responded to and lived well, it is a force to do enormous good in our world and in our Church. When it is lived badly or carelessly, it is tragic. Its consequences are really damaging. So Teresa, in writing the Way of Perfection, is writing with great seriousness, this is a very serious subject for Teresa; this is very literally a life and death question. She is very specifically writing for her nuns, for the ones who are finding it difficult to live their vocation, who are not living their vocation as they should be living it or not as completely as they could be living it. Therefore what she is writing is very important to her.

Theory and practice of prayer

In paragraph number three from the little introduction Teresa gives to the Way of Perfection, she says:

I know that there is no lack of love in me and of the desire to help as much as I can that the souls of my sisters may advance in the service of the Lord.

This is strong statement. Teresa expresses love and desire, she will do everything she can to help these sisters live their life in love and service of the Lord.

This love, together with my age and the experience I have of living in some monasteries may help me in speaking of ordinary things to be more successful than learned men. Since these learned men have other more important occupations and are strong, they don't pay so much attention to things that don't seem to amount to much in themselves. But everything can be harmful to those as weak as we women are.

These women, handpicked and trained by Teresa, are certainly not weak!

What Teresa is pointing out, is that the details matter, that so many books on prayer by so many learned men actually miss the point. She, from her experience of living the life in "some monasteries", in places of her direct experience of a life of prayer, is telling us that prayer cannot be lived at a superficial level. What Teresa wants to bring is not theory on prayer - there was plenty of theory on prayer in her time (and today is no different to Teresa's time - there isn't a day when somebody doesn't bring out a new book on prayer) but very few people take the approach Teresa is taking.

Teresa is going to speak from her *practical experience*, from her intimate knowledge of the life of prayer, both in herself and in her own sisters, and indeed in many other people whom she knew, whom she was directing, helping with prayer. There was a vast range of people to whom she was spiritual director or accompanying in prayer. She had vast experience of the kind of difficulties people encounter in prayer.

She rightly points out to us here that the source of These difficulties is in the detail of life. We can have all the wonderful principles —I want to serve God, I want to be holy, I want to be Christian —we can set out our principles so well and write beautiful books on them and read beautiful stuff on them, but from Teresa's experience it is only theory when it is lived at this superficial level.

The detail is what matters

Teresa wants to take us into the detail, the detail that makes a difference, the detail that, if it is changed, then something radical changes. Or the details that if they do not change, then nothing really changes. So she is going to write a book that takes us into the detail of life, right into the personal details, the little things within us, or those struggles that we really cannot get over. Prayer for Teresa is something very simple but because it is so simple it is also so challenging.

These are just two of the general principles I want to set before you. I want to look at some of these details, at what Teresa describes as the details that actually matter when we want to pray. That is where Teresa takes us, and she takes us there (as she tells us) as a person of experience, out of love and of a great desire that we live our vocations as a true service of the Lord. That was her desire for her sisters and it is for us as well.

Teresa loves us today as much as she loved the sisters she was thinking about as she wrote this book. She desires that we serve the Lord as much as she desired that those sisters serve the Lord. We will look at some of the detail of what she is going to tell us.

2. Chapter 19

As today is the feast of Anne of St Bartholomew, as she is so close friend of St Teresa, I will read from the account she wrote of the death of St Teresa. Teresa is at Alba de Tormes. She is very ill.

She asked for the Blessed Sacrament. When they were taking it away, she sat up in bed with a great surge of spirit and said joyfully, "My Lord, it is time to be going. Very well, your will be done. She thanked God unceasingly that she was a daughter of the Church and was dying in it. She said she hoped for salvation through the merits of Christ and asked us all to pray God to forgive her sins and to regard His own mercy rather than them. On the evening of the day she died father Antonio told me to go and get myself something to eat. I had no sooner left than the holy mother became very restless and began looking all about her. The Father asked if she wanted me back and she nodded. They called me and when she saw me she smiled at me. She affectionately took my hands and laid her head between my arms. I held her there until she died.

Today we are celebrating somebody who was very close to Teresa. Interestingly, Fr Antonio, who was mentioned there, is also quite an interesting person. Teresa met him in Medina del Campo, when she was making her second foundation there. She spoke to him about her desire to have a reform of the friars, and he offered to be the first friar. She was very doubtful about him because she thought he was too old. But not only would he be present at her death, eleven years later he would be present when John of the Cross dies. So he was present at the death of both saints despite being too old to begin at the beginning. So we never know, he was around the place a longtime!

Our desire more important than distractions

We come back to Teresa and the Way of Perfection. We are going to look at chapter 19, where she is speaking more specifically about prayer, though, as we have seen, we cannot speak about prayer without speaking of the whole of life. Now she speaks about distractions and we could sum up what she says - don't let the distractions be a distraction. They are there. The first paragraph is very much tongue in cheek, very typical of Teresa, saying that what she has to say is of no help to those for whom all goes wonderfully well and who can follow all these beautiful books that have been written and all these wonderful meditations.

Teresa says:

Paragraph 1 There are so many good books written by able persons for those who have methodical minds ... that it would be a mistake if you paid attention to what I say about prayer. All who are able to walk along this path ... one proceeds peacefully.

She is implying that there aren't any of those in her convents or among those who are listening or reading. She is very down to earth and practical and she knows that 99% of us when we try to pray get distracted and prayer seems to get nowhere, our minds are everywhere and we are restless. Teresa accepts that that is the human condition and that is who we are. That is who Teresa is speaking to - she gives a lovely description:

Paragraph 2 There are some souls and minds are so scattered, they are like wild horses no-one can stop Now they're running here, now here, always restless.

We might expect Teresa to give us some method to quieten our minds, but she doesn't do that at all. She tells us that these people really *desire* to get to the Lord, they know what the purpose of prayer is, where they want to get to, but there are all these obstacles along the way. The desire comes from God. If the desire wasn't there, then The distractions would not be a problem at all. The fact that we are so worried and distressed and concerned about the distractions is because we desire that they not get in the way of our journey to the Lord.

That is the only importance these distractions have: that they can block us, be a hindrance. Or we *think* they are, that is more accurate - we think that this is stopping us getting to the Lord. We sit there and our minds are everywhere and we think we are not praying and we are getting nowhere and in that sense they become a distraction. But she says no, concentrate on what the purpose of prayer is.

Not by our own efforts

Then she shows us very wonderfully that we can't get over these things with our own efforts. You might get over the first one but you will never get over the next one, or the next one. Prayer is not a human achievement, a mental exercise, like some of the books she is smiling at would give the impression. We cannot master this. Because all these distractions are caused by two things, either they are the soul's nature, or they are permitted by God. Both of these are good things, they are the way God made us. We cannot be who we are not. The minds we have got are the minds that God has given to us. Obviously, God has permitted this. So prayer cannot go against human nature, cannot be opposed to the personality of a person, or to the mental state of a person. It is not a mental activity.

There is an acceptance here that this is who we are as people. This is human nature, our minds, our personalities. That is one of Teresa's wonderful gifts: her acceptance of human nature, of human weakness. Then she goes on to show that this is no obstacle for God. She returns to one of her favourite images that we find so often in her writings: water. I am not going to go into detail, you can read it yourselves. She goes back to the woman at the well, that episode that is so important for Teresa's thinking. Those of you who have been to Avila will have seen the painting in the monastery of the Incarnation that was in Teresa's house as she grew up. She so often thought about that woman at the well and what Jesus is giving to her: if you only asked for this water, if you only desired it, you would be given it. The desire is so important here, the Lord wants to give this. The more that the Lord gives it, the more is the desire for it.

So the desire keeps increasing, the living water the Lord is giving, and there is no mention of the distractions. They can't get in the way of any of this. It is the desire that matters, people who want the Lord. But of course, she says, the desire has to be purified. The desire, the water is going to get a bit dirty and there will be all sorts of things in it, so it needs to be purified. But it is the desire for God.

The goal

At the end of this chapter, Teresa says:

Paragraph 14 Why do you think, daughters that/ have tried to explain the goal and show you the reward before the battle, by telling you about the good that comes from drinking of this heavenly fount, of this living water?

That is how she deals with the problems in prayer, the distractions and difficulties. Rather than engaging with the battle, she goes to the end, the purpose, what she calls the goal, and then shows you the rewards. That is what matters, before you even start the battle. It is a very important principle for teaching about prayer, for any kind of formation in prayer. We find it over and over again in Teresa. And the fact that we find her repeating it over and over again would indicate that Teresa is aware that frequently people forget this, it is a root cause for so many of the problems people have in prayer. We forget the purpose, we forget the goal. We get bogged down in the difficulties; we are trying to measure progress. We are trying to see if I am getting anywhere with this, am I improving at it, we turn it into a human exercise. We are inclined to go to the battle all the time, whereas the goal is where we have got to start.

To illustrate what I am saying I will go to St John of the Cross. Most of you are familiar with his sketch, he used to give it to every novice of the Order, to the sisters to those who came to him for spiritual direction; he kept doing little copies. Down at the bottom are little pieces of advice. Then there is the road going up the mountain which is very steep and very difficult. At the top we have a wonderful circle and expanse where only the glory and honour of God lives. I guess most people start reading at the bottom and say I can't do this. And for many years I used to read it too, until somebody pointed out to me that, no, that wasn't St John of the Cross' intention at all. Only somebody with an artistic mind would see this: that when something is done as a circle, it is the centre of the circle that one's eyes are drawn to, it is the top where John wants us to begin and that is where our eyes should be set. If our eyes are set upon that, and if we have really meditated on that, where the glory and honour of God appears, then we can go on the journey. That is what Teresa is doing here in dealing with difficulties in prayer. You can imagine somebody coming to Teresa and saying, "I just can't pray, I am getting distracted", and Teresa saying, "forget that, look at what he is offering to you, look what he wants to give you, desire that, keep desiring that, he'll give it to you, he won't fail you."

Paragraph 14 So that you will not be dismayed by the trial and contradiction there is along the way, and advance with courage and not grow weary thinking that you have not the strength to reach it and that are not meant for it.

Christ is close

That is the problem, the biggest danger of distractions - that they make us think that we are much further away from the fount than we are. It might be that we just have to stoop down and Jesus is there, the water is there. Distractions and struggles in prayer make us think we are so much further away than we are. They are discouraging. Teresa wants to be so encouraging here, for the fact that we are struggling means that the desire is very strong for Jesus Christ. If a person is not struggling, then where is the desire? The desire is the prayer. If a person is really struggling with obstacles and difficulties and all these contradictions she speaks about, then the desire is very strong, so the Lord is probably very near, far nearer than the person thinks. That is the real damage that these struggles are doing: they are making the person think that Christ is far away. Christ is right here, he is not far away.

The last paragraph (15):

Behold, the Lord invites all. Since He is truth itself, there is no reason to doubt.

Everybody is called to this. There cannot be people who are not called. Prayer is for all. Prayer cannot be for some people to master and other people simply can't. There are certain people

like myself who could never master music, or art. But prayer is not like that, it is not a skill to be mastered. It is for all. Teresa is very strong on this, He invites all. You can see this conviction particularly in her letters: there is nobody that she won't speak to about prayer, who isn't called to the highest prayer or can't reach it. Prayer is for everybody. There is no personality type, mental state or condition that can possibly be an obstacle to prayer and to the highest forms of prayer.

Paragraph 15 If this invitation was not a general one...! hold as certain that all those who do not falter on the way will drink this living water. ..for He promises it

Here there is absolute reliance on the promise of Jesus. Jesus promised it, he cannot fail, that is a conviction of Teresa. But we start believing otherwise, we fall back into another kind of belief. That is the root of difficulties in prayer. In a very subtle way we stop believing in what we are doing and distractions and struggles are symptoms of that. If God wants to give us the living water, which he most certainly does, and if we desire it, and unless we very deliberately refuse it, he is going to give it to us. So don't let the distractions become distractions. Go to the goal, the purpose of it. Don't get caught up in the battle. Yes we engage in it, but it is already won.

Teresa knows us, particularly as Carmelites. She can be speaking to any of us. She is very down to earth and has a profound knowledge of human nature. She knows how it is we pray, how we struggle to pray and what it means for us to pray.

3 Chapter 20

Continuing Teresa's introduction to prayer, we can sense in these chapters that Teresa is trying to build the confidence in those for whom she is writing, she is very encouraging. In chapter 20 she picks up the same subject but now giving a different twist to it, another dimension that locks us or stops us or shatters our confidence

Prayer is for everybody

She begins

Chapter 20, paragraph 1

It seems I contradicted he excluded no-one to come to this font of life to drink... excluded me!

Nobody is excluded, this is for everyone. Nobody who cannot do this, nobody who is not called for it, there are no hierarchies of people of prayer in heaven or here - it is His desire that everyone drink of this water and everyone receive what the Lord is offering and he excludes nobody. Teresa says she should be excluded before anybody.

There is a very specific reason why she is saying this; she sees it as a major obstacle to prayer. We think we can't do it, or we are not worthy to do it, or it's not really for me it's for others out there. Jesus wasn't talking to me when he was saying this; he was speaking to other people. These words don't apply to me; I can't do this, that's for people in another place or another state. She was finding this thinking prevalent in her own convents and among people whom she spoke to about prayer. People were saying to her: you shouldn't be doing this, this is not for you. She is refuting it so strongly. The word of God, the promises of Jesus, this living water is for everyone. God does not exclude anybody.

Paragraph 2 Now, since he didn't stop me when I started to walk along this path, nor order me to be thrown into the abyss, surely he excludes no-one; rather, he calls us publicly, crying aloud. But since he is so good, he does not force us; on the contrary, in many ways he gives drink to those who wish to follow him so that no-one will go without consolation or die of thirst.

Having made her statement very strongly, she now tempers it by saying but there is no force here, each person is treated as an individual according to the uniqueness of each person. The gifts of God, the promises of God, the call of God is for everyone but respecting a person's individuality. Only as a person wishes, a person has to desire this; God does not force his hand on any person.

If one wants this, then there is nobody who cannot travel on this road. Teresa says, he didn't throw me over the abyss when I tried this, so if I can do it, anyone can.

Rivers stream from this overflowing font, some large, some small and sometimes little pools for children—for that is enough for them and moreover it would frighten them to see a lot of water.

Teresa gives us a lovely image here of what is right for each individual. You are not going to drown anyone here; it is beautifully put.

These children are the ones who are at the beginning. So, sisters, do not fear that you will die of thirst on this road never is the lack of consoling water such that it cannot be endured since this is so, take my advice and do not stop on the road but, like the strong, fight even to death in the search, for you are not here for any other reason than to fight.

Determination

She goes on to speak of the determination that is needed; we are getting to the battle now. She will go on to tell us that the beginning is so important, but if things do not go well, that is ok, good will still have been done. She is very practical - even if one starts well, there will be problems, even if a little bit of good has been done, that is good, good has been done.

Further in this chapter she comes again to something very important, speaking about prayer

Paragraph 4 Others already know that you are religious and your business is prayer... God is your business and language. Whoever wants to speak to you must learn this language; and if he doesn't, be on your guard that you don't learn his; it will be a hell.

We have got to go back to the time that Teresa lived to understand just how radical this is. In her time, prayer was dangerous, particularly for women. For a woman to start speaking about prayer or teaching about prayer - no, no, no! Here she is encouraging her nuns to speak and teach about prayer, and not just within the confines of her convent but everyone they deal with.

So look at the development that there is here, from first of all encouraging them 'don't be distracted by the distractions, just get onto the goal of prayer, the font is much nearer than you think, Christ is very near, don't let the distractions lead you into thinking that you are very far away from your goal, don't be discouraged if you think you are not making it or making

progress, or that this is not for you - it is for you. She is immensely encouraging when confronted with any of the road-blocks that there are.

The language Of prayer

Now she is saying: teach this, talk about it, tell others, prayer is your business, your language. Everyone you deal with, speak to them about prayer. She qualifies it by saying sometimes it is not appropriate, and that you must do it for a greater good, she is counselling prudence, you have to pick your moments and situations, but the principle she is laying out there, that a person of prayer should be a person that speaks about prayer and teaches about prayer, and helps others in prayer, and guides people in prayer.

Here, of course, Teresa is telling them to do what she is doing herself. In all the letters that have comedown to us by Teresa, there isn't any that does not speak about prayer. Whoever she is writing to, in her business letters, prayer creeps in somewhere. Teresa is all the time spreading the word of God. She is evangelising all the time, spreading the Good News in every situation. For her it is natural for a person of prayer to do that. People are going to know it, she says, people see. Teresa does not believe in hiding the lamp under a bushel, whatever this is. Her nuns might have lived an enclosed life but hidden she certainly never wanted them to be, or that their true vocation was to be hidden; prayer is their business and language and that must be seen and heard

She is not just speaking to her nuns here, she is speaking to everybody. If prayer is for everybody, as she has said, if this font of living water that wells up to everlasting life is for everybody, then what she is saying now is also for everybody. Everybody can help another person in prayer. Everybody can be a witness to prayer. Everybody can speak the language of prayer but always with prudence, when appropriate, when it is right. She is recognising the greatest obstacle, the lack of self confidence that can creep in: "1 am not good enough" and all that type of thing..

Teresa is very strongly encouraging here about the language of prayer. In not using it there is a danger. If we are not speaking that language, then we are speaking another language. If we are not communicating the fact that we are people of prayer, then we are communicating something else.

Paragraph 5 If they should think you are unsophisticated, what does that matter? If they think you are hypocrites, it matters even less... In order to know the one (language) the other is forgotten.

What are we communicating? If we are not communicating the love of God, prayer, then we are communicating something else. She is not speaking just about words, most of our communication is not verbal, it is communicated in all the many ways that we communicate. Most of what we teach we don't teach with our tongues, we teach through every dimension of ourselves. If our prayer is right, if we are really praying, then that is communicated. We don't need to be chatting about prayer, it is not that kind of talking she means, it is a different kind of communicating.

Paragraph 6 If those who speak with you wish to learn your language, though it is not your business to teach anyone, you can tell about the riches that are gained in learning it since telling of it is beneficial to the other. And when he learns about the great gain that is to be had, he may go and seek out a master who will teach him. It would be no small favour from the Lord if you were to succeed in awakening some soul to this good.

In that little paragraph, she gives a summary of the principle of her teaching about prayer that we looked at this morning. It is not for you to teach anybody, she says, you are to share the riches that are to be gained in learning it. These benefits, the goal of prayer —that is what to share with people. Leave the teaching, the methods and the wonderful books to others. What people need to hear is the fruits, the purpose: show them where this can go, what this can do, not the how. Then they will want to learn, they will seek the method, they will start desiring it. They will start to seek it themselves, that is Teresa's method of teaching prayer. There is a pattern here, the way that she deals with people. This is what she finds most helpful for people.

It will be no small favour from the Lord if you were to succeed ... may the Lord be pleased, Sisters, that I know how to speak of it better than I have practised it, amen.

She sums it up very neatly: the goal of prayer and what it is that we want to communicate as individuals and as an Order —the benefits, the fruits, the goal. As I said in my introduction, the vocation is so important for Teresa. This life has to be lived with a purpose, prayer has to be lived with a purpose, and here, when she is coming to her more specific teaching on prayer, she is coming to the purpose, the living water that Christ gives. We come to drink of that well, be saturated with that water of life, Jesus Christ.

4. Chapter 23

Chapter 22 Mental prayer

Looking at Teresa's teaching on prayer, I want to look at chapter 23 but that is skipping what is a very important chapter, 22, or indeed chapter 21. Chapter 22 is familiar to most people: it is teaching that she repeats over and over again in other ways, where she is speaking about what she calls mental prayer and what it is for her. I suppose it can be a little foreign to us, this distinction that she continually makes between mental prayer and vocal prayer. But it needs to be understood in the in the context of her time. Most people prayed what she called vocal prayer: basically, saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary or other set prayers. There were all kinds of complex prayers, very much verbal. There was a great distinction between vocal and mental prayer, what we might call meditation or contemplation, or as Teresa often says, using the mind. Teresa tends to understand it, not so much as a mental activity (it is not about controlling the mind), but more as a heightened level of awareness. Though she does not use that word, it is how she presents it in chapter 22. It is very much around knowing who one is speaking to, in whose presence one is.

Chapter 22, paragraph 7 Yes, bring yourselves to consider and understand whom you are speaking with... for him, to will is to do. Well then, it is only right, daughters, that we try to delight in these grandeurs that our Spouse possess and that we understand whom we are wedded to and what kind of life we must live.

So mental prayer is awareness of whose presence we are in, who God is (she means Jesus Christ), and to be in his presence and all the grandeurs and mysteries of Christ. Obviously, she

says, we can never understand them, yet to be aware that that is what prayer is, coming into the presence. She so often uses the image of the king, (Teresa at this time had quite a few dealings with the king and other important people). She lived in a society where there was so much of this, but when it comes to Jesus Christ, we are coming into the presence of someone so much greater.

Mental prayer is about this awareness, but for Teresa, there cannot be any other kind of prayer, as we shall see. There cannot be a kind of prayer where one is reciting words but one's mind is elsewhere, one's attention is elsewhere, but most particularly, one's priorities in life are elsewhere. One's priorities, one's lifestyle, one's attitudes, as we have seen, have to be in conformity with one's prayer, life lived in the presence of this great King. If we are in his presence, then what kind of life, what kind of behaviour, and what kind of attitudes conform to this? For Teresa, this is essential. So often in her time, prayer was understood as doing certain things, performing certain practices, rituals, and then you could live your life however you wanted to after that - you were fulfilling your calling. That kind of attitude was creeping into her Carmels, her sisters were coming in with those attitudes, that is why she was speaking of it so strongly.

Chapter 23 Determination

What I want to look at this morning is chapter 23. We have already seen that, for Teresa, what is very important is the beginning. We have got to get it right at the beginning. She is speaking to her nuns, who are accepting new vocations. A beginning for Teresa is when one is really starting to take the spiritual life seriously. She knows from experience that if bad habits creep in at the beginning it is very difficult to change them. That is so at an individual level and it is particularly so at a community level. The influences that are there, the way of operating, particularly around prayer is there, there is an attitude to prayer.

Chapter 23, paragraph 1 Well now, I say there are so many reasons why it is extremely important to begin with great determination that I would have to go on at great length if I mentioned them all. Sisters, I want to mention only two or three.

Determination is a great word of Teresa's: a decision has to be taken to do this, to take this seriously, to go with it, to stick with it. She has spoken to us about the goal, now she is tackling how to get there. Now we have to set out on this road, knowing what the goal is. Knowing the importance of where we are going, one has to set out with determination on this road. She gives us three principles here (she could have given us so many others), but these are pretty good ones.

Give with generosity

Number one is:

...that if we resolve to give something, that is, this little care, to one who has given so much to us and continually gives - giving this little care is certainly to our advantage and we thereby gain so many wonderful things - there is no reason for failing to give with complete determination. There is no reason to be like the lender who gives something with the intention of getting it back again.

Effectively, her first principle is that we have got to give with generosity, there has to be a total self-giving here. We must not start prayer like a lender: I am going to give a little bit because I

am going to get something from it; or if I do this little bit, I will gain this. That attitude is very prevalent in prayer. If I spend a certain time in prayer, then God will ... I'll get this back from him. We often hear it the other way round: God isn't answering my prayer. How often we say that, we think that, we hear that. We think that I am doing this and this and God isn't answering, God isn't doing his bit. We pray as if we are lending God something, we are giving but in order to get back. We are not really giving. Prayer has to be a self giving; it can't be some kind of agreement with God: I lend but you have got to give it back to me with interest. That is so often the way we pray, we all do it, and particularly when we want something —0 God you had better jump and do it!

If we want to start with determination on this road, we have got to set that aside. He has already given us everything, so much, so anything we give back is only a token. She gives the image here of somebody who has married someone very wealthy, who has given her everything and she gives him back a little valueless ring, but very important to give that, but it is something of what he already owns anyway. We are only giving God something of what is already God's.

There has to be this generosity in our prayer and that freedom to pray without expectation, giving it to God. This is time actually given to God, not lent to God, or conditionally given to God, or partially given to God, or given to God with reservations. It takes quite a determination to be able to do that, it doesn't come easily to us because we are, always whether we recognise it or not, measuring and evaluating. But here we have to set out on this journey with total self-giving, total generosity.

Beware of the devil

That is the first principle of this journey. The second one, she says, is to beware of the devil. Temptation is going to be there.

Another reason for beginning with determination is that the devil will then not have so free a hand to tempt the devil is afraid of determined souls.. .But if the devil should see carelessness, he would do great harm.

Temptation, the devil, can so easily creep in, that is always going to be part of the journey of prayer. We see this is the *Interior Castle*: at every stage we see what the devil is doing here, how we can be very subtly tempted. That is the second determination: to be aware of evil, of how we can be led astray and of the harm that that does, not just to the individual but to so many others. The person who begins with determination can do so much good. Consequently also, if the devil can creep in, so much harm can be done. The person of prayer has the capacity to do so much good for so many people, but if evil, temptation, the devil creeps in, the harm is also multiplied. So determination is so important here, any kind of carelessness or laxity that sets in, lack of awareness of how susceptible we are to temptation, then great harm can be done.

No going back

The third reason that determination is so important is:

Paragraph 5 ...that the person who does so struggles much more courageously. He knows that come what may, he will not turn back he is convinced of how important victory is and that for him to conquer is to live.

We could put that principle in another way: there is no going back. There is nowhere to turn back to. Once this decision is taken (she goes to her battle imagery again which she loves), once a person engages in the battle, they can't simply turn round and walk away—they will get killed or surrender is more disgrace. There is only going forward. Because the person engaged in this battle already knows the desired outcome and how important the victory is, then a person will not turn back. Teresa is always going back to how important it is to know the goal because once they know how important it is, a person will not turn back. She says quite literally, it is life or death - victory is to live, not victory is to die. A person who has seriously set out on the road to prayer, for that person to give up, for Teresa, is to die, to give up on life, because the person has tasted life, has begun to live. This is a road that, once one has taken a decision to set out on it, there is nowhere else to go; there is nothing comparable with this. Once a person knows who one is dealing with, the vocation one is called to, there simply isn't an alternative, we have got to go forward, there is nowhere else. That is her third reason for determination.

Our guarantee is Jesus

Paragraph 6 I'm not surprised that those who have not experienced this want the assurance of some gain for themselves If you don't believe His Majesty in the sections of his Gospel that insure this gain, it will be of little benefit, Sisters, for me to break my head in trying to tell you about it.

We should not be going along looking for some kind of assurance, "am I gaining this or am I not?", because Jesus has already told us. That is why, in her teaching on prayer, Jesus is so important. What Jesus tells us about prayer is so important to us, he tells us that anyone who gives anything is going to receive a hundred-fold. Even in this life, "ask and you will receive". If we listen to those parts of the Gospel where he gives us these assurances, then we must go forward with the determination that she is talking about.

Our guarantee is Jesus, not how we are feeling, or how we have gained at prayer or how well we think we are doing at prayer, or what progress we think we might have made at prayer, or what answers God might or might not be giving us at prayer. Our assurance at prayer is the word of Jesus, for Teresa, that is what matters. Not what I can show to anybody else or demonstrate in anyway, or any words of wisdom I think I have found anywhere. It is the word of Jesus. If Jesus said he is going to do something, for Teresa, he is going to do it. There is absolutely no doubt about that. If Jesus says he is going to reward everyone a hundred-fold in this life and the next, that is going to happen, there is an absolute certainty in that. That is why we go forward with determination, not looking for some results along the way. This is what we are always doing, we get bogged down on the road and that saps the energy and the life out of the determination she is talking about. It is the word of Jesus that matters.

A small effort brings great gain

Nevertheless, I say that should anyone have some doubt little would be lost in trying the journey of prayer, for this journey brings with it the following good: more is given than is asked for, beyond what we could desire. This is absolutely true; (know. And those of you who know it by experience, through the goodness of God, can be my witnesses.

Teresa says, even if you doubt what I am saying; try it anyway, because however little you try you are going to gain something. More is given than is asked for, even if that is as far you are prepared to go. So even if we are only at the beginning of the road and we are daunted

by this determination stuff, just look at our own lives, at what has got us here. We know we have got more out of this than we have put into it. That is the experience of all of us, so even if we doubt what Teresa is saying, the evidence is there in all of our lives,

She is appealing here: just do this, this works. Effectively she is showing us how all prayer must be. The distinction between mental prayer and vocal prayer is really a false distinction. Because for every person of prayer, whether you are doing it this way or that way, the same when we say "I believe" most importantly of all, it is the same goal that we are all called to, the same journey.

5. Chapters 24 and 25

Vocal with mental prayer

Chapter 24, paragraph 2 *Well what I now want to counsel you about is how you must pray vocally. I will speak of those prayers we are obliged as Christians to recite, such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary.. .sufficient.*

Now Teresa is leading up to concentrate on what will become her commentary on the Our Father. She is not speaking about the long vocal prayers used at the time. She is particularly drawn to these two prayers. Jesus taught us the Our Father, and the Hail Mary is the words of Luke's Gospel; it is the word of God.

What I would like to do daughters is refuse to be satisfied by merely pronouncing the words. For when I say "I believe", it seems to me right that I should know and understand what I believe. And when I say "Our Father," it will be an act of love to understand who this Father of ours is, and who the Master is who taught us this prayer.

Those two lines, we could argue, sum up the whole second half of the Way of Perfection. She is so concerned that we know what we believe.

It is Jesus, our Master, our teacher, who taught us this prayer. As we go on to read the latter part of the Way of Perfection, when she goes into the Our Father, don't just note what she says but the sheer respect with which she writes about this prayer, this love for the Father that she is talking about. We are going to love this Father that we are addressing every time we say this prayer and listen to and reverence this Master who taught it to us. Because we have been taught this prayer by Jesus, that fact for Teresa puts it in a completely different place to any other prayer.

Paragraph 3 *Well God never allows us to forget the Master who taught us this prayer, and with so much love and desire that it benefits us. He wants us to remember him often when we say the prayer, even though because of our weakness we do not remember him always.*

He taught us this prayer, taught it out of love for us, taught it so that we will benefit by it. Unfortunately we often forget this, of course we do.

Now she goes on to tell us something else about it.

Prayer in solitude with Jesus

Paragraph 4 Now, with regards to vocal prayer, His Majesty teaches that it be recited in solitude. That is what he always did when he prayed, and not out of any need of his but for our instruction.

We do not have time to look at what she is referring to in Matthew's gospel. Because where the Our Father is there, Jesus has taught that you go into your room to pray. You go to pray with your Father, who is alone with you. That is context in which he taught the Our Father. We often forget that. Teresa is emphasising here that this should be prayed in solitude. So many other times in the Gospels we are told that Jesus prayed in solitude, went out to a quiet place to pray, wanted to be alone at prayer. Teresa says he did not do this for his benefit; he did it to teach us, so that we would know how to pray.

Solitude is essential for prayer. For this prayer in particular, the Lord's Prayer, it is appropriate for us to do, because that is what Jesus instructed us to do and what he did himself by example. If we are praying in solitude, we are not of course alone, we are with Jesus who taught it to us, Jesus told us that when we go into that quiet place, your Father is there, who sees in secret everything. Solitude gives us the ideal context for this prayer.

There, we are with Jesus who taught us and is still teaching us. Jesus' teaching of this prayer is not some event that happened 2000 years ago. He taught us how to do it and then we do it after that. No, he is constantly teaching us. We can only pray it when we are listening to the Master himself, Jesus, teaching it to us. He is teaching it to us for our benefit out of love for us and that we may know this Father better.

We could go on and look at some of the texts in St John's gospel, where Jesus is speaking about the Father and revealing the Father: "the Father and I are one", and "whoever comes to me comes to the Father", the priestly prayer of Jesus. We have it so often in the texts, how Jesus wants us to know the Father. Teresa is so right to point out to us here that that is the purpose of this prayer and that is how Jesus wants us to pray this prayer. It is never just words to be recited; it is a relationship to be drawn into. More and more we must come to know and understand this Father.

Contemplation

We will skip on a bit and take a bit out of chapter 25. Teresa has very carefully thought out this section. There is a very careful order, how she set before us the Our Father and how we pray it, now she is going to start speaking about contemplation. The person who prays the Lord's Prayer well, as it should be prayed, the Lord, she says, just draws into contemplation.

Chapter 25, paragraph 1 To keep you from thinking that little is gained through a perfect recitation of vocal prayer, / tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father or some other vocal prayer, the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation. By these means His Majesty shows that he listens to the one who speaks to him.

Teresa is so convinced of that, we see it over and over again: in her insurmountable problems the Lord never lets her down. That is one of the things that makes Teresa's teaching on prayer so right and so attractive: it is grounded on personal experience. Read this alongside the book of her Foundations, when she runs into all kinds of problems she turns to the Lord and he does

quite literally what she told him to do. She has such a relationship with the Lord that when she says "he always listens", she knows something that has been proven from experience.

...he listens to the one who speaks to him. And it is his grandeur that speaks to the soul, suspending one's intellect, binding one's imagination, as they say, taking the words from one's mouth, for even though the soul may want to do so, it cannot speak unless with great difficulty.

So God just steps in and takes over - that is contemplation, an inflow of God. His grandeur speaks to the soul. The person who is praying speaks to God, God always listens, his grandeur responds, speaks to the soul. This is a lovely definition of prayer. God's grandeur binds one's imagination (all the distractions and difficulties), takes the words from one's mouth.

The next paragraph is as good a definition of contemplation that Teresa or anybody gives anywhere.

Paragraph 2 The soul understands they are enjoying without understanding how they are enjoying. The soul is being enkindled in love, and it doesn't understand how it loves... The will is enkindled without understanding how. This good is a gift from the Lord Of earth and heaven... What I have described, daughters, is perfect contemplation.

She is writing about the beginnings of prayer and speaking to people who are suffering from all sorts of difficulties and distractions, struggling to do anything in prayer. God can just step in and do it at any time, it is God's choosing. The person is not even aware of it. He can do so just when one is saying the first words of the Lord's Prayer

The difference between these prayers

Paragraph 3 Now you will understand the difference that lies between perfect contemplation and mental prayer.

Mental prayer, as she has said, is saying the Our Father, trying to concentrate on what we are doing, think about who this Father is, who is teaching us. Contemplation is God stepping in at that moment, showing us a way we could never have brought about or ever merited or ever imagined. He takes us beyond that. There is a world of difference.

Mental prayer consists Of what was explained: being aware and knowing that we are speaking, with whom we are speaking to. ...Don't think it amounts to some kind Of gibberish, and don't let the name frighten you.

To recite the Our Father or the Hail Mary or whatever prayer you wish is vocal prayer. But behold what poor music you produce when you do this without mental prayer... In these two kinds of prayer we can do something ourselves, with the help of God. In contemplation we can do nothing. His Majesty is the one who does everything, for it is his work and above our nature.

So, the vocal prayer and the mental prayer we can only do with God's help. Contemplation is what God does; it is taken out of our hands.

She goes on to say that she has spoken a lot about contemplation elsewhere (the Book of her Life) and she is not going to say much about it here. She is going to set out in chapter 26 what she means about the prayer of recollection.

Chapter 26, paragraph 1 Now then let us return to our vocal prayer that it may be so recited that, without being our being aware of the fact, God may grant us everything together and also enable us to say vocal prayers as we should.

That is what she wants us to get to all the time: whatever prayers we are praying, we pray them as we should teach about prayer. She wants her communities to be: places where prayer is carried out as it should be, that is why she writes this book. That her sisters will know what prayer is, what it should be, they would be praying in the right way and not then be a hindrance to what God wants to do. She lived in a time when there was so much distorted teaching about prayer that was not helpful. So she is setting out hereto give what she believes is going to be helpful, going to be right. Is going to ensure that these sisters and everybody else who reads it are doing it as we can, we do it the best we can do it.. That is our obligation, and then God steps in, at his time, usually without the person knowing it. The Lord does the rest.

A simple method of prayer

She now goes on to give a blue-print for a beginner in prayer — what one might do, starting with the sign of the cross and the act of contrition:

...since you are alone, strive to find a companion. Well, what better companion than the Master himself who taught you this prayer? ... Remain with so good a friend for as long as you can. ...if he sees that you go about striving to please him you will not be able - as they say- to get away from him. He will help you in all your trials; you will find him everywhere. Do you think it is some small matter to have a friend like that at your side?

In that little paragraph she gives us a method of prayer, a simple but profound method —just to be there beside the Master as he teaches, alone in his presence. Everyone can do it and should want to do it. This is a simple but very effective method of prayer she is starting to teach. It doesn't mean it is always going to be easy, she will go on to speak about the difficulties. She sets out for us this simple method, having laid down the foundations for it.

It is very easy to do this with a group of people. Just sit down together, say the sign of the cross and make a little examination of conscience for a moment or two to bring one's thoughts together. Maybe read a line or two from the Gospel about Jesus being alone or teaching the Our Father. Then invite people to imagine they are in the presence of Our Lord, he is teaching us now. Just listen to him saying the words in the silence. Maybe every now and again recite a line from the prayer, or maybe not, whatever short or long a period of time. Having spent this time personally with Jesus, the group could say the Our Father very slowly together.

There could be many variations. It has certain similarities with Lectio Divina but is a more simplified version, it doesn't involve sharing. It is to help people just to be alone with Jesus, to listen to him, to be taught by him.

This method of recollection can be done in a group or by an individual. It is so simple but also very effective. Teresa found it very powerful in her own experience.

6. Chapter 26 continued

Regarding the method of prayer she has been talking about, Teresa goes on to take us through her advice, but the first thing she says, it is not easy.

Paragraph 2 O Sisters, those of you who cannot engage in much discursive reflection with the intellect or keep your mind from distraction, get used to this practice! Get used to it of not being able to quiet the mind in anything.

She is telling us that for many years she could not do what she is advising here. One just perseveres and keeps it very simple.

Friendship with Jesus

But I know that the Lord does not leave us so abandoned; for if we humbly ask him for his friendship, he will not deny it to us. And if we cannot succeed in one year we will succeed later. Let's not regret the time so well spent.

We need to ask for his friendship. This is a key word for Teresa, friendship with Jesus. Of course Jesus is always there with us but we must not take it for granted, but keep striving to walk alongside this Master.

She says, I don't expect you to give long reflections, turn the eyes of your soul towards Him - just for one moment - she is so aware of how difficult it is. Keep doing that. The way she describes it here, with an examination of conscience. If we turn our eyes to the Lord, we are looking at something so beautiful; we, as she says who have committed so many offences. In awareness of your own sinfulness.

Paragraph 3 Is it too much to ask you to turn your eyes from these exterior things in order to look at Him sometimes?

She goes on to give us a few paragraphs, taking us into so many scenes in the Gospel: being with him in the Garden, being with him at times of joy, of suffering, wherever. Prayer for Teresa is very personal; it is friendship with Jesus, being with him. It is very real for her. This is born out in her life story, her constant consulting him, speaking with him, hearing him.

Images and books

At the end of this chapter she gives us two things that are very important for us, because they were important for her. They are the two things Teresa found most helpful in her prayer. One was images, a statue or a picture, an image in her imagination - she needs an image. It wasn't as an art, she needs something to take her to Jesus. We find this throughout her life story. I have already mentioned to you the Woman at the Well. This was so important to her as a little girl, it was hanging in the house she grew up in. She often looked up at that picture and asked Jesus to give her this living water, and that image has stayed with her all her life. At the Monastery of the Incarnation you'll see the statue of Jesus at the Column. You will also see the statue on the stairs depicting Teresa meeting Jesus there. She said to him, "Who are you?" he said, "Jesus, who are you?" She said, "Teresa of Jesus". At the end of her life when making her final journey to Burgos, after the most horrendous journey she insisted on the whole group of them going around the city to see a famous cross of Jesus Christ. How important this was to her: she needed to be able to visualise Jesus. He had to be immediate to her, beside her, a companion to her.

The other help for Teresa was books - they were very important to her. She grew up reading - novels, any books she could lay her hands on. She insisted that her sisters were able to read. The vast majority of the people at that time could not read. That is one of her motives for writing books; she knew that they were a very important way for coming close to Our Lord, hearing about him, hearing his words. Of course, the main source of all her books is *the Book*, the Gospels. At that time access to the Gospels was very limited, at least in a language she understood. Often they only had extracts translated.

Books gave her the experience of lived relationships with Jesus: she loved reading the lives of the saints, not out a superficial interest in these people but because this is a lived experience of a relationship with Jesus. Everything she teaches us is lived experience, her experience of those years when she "could not pray" - she could not concentrate for one moment on prayer: that was *lived experience* of prayer, therefore she could write about it so helpfully.

The Gospel

To learn to pray, we need to really know Jesus and have our image of him, know Jesus personally, have him beside us, put ourselves into the Gospel. The Gospel for her is not a document from the past, about somebody else; she is *right in* the Gospel. She is there at the tomb, at the foot of the cross, right where he is. It is real now. It is personal Jesus is speaking to me. Jesus needs comforting at this time; Jesus needs my presence because he is alone.

Books and lives of saints and the experience of living saints —that is why Teresa loved talking to people about prayer. She loved the conversations about Jesus, about prayer. For her that was entering into the living presence of Jesus. Friendship with the friends of Jesus became friendship with Jesus. She longed to meet people who she could talk to about prayer. From that she is drawn deeper and deeper into the mystery of Jesus and his presence, which for her is what prayer is.

There is one particular aspect of the life of Jesus that stands out for Teresa, as it would for every Christian person, and that is the cross.

Paragraph 7 Take up that cross ... be deaf to their gossip.. .do not withdraw from the cross or abandon it. You will come out consoled because you will see that they (those trials you suffer) are something to be laughed at when compared with those of the Lord.

She goes to the Gospel for a meditation on the cross of Jesus, walking with him and helping him carry his cross, and then to considering our own crosses in life: the sufferings of our own journeys being lifted through the power of the cross in Jesus. *Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.* In her own life, when faced with great difficulty nothing daunted her, nothing was too much.

The Our Father

Chapter 26 is the stepping stone in her Teresa's commentary on the Our Father. This Person she knows so well teaches it, that is the context in which it should be seen: Jesus has given us this prayer so that we will know the Father.

Paragraph 10 And/ again assure you that if with care you grow accustomed. ..join near to this good Master to learn what he teaches you...he will not abandon you if you do not abandon him. It is no small blessing and gift for a disciple to see that the Master loves him.

It is the Master teaching the disciple. If this is lived with determination, he turns out to be a good disciple. A good disciple is able to learn this prayer. The disciple is taught this prayer by the Master because the Master loves the disciple.

The relationship between the Father and the Son

The first word Jesus speaks is "Father":

Chapter 27, paragraph 1 Our Father who art in heaven. O my Lord, how you do show yourself to be the Father of such a Son; and how your Son does show himself to be the Son of such a father! May you be blessed for ever and ever!

In these first words we can see how profoundly Teresa has meditated on this prayer. Immediately, the Son tells her who the Father is, the Father who has given us this Son. She has a profound relationship with this Son and in the opening words she is immediately drawn into the relationship between the Father and the Son (developed so much in John's Gospel: the relationship between the Father and the Son, and how Jesus so much wants that relationship with us). Here, Teresa expresses it to us in one line, learned not from a book but from experience.

Teresa knows from experience that this prayer begins by bringing us into the dynamic of that relationship between the Father and the Son, so that we may relate to the Father. This really excites Teresa, but it is because the foundations of that friendship have been so well established. That is why she leads in to this with the previous chapters.

Jesus wants that relationship with us. When our relationship with the Son is established, one is ready for the kind of relationship with the Father that Jesus wants to bring us into. This is the purpose of this prayer: the friendship is so great, the love that Jesus has for the disciple is so great, that he now brings the disciple into this prayer, into this relationship.

7. Chapter27and28

Thomas Alvarez, in his account of Teresa's foundations, *St Teresa of Avila, her Spiritual Adventure* (for the centenary in 1981), in the chapter on the foundation in Soria, wrote a bit about Teresa and prayer:

Teresa's uninterrupted vision of Christ - when she teaches, she teaches from experience. Prayer and living are the measure of one another... If we take Mother Teresa as our tutor, it will only be a matter of learning our mother tongue.

This is a wonderful piece of writing and should be given to everyone in formation. The very title of the Way of Perfection, "camino", is the journey to the place that really matters: intimacy with God, to mastering our mother tongue, the language with which we converse with God. This is

the one thing we humans really need; it is a language in which we are almost illiterate. That is what Teresa is mastering in The Way of Perfection.

When she comes to the Our Father, in Ch 27 (paragraph.2) she breaks into a long prayer to *Jesus, O Son of God and my Lord...*

The relationship of the Trinity is for us

It is interesting where this chapter moves to. Teresa immediately goes on to relationships within the community. In her day, who your father was made an enormous difference to your status in society, but there can be absolutely no place for that in a Christian community, a Carmelite community. We all have the one Father, and he is God, the Majesty, the greatest of all. What she is showing is that, once we are into the relationship between Jesus and the Father, it transforms our human relationships. It has a very direct bearing on how we relate to people. She is illustrating it through the relationships in her community but it would apply anywhere. The most fundamental of relationships in our lives is, we could say, the training ground for all our relationships and it transforms all our relationships.

Paragraph 6 You have a good Father, for he gives you the good Jesus. Let no-one in this house speak of any other father but him... The Holy Spirit must be present between such a Son and such a Father, and he will enkindle your will and bind with a very great love.

The intellectual vision that Teresa told the Bishop of Soria about was of the Trinity and Jesus Christ. Here she shows us how the Spirit and the Trinity are present, how she is drawn into that relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.

When Teresa gets to the seventh dwelling place of the Interior Castle, she tells us that something changes: the relationship with and the understanding of the Trinity. It is same Trinity that we learn about in the Catechism and that theology books teach us, but now one knows it through experience. The truth is seen in a different way. That truth is drawing us into a great love. The opening of the Our Father brings us into this relationship between the Father and the Son, the Trinity, and the love which is the conversation between them.

Inward journey

We could say this is Teresa's point of arrival for her prayer because our Father is in heaven. Teresa goes on in the next chapter to tell us where heaven is: it is not out there anywhere, it is not in the sky or beyond the sky, it is right inside us. Wherever Jesus is, that is heaven. It can't be anywhere else, and it is within. It is wherever Father Son and Spirit is. Her Interior Castle has that idea but it is not just in that one work, we have got it here in chapter 28:

Paragraph 9 Well, let us imagine that within us is an extremely rich palace Imagine too that you have a part to play in order for the palace to be so beautiful ... Imagine, also, that in this palace dwells this mighty king who has been gracious enough to become your Father, and that he is seated on an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart.

So, heaven is within. The journey is inward, the journey to the true self, truth itself, and it is the preparing of that, the cleansing, the healing, the growth of the virtues, that makes this palace so beautiful. That is the real journey that Teresa is speaking about here. That is the way of

perfection. That journey within. Teresa journeyed in all sorts of ways but the most difficult and most challenging of all journeys is deep within ourselves, the place where God lives.

Jesus alone in our hearts

Paragraph 12 This fact is certain...he never works in the souls as he does when it is totally his without any obstacle now then, if we fill the palace with lowly people and trifles, how will there be room for the Lord with his Court? He does enough by remaining just a little while in the midst of so much confusion.

So he needs to be alone and needs to be alone within us. This is the same need to be alone that Jesus had in the Gospels, alone within us, not competing with other priorities, other loves. That is where he is found, that is where we speak with him: Our Father who art in heaven, we are speaking to our Father. Jesus is teaching us to speak to our Father, he is teaching us alone, in a place of solitude, deep within us, heaven.

That is total fulfilment, happiness, peace, fullness of life, life as it should be lived. Then we become our true selves, then also we are making the greatest contribution we possibly can to our world, transforming the world. That is Teresa's conviction and what she is setting out for us in this book. She has learned it through experience, tried it, discovered it and she is living proof that it works. The greatest book that Teresa wrote is her own life story, her experience - all the books are about something of her experience, but Teresa is her own book, she lived it. She proved it first of all then put some of it inadequately in writing. She is still teaching us, the Doctor of the Church, the great person of prayer.

I started by saying that for Teresa, life had to have a purpose, a goal. Now we find her right at that goal, with Jesus, and the Father and the Spirit. The goal is reached when a person's life is totally at one with that: a person who is living in heaven, whose heart is the throne where the Father sits, from where he rules, for the throne is a place of rule. When God the Father rules from the human heart then we have got something so powerful. That is who Teresa is. It is the journey to there that Teresa is outlining in this book.

For another time

Now she goes into the Our Father and takes us through various types of prayer that are outlined in her commentary on this. She takes us into the depths of the prayer that Jesus teaches us, she lets Jesus teach us to pray through the words of that prayer. We often refer to it as a commentary on the Our Father but that is probably a human way of speaking about it. It is really Teresa listening to Jesus and allowing Jesus to teach us to pray through the words that he gave to his disciples. We are saying with the disciples, Lord, teach us to pray, and Teresa shows us how he is teaching us. It is really a treatise on prayer, with Jesus as the teacher. As she said herself: "if I stay close to the Master then I will have something worthwhile to say to you". Teresa is close to the Master and does have something worthwhile to say to us.