

Interior Castle: The First Dwelling Place, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.

In this opening paragraph Teresa introduces us to the central image of this book [the Interior Castle] and gives a very strong affirmation of the dignity and worth of a human person.

1. This is not the first time she has used the image of a castle to describe the soul of a person [see: Way of Perfection 28:9]. The inspiration here is to use this image as the foundation on which to build this book.
2. We may feel put off by the idea that God gave her the inspiration but we must remember that Teresa lived in a society where God had the last word. The appeal to God gave her words strength and credibility [the opposite would probably be the case nowadays].
3. Teresa begins this spiritual masterpiece with a very strong affirmation of the dignity and worth of a human person. She tells us we are made in the image and likeness of God but we must also remember all she tells us in other parts of her writings about the humanity of Jesus. Her understanding of the human person is rooted in her understanding and appreciation of the truth and mystery of humanity of Jesus.
4. The castle is of diamond and crystal – diamond is strong, crystal is fragile, both are beautiful and valuable. The human person is strong, fragile, beautiful and precious.
5. Beauty and space are important images in this paragraph. Diamonds and crystal are both beautiful and the castle is large – Teresa wants to emphasise the beauty and capacity of the human person [a limitless space in which God dwells].
6. The soul, the deepest centre, of the human person is a paradise that God delights in – that is true of every person. This truth is the starting point of the entire spiritual life and has profound implications for how I see myself, how I see the other person and how I see God.
7. The spiritual life [the only real life] is a journey of growth, change and transformation. This book is a companion on that journey and Teresa writes

it to exhort and encourage all who are struggling on the journey. The Interior Castle is, first and foremost, a book of encouragement, giving a very positive view of the reality of human life and the great possibilities God has in store for those who have the courage to travel this journey.

8. Teresa wants us to contemplate this image rather than analyse it. Throughout the book Teresa will use a number of other images; each is an attempt to express what cannot be put into words. Truth must be accepted, contemplated and expressed – understanding is not a place we ever arrive at. The further we advance in the spiritual life the more elusive any human understanding becomes.
9. Teresa begins the book in prayer on the feast of the Blessed Trinity 1577 [see Prologue]. It is the Trinity that dwells in the deepest centre of the person – we are made in the image and likeness of the Trinity. The Trinity accompanies the person on this journey and the 7th dwelling place is the revelation of the truth of the Trinity [see 7th dwelling place, chapter 1, No. 6].

Questions

- A. What are the implications of these words of our mother St. Teresa for how we live our Carmelite life today?
- B. This is a possible starting point for the communication of Carmelite Spirituality: how do we make this better known?
- C. What are the wider implications of the truths of this paragraph? EG. God the centre of our lives – do our daily lives witness to this truth? Are our communities places where God is to be found at the centre? What about the Church, wider society?