

## **Interior Castle. Sixth Dwelling Place: Chapter 7. paras 5, 6,**

The interior Castle is the story of Christian discipleship told from the perspective of personal experience. Jesus is the “living book” that Teresa is constantly reading and the “guide” and “constant companion” on her journey. For Teresa Christian prayer and the Christian’s relationship with Jesus are inseparable: they are the one reality. The *Interior Castle* is the story of this ever deepening relationship and the story of the change and transformation that the presence of Jesus is carrying out in the depths of the person.

Chapter 7 of the sixth dwelling place is an opportunity to pause and reflect on this. Jesus is always present but the need to spend time “gazing” at Him grows as the relationship grows. Teresa meditated on all aspects of the life of Jesus in her prayer and she never stops emphasising how important this is at every stage of spiritual growth. In all her Carmels there are examples of images and statues that helped her. Before she entered the city of Burgos to make her final foundation she made a detour to visit a famous crucifix and to recommend the foundation to the Lord [the constant companion in prayer was also the constant companion in her work of founding].

Teresa’ favourite image of the Human Jesus was the Risen Lord. Let us listen to her speaking to us: *“If our nature or health does not allow us to think always about the passion, since to do so would be arduous, who will prevent us from being with Him in His Risen state? We have Him so near in the Blessed Sacrament, where He is always glorified and where we do not have to gaze upon Him as being so tired and worn out, bleeding, wearied by his journeys, persecuted by those for whom he did so much good, and not believed in by the apostles...Behold Him here without suffering, full of glory, before ascending into heaven, strengthening some, encouraging others, our companion in the most Blessed Sacrament; it does not seem it was in his power to leave us for even a moment ....whoever lives in the presence of so good a friend and excellent a leader, who went ahead of us to be the first to suffer, can endure all things. The Lord helps us, strengthens us and never fails; He is a true friend. And I see clearly, and I saw afterwards, that God desires that if we are going to please him and receive His great favours, we must do so through the most sacred humanity of Christ, in whom he takes his delight. Many, many times have I perceived this truth through experience. The Lord has told it to me. I have definitely seen that we must enter by this gate if we desire His sovereign Majesty to show us great secrets”.* [Life 22:6]

These words were written at least twelve years before she wrote the Interior Castle. The whole book but especially the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> dwelling places are a

celebration of what this “True Friend, Jesus” does in the souls of those He chooses to favour. In the 6<sup>th</sup> dwelling place this work of Jesus is beginning to bear fruit. Love is transforming the person but it is not yet complete: *“The soul desires to be completely occupied in love and does not want to be taken up with anything else, but to be so occupied is impossible for it even though it may want to”*. This is the frustration and suffering of the 6<sup>th</sup> dwelling place, the suffering of love, love that is growing and being purified but is not yet complete and perfect.

### **For reflection and discussion**

1. The two most important chapters of Teresa’s writings on this subject are: Life: Chapter 22 and Interior Castle: 6<sup>th</sup> dwelling place, chapter 7. It is interesting to read these two chapters together.
2. The apostles, the saints and particularly Mary, are very important to Teresa. Her relationship with Jesus is modelled on their relationship with Him. In addition her understanding of her own personal experience is enlightened by her reflections on their experience.
3. Much of the language and imagery she uses comes from St. Paul – his writings are testimony to a deep relationship with Jesus. So often Teresa’s experience echoes what she hears Paul speaking about; hence her frequent use of his language and imagery.
4. Go back and read the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb and the appearances of the Risen Lord – read them in the light of the sixth dwelling place and especially chapter 7. Perhaps this would make a good reflection or retreat around Easter time!
5. *“The Lord himself says that He is the Way; the Lord says also that He is the light and that no one can go to the Father but through Him and anyone who sees me sees my Father” [no.6]*. Here she is paraphrasing John’s gospel and giving witness to the truth of these words, truth she knows through experience. The living word of God is alive in her and bringing her to life.

6. Teresa is an inspiration for us in our reading of the scriptures and especially the Gospels. She enters so fully and completely into the experience and is transformed by it.