

LIFE Chapter 14 & 15: Second manner of drawing water [1]

The chapter heading that Teresa gives for Chapter 14 is worth noting:

“Begins to explain the second degree of prayer in which The Lord now starts to give the soul a more special kind of delight. Explains how this experience is supernatural.”

At the beginning of paragraph two she puts it like this: *“Here the soul begins to be recollected and comes upon something supernatural because in no way can it acquire this through any efforts it may make”. Another explanation she gives at the beginning of Chapter 15: *“This quietude and recollection is something that is clearly felt through the satisfaction and peace bestowed on the soul, along with great contentment and calm and a very gentle delight in the faculties”.**

I have underlined the principle ideas and many words that we meet over and over again in Teresa’s teaching on this grade of prayer. We are at the beginning of contemplative or supernatural prayer. The two most important terms she uses are **Prayer of Quiet** and **Recollection**. These are two terms Teresa associates with this stage of prayer but she is not consistent in her use of them and it can be difficult to define what she means by them.

Prayer of Quiet: This is the name for the type of prayer the person gradually becomes aware of at this stage of their spiritual growth. It is characterised by many of the words I have underlined above. The most important point about it is that the person can do nothing to bring it about or prolong it. It is a manifestation of the grace of God in the soul and is pure gift. *“This satisfaction takes place in its intimate depths, and the soul doesn’t know where the satisfaction comes from or how, nor frequently does it know what to do or what to desire or what to ask for. It seems it has found everything at once and doesn’t know what it has found”. [L 14:6]*

Recollection: This word seems to have two uses in Teresa’s writings. It is the most advanced or mature form of prayer we can achieve with our own efforts and which with the grace of God becomes the preparation for contemplative prayer. Other times “recollection” is the beginning of contemplative prayer and the word is almost synonymous with “prayer of quiet”. In other words

“Recollection” is the stage of prayer before “Prayer of Quiet” and other times the term is used for the prayer that is the fruit or consequence of the experience she calls “Prayer of Quiet”.

Teresa struggled greatly in her own spiritual journey when God began to grant her these favours. She will tell us when she takes up the story of her life again in chapter 23, see especially paragraph 2. Here she tells us how she began to experience this prayer, how sure she was that it was from the Lord. She also tells us about her fear of being deceived and her difficulty in finding anyone who understood her. Finally she tells us that the main sign that this was from God is the growth in the virtues: “*I came out of prayer much improved and strengthened.*” [L23:2]. This is a principle Teresa uses throughout her spiritual writings for discerning if an experience is from God – we know by the results or fruits; growth in humility, charity, desire that all praise the Lord, etc.

These chapters 14 & 15 are her own experience and she will write about this prayer a number of other times in her writings, on different occasions and from a variety of perspectives. The most important are: Way of Perfection chapters 30 and 31, Interior Castle 4th dwelling places, Spiritual Testimonies 59 and Meditation on Song of Songs chapter 4. This gives us a sense of how important this is for Teresa. She struggles to understand this vital stage of spiritual growth and sees the great need that she and many others have for an explanation. Teresa is writing what would have helped her at this critical stage of her spiritual growth.

Teresa expresses how critical a clear explanation of this prayer is in paragraphs 10 and 11 of Chapter 14: these paragraphs are addressed directly to God.

These words from Teresa’s Meditations on the Song of Songs [4:3] perhaps sum up for us this great gift of God: “In this friendship (for the Lord now shows the soul that He loves it in so particular a way that there is nothing separating the two) great truths are communicated to the soul. For this light that dazzles the soul, since it is not understood, makes one see the vanity of the world. The soul doesn’t see the good Master who teaches it, although it understands that He is with it. But it is left so well instructed, with such great effects and fortitude in the virtues, that it doesn’t know itself afterward; nor would it want to do or say anything other than praise the Lord. While in this joy it is so enwrapped and absorbed that it doesn’t seem to be within itself but in a kind of divine intoxication so that it doesn’t know

what it wants or what it says or what it asks for. In sum, it doesn't know itself; but it isn't outside itself to the extent that it fails to understand something of what is going on."