

Interior Castle: Seventh Dwelling Place, Chapter 4

Sometime after Teresa had completed the Interior Castle she re-read the book, divided it into chapters and wrote the very important chapter headings [we could say that these are Teresa's reading guide to her own book]. In the heading for this chapter she alerts us to three very important points about the text we are about to read.

1. The Lord's purpose in granting such great favours to the soul

The following quotes give us a flavour of what this purpose is.

"His Majesty couldn't grant us a greater favour than to give us a life that would be an imitation of the life His beloved Son lived."

"This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works."

"Do you know what it means to be truly spiritual? It means becoming slaves of God. Marked with his brand, which is that of the cross, spiritual persons, because now they have given Him their liberty, can be sold by Him as slaves of everyone, as He was."

This is the main point Teresa wishes to make in this chapter. Let us pick out a few features of this "Purpose".

- It is the Lord's purpose: not ours, not the purpose of the person of prayer. Our fulfilment, our complete happiness is the fulfilment of God's purpose in us.
- This is the fullest possible living of God's grace ["His favours"]. It is total gift of God to the person – now the person is fully living this gift.
- The fulfilment of this purpose is seen in practical ways: "good works!"
- The person favoured by God lives a life that resembles the life of Jesus.

2. It is necessary that Martha and Mary join together

Paragraph 12 was our starting point for these reflections nearly a year ago. This is a crucial paragraph for the understanding of the whole book. When everything that Martha and Mary symbolically stand for, comes together in a person's life, that person has reached the heights of human and Christian maturity. This person's life has been transformed by prayer into the life God has destined for that person.

3. This chapter is very beneficial

This could be said about every word of the entire book – this book is written to meet a very practical need; to encourage, enlighten and guide her readers. This chapter is peppered with the responses to many practical questions the reader may be asking about the nature of Christian holiness. The heights of Christian holiness are very down to earth, Christian holiness is lived by people whose feet are firmly on this earth, and need all the help and guidance they can get.

“In sum, my sisters, what I conclude with is that we shouldn't build castles in the air.”

“The Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our works but at the love with which they are done.”

“Thus even though our works are small they will have the value our love for Him would have merited had they been great.”

The “benefit” is not just for the person of prayer who now lives from the 7th dwelling places but, much more importantly, this person's life and experience brings benefit to so many others. The fruits of these peoples' lives enrich the life and mission of the whole Church.

For reflection/discussion

The effects of prayer are seen in the details of our everyday lives. Teresa is writing autobiography but her purpose is that what she writes becomes the autobiography of her readers.

Recommended reading! Four years after writing this book Teresa wrote an account of her spiritual life for her confessor Dr. Alonso Velazquez [Spiritual Testimony No. 65 or Relations No. 6, Palencia 1581]. This document gives us a very clear insight into Teresa's living of what she is speaking about in this Chapter.