

The Interior Castle, *Study Guide with analysis of selected passages,*

Fr Matt Blake, 2013

Introduction

St.Teresa's Interior Castle gives us a richness of wisdom and insight into the spiritual life. The purpose of these articles is to select short texts that can give helpful insights to the reading of the entire work. It is intended that they be used to help the reading and study of the entire work and not as a substitute for this. They do not set out to provide a summary of the main teaching nor are they to be seen as a selection of the most important sections. Furthermore, while an article will be distributed each month for this year, the articles do not need to be used in any particular order, each stand alone and can be used at meetings, prayer groups, study groups, etc.

Interior Castle: 7th dwelling place, chapter 4, paragraph 12.

It may seem surprising to begin almost at the end of the book, however we must remember that the 7th dwelling place best describes Teresa's own spiritual life at the time of writing this book. This book is a description of the spiritual journey from the perspective of a person living in the 7th dwelling place. This is a place of peace: peace with oneself, one's life, one's circumstances and most importantly peace with God as He really is in one's life and experience [not as I would like Him to be or would expect Him to be!]. Prayer and "ordinary" life are no longer two separate realities – it is now impossible for the person not to be praying and all a person's work, decisions and attitudes have their source in the deepest dwelling place, the place where God lives within the soul. The story of Martha and Mary [Luke 10:38 – 42] has traditionally been interpreted (or misinterpreted!), as a contrast between the active life and the contemplative life – Mary's life, the contemplative life being the "better".

Teresa does not accept this interpretation; for her what matters is service, "to have the strength to serve".

Questions for reflection and/or discussion

1. Am I familiar with the inner conflict between work/activity/noise and prayer/contemplation/silence?
2. How do I deal with this apparent conflict in my life?
3. How can I use Teresa's teaching to help others in their struggles in prayer?

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.

ti. 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? e.g.. 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.

Interior Castle, First Dwelling Place Chapter 1, para 7

Door of entry to the Interior Castle is Prayer.

1. Teresa begins this Book by giving us the image of the Castle and describing what it is: the image that tells us the dignity and worth of the human person made in the image and likeness of God. The two chapters of the first dwelling place are all about the invitation to enter this castle.

Everyone is invited to enter the castle. There are no pre-conditions: saint/sinner, Christian/non-Christian, believer/non-believer, - there is no human being to whom this invitation is not given. A person's past life is no obstacle to entry.

3. Conversion is not a pre-condition; it is a fruit of entry. Those who are in the castle are constantly invited to deeper and deeper conversion.

ti. Prayer is the door to enter – if we want to enter we must begin to pray, or at least want to pray or be trying to pray [it is sometimes difficult for us to know if we are praying or not].

5. There is no particular type of prayer. However the more one enters into this dwelling place, the more one is called to reflect on one's prayer and consider more deeply the God to whom one's prayer is addressed.

6. The greatest gift given to us by God in this dwelling place is truth and self-knowledge. The truth of who God is and the truth of oneself – this leads to a mature self-knowledge.

7. This dwelling place brings us face to face with the reality of sin: our own sinfulness and the reality of sin in the world in which we live. This is a consequence of the deeper freedom the person is living. We must confront the truth that freedom can be misused. All sin is a misuse of the freedom God gives us – the more we grow in freedom, the greater is the awareness of the potential to misuse it.

8. Teresa time and time again, in her writings, speaks of herself as a "sinner" yet we are never given a list of her "crimes". She is not speaking about sins committed but of her ever deepening consciousness of her state of sinner and the wonderful gift that God's mercy is. The greatest freedom God gives is the freedom not to sin – this is pure mercy, the saint knows this better than anyone.

9. Those who dwell in the other six dwelling places must make frequent visits to the first dwelling place because we are all constantly called to deeper conversion.

1ti. Once we enter this dwelling place we are given a guide, the guide is Jesus Christ [cf. Chapter 2 No. 11 "focus one's eyes on Jesus Christ"]. Jesus will be with us in each dwelling place. Look out for how Teresa describes Jesus' role in each dwelling place.

11. True humility is the first of the many fruits of this dwelling place. This is indispensable for all who will answer the call to enter the next dwelling places.

Questions:

A. Teresa's teaching in this dwelling place challenges the prevailing understanding of;

- God
- Prayer
- Sin

What is the prevailing understanding of God, prayer and sin in our Church today and does Teresa' teaching challenge this also?

B. If we are to pray well we must be willing to be changed by prayer. Do we truthfully see prayer as a life changing reality?

C. Some people see the Church of today as a Church that is living in Teresa's 1st dwelling place [A place of truth, invitation and opportunity but also great challenge – we must say "yes" to the full truth of this challenge].

Do you agree?

Interior Castle: Second and Third Dwelling Places

Text: The Third Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paras 6 to 7 [Matthew 19:16 – 22]

Having lived in the first dwelling place for a time the person feels the call of God to a deeper commitment. These two dwelling places could be called the “vocation stage”. Looked at from the perspective of the Gospels, this is the call of the first disciples and their commitment to living with Jesus and accompanying him in his ministry. The characteristics of the second dwelling place are: prayer, sacraments, Christian living, vocation, fight against temptation and sin, struggle for detachment, etc. In other words the second dwelling place is the time when the person makes a deep commitment to the following of Jesus Christ and does all the “right Christian things”. In the third dwelling place all starts to change. Teresa uses the gospel story of the rich young man to illustrate this stage of the Christian journey.

1. The rich young man has done all the “right things” throughout his life but is unhappy. He cannot go on living as he is but does not know what to do. This is the stage when marriages and/or relationships break up, people give up on their faith, leave priesthood or religious life, become disillusioned with vocation or Carmelite Order, etc. It is a pattern well known to us all.

2. What is really happening here is that the person is being called to a deeper level of commitment. The rich young man in the gospel cannot see this: he relies totally on externals – his wealth to give him happiness in this life and his “good living of his religion” to give him happiness in the next life.

3. Jesus is calling the rich young man to something “new” and “different” – relationship, a relationship not based on externals [in my control!] but one based on love. The young man misinterprets what Jesus is saying and “walks away sad”.

ti. This is the stage when we often misinterpret what Jesus is saying. The third dwelling place is “crisis time” and we fall into the trap of seeing it as negative. Jesus is asking the rich young man to trust Him but trust implies the letting go of some control and the young man cannot do this.

5. In the third dwelling place Jesus is detaching us from the control we like to exercise over our spiritual lives – the closer we come to Him the more we must hand over. Jesus is taking over and drawing us closer to Him and we are resisting and protesting.

6. The most important virtue at this stage is humility – the humility to accept life as it really is; not how I would like it to be or think it should be or had planned it to be. God is closer but it feels like he is further away, progress is being made but it seems like I have gone backwards, Jesus is inviting me into a closer relationship with Him but it seems like He is not helping or has rejected me.

7. This is a critical time in the work of formation and spiritual guidance. Now is the time for perseverance and courage. This is the time to take a radical decision to follow Jesus and to stick to that decision and never be swayed by circumstances, events or set-backs.

8. “Thy will be done not mine” this is the prayer of this 3rd dwelling place.

Points for discussion

- a. This is the critical stage in the development of human relationships and also in our relationship with God. How can Teresa' wisdom be best used to help us?
- b. Can you identify the "3rd dwelling place" in your own life? What are its challenges?
- c. Teresa's teaching here is vitally important and could change many peoples' lives. How can we explain it well and make it better known?
- d. Many peoples' spiritual lives have become trapped or imprisoned somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd dwelling places: good people but have become sad, disillusioned or angry, and are at best just going through the motions of their religious lives or at worst have given up altogether – how can they be helped?
- e. A misinterpretation or misunderstanding of this stage of human and spiritual development is the cause of so much bad decision making. Wise decision making is so necessary for progress in spiritual life!
- f. Our image of God and how we think He works in our lives is challenged here. Can we accept this new, incomprehensible and disconcerting image of God?

Interior Castle Fourth Dwelling Place - Chapter 3, Para 2.

“A recollection that also seems to be supernatural because it does not involve being in the dark or closing the eyes, nor does it consist in any exterior thing, since without first wanting to do so, one does close one’s eyes and desire solitude. It seems that without any contrivance the edifice is being built for this prayer.” [no.1]

These words from the first paragraph of this chapter give us a sense of the type of prayer Teresa is speaking about in the tith dwelling place. This is prayer that is totally a work of God, it is pure gift and the person is gradually being awakened to its existence. She uses a variety of terms and various images to convey the message that everything is changing and that God is now gradually and subtly taking over. It is the God of the Bible, King and Good Shepherd, whose presence, word and action, we discover in this very blessed room.

1. We become “bible people” through the following of Jesus and the living of a life of prayer. We begin to think in a biblical way and discover a deeper familiarity with biblical figures and biblical imagery. What the bible reveals is happening more and more in the depths of the person.

2. The Shepherd’s whistle is the important image here. The whistle is subtle, silent and mysterious. Only with God’s grace can it be heard and understood. “Before one begins to think of God these people are already inside the castle and I do not know in what way or how they heard their shepherd’s whistle. It was not through the ears because nothing is heard ...one senses a gentle drawing inwards”. [no.3]

3. The whistle, the word, the voice has the power to change lives because it is coming from the 7th dwelling place, from Christ Himself. However we have no control and very little understanding of that change.

ti. Only Jesus can teach us to recognise His voice – we learn through listening to Him. This is the beginning of a new and deeper listening – a listening that is total gift, we can do nothing to learn it or bring it about; yet at the same time everything that has been lived and learned up until now is a preparation for this.

5. The person in this dwelling place feels a strong desire for silence and solitude – often in the midst of some of the most challenging and difficult circumstances of human life. External circumstances do not contribute to this silence; neither can they take it away: in other words, it is not a silence that can be created by “ideal” human circumstances, neither can it be taken away by “adverse” circumstances.

6. In this stage of transition and growth there is a pulling away from the things of this world [in desire, if this is not possible in reality] and a growing detachment and inner freedom.

7. The spiritual life is a work of God, not a human enterprise – up until now this is only known as a theory, now it is beginning to be experienced as reality. The Kingdom that God/King is ruling, the sheep that God/ Shepherd is caring for, is within me. It is my life and it is happening now, has always been happening, and nothing is going to compromise it or stop it.

8. A practical question arises here: What must I do? Must I change my way of living? This is a time to continue doing what one has always been doing. Everything learned in the first three dwelling places still applies and the person is returning to these regularly. In this dwelling place a deeper love is being learned, God is the teacher – the person is learning to listen and respond to Him. “The soul’s progress does not lie in thinking much but in loving much” – this is the teaching of the tith dwelling place.

9. Teresa is attempting to explain the double movement of this Book: “The soul enters within itself” and “the soul rises above itself” and she is pleased with her explanation: “I don’t think I have ever explained it as clearly as I have now”. This book is about the shepherd’s whistle [the voice of Jesus] calling and leading his sheep [people/souls] back to their dwelling place [the centre where Jesus is]. The tith dwelling place is the crucial turning point of this journey.

Points for discussion:

The tith dwelling place is critical for the understanding of the whole book. Why? Discuss!

- What do you find most encouraging in this part of the book?
- Change, Loss of Control, Lack of Understanding, Entry into Unknown – this is the tith Dwelling Place: Am I open to it????
- Is the experience of reading the Interior Castle taking you back to the scriptures?

Interior Castle. Fifth Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paragraph No. 2.

Teresa begins the 5th dwelling place by sharing her difficulty and reluctance to explain these dwelling places and by praying for the Lord's help: "O Sisters, how can I explain the riches and treasures and delights found in the fifth dwelling places?... there is no knowing how to speak of them, neither is the intellect capable of understanding them nor can comparisons help in explaining them....Send light from heaven, my Lord that I may be able to enlighten these, your servants so that they may not be deceived."

1. Teresa begins by telling us that there are "only a few who fail to enter this dwelling place". We should not be surprised by this statement. All who seriously live Christianity are destined to grow into this place of healing, transformation and Union with God.

2. However there are degrees and some people do not experience some of the things she speaks about; "some do no more than reach the door". There is no serious following of Jesus Christ that can avoid this place.

3. All Carmelites are called to prayer and contemplation – here she tells us the purpose of this and the inevitable point of arrival of this journey. Here she urges her sisters [and all Carmelites] to live our vocations well: "be brave in begging the Lord to give us His grace in such a way that nothing will be lacking through our own fault; that He will show us the way and strengthen the soul that it may dig until it finds this hidden treasure". Is she subtly implying that all Carmelites do not do this? Is it possible/easy for Carmelites to stop along the way and accept something less than what the Lord has called us to?

ti. What is the Lord inviting us to? What is this hidden treasure? It is "heaven on earth". In the Lord's Prayer, we pray; "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Wherever the Lord's will is done that is heaven. When our will is totally united with the will of God, then we are in heaven, we have total happiness, peace, joy – this is the treasure our whole lives have been committed to finding.

5. From the first dwelling place our eyes have been fixed on Jesus, he has been accompanying us and we have been following him. A careful reading of No. 12 of this Chapter tells us where we are. The Lord has now placed us in the "wine cellar" [Song of Songs]. Wine in the scriptures is the symbol of God's greatest gifts and blessings and in the life of Jesus it is transformed into his blood. So we are at the Last Supper, our will "has been entirely surrendered to him" Gethsemane, the tomb, and the locked room where he appeared to the disciples. So we are taken on the whole journey of Holy Week.

6. We cannot do any of this by ourselves. It is total gift. "However great the effort we make to do so, we cannot enter. His Majesty must place us there and enter himself into the centre of our soul".

7. In the fifth dwelling place we die and rise with Jesus. We receive the fullness of baptism grace. The "old self" dies and the "new self" rises with Jesus: "It is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God" [No. ti].

8. "Many are called, few are chosen". These words made a profound impact on the young sixteen year old Teresa [see Life 3:1]; they are the very first words of the Gospel to be quoted in Teresa's writings. She is now sixty-two years of age and is using them to inspire and encourage all her readers to do everything possible to prepare themselves to enter these dwelling places [she has spent her life doing this].

9. Entry into these dwelling places is possible for everyone: "He doesn't make it impossible for anyone to buy His riches" .However, entry requires the total commitment of the person according to their situation or state of life: "He is content if each one gives what he has.....whether you have little or much, He wants everything for Himself". [No.3].

1ti. Teresa struggles to explain the "Union with God" that is brought about in this dwelling place and at the same time feels a deep need to explain it for the sake of the reader: "its whole intellect would want to be occupied in understanding something of what is felt". The need for this understanding is one of Teresa's principle motives for writing this book.

Points for discussion:

How do you understand "Union with God"?

Discuss the Carmelite vocation viewed from the 5th dwelling place.

Everyone who has loved knows the demands and possibilities of this place: commitment, self-giving, union of wills, putting others first, etc. Discuss.

Interior Castle. Sixth Dwelling Place: Chapter 1, Paragraphs 1 to 2

In 1569 when Teresa herself was living these sixth dwelling places she wrote her Exclamations or Soliloquies and this prayer from No 17 of this work gives us an insight into the prayer of a person entering the depths of these dwelling places: *“That this I [the Ego/false self] may now die and The Other [Christ] live in me who is greater than I and for me be greater than me, that I may serve Him; that He may live and give me life; that He may reign and I be his slave, that my soul does not desire another freedom. How can it be freedom if one is distant from the Most High?”*

In the sixth dwelling place the Lord answers this prayer, only He can bring this about and Teresa is going to explain some of the signs or evidence that He is doing it and give us some guidance for living through the challenges of this experience. Entering these dwelling places is total gift of God [a person can do nothing to bring it about] and the correct response is service: *“You must note that greater glory is not merited by receiving a great number of these favours; rather, on the contrary the recipients of these favours are obliged to serve more since they have received more – there are many holy persons who have never received one of these favours and others who receive them but are not holy”.*

Teresa prays that His Majesty and the Holy Spirit may move her pen so that she may explain something of these dwelling places. Here God lavishes his greatest gifts on the soul and completes his work of healing and transformation so as to prepare the person to enter the seventh dwelling places [the fullness of human and Christian maturity]. This is a long, painful and mysterious stage of the journey of growth and so the person needs wise guidance and encouragement. She sets the scene for us in her short opening paragraph of just five lines.

1. *“Let us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, speak of the sixth dwelling places”,...*

Teresa clearly wants to speak of these dwelling places, in fact she is very determined to speak of them, we could even say that the rest of the book is a preparation for speaking about these sixth dwelling places – because from her experience this is what her readers most need. These chapters will give testimony to the deepest, most mysterious, most fruitful and at times most painful gifts that the Lord bestows on his most favoured souls on the spiritual journey.

2. *“...where the soul is now wounded with love for its Spouse...”*

We are at the stage of total commitment but not yet complete union: *“Now the soul is fully determined to take no other spouse. But the Spouse does not look at the soul’s great desires that the betrothal take place, for He still wants it to desire this more”.* (paragraph 2) In these words we can feel the soul’s pain and get a sense of her feeling of total helplessness.

3. *“...and strives for more opportunities to be alone...”*

This does not necessarily mean places of solitude, peace, tranquillity and no disruptions – though this would be great! It is the solitude of the heart, no other love but God alone. In the midst of greatest noise, suffering, work, etc. the heart is always desiring God alone.

4. *“...and in conformity with its state...”*

This means that the sixth dwelling places must be lived in conformity with whatever one's state in life is (marriage, priesthood, religious life, single life, parenthood, etc.) and committing oneself to the obligations and responsibility of one's life. It also means that one's obligations and responsibilities are no obstacle to the gifts and blessings God wishes to give here.

5. *"...to rid itself of everything that can be an obstacle to this solitude."*

Only the grace of God working in the soul can do this. The obstacles are now very deep within and the process of healing, liberation and transformation will be painful and misunderstood. In this chapter Teresa gives examples or symptoms of this work of God and the challenges they bring: False praise or adulation, blame or accusations, illness, anxiety about past sins, feeling of distance from God.

Through any, or all, of these God can bring about his work but the challenge and pain facing the soul can be unbearable:

From paragraph 9 *"Many are the things that war against it with an interior oppression so keen and unbearable that I do not know what to compare this experience to if not to the oppression of those who suffer in hell, for no consolation is allowed in the midst of this tempest."*

From paragraph 12 *"Our great God wants us to know our own misery and that He is King and this is very important for what lies ahead."*

For reflection and discussion:

What do you understand by Mysticism?

What does it mean to be "Christian" according to the teaching of Teresa?

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’s 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 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 momentwhoever 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 6th and 7th dwelling places are a celebration of what this “True Friend, Jesus” does in the souls of those He chooses to favour. In the 6th 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 6th 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: 6th 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.
- ti. 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.

Interior Castle. Seventh Dwelling Place

The 7th dwelling place is Teresa's explanation or description of Christian Holiness or to put it in Teresa's own words the "mercies" and "grandeurs" of God – a God whose greatness is without limits and whose works are also without limits [see paragraph 1]. She gives us four images of holiness:

1. Knowledge of the living and active presence of God; Father, Son and Spirit, in the deepest centre of the person – Chapter One.
2. Transformation through relationship with Jesus – Chapter Two.
3. The fullness of human maturity – Chapter Three.
4. A life of service – Chapter Four.

Chapter 1, Paragraph 6.

This paragraph makes it clear that the holy person knows God in a new way. The person does not know more about God [in other words the person does not have secret revelations or superior knowledge] rather what has changed is the "knowing". Teresa, struggling for language, describes it as "an admirable knowledge" or a knowing "through sight" [though not with the eyes of the body or of the soul!]. We must ignore our confusion and incomprehension and hear Teresa's awe and conviction. Teresa is filled with "amazement" at what she now knows and speaks about it with total conviction. Teresa is bearing witness to this truth: "Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments". Teresa goes on to attempt to explain herself in paragraph 7: "Oh, God help me! How different is hearing and believing these words from understanding their truth in this way! Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for the three persons never seem to leave it anymore, but it clearly beholds, in the way that was mentioned, that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it does not know how to explain, because of lack of learning, it perceives this divine company".

The essential points Teresa wants us to remember are the following:

- This is total mercy of God. It is proof of how merciful and generous God is. God reveals Himself through mercy and generosity. The title of the Chapter is significant: "Treats of the great favours God grants souls that have entered the seventh dwelling places".
- The God that one now knows is the God of scripture, of the Gospels – the same God we learned about in the catechism.
- "The essential part of the soul never moves from this room" [par. 10]. Teresa lives the last ten years of her life from this blessed place. Four years later she writes: "The presence of the Three Persons is so impossible to doubt that it seems one experiences what St. John says, that they will make their abode in the soul. God does this not only by grace but also by His presence because He wants to give the experience of this presence." [Palencia 1581]

- The person is not living “outside of themselves” or in some heavenly world. “On the contrary, the soul is more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God”. [par. 8]. Any account of the last ten years of Teresa’s life will prove this!
- Awe, amazement, wonder, worship, praise, is the correct human response to this.

For a fuller understanding of Teresa’s personal experience of the Trinity read her spiritual testimonies of May 29th 1571, June 30th 1571 and Sept. 27th 1572 [No 13, 1ti ti 29 Kieran Kavanagh edition, other editions vary]. The dates of these experiences are important. Teresa’s full awareness of the 7th dwelling place begins with her experience of the Spiritual Marriage November 18th 1572 [7th dwelling place chapter 2]. Therefore the first two chapters of the 7th dwelling place follow the chronology of Teresa’s own life experience. She is witnessing to the “grandeurs” and “mercies” of God in her life and how God gradually, in His time, made her aware of these.

For reflection:

What does it mean to live a mature, holy, Christian life?

The relationship between “spirituality” and “everyday living”.

The relationship between “God as experienced in our spiritual lives” and “God as we learned about him in catechism.”

Seventh Dwelling Place, Chapter 2

Read Teresa's Spiritual Testimony of November 18th, 1572 [No. 31, Kieran Kavanagh edition]. This is a very important experience for Teresa. She now becomes aware of the full reality of the "Seventh Dwelling Place" and everything she says, writes and does for the last ten years of her life is said, written and done in the light of this reality. Almost exactly five years later, November 1577, she is writing her account of the seventh dwelling place – once more she is in the presence of John of the Cross, who will be arrested and imprisoned only days after this book is finished.

We are now in the deepest and most mysterious dwelling place of the human soul – the place where God dwells and bestows his most profound graces and blessings. In the first chapter she has spoken about the indwelling of the Trinity in the human soul, now the focus is on Jesus Christ. The highest point of the spiritual life is the discovery or revelation that "our life is Christ" – the two lives become one, the life of Christ and the life of the person living the fullness of the life of grace. This is what Teresa lives during the last ten years of her life. This is the closest we can come to understanding the inner life she is living. However we must never read it without remembering the external circumstances she is living at time of writing: the book of her LIFE is with the Inquisition, she has been ordered to stop her work of founding, she and her closest collaborators are suffering greatly from threats, uncertainty, opposition and false accusations. This is the context in which she writes the Interior Castle and especially this very important chapter. How is Teresa going to speak about this? She will speak from personal experience, she is a witness to what Jesus is doing in her. She speaks with wonder and awe of the unfolding of this mystery in her. She uses the language and symbolism of St. Paul [Paul speaks of this from personal experience, he has no language to use, he is writing before the Gospels or any other part of the New Testament is written, so he must "invent" a language to speak of what Jesus Christ is doing in him]. Both Paul and Teresa are writing autobiography – autobiography that becomes theology, their personal experience becomes our language to express what cannot be put into words, God's mysterious presence in the depths of human life and experience. That the Life of Jesus and the Life of a human being can become One is the most profound of all mysteries. This is Paul's discovery as he lives Christianity more and more deeply and he tries to express it to his Christian disciples in his letters – he sees clearly that they need to understand it because this is what being Christianity is all about.

Many times in her writings Teresa quotes or refers to these words of St. Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me". [Gal 2:20] She is now living these words in their fullness and is trying to express this reality in words. She also knows that many of her sisters, and others who have shared their spiritual lives with her, are also living this; hence the great need to explain.

"Do you know what it means to be truly spiritual? It means becoming the slaves of God. Marked with his brand, which is that of the cross." [chapter 4, no.8] We are now at the summit of the spiritual life. When Teresa wrote this, for greater emphasis, she drew the cross or nail – the gift given at the Spiritual Marriage, the sign of permanence! On the cross

Jesus gives himself totally and permanently to humanity, now Teresa [and all truly spiritual people] give themselves totally and permanently to Jesus.

For reflection/discussion:

The term “Spiritual Marriage” is a difficult one for us. How do you understand the reality it is trying to express?

The “summit” of the spiritual life can only be understood and explained with reference to the cross. How do we explain this? For Teresa **Prayer**, and one’s relationship with **Jesus**, are the one reality [to grow in prayer is to grow in relationship with Jesus]. True Christian and Carmelite formation should help us see this – discuss!

Seventh dwelling place: Chapter 3

In the opening paragraph Teresa sets the scene: “this little butterfly has already died, with supreme happiness for having found repose and because Christ lives in it. Let us see what life it lives, or how this life differs from the life it was living. For from the effects, we shall see if what was said is true.”

In this Chapter the focus is on the person who has changed and matured, who has been transformed in Christ and is living a “new life”. We will know this is true by the effects and so Teresa concentrates on the effects. Let us look at some of these effects.

1. **Forgetfulness of self** [Para.2]. Now the ego, false self, self-interested self, has disappeared and the person now lives a life totally centred on “procuring the honour of God”. We are reminded of the words spoken by our Lord to Teresa on the occasion of the spiritual marriage [Nov. 18th 1572] “My honour is yours and yours Mine”.

Note the clarification in Para.3; “Don’t think by this that a person fails to remember to eat or sleep and do all that he is obliged to in conformity with his state in life. We are speaking of interior matters”.

2. **Desire to suffer** [Para.4]. Note how important the word “desire” is in this chapter! This paragraph needs careful reading – the characteristics of this desire to suffer are: deep peace, total self-giving to the will of God, not disturbed if things go differently to what is expected and total trust in God. “If he desires the soul to suffer, well and good; if not, it doesn’t kill itself as it used to”.

3. **Love of enemies** [Para.5]. We are familiar with this command from the Gospels and we are also aware that it is impossible to fulfil the command by human effort alone. Here the fulfilment of this command is pure grace of God, it is total gift. When the person is persecuted they experience this “deep interior joy” and all the other effects she mentions.

4. **Desire to serve** [Para.6]. She tells us 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 these they can help that the Lord be praised, even though in something very small”.

5. **No fear of death** [Para.7]. This is something Teresa suffered greatly from earlier in her life. [see Life 38:5]

6. **No desire for consolations or spiritual delight** [Para.8]. The reason for this is that “since the Lord himself is present with these souls and it is His Majesty who now lives”.

7. **God’s particular care in communicating with us** [Para.9]. She tells us that if knowledge of this effect was the only gain then all the trials would have been worth it. God is constantly communicating these “touches of love, so gentle and penetrating”.

8. **No experience of dryness or interior disturbance** [Paras. 8 to 10]. This is total gift of God and coming from the depths of the soul, where God Himself dwells. “So in this temple of God, in this His dwelling place, He alone and the soul rejoice together in the deepest silence”. Neither human weakness nor the devil can deceive a person here.

9. **All raptures taken away** [Para.12]. 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.

10. **Gratitude to God and knowledge of their own miseries** [para.14]. The attitude of the Publican – read Luke 18: 9-14.

11. **The Cross is not lacking** [Para.15]. The presence of the cross does not make the person lose peace. It is the sure sign that the person is living the life of Christ.

Points for reflection and discussion:

The nature of Christian holiness: The fullness of union and communion between God and the human being – the new way of living and acting of the Christian who has arrived at this state – the way that God communicates with and through this person.

A mature Christian understanding of: Detachment, suffering, inner freedom, peace, service etc.

Para.13: Pray and reflect upon this paragraph; the scriptural references and the imagery.

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 at the very start of this Study Guide. 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.