

West Regional Day at Boars Hill

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### **The Interior Castle**

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Everything in the Castle begins with the Scriptures, the Word of God – Teresa opens it and *light comes out*. All the dust and cobwebs, the accretions and associations that block and clog the light are brushed off. Aspects of our life that hurt us, for example memories of family conflict, our anger with God: all that is secret and subversive and hidden, is brought to God.

Teresa tells us that Christ is at the heart of the soul, which is a crystal with a nucleus of immense power that belongs to my life and yours.

Nothing ever after will be meaningless. Much psychotherapy and social impetus is around finding meaning, but meaning from externals. Core peace lies deep within our psyche but God knows we are not ready for this knowledge which would ravage us, so we develop self importance outside: a toothbrush in the wrong place causes rage and tantrums; we're not in touch with something inside.

Teresa starts by describing something of immense beauty. Our soul is like a diamond, the mansions are seven concentric rings progressing from outside in, towards the crystal shining in the centre. Teresa starts by facing down who she is on the outside: in the psychological, the emotional and the spiritual terrains. Although quiet prayer is "not done" by women, she wants to bring this way of prayer to the home, to the kitchen.

Teresa has been there, she is coming from real experience. She was the second of twelve children, ten born to her step-mother. Don Alonso, her father, disapproved of her mother reading books about chivalry and love, so Teresa connived with her to read them behind his back. Teresa and her mother, who were very close, knew how to move in a male household. It was a man's world, but it wouldn't be for long!

Teresa knows about death and loss and family conflict. Her mother, who was fifteen when she married, dies aged 33 after a close and virtuous marriage. Five of her brothers die abroad, two brothers have children outside marriage, and Pedro returns home but creates havoc. Lorenzo, her favourite brother, is injured and has two children. Teresa is the Executer after her father dies leaving lots of debts and lots of land. She tries to mediate between rival claims but all the family fortune is finally lost in court battles.

When we are struggling in our lives, within our own families, we wish we could "hold it together" as we imagine Teresa did. But that is not what the *Interior Castle* is about; it is a way of *coping* with life's difficulties. The centre of each one of us is a place of profound illumination and beauty. The key aspect of this crystal is that it is human and warm, it is truth, beauty, intelligence, wisdom; unfolded by the Word of God, the presence of Christ. Jesus told Teresa in a vision, *Find yourself in Me*. The way through is not to go round and round in yourself but to find your place in your family, in your marriage, to find it *in Me!* From the diffuse muddle, gather it all in one place, find a focus. .

Our biggest fear of God is that we will lose ourselves, but in giving myself to Christ I am going to *find* myself. Our biggest mistake is to think that we *believe* what we believe – but we don't! Consent to this belief must be given, without consent we have no choice, it is abuse.

*Find yourself in me* takes away the fear of losing control of life. Abraham and Moses had the fear of commitment as much as we have today. But once we find our fulcrum in Christ, the place which anchors us, we relate differently to that place deep within us.

How do we get inside? Teresa says, stay quiet, do nothing. Take Christ as the only answer to everything. Our consent to this quietening prayer is essential up to the Fourth Mansion. As it was for the rich young man, it is a place of transformation, a place where the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, a place where Teresa's imagery of water reaching the garden is enacted. These stages of watering the garden of our soul demonstrate our active effort to consent to God, to line up our will with that of God.

What stops us? Facing the suffering of truth means I am ready to stay with that which is hurting, to stay with the aspects of myself that seem unforgivable. Just settle and stay quiet. When Moses and the people being led through the desert reached the Red Sea, the people were frightened by the Egyptians chasing them, but Moses was told by God "only be still".

Teresa is calming us down. She tells us to use anything we can do to stay in the presence of God. Inner emotions and temptations are more acute in the sixth castle, where the devil tries to show the person that it is all an illusion. (As the Pharisee said, "I'm fasting twice a week, I do this and do that...")

Teresa sees what is involved in preparation of meeting God at the centre. The crystal is transparent, truthful. In our hidden selves, the secrets that make us who we are, that we think are so important for self survival, are the most destructive. The Desert Fathers said pride is refusing to be honest about what is happening inside us– but we think that is how we survive, how we get along.

It is actually simple: a moment of seeing myself truthfully, in finding myself in Jesus. Christ became sin that I might live. Though he was in the form of God, he emptied himself into the Cross. The Cross is the centre of the crystal. We're afraid of dying but without dying we can't rise.

Jesus became my sin. Jesus knew we were too frightened to approach God – he is in the deepest place of deepest sinfulness. He calls me by my name and says "follow me". As Christ begins to visit me, I realise that all this fear is not necessary. We have an invitation to go deeper. *For forty years I was wearied with these people...* but forty years later I realise I'm still not listening, like the rich young man.

The dwelling places are not a sequence; they are a broad working way for Teresa's nuns. She is telling them how something in the kitchen works. The crystal becomes increasingly transparent. Once the outer ring, the first mansion of the castle, is penetrated, a huge light pours in, the outer skin of the caterpillar has split open.

But the accretions and associations that block the light need to be off-loaded, I can't do this alone. This necessary communion with another is the Church, through confession, spiritual direction etc. As the butterfly moves towards the deeper light it becomes more sensitive. Look at the care some people take of their CD's, their car. Likewise with ourselves: we become aware of the movements of the soul.

Physiotherapists tell us that we do not listen to our bodies when they are sick, so boom! There is a heart attack. The body says "now you are listening!" So we too listen in prayer. High performance people find it difficult to listen to what their bodies are telling them, even more their inner selves; they are at risk of being abandoned in themselves.

The concept of a castle evokes fight, defence, struggling to victory. The images of water, spirit and fountain represent our effort to find natural watering in our relationship with God. The bridal concept in

the Song of Songs relates to the fourth mansion, where the person in their inner dwelling experiences the painful *absence* of the Beloved.

The love of God enters in the measure the love is received in the soul. It comes from love of neighbour, from good works. Awareness of my sinfulness is not self-indulgent or self deprecating.

In summary, the first dwelling place is as above. The second is staying with prayer, steeping the sheets in "blue" for the visitors. Lord, I am going into the Jordan River and doing nothing. The Prodigal Son came home and a ring was put on his finger and his father threw a party, the son did nothing.

The third dwelling place is more of a programme for life. Watch the resistance and be curious without putting yourself down. Consent is purified towards surrender.

The fourth dwelling place is a big transition, as for the rich young man. Jesus reveals his presence and you are lovable. God invites total surrender. The butterfly casts off its shell of egoism.

The fifth dwelling place is that of the silkworm. We are willing to die. People in marriage come near this place and don't know it. The marriage seems dead but in fact it is alive. This is the cusp of seeing the meaning of death and resurrection of Christ. For example, a man with a serious addiction problem has two kids and a broken marriage. He tells his wife that he deeply realises what hurt he has caused her. After years of oblivion, she is amazed that he has this awareness and their lives move forward. We need each other to find the key that lets us in.

The sixth dwelling place is the crucible of love, and the seventh is mystical union.