

Talks around the Interior Castle
Secular Carmelite retreat led by Fr Matt Blake OCD

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First talk – Introduction

As you know, the subject for reflection is St Teresa's *Interior Castle*. We will use that as our base, as our reflection as we gather here these days for this time of prayer, this time to renew and re-invigorate our lives as Carmelites and we spend these days listening to Teresa, our mother, our inspiration, the person who holds this gift of the Holy Spirit that we're all called as Carmelites to live. And so this work that we're reflecting upon, we could argue that this is Teresa's masterpiece, it is her last complete work, she writes it at the fullness of her human and Christian maturity, about five years before she dies in 1577.

I want to begin by looking at a few things at the very end of the book. She writes this little epilogue. She's finished writing, it's the end of November 1577 and she writes these two pages of an epilogue, a little reflection at the end and it's a wonderful starting point because in it she tells us what she thinks of the work that she's written and she gives us a few pointers – in a very gentle and subtle way, she points out a few things to us. First of all, she likes what she's written – Teresa has no difficulty boasting – she likes what she has written. She said: *I admit the work brought me much happiness and I consider the labour, though I confess it was small, well spent*. So she recognises that this is a work well done, and for herself to recognise it, she's recommending it to her sisters and she's writing this epilogue particularly for her sisters, though she clearly has in mind that the book is for everybody.

As one reads the book one notices at times she's very directly addressing her sisters. That doesn't mean that this is a book written just for Carmelite nuns; Teresa's intention was that this was a book for everybody. But many writers do what Teresa does here; when they're writing something, they have a particular few people in mind, or sometimes a writer might have a particular person or a few people in mind, it helps them to say what they want to say, but also Teresa uses it as a technique in the book, a sort of a dialogue – this is a dialogue, so it makes the book more intimate. The fact that she's very specifically addressing her sisters mustn't be misinterpreted and that we think that this book she intends only for Carmelite nuns – that was never her intention, it is for everybody but she writes it specifically for them.

And she says: *you should delight in the interior castle*, and by delighting in the interior castle she doesn't just mean delighting in what she has just written, she means delighting in the interior castle that's within each one of us. And that of course is the object of these days and this retreat; it's not to get to know this book much better, which hopefully we will all do, but it is to enter into our own interior castle. Everything Teresa writes about is within each one of us. The interior castle is within each one of us and she wants us to delight in that and to enter into it. Then she goes on to make a very important point about the whole structure of the work. At the beginning of paragraph 2 she says: *True, you will not be able to enter all the dwelling places through your own efforts, even though these efforts may seem to you great, unless the Lord of the castle Himself brings you there*. So not all the dwelling places – and specifically of course the fifth, sixth and seventh dwelling places – one cannot enter, one has to be brought in. And then she's advising – don't use force, don't rely on your own efforts – it's gift of God. So don't force yourself, use no force, she said, don't turn the spiritual life into a task to be achieved, take it gently, *he is fond of humility*, she said, take this journey gently.

Then she gives a key to the reading of her book: *By considering that you do not deserve even to enter the third, you will more quickly win the favour to reach the fifth*. That sentence is crucial to Teresa's whole thinking. One of the dangers of this work is that we see it as 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. It's not that of course, the critical transition is from the 3rd to the 5th, as she points out to us here. The 4th is the centre - see it as concentric circles from the centre: within the centre is the 4th, then the 3rd and 5th, then 2nd and 6th, and the outside circle 1st and 7th.

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It's another way of seeing it and what Teresa is hinting here is that it is the transition from the 3rd to the 5th that really matters, that's where the real change takes place. So she's giving a key here, and one could almost miss it, to the reading of her whole book. Then she speaks about being outside of it and at times we're going to find ourselves outside, but we can always enter any time. What is she getting at there? It's probably the only hint in the whole book of Teresa's own situation when she wrote this. One could be mistaken reading this thinking this is written by somebody who is living a very tranquil, peaceful life somewhere, who has ample time for prayer and reflection and can put in an enormous amount and time and effort into this work. In fact it's written at probably the most difficult time of her entire life, when it looked as if everything she had worked towards was being brought to an end. The opposition was ranked against her and in fact only a day or two after she wrote this epilogue, John of the Cross will be arrested and imprisoned. So really this November of 1577 when she wrote the last part is a very difficult time for her, and yet there's not a hint of this in the book, one or two little hints if you really read, but apart from that there's nothing. And yet she's actively engaged all the time in these things and we know that from her letters, we know that from other historical evidence, she is fighting lawsuits, all kinds of conflicts, she's very concerned for her sisters and her friars and the difficulties they're going through and she's very involved in all of that. She's very engaged in all that's going on in the outside world, in the world around her, and yet she's able to enter her castle and write this beautiful work about the castle from that castle. The ability to enter into it, to be fully engaged in life in the world and be able to enter deeply into the spirit. One doesn't take from the other, but rather gives her the wisdom and the strength to live what she's living. She's speaking from real experience there. Then she marvels again at this work that she had done: *no more than seven dwelling places were discussed, in each of these there are many others, below and above and to the sides, with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths, such delightful things that you would want to be dissolved in the praise of the great God who created the soul in his own image and likeness.*

That's where the work began, with a very strong statement that we're created in the image and likeness of God. And there she speaks about the soul, and we need to be careful about that word *soul*. Only a few days ago somebody who was reading John of the Cross wrote to me: what does John of the Cross mean by the soul? Gosh, I needed to answer this question, because it's not easy to answer it. And the difficulty nowadays I think is that we think of the soul as part of the person or some part that's in there somewhere. For Teresa and for John of the Cross, it's something much more than that, although it's not easy for us to exactly pinpoint it. It means undoubtedly the whole person, the whole person in the fullness of their maturity. It is that 'place' – and we put place in inverted commas, because obviously it's not a place – where God lives in the person, where the person meets God. Another aspect of it is that it is the most true and most real dimension of the person. It is the true person, or as she put it there: *the person as the person is made in the image and likeness of God*. And what we see in the *Interior Castle* is that while that's a fact – we're made in the image and likeness of God – Teresa shows us in this book that we grow into it, it's a lifetime process of growing into the fullness of the person, the person as created in the image and likeness of God. So the word *soul* is a word that contains an enormous amount, we have to see it in a very broad way. It's the person she's speaking about, the whole person, not just part of it, though it is the spiritual all the time that she is speaking about – the relationship between the spiritual and the physical, the psychological, the emotional, the social, all the other dimensions of the person. When something happens in the spiritual, when an experience is spiritual it affects the whole person, the whole person is changed and transformed – every dimension of the person – but the experience is still spiritual.

Maybe it could be described something like this: so much of our experience comes from outside of us and it affects us in all sorts of ways. Spiritual experience always comes from the deepest place within and it affects us in an outward way, its like something coming from

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outside. Whatever happens in the soul has an effect on every dimension of the person and Teresa wants us to live from the soul, because that's the spiritual life. The person who is living the fullness of human and Christian maturity is living from the soul, living from the deepest place within. And that's what this whole book is about, what it means to live from the soul, live the life that comes from the soul, and here she says it's wonderful, it's a wonderful world, it's limitless! There are gardens, labyrinths, there's everything one could think of here, there's far more there, far more than what's in all the world around. So these are just a few points from the end of the work.

I sometimes say to people, how do we read this *Interior Castle*? I sometimes answer, start with the seventh – that might be a bit much if somebody has never read the book before, but it makes a lot of sense to do so. Teresa is speaking here about seven dwelling places, seven places to live life from, seven depths of living human life, but all seven of them are within us and all seven come to life. One won't even get inside the door of the first one unless the light from the seventh is drawing one. It's a fundamental principle and we see it in St John of the Cross for example, in his teaching, it is so important to know the end of the spiritual journey, one's focus should be on the end of the journey, so therefore he puts his focus upon the top of Mount Carmel and we have got to know what's there and we've got to know where this is going, got to know the direction you're going in. So the seventh is so critical to the understanding of the whole work, because it is from there that we are enabled to enter and to live all the others. Our inclination is always to start at the beginning, and of course that's what we do, that's the natural thing to do, but there's a value in reading the seventh, familiarising oneself with the seventh, because it is the light from there that enables one to see and understand everything that is going on in all the previous dwelling places.

So this work that Teresa has written here is a very carefully constructed work. Despite all the difficulties that were going on, she began writing, she tells us, on the Feast of the Trinity in 1577. She's in Toledo – the circumstances – the *Book of her Life*, written twelve years earlier was with the Inquisition – though they had approved it, they wouldn't release it. She had one or two very poor copies that had been made and were going around the place, but she wanted the original and couldn't get it back. She was speaking with Fr Gracian about spiritual things and she said, oh, I explained that very well in that book, I wish I had it now, and he said why don't you try and remember what you had written and maybe write it again, adding in a few other things? In those kinds of circumstances this book came about. As I said, the circumstances all around her were very difficult, but not only all around her, but also within herself. At the beginning of that year of 1577, Teresa has, I suppose what we would call nowadays a breakdown. She is physically and psychologically exhausted, she breaks her arm, all sorts of things, and she's very, very unwell. And yet when you look at this work and if you look particularly at the original, the handwriting is that of a woman in the fullness of health. It's only God's grace and the depth of God's grace that she's living that enabled her to do this.

And so she works in Toledo on it for about five or six weeks, gets as far as the fifth dwelling places, second chapter, has to let the book down and doesn't pick it up again until the beginning of November. So there's a big break there and she has moved house, she's now moved to Avila and the dark clouds over her are getting worse and worse. But she sets about this and sets about it with great care as she always does. Because for Teresa, writing a work like this, and she says exactly the same in the *Book of her Foundations*, when she was writing about the work of founding: *This is a work of God and therefore we have to take great care and respect the work of God. Writing is an act of worship, it's a prayer, it's giving honour and glory to God because it is writing about sharing, reflecting upon the great work that God does in a human being.* So she delights, as I said, in what she has written, but it's not so much because she recognises that she has written something very good. Though she wanted to write, Teresa loved writing and was a natural writer and a very, very gifted writer she delights most in it because it brings out, it shows the great work that God does, what God

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does in the life of a human being, what God does in our lives, that's what this book really is about. It's a celebration of, an act of worship or homage of what God does in our lives, that's what Teresa marvels most at. Not only has God created us in his own image and likeness, created with great beauty and dignity every human being on the face of the earth, he chooses to dwell within every person, he chooses to make the soul of the human being *a paradise where he can live*. These are words from the very beginning of the *Interior Castle*.

But much more than that, what Teresa is really celebrating here is when a soul gives themselves to this, when the person opens their minds and their hearts to this, the great work that God does, the greatness of what is accomplished, that is what Teresa wants to make known, that's what she wants everybody to know, not only who we are but who we are created to become, and prayer is the key to that, hence Teresa's fascination with prayer. She's not only an expert on prayer, she's fascinated by it because there is nothing else in this world, there's nothing else in human life that can tell us who we are, that can give us the capacity to become who we're meant to be. There's nothing else in human life that enables us to see the light, to see what God is doing, to become more and more aware of what he is doing. Teresa is a woman fascinated by prayer.

As I said, she wants it to be known, therefore as she wrote this book, they were taking no risks with it, copies were being made. As she would write a page, she would pass it on to you for you to copy it out, you would pass it on, so copies were being made immediately to make sure this was not lost. And no doubt also in November 1577 John of the Cross was there and getting copies; he was in Avila at the same time and no doubt they discussed this and he was very much part of this process of writing. How much influence this book must have had upon St John of the Cross at this very critical point of John's life. John is one of the first readers of the *Interior Castle* after the sisters who were copying it.

This is a work that emerges out of lived Carmelite life. There are times in the book where she's very directly addressing her sisters, as I said earlier, but there's more than that, there are times in the book when you can almost guess the question that she's answering. It's like she's writing and they are saying: *but Mother, can you explain this to us, mother we don't understand this part, what have you written here?* It's as if she's responding to them – they are asking her questions and she is responding, though at no stage is that explicitly stated. So the work has grown out of lived Carmelite experience and therefore it's what makes it such a special work for us as Carmelites. The lived experience of these sisters is also our lived experience as Carmelites. We are listening to our mother, we are listening to the other early Carmelites who were there with her. As we read this, we are also listening, and it is personal to us. How we experience it of course is going to be different for each one of us, in our own lives and in our circumstances, but the fundamental principles are always the same.

One final point I'll make – take note of the scripture references, the amount of scripture that's in it, directly and indirectly. This book – and I'll bring this out a little bit more, later on – has often been described as a gospel. It's a gospel in the sense of being good news about Jesus Christ. When the good news about Jesus Christ is lived what is the person living? The person is living the gospel, is living the scriptures, so in each of these seven levels we find a wealth of scripture, directly and indirectly – often it is indirectly, often it is images from scripture, but often it's very specific biblical figures. The bible is being listened to, being lived; the bible is the source of light. So just be attentive to the scriptures, to the biblical references in the book.

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Second talk – *The First Dwelling Places*

This morning I will look at the first dwelling places. Obviously one can't look at everything, but I am picking out certain aspects of it with the purpose of helping towards an overall understanding of what Teresa is doing here, what her approach is. And here in the first dwelling places she gives us what we could call her starting point and her starting point, we could say, is rather surprising. Certainly in Teresa's time and probably today also, if somebody was setting out to write a book about prayer, to teach about prayer, they would probably start in some way or other – this is how you do it, this is what you should be doing, this is what's required of you – or some kind of an approach like that. Teresa doesn't do anything like that; there are no pre-requirements, there is nothing that has to be learned or mastered or anything like that.

Teresa's starting point is: *the beauty and dignity of the human person, who we are, made in the image and likeness of God*. The first dwelling places Teresa herself calls the dwelling place of self-knowledge and there are two aspects to self-knowledge – one is the knowledge of the beauty and the dignity of the person. I will just read a line or two from this opening paragraph: *For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds his delight... He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness.* [*Interior Castle – The First Dwelling Places*, Ch.1] Created in the image and likeness of God, a paradise, etc., and I love the image of the castle and the diamonds and the crystal, all of this to emphasize that – who we are.

And the other aspect of the self-knowledge is the darkness, the sinfulness in which we live, the dark world we live in. We are made in the image and likeness of God but we don't appear that way, we are very far from it, and in the first dwelling place we must learn how far we are from it, learn what is not of God. Therefore she will speak extensively about sin, mortal sin and temptation and these things that are there, and she speaks about them, not so much in negative terms, but in terms of motivation. And she recounts for us in the second chapter her own experience, of being shown what sinfulness does, in order to motivate the person to stay away from it, to reject it, because one's eyes are opened.

Very little light from the seventh dwelling place, she said, reaches the first, but enough is clearly reaching the person to enable them to begin this journey of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, she said, is the essential and this first dwelling place is the dwelling place of self-knowledge. There is nowhere in the spiritual life in which one doesn't need to return to this place over and over again, in all seven dwelling places one sees that there is an element of self-knowledge, of growing in self-knowledge. There is a lesson in self-knowledge in every dwelling place, but the first is the one that she specifically names the dwelling place of self-knowledge. So these dwelling places, these levels of living that she's giving us here, it's not that one goes from the first to the second and then the third and fourth – yes one does – there is progress, growth, development, but as one moves from the first to the second, one is living both first and second at a deeper level, then one eventually will be living all seven, but at a deeper level. And Teresa is writing this whole book from the perspective of the seventh. It's the whole spiritual life looked at from the perspective of the seventh, which is another reason why I said yesterday that sometimes I recommend a person read the seventh, because there one is, we could say, standing at the viewing place from which Teresa is viewing everything in the book. Where we view something from gives us a certain perspective, so everything in the book is viewed from the seventh.

I want to look at certain things from the second chapter. The first thing I want to pick out is from the first paragraph where she speaks about what we do, and she says that the good works done by somebody in mortal sin are fruitless, *Since these works do not proceed from that*

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principle, which is God, who is the cause of our virtue being really virtue and are separated from Him, they cannot be pleasing in his sight. So in other words, no matter how good something is, if it doesn't come from the right place within, it is not of worth. It's about living from this place within and when a person is living from that place, then their works are good. It's not about what the person does, but where that work is coming from. It's not necessarily just work; it's attitude and way of living etc. *There would be no freshness, no fruit, if it were not for this fount sustaining the tree, preventing it from drying up, and causing it produce good fruit.* That fount, that spring of course is the presence of God within, in that deepest place in mind. Paragraph three: *It should be kept in mind here that the fount, the shining sun that is in the centre of the soul, does not lose its beauty and its splendour; it is always present in the soul, and nothing can take away its loveliness. But if a black cloth is placed over a crystal that is in the sun, obviously the sun's brilliance will have no effect on the crystal, even though the sun is shining on it.*

That's a very important principle. God is always present within, that doesn't change, our sinfulness doesn't change God, or lessen his presence or his love, rather what it does is it hinders our participation in it, our relationship with him. The black cloth is put upon the crystal, but of course the crystal is still there and the light is still shining. And that has huge implications also, not just for how I see myself but how I see others. There is no human being for which this is not true. So the implications in that are very important in Teresa's thinking. The person does not see who they truly are, that's the tragedy, that's the great tragedy of life.

We are going to paragraph seven here and she gives a very important principle for understanding the whole work and what she is setting out herself to do. She said: *mostly in books of prayer what we ourselves do in prayer is explained to us; little is explained about what the Lord does in the soul, I mean the supernatural.* In this entire book Teresa wants to speak about the supernatural, what God does, hence the approach that she is taking. The first three dwelling places in a sense are about what we do or can do; the fifth, sixth, and seventh are what God does; the fourth is the transition between. But even in the first, second and third her thinking is all the time on the others and we will see that as we go along. By far the longest sections of the book are in the second half, that's what she really wants to speak about, and she really wants to speak about it because that's what people need to know about, that is so essential. *By speaking about this heavenly interior building and explaining it and considering it in many ways we shall find great comfort.* Teresa really wants us to know this interior building: *It is so little understood by mortals, even though many walk through it.* That again is not understood, but many people live this without knowing it, and for her it is so important to know it. Many people live it; there are people everywhere living the fullness of what she is speaking about here. She wants through her writings to help people to know it, to see it, to understand it, because what she is speaking about is what it means to live the gospel.

And although in other things I've written the Lord has given me some understanding, I know there were certain things I had not understood as I have come to understand them now, especially certain more difficult things. Of course she is speaking about her other books and particularly her *Life* and also the *Way of Perfection*. So she hasn't got the full enlightenment, she is recognising now that when she wrote those books she didn't know everything that she can now see. We need to be careful how we understand that. It doesn't mean that she had gone 80% of the way and now there's 20% added. Rather what the 20% added does is to enable her to understand the 80% much more clearly and more deeply. Hence all the time the conviction that we can only really understand the spiritual life looking from the end back, looking from the seventh outwards, not from outside in, but from inwards looking outwards. She can see things now that she couldn't see, she recognises she has a deeper understanding of things and that understanding has not come from some knowledge she has learned, some books she has read or something she has been taught, it's coming from her experience, her inner enlightenment that God is giving her that enables her now to see more clearly.

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A principle that she gave in the *Book of her Life*, when she is speaking about experiences of God, she said there are many people who have these experiences, but there are few people who recognise them, and she said there are fewer again who are able to put words to them, to express them, to explain them. Now we could say Teresa has grown into them, she clearly has the experience, she is able to recognise what it is and she's able to speak about it now with a light that's coming from within her. That's why her whole approach here is so original; it's not based on any other book, any other way of teaching, it's the originality of it and the clarity of it that's coming from within.

Paragraph 8. Again I've been touching on this, but it's good always to hear Teresa's own guidance to reading her work. *You mustn't think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other, but turn your eyes towards the centre which is the room or the royal chamber where the king stays and think about how a palmetto has many leaves surrounding it and covering the tasty part that can be eaten.* The palmetto is a vegetable with leaves around the centre, which is the part that can be eaten. Fix one's eyes on the centre, that's what one must always do. *The things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious and large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine and the sun that is in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places, which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such great dignity. Don't force it to stay a long time in one room alone.* So, be ambitious when it comes to prayer. Teresa is always lamenting the fact that we underestimate who we are; we underestimate the power of our prayer. Even a little or large, whatever time one can give to prayer, don't underestimate it, the good it can do, how powerful it is and don't think little of who one is, the soul is great. She is a very experienced(?) human being and what is possible, but can only be possible with God's grace – so this broad perspective on everything and what can be done. *Oh!* she said, *but if it is in the room of self-knowledge!* – and this is all part of this room of self-knowledge – *How necessary this room is – see that you understand me – even for those whom the Lord has brought into the very dwelling place where He abides. For never, however exalted the soul may be, is anything else fitting for it; nor could it be even were the soul to so desire.* This room of self-knowledge, so important.

Humility, which again she will speak about in various ways, at various times, in different terms. *While we are on this earth nothing is more important to us than humility* – and that's what one starts out with and that's what one continues with and all the way through spiritual growth is a growing in humility. So she's giving us here a beautiful and very broad image of the human being, of the human soul, the human being made in the image and likeness of God, that's the essential starting point. Then the person learns and must learn that the very minute one begins, it's like one gets a sense of who one is, and then the darkness seems to come in, the pain of human life and life in this world. We are made in the image and likeness of God, but we are far from it for all sorts of reasons. Do not be put off by that, she said, but rather see it as a great motivation to come into the castle and the door of entry is prayer, just prayer. Don't let the darkness, the sinfulness and everything else prevent you from praying or put you off praying or think that you shouldn't pray. It's a very false humility to be too humble to pray. Teresa is always very conscious of the fact that years earlier in her life when things were going badly – in her own words – she gave up prayer. She didn't really give up prayer, but somehow she gave up believing in it or believing in her capacity for prayer. She said that for her that was the greatest tragedy of human life – to give up prayer. As long as the person is praying, there's always hope, the possibility of growth and change is there. For Teresa, it's the most important and most essential thing any human being can do – pray.

So the lesson of the first dwelling places is pray – just pray. However, Teresa is very down to earth and very practical – she always is, and she knows that's not going to work and that it's not sufficient, and so she writes: *I am not surprised if we never get free from ourselves, for*

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this lack of freedom from ourselves and even more is what can be deemed, so I say daughters that we should set our eyes on Christ, our good, and on his saints. She's recognising there that the person at this stage is not free from themselves, the person does not have the fundamental inner freedom that's necessary to live the spiritual life in a healthy, life-giving way; that only comes in the fifth dwelling places – really until the fifth the person does not have that. Here the person becomes very conscious of not having it and Teresa knows that there's a danger they will just give up, so she says *don't fix your eyes on yourself but fix them on Jesus Christ and on the saints.*

Here in the first dwelling place we could understand it like this: she very strongly states that the human being is made in the image and likeness of God, but there is actually only one human being who is in the image and likeness of God and that's Jesus Christ – *So fix your eyes on him.* In the second dwelling place of course the person now is, and knows what it is to be in the image and likeness of God. But in the first, though that is what the person is created for, the reality of life, the tragedy of human life doesn't enable the person to see this, and the danger Teresa recognises is that if this is too strongly emphasized and the person is focussing on this and on this, then it's just not going to work. So the practical Teresa says: *just look at Jesus, fix your eyes on Jesus, listen to him, see him in the gospels, listen to what he is saying, look at how he is living and the saints.* For Teresa they are always present, they are always here, you can turn to them any time and the saints are like the community that she's got around her.

Teresa is a great communicator and a great community person in the true sense of what a community person is. I already mentioned to you here that she is writing to her sisters, she's like writing this but all the time having a few sisters there that's she's speaking with – whether in reality they're there or not – she's speaking with them, she's listening to them, she's responding to their questions. But there are other communities – there is the community of the saints all around her, they are present and she will turn to them and speak to them or speak of them. God is always present, God is always there, so she can effortlessly turn and just be writing and then turn to prayer and come back, address God, address her readers. So the saints are very much there and whenever we pray we are in the presence of the saints, so turn to them, look to them, the help is there, she is saying. The person who is praying must never feel alone and she recognises that particularly in the first dwelling places there's a danger of feeling alone, with all these other things, these devils, this evil and all these things, these dangers that are very close that she speaks about. Jesus Christ is always present, the light coming from the seventh dwelling place is always there, even if it seems very faint, the saints are there, turn to them, speak to them if it's needed.

So how then does growth come about? What's going to happen, what's going to change? *If the person is to enter into the second dwelling places,* she said, *it is important that he strive to give up unnecessary things and business affairs. Each one should do this in conformity with his state in life.* She'll tell that us many times, right throughout the book she'll tell us that this must always be lived in accordance with one's state in life. What does that mean? In practical terms I suppose it means that while she is addressing specifically her sisters here – she's living the life of a Carmelite nun – she is saying that what's she speaking about can be lived by everyone, anywhere, whatever in her terms their state of life may be – single, young, married, young, old, male, female, educated, not educated, any nationality, race, religion. Wherever God has put the person, wherever the right place for the person is and as the person grows they live their state of life more deeply, they become a better teacher, a better nurse, a better parent, whatever the person's state in life may be, and there is no state of life that is more suitable or less suitable for living the spiritual life. It is whatever is right for the person; it is whatever the person is called to by God. But to give up what is unnecessary – in every state there are things that are unnecessary. What starts to happen when a person perseveres in the first dwelling places – over who knows what time, for every individual this is going to be different – but what gradually begins to emerge is a sense of calling, and that's what the

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second and third dwelling places are, which we will look at in the afternoon. What gradually begins to emerge here is that sense of personal calling. We could put it another way, that the life of prayer gradually begins to clarify for the person *who I am and what life God is calling me to*.

I mentioned yesterday that Teresa's *Interior Castle* can be read as a gospel, a living of the gospel. And if we read it that way, the first dwelling place is that first encounter with Jesus, that first meeting with him, the beginning of the gospels when the crowds are drawn to Jesus, when Jesus makes an impact on their lives. The person of prayer here who fixes their eyes on Jesus, begins now to feel the effects of that and that comes in the sense of that personal call. Peter, James, John – the disciples – they are drawn to Jesus; they hear him preach, they spend time with him. Then there gradually comes this sense of personal calling, of being called by him and what that's going to mean for any individual.

The devil of course is always there, in every place. As I said, here in this first dwelling place, Teresa is very conscious of the fact that these people have come in from outside of the castle and that they're damaged by what they have lived and conversion is only at the very beginning. But the devil will try to stop what's happening, at every stage of the spiritual life there is going to be the encounter with evil. Here in paragraph 17 of the second chapter: *What the devil is hereby aiming after is no small thing: the cooling of charity and love the Sisters have for one another* – because of course charity is starting, that's the sign that the spiritual life is starting to grow. Charity is growing, love is growing, that's the fruit of prayer and the devil sees that even if the person doesn't see it, and of course usually the person doesn't see it, but the devil sees it and therefore he tries to cool charity. *True perfection*, she said, *consists in love of God and neighbour* – that's in the gospels, that's everywhere, but at this stage the person hasn't either of those, hasn't got the inner freedom to live either of them – that will come later. *...the more perfectly we keep these two commandments the more perfect we will be* – but the person is at the beginning, this is the beginning of that.

There are two dangers that the devil likes to put in at this stage: one is, she said, *indiscreet zeal* – fanaticism, over-doing it, trying to become too perfect in an external way, the trappings of holiness, the trappings of perfection. She said it can do a lot of harm and the other one she speaks about is criticising others. Those are the two of the real dangers at the early part of the spiritual life – excessive zeal, over-doing it, concentrating on the externals, whether that be excessive times of prayer or penitential practices or going to excess with something or doing something that is not in right conformity of one's way of life, any kind of excessiveness, exaggeration that's putting the emphasis on oneself: *I can do it*. Of course we can't, and the second one is criticising others, looking down on others. The gospel story of the two men going to the temple to pray, one saying *thanks be to God I'm not like that person there, I do this and I do that*. That kind of attitude can creep in at the early stages of the spiritual life that she warns against here, these are the two dangers at this stage.

So there's a lot more there, there's vast richness and she gives two chapters for the first dwelling place because she has written about this part of the spiritual life extensively elsewhere, as so many others have, but there's such a richness to get it started. Maybe that's enough, this first initial stepping into the spiritual life, this commitment to pray, to the following of Jesus Christ, or another way of putting it is the beginning of living – of real living – the person is starting to live because this is what these dwelling places are, they are the levels at which we live our lives and the deeper we live, the more alive we become. So the person is beginning to live, to come alive. The light is beginning to shine, though at this early stage the person has little sense of that.

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Third talk – *The Second and Third Dwelling Places*

This session we will look at the second and third dwelling places. We'll take the two of these together, partly because we saw what Teresa was saying this morning, that she wants to get on to the later ones, so we want to get on to them too. The first three dwelling places, she tells us, are what we can do in the spiritual life, but – she would put very strongly – what we can do with God's help, and the third dwelling places really brings us to the limits of that; after that God takes over. But that's a rather artificial division, because nothing can be done without God's help. As I said yesterday, one doesn't get in the first crack of the door without the light coming from the seventh dwelling place somehow striking the person. The person only turns to God if God has already called the person – God puts the need there already.

So as concerns the second and third then, what are we dealing with? In the first dwelling places the door of entry is prayer, the person has begun to pray, the person has begun to give a certain commitment to prayer, whatever shape or form that might be taking in the person's life. And the one certainty we can say about prayer; anybody who prays, anybody who commits themselves to prayer, the one certainty is that *I am going to be changed*, and I very deliberately put the words that way: *I am going to be changed by this*. We see this particularly in the earlier part of Teresa's *Way of Perfection*, where she puts this very strongly: *don't set out on this road unless you are willing to be changed*, rather than saying *willing to change*, because the change is not on our terms or as we might expect it, or even the things that we think that should be changed. Often our need for change is something that is revealed to us and revealed to us in ways that we would never have foreseen or have thought, because this road of self-knowledge is about facing up to our blindness and our eyes being opened to our blindness.

So we're going to be changed by the experience. The person who prays, the person who successfully – and I use that word very carefully – lives the first dwelling place or navigates the first dwelling place, *begins to hear the call of God*. Obviously the call of God has been there from the very beginning. Sometimes people label the second and third dwelling places the vocational dwelling places. We have to be a little bit careful with that but it is helpful, because what is happening, among other things, is that the Christian calling is becoming more personal. There's a sense of personal calling. It's not just about praying or following Jesus Christ or living the gospel, what gradually emerges is there's a sense here of a personal calling. Jesus is speaking to the person personally here and calling the person very specifically within their personal life and circumstances. So the person begins to sense and feel a personal calling. If we're to look at this in gospel terms, it's the early part of the gospel – the call of the first disciples, the listening to the preaching of Jesus, taking on board the new way of life that Jesus is setting out to teach and to bear witness to.

The Second Dwelling Places

So the second dwelling place in particular could be labelled *learning Christianity*, learning what it means to live, not in some general theoretical sense, but in the reality and the practicality of one's life. How is this changing me, how is this going to be lived out in my life? We cannot pray, we cannot engage seriously in prayer without it affecting every dimension of our lives. A person might begin prayer by making it a certain time each day or each week or every now and again: this is the time for prayer – and this is time for the rest of life. That doesn't work for very long; before long of course the prayer is starting to influence the whole of a person's life and it is starting to ask questions about how a person is living and there will be tension and conflict and questions asked, etc.

So the second dwelling places is learning to live Christianity – the commandments, the catechism, the teaching of the Church, the scriptures, etc., – whatever living the Christian life means for the individual. Another aspect of the second dwelling places is what we might call,

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and it's a rather old fashioned term, *spiritual combat*. The devil was very much part of the first dwelling places in the way Teresa wrote about it, but here it becomes more personal – there's a battle. Teresa loved battles, she loved speaking in military terms, in terms of fighting wars, of course because there were so many wars going on in her time, and people were so familiar with battles and wars and the spiritual was often spoken of in those terms, though we might not now speak so much in those terms. But there's a battle going on. To live Christianity seriously in a committed way, it's going to become a battle, and that battle is deep within. There might be battles around one as well and with others, in other situations, but the real battle, the real combat, is within – that's spiritual combat. So in the second dwelling place in particular, the person is plunged in there.

I just want to read one or two little extracts from the second dwelling places. This is from Paragraph 6. Teresa is all the time giving advice and often she turns to prayer. She prays, she is speaking to God, *Ah my Lord! Your help is necessary here, without it one can do nothing*. That of course is part of the learning experience, learning to depend on God. In the second dwelling place there's an enormous amount of learning going on at different levels and one is certainly learning to depend on God. She goes on with her prayer. *In your mercy do not consent to allow this soul to suffer deception and give up what was begun. Enlighten it that it may see how all its good is within this castle and that it may turn away from bad companions. It is a wonderful thing for a person to talk to those who speak about this interior castle, to draw near not only to those seen to be in these rooms where he is but to those known to have entered the ones closer to the centre. Conversation with these latter will be a great help to him, and he can converse so much with them that they will bring him to where they are. Let the soul always heed to the warning not to be conquered.*

So there's a battle going on here. God's help is so necessary. We saw this morning, *turn to Jesus Christ and turn to the saints* and here she says *turn to God and turn to the good people that are around you*, because bad companions – there are many people who will lead one astray, who will not understand – turn to those who are living in these dwelling places and to the ones closest to the centre, turn to others for advice, for help, for support. Because of course the problem with the second – and we will see it even more so in the third – is that the person is inclined to rely on themselves, *I can do this*. Of course the person can't, they need the help and advice and support of others. That's so important, particularly because Teresa is very aware of the danger of going backwards, she even began speaking about the second dwelling places saying *these people of prayer – the door of entry is prayer – but they are inclined to slip back*, they are inclined to go backwards. Perseverance is the real challenge here and perseverance particularly when things are difficult, therefore support, right guidance, right help, is needed here.

Paragraph 8: *It will seem to you that you are truly determined to undergo exterior trials provided God favours you interiorly*. That of course is very much what Teresa would label a *temptation of beginners*. Yes I will do all kinds of heroic things because God will give me consolation and good feelings within. Beginners in prayer very much want that, but there's too much self-centredness still here. *Embrace the Cross*. In every dwelling place Teresa speaks about the Cross and speaks about it in different ways; it takes on different forms. But the Cross is the suffering, the sacrifice, the struggle that is there, but is liberation, the salvation; it is what gets the person through this; it is what carries the person. So a willingness, a determination to do everything possible.

Paragraph 10: *You cannot recollect yourself by force, only by gentleness*. I read something similar earlier on in the first dwelling places. Teresa is all the time, here in particular in the early dwelling places, when a person is full of enthusiasm, particularly maybe somebody who has come after a conversion, they will say *I can do this*, and there's a danger of forcing things, of trying to rush. Only gentleness – we must be gentle with ourselves, understanding with ourselves. Further on in Paragraph 10: *Provided that we don't give up, the Lord will*

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guide everything for our benefit, even though we may not find someone to teach us. While she said earlier on that we need people who understand this, she recognises that even in these early stages – much more so in the later stages – one may not find somebody who understands one, who can guide one. The Lord cares for us, the Lord looks after us, even when nobody understands, God has a way of caring for people. Just to continue that: *There is no other remedy for this evil of giving up prayer than to begin again: otherwise the soul will gradually lose more each day – and please God it will understand this fact.* Begin again, over and over again – never give up. If prayer doesn't happen today or goes very badly, just start again tomorrow, begin again. Don't worry about what didn't happen; if it didn't happen today, just pick it up again, begin again. Don't give up. For Teresa that is the worst thing, to give up prayer, because then everything else – the door of entry – there's no way in. Prayer is just so important and it's always a living of the gospels.

Paragraph 11, the final paragraph of the second dwelling places. There is only one chapter to the second dwelling place. Of course she has written at length about this elsewhere, particularly in the *Way of Perfection* and in the *Book of her Life*. *Someone could think if turning back is so bad, it would be better never to begin but to remain outside the castle.* Turning back is bad, so come back in again. *I have already told you at the beginning – and the Lord Himself tells you – that anyone who walks in danger perishes in it and that the door of entry to this castle is prayer. Well now, it is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, coming to know ourselves, reflecting on our misery and what we owe God, and begging Him often for mercy.* There in one sentence she has given a whole programme of spiritual life. Everything is contained there. We must enter into ourselves and of course ourselves is the paradise, we must enter into ourselves, come to know ourselves, reflect on our misery and what we owe God, begging him for mercy. And then the gospels, which are always there, very much in her mind: *'No one will ascend to My Father but through me and whoever sees me sees Me sees My Father.'* Well, *if we never look at Him or reflect on what we owe Him and the death He suffered for us, I don't know how we'll be able to know Him or do works in His service. And what value can faith have without works and without joining them to the merits of Jesus Christ, our Good? Or who will awaken us to love this Lord?* There, put very simply, she is telling us of the importance of the gospels in prayer, the importance of staying close to the gospels. That is really the lesson of the second dwelling place. Whatever combat a person finds themselves in, whatever their struggles may be, pick up the gospels, the stories about Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, stay close to them. She's gone into much more detail about this, particularly in the *Way of Perfection* but also in her *Life*, both of these books written ten or twelve years earlier, and here is a reminder of that: stay close to the gospels, never put the gospels down, the teaching of Jesus, looking at Jesus, reflecting on him.

The Third Dwelling Places

So the second dwelling places are very much a call to perseverance, to learn and to persevere, to listen and to act, and that is going to bear fruit. In the third dwelling places there is very definite evidence that this is bearing fruit. The person is growing in commitment, but in the third dwelling places we also come to the limits of this, and Teresa explains the third dwelling places perhaps most clearly of all by the gospel passage of the rich young man. And you're familiar with the story – this rich young man comes to Jesus: *what must I do to inherit eternal life?* and Jesus says: *obey the commandments* and he says: *I've done that from the beginning, what more do I need to do?* And Jesus says: *sell all that property give it to the poor, come and follow me* and the man walks away, sad.

That's the story put very simply and at the end of the third dwelling places Teresa tells us this is the time many people walk away, sad. And that's the tragedy, because that's the moment that God has said *come and be my disciple, come follow me*. The rich young man couldn't see that he was being given the greatest favour Jesus could ever give to a person, he was calling

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him to discipleship – *come follow me*. But there was something stopping him and what was stopping him was he had been too successful. He's rich and that says it all: he has good health, a good future ahead of him, he has been very successful in business, he obeys the commandments, he lives by his religion. So in every area of life he has got it right and he has mastered it himself, but in the fact that he has turned to Jesus and has asked Jesus *what do I need?* we can see that somewhere deep within him there's a sense that something is missing, something is lacking. If we met this person we would say he has done very well for himself, and look, he's at church every Sunday, and he is saying his prayers, he's living a very good life and he has done very well with his family, his business and everything – he's got everything. But deep within him there is something missing, there's a sense of emptiness. That's why he turns to Jesus – Jesus will give me the piece that's missing from the jigsaw, Jesus will give me what I'm longing for, and of course he does, but gives it in a way that he was not open to, he was blinded. Jesus simply pointed out to him that he's much too attached to what he's achieved. It's not the goods in themselves. As St John of the Cross so rightly points out to us, it's not the goods themselves that are an obstacle between us and God, it's our relationship with the goods. Do they control us or do we control them? Who's in charge here? The goods were in charge of this man. He wasn't free to leave them and follow Jesus, he wasn't free to let them be and listen to what Jesus is saying, he wasn't free of the goods that he had. So he missed his opportunity, missed the invitation, the greatest of all invitations.

So what had this man got wrong then, we could ask ourselves, and this is very much what people in the third dwelling place get wrong. They've done well to get to the third dwelling place, Teresa tells us, you've done well. You can't get to here without a level of commitment, of giving, of love. People in the third dwelling place – and you see it as you make a careful reading of it – they are growing in the virtues, they are becoming better people. But what this rich young man had got wrong was he saw it all as being about getting into heaven, getting into the kingdom of God, getting what I want from this through *my* achievements. In other words Jesus was there to give him what he wanted, *Jesus is here to give me what I want*. Effectively the man was using Jesus, but what Jesus wanted from him – that he would be wonderfully good at obeying the commandments or wonderfully good at living a Christian life, or wonderfully good at everything – Jesus wanted a relationship with him. Jesus looked hard at him, we're told, and loved him. This man had learned to do all the right things, but he hadn't learned how to receive and give love, he hadn't learned what it is to enter into a deep relationship with Jesus Christ, that's what he hadn't learned.

The third dwelling places have sometimes been called by people *the dwelling place of right relationships*. It's not enough to get Christianity right, to do all the things that are expected of one, those things are good, there's nothing wrong with anything the rich man does, there's nothing wrong with anything the people in the third dwelling places do or people in the second dwelling place are learning to do, but they are a means to an end, they are not an end in themselves. What Jesus wants is a relationship and therefore he will say to the rich young man, *come follow me*. Another way of putting this is that we have all been here; perhaps many times in our lives we've been here. Do I walk away – it's all failed, it's all collapsing, it's not working. What I thought should have happened hasn't happened, the way I thought this should have gone, it hasn't gone. Do I walk away, how do I persevere, do I dig deeper and go into a deeper relationship? Because this young man must trust Jesus, not just accept Jesus' word and do what Jesus says, but actually trust Jesus to go beyond the safe and the secure, to go beyond what can be understood, to go beyond what is predictable and seems right. This is the step beyond that. Here, many people walk away and many people give up and they give up at the wrong time, and this is as true of human relationships as it is true of one's relationship with God. So many relationships break down just at the moment when the door is opening to something much deeper. So many people walk away from prayer in their Christian lives, just at the moment when God is calling them, inviting them to something deeper. So the third dwelling places are a critical moment. As I said, there is real progress,

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real growth here, but there's also a blindness, there's a false security and it is how one lives this now.

Chapter 1 Paragraph 9: *Reflect a great deal, daughters, on some of the things that are here pointed out, even though in a jumbled way, for I don't know how to explain them further.* She knows perfectly well how to explain them, as Teresa always does. She knows how critical this dwelling place is; she will have seen so many people flounder at the critical moment. Reflect very much on what's pointed out here. *The Lord will give you understanding of them so that out of dryness you may draw humility and not disquiet, which is what the devil aims after.* While in the second dwelling place, and then perhaps towards the end of the first and the second and even into the third, people will draw great consolations and peace and a sense of well-being from their prayer. Now dryness sets in and prayer suddenly dries up, but she said, what you draw from that is humility. The devil tries to draw disquiet from it, because what the devil will be telling the person here is you've got it wrong, it's your fault that the well has dried up. You're not feeling consolations in prayer any more, it is your fault, that's what the devil will be telling the person. So the person will be trying to put it right – what have I missed? No, this is a time for humility, to recognise that the consolations given were gifts. Now one accepts from the Lord's hand what the Lord is giving.

It's beautifully explained in the *Book of her Life* and you will be familiar there where she explains prayer as four ways of drawing water. At the early stages of prayer you go with your bucket to the well and you put down your bucket and you draw out water and you water the garden, and it's hard and laborious, but as long as you draw water, she said, the plants will grow. The problem she said is that the well runs dry. But, she said, it's unlike physical water – water in this world – where, when the well runs dry, the plants are going to die. The way she illustrates it: *if you keep going to the well, she said, keep putting your bucket in, drawing it out, the Lord makes the plants grow even though there's no water in your well.* It's a lovely way of describing it, it's perseverance, the person who perseveres will grow and will grow in a much deeper and more real way. So the well runs dry in prayer, dryness comes in, the person has the sense that *I was making great progress and now I am going backwards. I had mastered what prayer was and now it has all fallen apart.* The person has to learn not to depend on themselves, but to depend on God. That's the painful message, because it goes like this, at the beginning of the spiritual journey one is told that this is what you must do and you do these things and you live in this way and you learn this etc., etc. and it should all work. Of course it doesn't work with spiritual life, it might appear to work for a while but then it all collapses. That doesn't mean that the work done earlier on wasn't valid and right and important and good – it was, and very much needed – but what's now happening is that the Lord is taking the person to a deeper level and there are other lessons to be learned that can only be learned deep within.

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Fourth talk – *The Fourth Dwelling Places*

We're getting to the fourth dwelling places, depths that one lives from, and the gospel reading we had today at mass for Elijah is very appropriate, because that perhaps better than anything else helps to illustrate what's taking place in these fourth dwelling places. This is the gospel story of the Transfiguration, which we find in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and we've got Luke's version for the Feast of Elijah. Of course, the episode is a very important episode in itself in the whole story of the gospel and the structure of the gospel, but it also fulfils another function in those three gospels and that is, it marks a change or a transition in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. If we note carefully, in all three gospels, after the episode of the Transfiguration the dynamics of that relationship shifts. We could put it like this; from now on the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is on Jesus' terms. Before this, they were attracted to Jesus; it was probably very exciting and stimulating, they were listening to all his preaching and miracles and big crowds were coming. After the Transfiguration, it's the journey to Jerusalem, the journey to the Cross. It becomes ever more difficult. For example, there's a lovely illustration at one stage in Mark's gospel – Jesus is way ahead on the road and we're told the disciples are lagging behind, a wonderful symbolic way of saying they are struggling to keep up, they're struggling to follow. Discipleship is difficult, they don't understand now what's being asked of them. Earlier on it was very clear, they chose this and they were part of something that was new and good, and now: *we don't know what this is all about, this has taken a direction we would never have expected, this isn't working out at all according to our expectations.* Peter dramatically illustrates this: one moment he is praised by Jesus saying: *on this rock I will build my church* – he gives all the right answers – and then a moment later Jesus is saying: *get behind me Satan.* The mystery of following Jesus Christ – one is entering ever more deeply into this mystery.

So we come to the fourth dwelling places, and as we saw yesterday at the end of the third, there's crisis. The foundations are pulled out from under the spiritual edifices that we have built, whatever they may be, whatever forms they might be. Questions start to enter in, that we never expected would come up, things that we were absolutely certain of and that were relied upon and believed in, are being called into question, seem to no longer give us what they gave us before. For each individual this will happen at different times in life, in different ways – this sense we've done all the right things but the outcome is very unexpected, we've done all the right things but we have ended up not where we expected to end up.

Now Teresa has the task of telling us what happens now. In Paragraph 14 at the end of the third chapter at the very end of the fourth dwelling places she says: *I'll say no more here. I have greatly enlarged upon this dwelling place because it is the one which more souls enter. Since it is, and since the natural and the supernatural are joined in it, the devil can do more harm.* So the natural and the supernatural are joined. Most souls, she said, enter here. Everybody who follows Jesus Christ finds themselves in these kinds of situations in this place, perhaps many times in a lifetime or perhaps under particularly dramatic circumstances. As I said, it happens differently for everybody, but everybody is going to find themselves here. And Teresa is trying to explain this, but recognises the great difficulty because we are now at the meeting of two worlds, as she said – the natural and the supernatural. The meeting of our understanding, our way of learning, our way of doing things, the ways of this world – and the supernatural, the grace of God, the action of the Holy Spirit that intervenes in a way that is beyond our understanding, beyond our grasp, beyond our expectations, and the two here in the fourth get mixed in together. That's why discernment is so difficult here, that's why decision-making can be very difficult here, because one has often got to go totally against the rationale of the earlier part. Here something deeper is entering in.

As Teresa puts it in the very first paragraph of the fourth dwelling place: *For supernatural experiences begin here. These are something most difficult to explain, if His Majesty doesn't*

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do so, as was said in another book I wrote fourteen years ago, more or less, in which I dealt with these experiences to the extent of my knowledge of them at that time. Although I think I now have a little more light about these favours the Lord grants to some souls, knowing how to explain them is a different matter. May His Majesty help me to do so if it will be of some benefit, and if not, then no. So Teresa has to rely here on God, as she always does. Here there is a sense that one is dipping one's toe into something mysterious, deeply mysterious, not only outside of our control or our understanding but also something that we never will fully understand, because we are dealing with pure gift of God, gift that is not earned or deserved. Though the person in the first three dwelling places learns to do all the right things, which are important and do the learning and the study and all of that, here there is a sense that all of that is cast aside, it is something that is beyond that is entering in. So it is pure gift of God.

So let's just take a few things that Teresa tells us here: *For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires.* [Chapter 1, Paragraph 2]. Here we have no control and it doesn't follow any logic or rationale that we might come up with. It is with his timing and in his way and to whomever he chooses and to whomever he chooses she will later deal with. It's not a sign that a person is better than anybody else. God brings people by many different roads, she tells us, and the experience of different people will be very different.

In the third paragraph she deals with one of the most difficult things here. She said: *Poisonous creatures rarely enter these dwelling places – there were plenty of them if you remember in the first dwelling places and outside the castle. If they enter they do no harm; rather, they are the occasion of gain. I hold that the situation is much better in this stage of prayer when these creatures do enter and wage war, for the devil could deceive one with respect to the spiritual delights given by God if there were no temptations, and do much more harm than when temptations are felt. The soul would not gain so much; at least all the things contributing to its merit would be removed, and it would be left in a habitual absorption. For when a soul is in one continual state, I don't consider it safe, nor do I think it is possible for the spirit of the Lord to be in one fixed state during this exile.* [Chapter 1, Paragraph 3] There's always going to be temptations and dangers, but here she said, they do no harm. But the person of course might think that they do, and the person might think they are getting much worse, and how can I be making progress if I have all these temptations and disturbances and worries and I appear to myself to be getting worse and worse, when in reality the person is getting better. It's one of the great mysteries – the person grows through temptations, through difficulties, through struggles, because what is happening is that the strength of virtue, the strength of love is increasing, but the person may in reality find themselves in very difficult situations, very difficult circumstances, but God works through that. *Without him we can do nothing.* So she goes on then to explain something of the nature of the kind of prayer that people have, the question of dealing with consolations, and the other word she uses is spiritual delights. With the first two, often a person, particularly at the beginning, with great enthusiasm and fervour will get much delight and consolation from their prayer and feelings that they're getting very holy, they will be very enthusiastic for it and all of that, and we saw in the third dwelling places that that's all taken away and the person is left in dryness and the sense that God is absent and distant, etc.

And now at this stage a different kind of spiritual delight, she said, comes in that doesn't come from the person, but comes from the spirit. There's nothing wrong with the first type, she said, but we can also get them from all kinds of other things as well, like some very happy experience, and they're fine, she said, and the way she puts it: *these joyful consolations in prayer have their beginning in our human nature and end in God.* So they can be very important to a person, particularly in the early stages of the spiritual life, to give a person the impetus, the enthusiasm to persevere. They begin in the person and bring the person to God. But now we are talking about consolations that begin in God, that are spiritual, but affect the whole person. A deep concentration cannot bring them about, cannot prolong them. If they

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happen, they're pure gift of God, if they don't happen, this is no sign that the person is not praying well or that the person is not close to God, they are not an indicator of that, they are simply a gift that God gives and often in very unexpected circumstances. They will often come not at prayer time but at other times, maybe when a person is very far away from God, or maybe when a person is dealing with these temptations and poisonous creatures that creep in, or whenever. What's beginning here is a sense of what God is doing and sometimes a person can feel very disconcerted and confused because they don't understand.

So what's happening in the fourth dwelling places put simply is that love is growing. This is the beginning of mature, adult love, that's what the fourth dwelling place is, love is being purified. One of the great difficulties about this stage of the spiritual life is that people will always ask *what must I do, what can I do?* Of course the answer to that is really nothing, but of course nobody is satisfied with that answer. So Teresa gives the only answer that can be given and it is in paragraph 7 of the first chapter: *The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love.* So don't think too much about this, she said, because we can't work this out, we are only dipping our toe into what is beyond our understanding, so trying to understand, trying to rationally work it out is not going to do any good for anybody. So don't try to think much, but love much and whatever stirs you to love, just love, any opportunity to love, love. Just love, because that's what is really happening in the person, love is being purified, love is growing here, but it's a love that can be very unfamiliar because it won't seem like love very often, or won't comply with the kind of ideals of what love is or should be that one has been told or learned or has been imprinted on one's mind. It's a different kind of love, and how Teresa says this love is: *it's a love, she said, with no self-interest whatsoever.* Love with no self-interest whatsoever, because with everything that's called love, that's labelled love in our world, there's always an good element of self-interest in it, far more than we think. No matter how generous and loving we might think we are, there's always an element of self-interest in it. Here she's speaking about a love that has no self-interest whatsoever, it's a mature grown-up love, it's the love of a person who has really become free. So whatever stirs love, whatever opportunities there are to love, just love, that's the way to live through this experience, she said. And then she says: *perhaps we don't know what love is,* and of course that's the shock that the person faces here – confronted with real love we don't actually know what love is. Love is being purified. She said: *I wouldn't be very surprised* – of course she wouldn't – *because it doesn't consist in great delights, but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything, in striving insofar as possible not to offend Him and in asking Him for the advancement of the honour and glory of His Son and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love, don't think the matter lies in thinking of nothing else and that if you become a little distracted all is lost.* The signs of love – this is the kind of love now that is emerging and it is love as you can see that is focussed upon Jesus Christ and his Church. The Body of Christ – it's outward, it's bigger than the individual, it's a much greater love that one is being brought into. So it is love.

A major problem that Teresa confronts several times in her writings, and she deals with it here as well, because a person can feel very distracted and confused in these fourth dwelling places. When one tries to pray, one is completely distracted and so these poisonous creatures of course come in. There are temptations, but they cannot do any harm. So it is also with all kinds of distractions – the mind can be everywhere – she had to learn that that's not where prayer is happening, a person can be in the deepest of prayer and yet totally distracted in their minds. Teresa has to learn that herself over many years, but she said it's particularly important here, because whatever methods one might have learned in the second and third dwelling places to enter into quiet and to still the mind, they collapse here. And so what the person can actually be experiencing are all kinds of distractions when they go to pray. *I was able to pray wonderfully five years ago and now I can't at all,* and the person can be tempted to think *I am going backwards,* in reality of course it's forward the person is going, because the person has now become less dependent on what they have learned to do themselves and must trust much more deeply in God. And so it is with all these distractions and all of this.

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Just taking for an example what she says in the second half of Paragraph 9: *We think we are lost and have wasted the time spent before God* – I think we are all familiar with that, we can think we've spent time in prayer and that this must be a complete waste of time and we've wasted all this time when we could have been doing something much more useful. Teresa goes on to say: *But the soul is perhaps completely joined with Him in the dwelling places close to the centre, while the mind is in the outskirts of the castle, suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts and meriting by this suffering.* So the soul is in the centre of the castle, very close, close to God. Very deep prayer is taking place, but the mind is outside of the castle in the midst of all of this suffering among a thousand wild and poisonous beasts, and she said, *meriting from this suffering*, is growing, maturing. But of course they think this is total distraction and struggle, but the deepest of prayer is going on. Teresa goes on to say: *as a result we must not be disturbed nor should we abandon prayer, which is what the devil wants us to do.* That's a theme she comes back to over and over again, *never abandon prayer*, and most particularly when it is all disturbed and distracted and one can't get one holy thought in and the mind is everywhere and it just appears to be a complete waste of time, a blank – *do not abandon prayer* – because that's the very time when God could be doing something very profound. She puts that in all sorts of ways here.

Paragraph 10, end: *for all this turmoil* – because she's speaking about herself now when she's writing this; all sorts of stuff's going on in her head – *in my head doesn't hinder prayer. All that I'm saying is that the soul is completely taken up in its quiet, love, desires and clear knowledge.* So Teresa at this time – she's already just told us before this that *the Lord gave me a headache, so that I could understand what to say here.* The reality is she is suffering, people think, from migraines or tinnitus; she's probably suffering from both of those because she speaks about this noise continually in her ears. So she's going through all of that here as she's writing, but she said this doesn't hinder her prayer – even though she's probably suffering terribly when she tries to pray from all of this – but it doesn't hinder prayer, she said, nor what she's trying to write in this book. She's able to write this with a clarity, because the soul is completely taken up in its *quiet, love, desires and clear knowledge* – but the mind might have no knowledge of this, that's what she's all the time trying to get across.

Images: Water

I want to go on to two other aspects of this fourth dwelling place, other ways that she tries to explain this. Two images that she uses – one is of water – this is at the beginning of Chapter 2, Paragraph 2. Water, of course, a great image for Teresa for what God is giving. *The experiences that I call spiritual delight in God, elsewhere the prayer of quiet, are of a very different kind, as those of you who by the mercy of God have experienced them will know. Let's consider for a better understanding that we see two fountains with two water troughs, for I don't find anything more appropriate to explain some spiritual experiences than water and this is because I know little and have no helpful cleverness of mind and I am so fond of this element.* Paragraph 3: *These two troughs are filled with water in different ways, with one the water comes from far away through many aqueducts and the use of much ingenuity; with the other the source of the water is right there, and the trough fills without any noise. If the spring is abundant, as this one we are speaking about, the water overflows once the trough is filled, forming a large stream. There is no need for any skill, nor does the building of aqueducts have to continue; but water is always flowing from the spring.*

So, the two sources of water. In the first three dwelling places we've got to build the aqueducts, we've got to use our ingenuity. Now it is flowing from the spring and therefore the ingenuity and the aqueducts are not necessary, but we still want to use our ingenuity and our aqueducts and we hold on to the ingenuity and the aqueducts and we're very proud of them and what we have achieved and the lovely aqueduct that we have built etc. And therefore there's this pull going on here, we want to play our part in this and of course the building of the aqueducts was a necessary preparation for this and they still have their part,

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but now God is doing something deeper and we've got to let go for God and let the water flow and step back. And that's what I'm here trying to illustrate. We can be so attached to what we've achieved, we can be too good at the spiritual life, or we can be so good at the spiritual life that we can actually keep God out of it. Here God wants to come in, and he's coming in and he's coming in on his terms.

Images: A new kind of listening: the good shepherd and the whistle

One other image, and this is toward the end of Paragraph two of the Third Chapter, a very important image here and that is the new kind of listening: the good shepherd and the whistle: *Like a good shepherd, with a whistle so gentle that even they themselves almost fail to hear it, He makes them recognise His voice and stops them going so far astray so that they will return to their dwelling place.* This new kind of listening that gradually enters in here. And she said at the beginning the person doesn't recognise it and of course the beginning here can be many many years, it can be many, many years of drifting off in different directions for people, but the good shepherd can be all the time whistling, and eventually the person will hear the shepherd's whistle and will be drawn. So a new kind of listening is beginning here. Obviously it is not a listening with the ears, it's not something that's physically being heard; it's not in the imagination; it's at some much deeper level and when it is recognised of course it really is and it has a power. So, this new kind of listening.

I want to have a look at Chapter Two, Paragraph 9, where she gives some important principles here. She sums up here very well here what we're speaking about. *After you have done what should be done by those in the previous dwelling places* – because in the previous dwelling places, as we've seen, the person has learned how to live Christian life and how to live it well. You've done that, she said. Now she puts in: *humility! humility!* – that is always the key. The danger is that we get can get so good at it that humility is rather difficult. *By this means the Lord allows Himself to be conquered with regard to anything we want from Him.* That's true humility. *The first sign for seeing whether or not you have humility is that you do not think you deserve these favours and spiritual delights from the Lord or that you will receive them in your lifetime.* So if you think you deserve them or that will deserve to receive them at some time in the future, then you are not learning humility. So humility is that this is not deserved, or I will never deserve them.

You will ask me, she goes on to say, how then one can obtain them without seeking them. I answer that for the following reasons there is no better way than the one I mentioned, of not striving for them. One does what one can, one loves, but not striving after any particular gifts, and here she gives her reasons: *First, because the initial thing necessary for such favours is to love God without self-interest.* That's the first requirement – love God without self-interest, and of course here the person is only at the beginning of learning this. We'll see this afternoon in the fifth dwelling places, where the person has now learned this, but here we're only at the beginning, and so there's a real struggle here because there are still elements of self-interest creeping in. We don't even think they're there, but they are there because self-interest is so subtle and so deep. *Second, because there is a slight lack of humility in thinking that for our miserable services something so great can be obtained.* There's a lack of humility there if we think we can earn God's gifts or that we deserve them. *Third, because the authentic preparation for these favours on the part of those of us, who, after all, have offended Him is the desire to suffer and imitate the Lord rather than to have spiritual delights.* To suffer and imitate the Lord in order to have a life like Jesus Christ himself, that's what the authentic spiritual person desires, not the lights or favours or gifts or prestige or success or anything else, but to live a life like Jesus Christ lived. As I have said a few times already, this is a gospel; the *Interior Castle* is a gospel, known from within from what it is like to authentically follow Jesus Christ. And of course, as I have said already, this is the road to the Cross; this is the road the disciples go on after Mount Tabor, after the Transfiguration. In the second part of the gospels they have to walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, to his suffering, death and resurrection. So those are the most authentic gifts God is ever

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going to give. *Fourth, because His Majesty is not obliged to give them to us as He is to give us glory if we keep His commandments.* So he's not obliged, and he often doesn't and it's not a sign that the person is less favoured by God or less close to him. He deals with different people in different ways; how he's going to deal with each one of us is a mystery that only he knows and it will never be how we expect. And finally the fifth, where she says we'd be labouring in vain, there's no point. She concludes there in Paragraph 10: *I really believe that whoever humbles himself and is detached (I mean in fact because the detachment and humility must not be just in our thoughts – for they often deceive us – but complete) - complete detachment and humility – will receive the favour of this water from the Lord and many other favours that we don't know how to desire. May He be forever praised and blessed. Amen.*

There's a lot more there, but I think you get a certain flavour of these fourth dwelling places, this time of transition into a whole new world that prayer brings us to and a world that is beyond our understanding or our expectations, or beyond anything we can do or achieve ourselves. It is bringing us into the authentic following of Jesus Christ. It is the beginning of the purification and transformation of love; it's the beginning of real change. St John of the Cross's principle that we can be changed by love – nothing else, he said, changes a human being – we can have rules and regulations and coercion and force and persuasion and all sorts of other means we can use to try and change either ourselves or another person, but all that change is from outside, it's changing externals, the superficial. Only love changes from within and it's only what comes from within that transforms the whole person. It is only love that brings about the real radical and lasting change in a person and the fourth dwelling places is the beginning of that. We'll see in the afternoon when we'll get to the fifth, that that then takes place, but the fourth makes possible what happens in the fifth. We'll pick that up in the afternoon, but here we're at the beginning of this. The person is really now beginning to change and it is a change that is brought about by God, that is pure gift of God. The person has prepared themselves for it, yes, and opened themselves to it, but the actual change is brought about by God and God is teaching the person what true love is. The person is beginning to recognise that and is beginning to reason to it. The shepherd's whistle is the call to love, the call to true, authentic love, and as I said it can take a long time to recognise it, not that time means anything here, it is God's time, the pace of the person, of the individual – that's how God works.

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Fifth talk – *The Fifth Dwelling Places*

We saw in the fourth that now there is the possibility of real change, that's what the fourth signifies, that real change is now beginning. In the fifth, real change happens, if that makes sense. It's in the fifth that change and transformation takes place. We could describe the fifth as the dying to the old life, the rising to the new life. In terms of the gospel the fifth is Holy Week, Easter, it is entering deeply into the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the following of Jesus, it's the going there through that dying and that rising, it's the total change and transformation that takes place.

It's always interesting to read Teresa's little headings that she puts under the chapters, because she wrote them, and here for chapter one of the fifth dwelling places her heading is: *Begins to deal with how the soul is united to God in prayer*. That's what this is about, this is living spiritually, and she begins as she began the previous one – how can I speak about this, there are no words, there's nothing that can be said – *I believe it would be better not to say anything about these remaining rooms, for there is no way of knowing how to speak of them; neither is the intellect capable of understanding them nor can comparisons help in explaining them; earthly things are too coarse for such a purpose*. So there's no way of explaining this and there are no comparisons that can be made that can help, yet we have to say she makes a pretty good effort to explain it and she succeeds in coming up with some very good comparisons. One thing we've got to remember with the fifth is that Teresa's life was very much disrupted while she was writing this. She had got as far as the second chapter of the fifth, then she had to put the book down again, move house – nobody is really sure where she wrote the third chapter, she might have written it on the course of her journey but then the book is put down from about early July of 1577 until the beginning of November, and so she picks up chapter four of the fifth dwelling place when she starts to write in November of 1577 and she will complete the book within that month. So there is a long gap in the process of writing – it isn't just a long gap time-wise, so much else happens in Teresa's life at that time, there are so many difficulties to deal with and she just can't get back to it. So there's a major disruption in the midst of this, which as I said, without realising this, but it is actually important, it's almost as if what's happening in her external life mirrors what happens in the fifth dwelling places, because the fifth dwelling places is of the seven the most difficult to explain, it's the most difficult to understand, particularly when the person is in the midst of it, to actually know what's going on.

She comes up with comparisons and here she comes up with two of her most famous comparisons. Obviously the castle is the image running right through all seven dwelling places, but for the last three, five, six and seven, she brings forth two very important images. One is that of the silkworm or the caterpillar, the butterfly, that transformation which we will look at in a few moments and the other comparison she brings in is the one of marriage. She introduces two new ones, though of course she has used a whole number of other images – we saw the drawing of water and the aqueducts, there are a whole lot of other ones she brings in from time to time, they are the three principal ones, but two of them she introduced because of the sheer difficulty of explaining what she's trying to explain. There's a lot involved here.

The fifth is sometimes described as the Carmelite dwelling places, and it's interesting that she begins paragraph two speaking about Carmel and the Carmelite vocation. When I mentioned the kind of structure of this work, at the end of the third, almost at the last line, she mentions living by the rule and she begins the fifth with the Carmelite rule, so the link between the third and the fifth, which I have already mentioned, is Carmelite. One could spend forever going into detail and when I looked at the Epilogue on the first evening it's the link between the third and the fifth that Teresa drew our attention to. Because the third is when human

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efforts fail, when the person comes to the limits of not just what the human being can do, but also the limits of what the human being can understand or accept, or what seems right or normal for the course that things should be taking hits a buffer. To use a phrase that Teresa uses at the end of the fifth, *we're taken to the boundaries, or beyond the boundaries*. We're stepping in here into the territory; we're in it now. In the fourth we were dipping our toes into the territory of Christian mysticism, now we're plunged right into it.

So Carmel then, this is in paragraph 2. There's a contradiction here in the way that Teresa writes about this: *And although I have said "some," there are indeed only a few who fail to enter this dwelling place of which I shall now speak. There are various degrees, and for that reason I say that most enter these places. But I believe that only a few will experience some of the things that I say are in this room. But even if souls do no more than reach the door, God is being very merciful to them.* At times she seems to be saying that very few enter these places; at other times she's saying that very many do, or almost everyone does. *Both and* are probably the right words because there are degrees and this is part of the complexity of it. We're dealing with the work of God and therefore we can never explain it fully in human or worldly terms. All seven of these dwelling places exist and are within the human being all the time – from conception, from the very beginning – and at different times one lives life at different levels. In the course of a day one might dip into all of these, yet there will be one level that one is habitually living from, but we'll dip in at times to the others. So Teresa in writing this is habitually living from the seventh, or maybe the sixth and the seventh, because she said there's an open door between the two of those. But we will habitually dip in to all the other ones in the course of a day. We go in and out, up and down all the time, so even if a person who hasn't fully reached all that the fifth speaks about, will be dipping into the fifth from time to time, will find themselves before this mystery. So that apparent contradiction isn't really a contradiction, it's simply how it is. Nobody can ever tell where they are themselves anyway and even less can you tell where somebody else is. It's impossible and it's not needed. But what Teresa is trying to point out here are two things: that it is necessary for us to know about this, wherever we might think we are, and she is trying to point out that even if somebody believes and it seems that they are in the early stages, there are times when they will dip into this and the light from here will reach them.

So what about Carmelites then? *I say now that all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin; we are the descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel, who in such great solitude and contempt for the world sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation that we are speaking about.* Teresa always has the origins of the order in mind; she makes reference to it right throughout her works. She lives with a fascination of those who have gone before, those who are the inspiration of Carmel, and today, as we celebrate Elijah, we are very aware of that, of these first Carmelites on Mount Carmel and everything that they lived, everything that they stand for, what they mean to us. But she's using it here to make a very important point. She said we're all called to prayer and contemplation, *yet few of us dispose ourselves that the Lord may communicate it to us.* That's an extraordinary statement, particularly in view of the Carmelite nuns that she is living with, that she has formed, that she has been working so closely with and teaching for so long – *few of us dispose ourselves to this.* She goes on to explain what she means: *In exterior matters we are proceeding well so that we will reach what is necessary,* but it's in the interior things... The point she is making is that we can get all the externals right, but it's that inner life, the growth in virtue, which all the time one is looking for, searching for that treasure within – all the externals can be right and yet that may not happen – something she's always warning against. So she's making an essential point here, this treasure lies within us, that he may show us the way, that we may dig deep and find this treasure. This is who we are, this is what we're about, this is the call that's made. So she starts there with this very strong passage and just what Teresa understands by Carmel and the purpose of Carmel. And the fifth dwelling places tells us this.

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Paragraph 4: She says that it's a dying and a rising: *It is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all operations it can have while being in the body.* It's a complete change, what is sometimes called mystical baptism. St Paul describes baptism as a dying and a rising with Jesus Christ, an entering the womb and coming out with him. We're all baptised of course and probably most of us too young to remember it, but entering fully into the grace of baptism, into the mysticism of baptism, that's happening here in the fifth dwelling places and in fact we could say both baptism and Eucharist. The fifth dwelling places is living those two sacraments very deeply, mystically, in the fullness of what they mean. So these two are very sacramental – baptism and Eucharist in the full meaning of those.

To get a sense of this then, look at Paragraph 12 of the first chapter. For Teresa the gospels and the bible are all the time at the forefront of her mind. There's a wonderful paragraph here where she puts down what is taking place. First of all from the *Song of Songs: He brought me into the wine cellar.* Then she goes on to clarify why that's so important to her: it doesn't say that she went, but that he brought her in. We can never enter the fifth on our own, only when he brings one in. *I understand this union to be the wine cellar where the Lord wishes to place us when He desires and as He desires. But however great an effort we make to do so, we cannot enter. His Majesty must place us there and enter Himself into the centre of our soul.* So the wine cellar is the soul, the centre of the soul. The wine cellar of course is the place of God's generosity and is linked of course with the Eucharist and the wine and the blood of Christ. And then she goes on to another scripture: *He wants to enter the centre of the soul without going through any door, as He entered the place where his disciples were when He said pax vobis; or He left the tomb without lifting away the stone.* All the things that God does: he can leave – there are no doors, he's entering into that deepest place within. But again it's Easter, the tomb, the resurrection.

This is very much in Teresa's thinking here, these scriptural allusions – she's not just illustrating something with scripture, she is saying that this is what's being lived here, this is the experience that's being lived, the scriptures are revealing what is being lived by the person, the person is living the gospel, living the life of Jesus Christ. *Fix your eyes on Jesus Christ,* we heard in the first dwelling places. Now we're seeing what that really means. If one fixes one's eyes on Jesus Christ, one lives a life like he lived and we saw that in the text I read in the previous talk on the fourth dwelling places, what is it that we would want from the Lord – it's not consolations or any of those things, it is a life lived like that lived by his son. Now the person in the fifth dwelling places is receiving that gift of a life like the life of Jesus Christ, that's what the person is receiving mystically.

So then in the second chapter, paragraphs 2-5, Teresa brings in the silkworm – and this really is a work of sheer genius – the silkworm becoming the butterfly and the caterpillar becoming the butterfly, the same creature that can change so totally, radically. The silkworm, which is fat and ugly, dies and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes out. She couldn't get a better image of the total transformation – a butterfly that can fly, that is beautiful, and a caterpillar, a worm, that is so limited and dies. The old life dies and the person rises to a new life, it is total transformation and it's irreversible transformation. The difficulty, as we saw in the early dwelling places, is that a person can make progress, but can also go backwards. Here there is change that is irreversible, the person cannot really go backwards, though Teresa will contradict that a little bit later when she responds to the question, *can these people sin?* Yes, she says very emphatically, *they can.* At no stage in the spiritual life does a person get to a point where one cannot sin, but, she said, the power of love is so strong that the person will do everything to avoid sin. It is the power of love, and love of course is what's being learned here.

The fifth dwelling places – another way of describing them is they are the dwelling places of love of neighbour. We saw back in the first dwelling places where she said the Christian life

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is love of God and love of neighbour. Here the person is learning what both love of God and love of neighbour are. But we can't really know if we love God, but we can know if we love our neighbour and here in the fifth dwelling places true love of neighbour is learned. It's the learning experience here because the person has now died to the old life, they can now begin to love with no self-interest, that's real love of neighbour, founded on truth, with no manipulation or distortion or self-centredness, but to truly love one's neighbour in truth. In the third chapter, paragraph 8, she speaks about this love of neighbour: *The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbour. We cannot know whether we love God or not, although there are strong indications for recognising that we do love Him; but we can know whether we love our neighbour. And be certain that the more advanced you see you are in the love for your neighbour the more advanced you will be in the love of God, for the love His Majesty has for us is so great that to repay us for our love of neighbour He will in a thousand ways increase the love we have for Him. I cannot doubt this.* But then she goes on to say that we will not reach perfect love of neighbour if it doesn't rise from love of God at its root. So the root of love of neighbour is love of God, the two go together. One cannot really love one's neighbour unless it is rooted in love of God, or the love of one's neighbour will somehow have some elements of self-interest in it, will be distorted and compromised. The only pure love of neighbour is the love of neighbour that is rooted in love of God.

In the fourth chapter she brings in marriage as an image, and particularly to explain the three final dwelling places and she is following very much the course of marriage in her day. There are three stages. This first one in the fifth is the giving of gifts or the meetings. The second in the sixth is the spiritual betrothal and the third in the seventh is the spiritual marriage – we'll get to those. So here in the fifth it's the meetings between the couple, and in her day this was very carefully arranged in the higher echelons of society. Among the aristocracy very formal meetings would take place, exchange of gifts – that's what's happening here in these meetings, the exchange of gifts between the lovers – that's the soul, and God. The betrothal happens in the sixth, so it's giving Teresa here a way of explaining that this is really a beginning, this is the beginning, this is what enables real Christian life to happen. It will start to happen then when we get to the sixth. This image of marriage that she brings into the fourth chapter is interesting. She is now in Avila.

I want to look at paragraph 6 of chapter 4, which is prophetic in many ways. Recently we celebrated the centenary of Teresa's canonisation and one of the people she was canonised with was Ignatius of Loyola and she mentions Ignatius here in this paragraph. Here what she's getting at is that the devil is going to intervene here, there's always going to be temptation, the evil one is always – in every dwelling place she tells us what the devil is going to do here – and of course the further advanced a person is, the more the devil would want to trip the person up because then more will be gained by the devil and will be lost to God. The devil has experience of this matter, because if one soul like this gets lost, they bring a whole multitude. Here she is saying the person who lives this, the person in the fifth, is bringing a whole multitude of others with them, in a mystical way. The person who lives a life of prayer – externally it might seem that they are doing nothing, that they are having no influence or anything, achieving nothing in their lives – Teresa is here telling us here that is not the case, these people are influencing a multitude of others, sometimes directly but mostly indirectly, in a hidden way. Here now life is really becoming fruitful, real good is now being done. The people in the second and third dwelling places were doing good work, yes, but now the person has grown, advanced in virtue, the person can really do good. *Look at the multitude of souls God draws to himself by means of one.* One person living this draws multitudes to God. *He is greatly praised for the thousands converted by the martyrs, for a young girl like St Ursula, for those the devil must have lost through St Dominic, St Francis and other founders of religious orders and those he now loses through Fr Ignatius, the one who founded the Society. Clearly all these received, as we read, similar favours from God. How would this have come about if they hadn't made the effort not to lose through their own*

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fault so divine an espousal. Oh my daughters, how prepared this Lord is to grant us favours now, just as he granted them to others in the past, and in part he is even more in need that we desire to receive them for there are fewer now who care about His honour than there were then – we might be tempted to say the same thing today. We love each other very much; there's an extraordinary amount of prudence we use so as not to lose our rights. Oh, what great deception! May the Lord through His mercy enlighten us so that we do not fall into similar darkneses. Very strong encouragement to this because of the good it can do, and that's what she meant earlier on about building up the Church, this is the kind of thing she is getting at, the mystical life that builds up the Church – Teresa giving her life for the Church, and the Communion of Saints, the saints are always so present to her, they are present in the prayer life, in the mystical life, the good that this does. The deeper one's prayer life goes, the more good that person does and it is real good now, irreversible good, good that knows no limits, that can transcend time and space and everything.

Fifth Dwelling Places, Paragraph 9. *The diligence on our part that comes to my mind as being the most effective is the following.* So what can we do, she is saying, because she is always practical in all her ways, we have to know what we can do and particularly now that one gets into these later dwelling places. This is all God's work now, from the fourth onwards, it is everything God does, but that does not mean the person is blind within, the person is more actively engaged than ever and busier than ever. *First, she said, we must ask God in prayer to sustain us, and very often think that if He abandons us we will soon end in the abyss, as is true.* The person now knows more than ever their total dependence on God and if God for one moment doesn't sustain us, we'll end in the abyss, there's radical trust in God, totally thrown into the hands of God. Then she goes on: *we must never trust in ourselves since it would be foolish to do so. Then we should walk with special care and attention, observing how we are proceeding in the practice of virtue:* that's always her sign, the growth in virtues: charity, justice, love, all the virtues – *whether we are getting better or worse in some areas, especially in love for one another, in the desire to be considered the least among the Sisters, and in the performance in ordinary tasks.* The ordinary tasks of life – so it is charity and the ordinary everyday tasks of life. Famously, she tells us in the *Book of her Foundations* that *God is among the pots and pans.* It is one of the texts so often quoted from St Teresa, but there's a profound truth underlying that statement. God is in the ordinary; it is the everyday ordinary tasks in life, the mundane. Whatever the mundane is in our life, whatever the pots and pans are in our lives, that's where God is and commitment to the mundane, the everyday, the ordinary, that's more essential here than ever. The spiritual life doesn't cut a person off from the reality of daily life, it actually inserts a person ever more deeply into it. So, the ordinary mundane tasks of life, so important for Teresa. *For if we look out for these things, she said, and ask the Lord to enlighten us, we will soon see the gain or the loss. Don't think that a soul that comes so close to God is allowed to lose Him so quickly, that the devil has an easy task. His Majesty would regret the loss of this soul so much that He gives it in many ways a thousand interior warnings.* And these are the warning signs, she said, a lack of love of neighbour, of the desire to be considered the least, in other words radical humility, and not keeping our feet firmly on the ground in the ordinary tasks of life. Love is never idle and a failure to grow would be a very bad sign. Love is never idle, love never reaches a point, but now she said, we've reached the boundaries.

Maybe that's enough. There's an enormous wealth in the fifth dwelling places. It is, I would say, Teresa's great affirmation of the power of prayer, the effectiveness of prayer; it can change the human being totally in a way that nothing else can. It is what unites the person with God in a way that is complete, final, irreversible, and it opens up the possibility of living the fullness of human and Christian maturity and that's what we will be dealing with tomorrow in the sixth and seventh dwelling places, what it really means to live Christian life, human life, in all its power as it is meant to be lived.

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Sixth talk – *The Sixth Dwelling Places*

We've got as far as number six of our seven dwelling places, but another way of looking at it is that we're not halfway there yet. If we think of it in terms of chapters, there are twenty seven chapters in this book in all – eleven are in the sixth and four in the fifth – so that's fifteen out of twenty seven are in the sixth and the seventh, so in that sense we're not even halfway there. But as Teresa told us at the very beginning, this is what she really wants to write about; everything else is to get us to here, or everything else is to prepare us to be here.

So what have we got in the sixth? Before going to that I want to begin with two little passages that perhaps give us a taste of this, which might be a better way to begin. The first one is a prayer. As we know, Teresa breaks into prayer regularly in her writings and this is a prayer from chapter 6 of number 6, so this is 6.6, and it's paragraph number 4, so 6.6.4 if that's the way you want to designate these. She's praying for her butterfly here - what's happening, what's happening to the person here? *Oh, poor little butterfly, bound with so many chains which do not let you fly where you would like! Have pity on it, my God! Ordain that it might somehow fulfil its desires for Your honour and glory. Do not be mindful of the little it deserves and of its lowly nature. You have the power, Lord, to make the great sea and the large river Jordan roll back and allow the children of Israel to pass. Yet, do not take pity on this little butterfly! Helped by your strength, it can suffer many trials; is determined to do so and desires to suffer them. Extend your powerful arm, Lord, that this soul might not spend its life in things so base. Let Your grandeur appear in a creature so feminine and lowly, whatever the cost to her, so that the world may know that this grandeur is not hers at all and may praise You. This praise is what she desires, and she would give a thousand lives – if she had that many – if one soul were to praise You a little more through her; and she would consider such lives very well spent. She understands in all truth that she doesn't deserve to suffer for You a tiny trial, much less die.* We could spend the whole session on that and we wouldn't exhaust all that she has put into that prayer, but since she has summarised the whole sixth dwelling places in that prayer, let's just leave it like that.

Flip back a few pages to chapter five, number 3. Again she is using an image that she used back in the fourth dwelling places on the water. *It seems the trough of water we mentioned (I believe it was in the fourth dwelling place, but I don't recall exactly) that's where it was – filled so easily and gently, I mean without any movement. Here this great God, who holds back the springs of water and doesn't allow the sea to go beyond its boundaries, lets loose the springs from which the water in this trough flows. What a powerful impulse, a huge wave rises up so forcefully that it lifts high this little barque that is our soul. A barque cannot prevent the furious waves from leading it where they will; neither does the pilot have the power, nor do those who take part in controlling the little ship. So much less can the interior part of the soul stay where it will, or make its senses or faculties do other than what they are commanded; here the soul doesn't care what happens in the exterior senses.*

So both of those passages in one way or other give us a picture of what's taking place here. The water here is the grace of God, the floodgates are now opened, the enormous wave just sweeps up the person, the person is totally carried, is living totally by the grace of God. That's what we've got here and as that prayer so wonderfully puts it, that's what the person would most desire, that's the fulfilment of the deepest desires of the person. That's what we have got in these sixth dwelling places, the fulfilment of everything a person would desire, would long for, would hope for, would pray for, would work for – the whole purpose of life, the spiritual life. Now the person is living.

I will give you a page, which some of you might have already as I gave it out some years ago, to summarise and to give you an overall sense of these sixth dwelling places. Teresa writes extensively because she wants to, in fact she would probably never stop to write about this

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part of the spiritual life. When Teresa was asked to write the *Interior Castle*, she was asked to write very much the same material that she wrote twelve years earlier in the *Book of her Life*, but she was asked to write it now in an impersonal way, not as autobiography but as teaching, but needless to say everything in the book is autobiography. Time and time again when she would write, *I knew a person, or the person I am thinking about* – it is almost always herself – a few times it's not, but almost always it's herself she is speaking about, that's more so in the sixth dwelling places than anywhere else.

The sixth dwelling places are really autobiography, Teresa's account of her own life, her own spiritual experiences. They are now taken out of context. In the *Book of her Life*, we have them in the context of her life, here they are taken out of context, and put in order and used as the source for her teaching. She tells us in the *Way of Perfection* she only speaks about what she has experienced and that here more so than ever, it's what she has experienced, that is what she is writing. But more than that, she's writing what would have helped her when she was experiencing this. You see there that I have put in that these are really from the years when she was 43-57, from about 1556-7 to 1572, and two years into that period of time, in 1559, Teresa's books are taken off her. She's the woman who's only happy when she has a new book. She was a real books person, Teresa was a person of words, loved books from a very young age and in those strange times she was living in, of the Inquisition and the Index of Forbidden Books, most of the books that were really helpful to her were taken off her. And she tells us in the *Book of her Life* that when this happened – obviously it was devastating, it was a traumatic experience that would have damaged her psychologically in every way – in the midst of this turmoil she heard the Lord say to her: *don't worry, I will be your living book*, and she said she didn't know what that meant at the time because she'd never had visions up until then. We can make what we like of that, that she only started to have visions when the books that were helpful to her were taken from her.

The Lord was stepping in, the living book now is the presence of Jesus Christ in her life, her experience of Jesus Christ and that's what she's speaks about in the *Book of her Life* and I have put in there in the page I have given you the chapters in the *Book of her Life*. First of all in the *Book of her Life – Vida (Spanish)* – chapters 16-21 are the third and fourth way of drawing water. There she explains prayer in terms of four different ways of drawing water. So the third and fourth way of drawing water are the sixth dwelling places – effectively the same material – though obviously she is looking at it now with greater clarity and much more experience. So it's basically that same material but it's from chapters 23-32 where she really takes us into the depths of her experience of Jesus Christ. She speaks about that experience of Jesus Christ as the *living book*, his constant presence with her. In Chapter 27 for example, we find the source of her learning, the source of her wisdom when she just knows Jesus Christ is beside her, he's always walking beside her, the presence of Jesus Christ is in her life.

And now when it comes to the sixth dwelling places she is speaking from her experience, she is really putting in all of this, making it the most autobiographical of her works and very much this intense experience of mysticism that she lived through over these approximately fifteen years of her life, up until November 1572, when she has the experience we will be speaking about this afternoon, which brings her into the seventh dwelling places for the last ten years of her life. Now, when I say that, I don't mean that for these fifteen years, or indeed for all the years before that, she wasn't dipping in and out of the seventh dwelling places. Of course she was, and as I have said over and over again we can live none of these without the light that comes from the seventh. What she didn't have up until then was the full awareness of the seventh or the full knowledge or understanding of it and that's why now in this book she was able to look back on these experiences with a greater clarity than she had when she was writing about them twelve years earlier, because she now has greater insight and experience, both from her own life, from the life of so many people that she's been with, who she's been advising and guiding and listening to, but most particularly from the direct experience of God in her life. So it is those chapters from the *Book of her Life*, which are

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now being looked at from the perspective of the seventh dwelling places, which we will come to this afternoon.

I have tried here in a sense to give some kind of an overview of this. We're in now what we might call the depths of Christian mysticism, or another way we could put it is that now the human being is fully alive. This is what it means to live; this is what it means to live human life as it is meant to be lived, or another way of putting it is the person has learned to love. When a person has really learned to love, what kind of a life is that person living or is that person capable of living? That's what the sixth dwelling places is answering. What kind of a life does a person have who is now living totally by love? And it is this love that she has been speaking about from the fourth dwelling places onwards, a love that has no self-interest, a love that is pure, a love that is equal to the love that Jesus Christ has. The person is now living by the love of Jesus Christ, is loving as Jesus Christ loves, therefore we could say that the entire sixth dwelling places are about the life of Jesus Christ, looked at not externally, but from within, from the spiritual viewpoint, the spiritual perspective.

The first little phrase I put at the top of this page is not from the *Interior Castle*, it's from a work of Teresa's sometimes called the *Soliloquies* or the *Exclamations*, it's towards the end of that short writing of Teresa's. It's based obviously on St Paul, *no longer I who live, it's Jesus Christ who lives in me*. It's a helpful phrase, that this I, the ego, the self-centred self, the false self – whatever word we want to use – may die. That's what we pray for, that prayer is now answered – that I, that false self, that ego, that self-centredness, has all died. And the other, of course the other is God, Jesus Christ – *live in me, who is greater than I and for me better than me, that I may serve him* – take note of how important the word *serve* becomes here and in the seventh dwelling places. It's an important word in Teresa's writings all the way through, but in the sixth and seventh dwelling places it becomes a very important word. To *serve*, and of course that's taken from the gospels, particularly Mark's gospel, *Jesus has come to serve and not to be served*, to serve is a sign of authentic Christianity – *that I may serve him that he may live and give me life*, that's now what's happening, *that he may reign and I be his slave* – the word *slave* of course comes straight from St Paul, also at the beginning of his letter to the Romans. Sometimes we feel uncomfortable with the word *slave*, but Paul uses it at the beginning of his letter, *I am a slave of Jesus Christ*, he says – it doesn't have the negative overtones that it has had in more recent history – *That my soul does not desire another freedom. How can it be freedom if one is distant from the most high?* So in the sixth dwelling places the person is living the fullness of freedom. What does it mean to live freedom? The truth of what real freedom is, that's what we have in the sixth dwelling places and the person is now free, and freedom is union with Jesus Christ, union with God – there's no freedom if one is cut off from God.

I want to give us an overview because that's about all we have the time for and I will do it in two ways here. These eleven chapters are very carefully put together, as all of Teresa's writings are. Never believe Teresa when she says she doesn't know what she's talking about or that she's getting confused or she's gone off the subject, because she never does. Teresa knows exactly what she's doing, everything is very carefully constructed. We know in the sixth dwelling places that the first and eleventh chapters – the first and last chapters – are like the parenthesis into which all of this is put in. Teresa never uses John of the Cross' terminology *night* or *dark night*, but effectively the first and the last chapters are that, they are the closest Teresa comes to John of the Cross' teaching on the dark night. Both the first and the last chapters are really taking us into these trials, purification, the first one is *trials, struggles*, and the last is the *purification*, the final absence. So the first and last chapters are taking one into this darkness, into the night.

Chapters two to six all use the first as their springboard. Two to six are various experiences, a whole range of experiences and the struggle with those experiences. Chapter seven is a key chapter in the whole teaching of Teresa on the humanity of Jesus Christ. We saw in the first

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dwelling places how important the humanity of Jesus Christ is, and the two chapters of Teresa's writings that are key are Chapter seven of the sixth dwelling places and in the *Book of her Life* Chapter twenty-two, and though there are other places as well, these are key passages to understanding Teresa's whole thinking. It was a controversial issue in her lifetime and she got strongly criticised by certain theologians for her teaching on this issue and she stands by it very, very strongly. Chapters eight to ten, the fruits of Chapter seven, are preparation to enter the seventh dwelling places, Chapter eleven, the final purification.

Just going through them in a little more detail to get a taste of what we've got here. First of all we're entering into the heights of Christian mysticism here. What do we mean by that term? Perhaps the best way to define it is living the fullness of the spiritual life, living from one's spiritual centre, living the most authentic life a human being could live, that is they're living from the deepest place within and they're living in such a way that can't be really understood. That doesn't make sense, looked at externally, but it's authentic and consistent, living by the grace of God. So the person has now entered into this place of the fullness of Christian mysticism and we would expect that this would be a life of tranquillity and peace and strength and all sorts of things, but Teresa very quickly removes that illusion because she plunges us into the most precarious of human situations. It's as if Teresa searched around what are the most vulnerable of situations a human being could find themselves in? Let's put them in here. It's life lived in the midst of human fragility: *The soul is wounded with love, there's a very strong pull toward silence and solitude*. That's the sure sign always that this is an experience of God. The person wants silence and solitude, there's a very strong pull towards it, but of course it's not there, it's not going to be possible.

In her *Book of the Foundations*, Chapter five, where she is speaking about busy people being brought to the heights of prayer, people she said, who never, because they're so busy with the obligations and commitments in life, find time for silence and solitude. But, she said, the desire is there, and if the desire is there then that's a sign that God is bringing them to perfect prayer. It's the desire for it, not the fact of whether one has it or not, because the desire for it and the pull towards it is a sign of God's presence and God's actions. Whether the person has the time or the circumstances for silence or not is not what determines whether God does what God does or not, God does it and sometimes the person will grow and deepen in prayer in the most unlikely and what we would call the most unsuitable of circumstances, because it is purely the action of God. So it is the desire, the pull towards solitude here that matters, not whether the person has it in practice or not. So the person must face interior and exterior trials and sufferings, must be prepared. It is through this that the person is prepared, because to enter the seventh one has to be living the fullness of love.

From the sixth dwelling places, chapter 2: God calls, even in the midst of deepest absence. In the sixth dwelling places we would expect a strong sense of God's presence and there is that here, but there's also absence, because absence of course is a sign of presence. We can only miss somebody if we have a deep relationship with that person and the deeper the relationship is, the more that person is missed and therefore the sense of the absence of God is a sign of deep relationship and the person has a very strong sense of God's absence at times and it's so strong because love is so strong. The stronger the love, the greater the pain of absence and God's call is heard in the midst of this, God is speaking to the person. I picked out here the word *desires*. We've seen that in the prayer I read, desires go right throughout all this. Teresa of course has been described as the woman of desires, desire is such an important word in her writings, and here in the sixth dwelling places, desires are so strong, they are the driving force, the energy. Desires given by God of course and can only be fulfilled by God, and they get bigger and bigger because of course they cannot be fulfilled. Perhaps John expresses this best – these vast caverns, and the caverns are getting bigger and bigger and hungrier and hungrier, he said. Of course as love gets bigger the greater the emptiness which gets bigger, *hungrier and hungrier*, he said, because the desires cannot be fulfilled, because

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the human being hasn't the capacity to contain what the spiritual dimension is now hungry for, which is the fullness of God.

Words, then, words, Teresa being a woman of words. I have put in here some principles, they apply really throughout the whole sixth, they apply everywhere. I'll just pull them together. How do we evaluate or assess whether it is words or any other spiritual or mystical experience? There are certain keys to evaluate it – it's always according to the Bible, the Word of God. In fact people have studied Teresa's words, all the words that she tells us she had heard, though she said she had never heard anything with the ears of the body or with the imagination, she never saw or heard anything but everything she heard is to be found in the Bible. They are always words of scripture; they are always according to the teaching of the Church.

When something comes from God it's never forgotten, it makes a lasting impact on a person's life. One just knows this is different to something else a person has heard, it cannot be forgotten, a person might have only one of these experiences in their whole life but they will never forget it and it will have changed life forever, the impact that it makes is greater than any experience that a person could have, they change one's life, they always have positive good effects. That's what Teresa is always asking, what are the effects of the experience? And here she tells us in the sixth, even in the most painful and darkest experiences the soul comes out stronger, the effects are always positive, the effects of God are always positive even when they are very painful and dark, the person comes out stronger, there's a strength there, God always brings about positive effects and they are either for the sake of the person, or others, or the mission of the Church. The purpose may not be seen at the time, may not be seen for many, many years; you may only look back on them a long, long time later, but there's always a purpose there. Teresa often defines it as *that others may serve the Lord or praise the Lord*, as she had in the prayer I read in that prayer at the beginning, she really wants it that others would praise, *even if only one person praises the Lord I live a thousand lives*. The good of the Church, the good of the mission, that's what the person desires. And then the final one there, it's pure gift, don't bring them about, they're not a sign of holiness or a reward for a good life. I think I have already mentioned those.

Fourth chapter: experience of love, forgiveness, absolution. Explains radical love, what it means to be loved radically. Then, the total giving of self because of love, the liberty, the freedom of the children of God. I have already read number three where the floodgates of God are open. Then the difficulty, the inner battles. She defines the battle here as wanting to die but wanting to live and serve; that of course comes straight from St Paul. The influence of St Paul on Teresa is huge and of course Paul came to know Jesus through personal experience, Paul didn't have the gospels, the gospels weren't written until after Paul died. Paul didn't have the gospels, there's almost no information about the life Jesus Christ in Paul's letters because he didn't have it, but he had the personal experience, he knew the effects of Jesus Christ. Teresa obviously knows all the gospels, but primarily she knows Jesus Christ through experience. So, wanting to live, wanting to die, is very much Paul's experience. He serves the Lord, yes, but he wants to die to be with him; so it is with Teresa, and the two grow together in her experience. She wants to be united with the Lord, she knows that full union with God is only possible after death in the next life, she wants that, she desires that, that desire is growing and growing and at the same time the desire to serve for the mission of the Church, for making the presence of God known in this world is getting greater and greater. The two desires are growing and they appear to be pulling against each other. They are both signs of love. Love drives her to want to be with God and love drives her to want to do his work in this world.

Chapter seven I have already mentioned – the humanity of Jesus. The next three chapters are drawing from that, how Jesus Christ is known, the effects of that, the life of truth and I refer there to knowing Jesus Christ. In Chapter eleven we really enter the same territory as John of

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the Cross does in his *dark night*. I will just give some principles here: *Love cannot be known without knowing what is not love*, and that's a principle and here of course because love is at such a level. What is not love is also known, but knowing the absence of God, understanding the mystery of evil, you will find that in all the mystics and all the saints. The more one understands God, the more one understands what is not of God, what is opposed to him; the more one knows love, the more one knows what is opposed to love. So the mystery of evil – it's not avoiding it but entering deeply into it. It's one of the extraordinary mysteries, but we have it in the Apostles Creed: *he descended into hell*, that phrase about Jesus, or St Paul describes it: *God made him enter sin*, Jesus entered into the depths of darkness and sinfulness, but entered into the experience of it and the tragedy of it. So it is here that this experience is the final preparation and purification to enter into the seventh dwelling places.

I finish here with the phrase that Teresa finishes with at the end of the sixth dwelling places: *I believe that all of us would answer yes*, and the *yes* she has referred to is that of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, who ask Jesus for special places at his side – I think in one of the gospels it is their mother who asks him – and he said: *can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?* and they say *yes*. And Teresa here uses that as the capacity to say *yes*. That's what the sixth dwelling places are about: *the capacity to say yes*. John of the Cross' phrase: *the total yes of love*. That *total yes of love*, that's what the person has the capacity to give here, this *total yes of love*. When we know what this is, everybody will say *yes* to it. Nobody is put off by the pain and the suffering and the darkness, because love is stronger than all of that, love is stronger than all pain and darkness or anything else, any other obstacle. So, *I believe all of us, will answer yes; and very rightly so, for His Majesty gives strength to the one He sees has need of it*. God gives strength. *He defends these souls in all things; when they are persecuted and criticised, He answers for them as He did for the Magdalene – if not through words, through deeds... May He be blessed forever, and may all creatures praise Him. Amen.*

God is with these people, defends them, strengthens them. It is life lived totally by the strength that God gives, because all human strength, human ingenuity, everything of this world is of no use here, is of no help here. This makes no sense if it is not seen totally through the eyes of grace, through the light that comes from the Holy Spirit. It makes no sense otherwise, because the person is now totally living by God's grace, living a pure uncompromised love.

That's a very brief summary of a very, in some way complex passage – but actually it's not, it's not actually that complicated. Actually the fifth dwelling places are probably more difficult to understand than the sixth. The sixth is not difficult if you hold to certain principles. Once you know what's going on here, where the person is, then the sixth actually makes perfect sense.

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Seventh talk – *The Seventh Dwelling Places*

We have come to the final session, the seventh dwelling places. We've been referring to these from the very beginning because as Teresa told us at the very beginning, in the deepest place, in the deepest centre of the human being is this castle made of clear crystal and diamonds, filled with light, the light of Jesus Christ, the light of the presence of God and that's in the deepest place and the most real, most true place in every human being. Every human being, every soul is a paradise where God chooses to dwell. And that image of a castle of crystal and diamonds – I'm not sure you can combine crystal and diamonds. A diamond, I believe is the hardest of all elements; crystal of course is very fragile, but very beautiful. So she has put in beauty, strength, fragility; she is expressing the whole of nature of the human being. And so now we come to consider what is this seventh dwelling place that has been guiding us from the beginning. We wouldn't get inside the door of the first dwelling place, or even get our first toe in without the light from the seventh drawing us.

So what's Teresa's going to tell us now that she gets to finally telling us about the seventh dwelling places that we have all the time been journeying towards? Perhaps there are many words we could use: holiness, sanctity, maturity, maybe many words. What I would come down and say finally, what best expresses it, is the fullness of human and Christian maturity. Why do I put in both human and Christian? Because it is undoubtedly a journey of human growth, of human maturity, but there are stages or depths or levels – again, what words to use – of human maturity that we can only reach in relationship with God or when one is transformed by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, as we saw in the first dwelling places, is the one human being totally, completely created in the image and likeness of God. Now the person in the seventh dwelling places is now living in the image and likeness of God. To live from this place is to live human life in the image and likeness of God, is to live human life as God has created us to live it. So it is the fullness of human maturity as created by God and as fully revealed to us, or made possible to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And we've seen in the sixth dwelling places that the person is now living Christianity. In following this as a gospel I mentioned that in the fifth dwelling places is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the dying and rising – dying to the old life, rising to a new life. There is no Christianity prior to the resurrection; all Christianity is post-resurrection. So the person in the sixth dwelling places has the inner freedom to live Christianity that they did not have in the second and third dwelling places when the person was making great efforts to live Christianity and learning how to live it – the lack of inner freedom. Now the person in the sixth dwelling places has the inner freedom to live Christianity, and therefore there are no limits to the love that the person can receive and give – whatever may happen in the person's life, the person can live it through love.

Now entering the seventh – Teresa tells us there's an open door between the sixth and seventh – in fact she said they are the one reality, the same level of experience or perspective. Teresa as we've seen went through many years herself of not having full awareness of seeing the seventh, so in a sense what we've got in the seventh is what she has now grown into and has been living for the last ten years of her life. And how does she choose to present it to us? She chooses to present it to us in four chapters, but I would describe them more as four ways of looking at this new reality, or looking at it from four different perspectives. Let's say that table there in the middle is the fullness of human and Christian maturity – we can look at it from over there, from there, and from there, and from here – we can look at it from four different perspectives and that's what she gives us.

The first chapter

The first chapter, we could say, is the person who is now living in relationship with the Trinity, God, Father, Son and Spirit. The heart of the first chapter is her experience of the

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Trinity and she's given us her personal experiences of the Trinity in her *Spiritual Testimonies*, there are a few given there and she tells us here in this first chapter her experience of the Trinity. *Now God is known, it's the same God*, she said, *that we've learned about in the Catechism*, and she uses the language of the Catechism, *but now one can see the truth in a way that is much more real* – clearer, deeper, now it's known from the light that comes from deep within. It's one thing to learn about the Trinity or learn about the theology from books, from writings, from study, from the Catechism, whatever, but it is something so much more complete and deeper to know it from within, to know it from the light that there is within, to know it from relationship. So the first chapter is centred upon the Trinity – there is so much else there, but I am just being very brief.

The second chapter

The second chapter is the real point of arrival of the whole work, the found personal experience Teresa has in her life, the experience of the spiritual marriage, the experience of her relationship with Jesus Christ, the depth of that relationship with Jesus Christ that is now being lived. So the second chapter is looking at this reality of human and Christian maturity from the perspective of somebody who is now totally, irreversibly, one with Jesus Christ, totally living the life of Jesus Christ, sharing totally in his life. The spiritual marriage, that's the most profound experience that Teresa has in her life in November of 1572, slightly less than ten years before her death. So for the last ten years of her life she is living this fullness of maturity. It's what opens her eyes to this whole new perspective, which is the seventh dwelling places, and it gives her a new clarity on everything else that has gone before. So the second is critical, it's the point of arrival, it's the most profound step and it is very much linked with Eucharist. The experience itself, which happened five years before she writes about it here, was when she received the Eucharist from John of the Cross, who was celebrating the mass that day at the Monastery of the Incarnation. But it is much more than that, so many of her experiences are profoundly linked to the Eucharist. It is the sharing of part of her body, the unity of her body, the body of Jesus Christ with the Cross. In that experience the Lord gives her a nail instead of the ring of marriage. The nail of course is part of the Cross, it's a little something of his total self-giving upon the Cross. She is now totally giving herself as he totally gave himself. So that encounter with Jesus Christ there.

The third chapter

I have given you a page here on it, which I found going through my folder. This third chapter is often skimmed over by people, but in many respects it's the most original of the four chapters. Most people writing about holiness and certainly in Teresa's day would never have written about it from this perspective. And basically she is now writing from the perspective of the person. What kind of a person is this? What kind of a human being is this? The first two viewings, perspectives, are from that of God, the divinity we might say, sanctity, God. Now, what kind of a human being is this and that is why I want to spend a bit more time on it. I have picked out here a number of things from it. This one is important, Teresa sets the scene in the first dwelling places – the little butterfly, which is of course the human being that has been set free, that is now fully alive. Of course the butterfly dies, has died to everything that is not God, died to everything in this world, but of course is more alive than ever, is fully alive. So the butterfly has died with supreme happiness (7th dwelling places, chapter 3 para.1). You asked me about suffering before everybody had arrived and this in a sense is how it is: suffering and supreme happiness going together, suffering and the greatest joy going together. Here there's supreme happiness, joy, and the person has found rest, has found repose, because Christ lives in it – in the words of St Paul – *Jesus Christ now lives in me. Let us see what life it lives, or how this life differs from the life it was living*, that's Teresa's real interest. What kind of a life is this person now living, how does it differ from the life that other human beings live?

She's probably the first person in history to actually really set down and try to define this, and she said the only way we can do it is by looking at the effects, looking at certain characteristics of how this person lives and I have picked out some of them here. So this

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chapter focuses on the person who has changed and matured, who has been transformed in Christ and is living a new life. And it is only by the effects that we can know this, we only get glimpses of this. The person doesn't go around with *I am now living a fully new life* written across their foreheads, because the person looks more ordinary than ever, the person is more human, the holier a person becomes the more human they become – the usual way of seeing it is the opposite – no, they become more human, more grounded, their feet are more firmly on the earth, they are more engaged in human life, they look more ordinary, for want of a better word, they look nothing special.

First effect – *Forgetfulness of self* (7th dwelling places, chapter 3, paragraphs 1 and 2)

The first effect she puts down is *forgetfulness of self* – the ego, self centredness; the false self has disappeared and the person lives a life totally centred on procuring the honour of God. Let God be honoured; this comes up over and over again. We are reminded of the words spoken by Our Lord to Teresa on the occasion of the spiritual marriage, November 1572: *my honour is yours and yours mine*, and that's very much coming out of the culture of the time and the way that marriage was seen at the time – honour. But note the important clarification that Teresa gives to this, *don't think by this that the person fails to remember to eat or sleep or to do what he is obliged to do in conformity with his state in life, we're speaking of interior matters*. So the person will eat and sleep and look after their health and everything else that they need to do, and everything in conformity with their state in life. We have seen that phrase over and over again in Teresa's teaching. Again, this is very radical in the context of Teresa's time – Teresa lived in a time where if you want to be holy, you went to a convent or a monastery, if you want to be holy you've got to become a part of an elite of holiness and everybody else was on some kind of a lower level. Teresa never accepted that. Teresa's whole teaching was for everybody, the fullness of the Christian life of holiness is for everybody, but must be lived in accordance with one's state in life. A person must not try to imitate what they do in the convent or try to imitate what that other holy person does, it must always be lived in accordance with their state in life.

The place of holiness is the place where we find ourselves, whether that is married life, single life, whether it be in a convent, a monastery, whether it be as a teacher, a doctor, a soldier, a young person, an old person, male, female – if the person is living well the life that is right for them, that is the place of holiness. So the person in the seventh dwelling places has become a better teacher, a better nurse, a better missionary, a better soldier, a better politician, whatever they are, whatever their state in life is – that's a very radical conviction of Teresa's – wherever one has been called to be by God. So they're not living some kind of angelic life or some kind of life that cuts them off from the world, they're very much engaged in human life, and all that's going on, according to what is right for their state in life. And so here in the seventh dwelling places, at this height she makes this point once more and very strongly. So, total forgetfulness of self.

Second effect – *Desire to suffer* (7th dwelling places, chapter 3, paragraph 4-6)

The second effect is the *desire to suffer* and I draw attention to the word *desire*. I think I have already done that in the sixth dwelling places, but here again the importance of the word *desire*. This paragraph needs careful reading. The characteristics of this desire to suffer are peace, there's total self-giving to the will of God, not disturbed if things go differently to what is expected and total trust in God, so therefore there's deep peace – because the devil always disturbs. A characteristic of the devil, as Teresa said, is that he can turn himself into an angel of light – that comes from St Paul, I think – he can feign all the holy things, but there's always going to be an unease; he can't give a person the peace, the deep inner peace and he can't take it away. If something here is taking away the inner peace, then be careful. That deep inner peace is there, that can't be taken away. It has to be a total self-giving to the will of God, not one's own heroism, one's own fanaticism – there's none of that here, these people are not fanatics, they are not self-seeking in any way, not disturbed if things go differently to

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what's expected, in fact they're so used to that by now, because when it is the things of God, they never go as we expect them to go – we can't see and there's total trust in him.

And then she sums up: *If He desires the soul to suffer, well and good; if not, it doesn't kill itself as it used to.* And Teresa lived at a time when it was fashionable – there was a kind of a spiritual fashion around penitential things, sufferings, a kind of a spiritual heroism. Teresa and John of the Cross rejected those tendencies very strongly, because that was focused on the self – *I can do it.* If suffering comes one's way, accept it with love, if it doesn't, don't search it out, don't seek it. I remember years ago somebody giving a talk on John of the Cross, simply pointing out that when John of the Cross had a chance to escape from prison, he escaped, he did not stay there. John of the Cross did not stay in suffering if there was a way out, he planned his escape, he took the risk. You don't stay in suffering if there's a way out.

Third effect: Love of enemies (7th dwelling place, chapter 3, paragraph 5)

Next one, a very important one: love of enemies. We saw this also at the beginning of the first chapter of the sixth dwelling places, where Teresa is speaking about those who persecute us, those who accuse us in the wrong. A deep love for these people – and she's very surprised by this – a deep love for people who accuse us in the wrong, who persecute us. Love of enemies is there in the gospel, but it is only now that one can really love one's enemies. It has to be with no element (of heroism, of self?) in it. To say to somebody that they have got to forgive somebody who has wronged them, that's dangerous, that's not healthy. Now they can love in a limitless way by the grace of God, not by human strength. When somebody has been wronged, when somebody has been exploited or abused, they can only come round to a place of being really able to love when they have been transformed by the grace of God, when they have reached this very high level of human maturity. To expect it earlier is very dangerous, it can be very damaging. So she's psychologically very accurate here, she's psychologically very sane, healthy in the way she approaches this. So this is impossible to fulfil by human effort and the persecuted has a deep inner joy. There's a whole lot more she says which is well worth reading how she puts it there.

Fourth effect: Desire to serve (7th dwelling place, chapter 3, paragraph 6)

That word *serve* is so important and gets more and more important the further on we go in the *Interior Castle*, the desire to serve. And she tells us that this is the effect that surprises her most: *For not only do they not desire to die but they desire to live very many years suffering the greatest trials if through them they can help that the Lord be praised, even though in something very small.* The praise of the Lord, the desire to serve. She's caught up in the same dilemma as St Paul: wanting to die to be with the Lord, wanting to stay here to do the work of the Lord. Now the person wants to very definitely stay to do the work of the Lord. We see it in Teresa herself, on her last journey, when she's very ill and dying, she's planning a few more foundations, she doesn't want to stop working, right up to the last day of her life she's working, even in her bed in Alba de Tormes, she working. She's going to work to the end, she's going to serve right up to the end. This desire to serve gets stronger and stronger, whatever form that's going to take.

Fifth effect: No fear of death (7th dwelling place, chapter 3, paragraph 7)

Continuing then with these effects, there's no fear of death. This is something Teresa suffered from greatly in her early life, and I give a reference here to the *Book of her Life*, chapter 38. Now there's no fear of death, because of course the person has died to everything that is not of God, everything that is not love, therefore there's no fear of death, it's just going to God, it's passing to God. For a very good description of this, see John of the Cross' *Living Flame*, there's a section there where he writes about the death of a saint, which is totally different he said, from the death of everybody else. Though the physical reality will be the very same, the deeper reality is totally different, because they have died to everything else, and they are just living for God now, therefore it is simply a passing from one life to another,

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it's simply a gentle passing into another form of life, because they are already living it, but living it obviously in this world in faith, they are living the life completely.

Sixth effect: *No desire for consolations* (7th dwelling place, chapter 3, paragraph 8)

No desire for consolations or spiritual delights. They were very important to the person in between the second and third dwelling places and then they were removed from the third and the person is in dryness. Now there's none of any of that and there's none of any of that because the person is simply themselves. There are no delights because the person is already totally at peace. Even in the midst of the greatest suffering and trials the person is at peace, there is no difference, their whole life is a prayer, they couldn't not be at prayer. There's total consistency in life, so they are not looking for anything like this.

Again there's a description that St John of the Cross gives for this, which might be helpful. He said that the person has within them now all the joy and peace and consolation that they need, and therefore if something happens that gives them more joy or more consolation, actually they have something much greater inside them, so they would simply turn to what's already inside. So neither in general life nor in prayer is there anything that can be added to the peace and joy that is already there inside. Therefore no consolation that they will be given in prayer would in any way add to what they already have, because they are already totally united with God.

Seventh effect: *God's particular care in communicating with us* (7DP, Ch. 3, Para. 9)

She struggles to explain this, but there is a different kind of communication. We saw in the fourth dwelling places where a new kind of listening comes in. Now there's another element, something deeper, God is communicating to the person all the time and there's a sense of that, but it's beyond words, it's beyond any kind of understanding, it's just there, the union with God is such that there is a communication: *Touches of love, so gentle and penetrating*. There's some new kind of communication here. It's just love, the dialogue of love, a conversation of love going on with God here all the time.

Eighth effect: *There's no dryness here* (7th dwelling places, Chapter 3, Paragraph 10)

There's no experience of dryness or interior disturbance. I have already touched on that, because it's total gift of God, coming from the depths of the soul where God himself lives. So in this temple of God, in his dwelling place, he alone and the soul rejoice together in deepest silence. Neither human weakness nor the devil can deceive a person here. There's no place for either dryness or consolations because there's total peace and quiet.

Ninth effect: *All rapture is taken away* (7th dwelling places, Chapter 3, Paragraph 12)

All rapture is taken away, another effect that amazes Teresa. This is important: raptures, visions and all extraordinary experiences are not signs of holiness, they are means that God might or might not use. Now we are seeing the real signs of holiness. So all of these experiences she spoke about at length in the sixth dwelling places, they are part of the journey, they are part of how God carries out his work of purification and sanctification of the person, but now in the seventh they are not needed, because all the communication is happening at a deeper level. These extraordinary experiences – some people have them, most people don't. But here they don't happen because there is constant communication with God, which is in the total darkness of faith, it's not some light, it's darkness. So there's no need any more, these extraordinary experiences are not very relevant at this stage.

Tenth effect: *Gratitude to God and knowledge of their own miseries* (7th DP, Ch.3 Para.14)

The prayer of the person here is the prayer in Luke's gospel Chapter 18 - a Pharisee and a publican or tax payer go up to the temple to pray. It's the publican who is in deep prayer – *have mercy on me, a sinner* – we're told he went home at rights with God. That's the prayer of the person here, Teresa's model of prayer. That's her response to the question how does

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the person pray? That's how they pray – *Lord have mercy* – he beats his breast, he doesn't even raise his eyes. *Have mercy on me, a sinner* - he goes home at rights with God.

Eleventh effect: *The Cross* (7th dwelling places, Chapter 3, Paragraph 15)

The final one I picked out here is the Cross. Of course the Cross is never lacking, because it can't be, because the Cross is the high point of the life of Jesus. If the Cross isn't there then it's not holiness, it's not union with Jesus Christ. The Cross takes on different forms, it's in every one of these. So the presence of the Cross does not make the person lose peace, it's the sure sign that the person is living the life of Christ. The person does not lose peace.

The Fourth Chapter

So what's the final chapter then? The final chapter is all on setting out into the world. Again, very unexpected; we expect a journey into the interior life to be a journey inward to some safe holiness somewhere, some paradise on earth, but for Teresa it's the complete opposite. Some people have said to me over the years, *I don't like that Interior Castle, it's all about going inward, it's all about looking inward*. I think by now it's clear to us it's not about going inward at all, but it's about going inward in order to go outwards, we have to go in in order to go out, and the deeper we go in the more we go out. So the seventh dwelling place is the most outward looking of all the dwelling places.

Going back to my illustration at the beginning, the first and the seventh are the most linked because they are the two in relationship with the world. In the first the relationship with the world is destructive, not healthy, it's keeping a person away from God, it's distracting, it's temptations etc. Now the relationship with the world is a positive one, the love for the world that God created, the love for people. The purpose of prayer, she said, is *works, works, works*, it's so outward looking. That's the mission of the Church, engaging with the mission of the Church, the commitment to works, to bearing fruit. And the great image that she uses here we had in the gospel last Sunday, of Martha and Mary, she uses that many times in her writings, but here in particular, Mary of course symbolising the contemplative, the life of prayer and Martha, the life of service. Martha and Mary go together, they're one person for Teresa. The deeper one goes inward, to prayer, to relationship with God, the more that one responds to the life of service. So, live as Martha and as Mary - prayer and service. So the fourth chapter is all about service, the outward, and the mission of the Church and all of this.

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