

## Life Chapters 16 & 17: Third Degree of Prayer [2]

In Chapter 17 Teresa speaks about three types of “Union” within this grade of prayer.

Par. 1 - 3: God now takes over, it is He who waters the garden and wants the soul to rest. She tells us that courage is necessary because this is a dying to self and a total acceptance by the person of everything that God desires. She puts it beautifully in these famous words: *“Here I think it is advisable to abandon oneself completely into the hands of God: If He wants to bring the soul to heaven, it goes; if to hell, it feels no grief since it goes with its God; if its life comes to an end, this it desires; if it lives a thousand years, this too it desires. Let His Majesty treat it as His own - the soul no longer belongs to itself. It is given over entirely to the Lord - it completely overlooks itself”*. The effects are summed up in the third paragraph: the virtues are now stronger - the soul is different but does not know how this happened - it begins to perform great deeds - the humility that remains in the soul is much greater and more profound than in the past - the soul sees more clearly that it did neither little nor much other than consent to the Lord’s favours and embrace them with its will.

Par. 4. Here the will is united [with God]: “It sees clearly” that the will alone is in deep quiet, is held fast and is rejoicing. The intellect and the memory are free to attend to business matters and to works of charity. She uses one of her favourite Gospel passages to illustrate what she means: *“In the prayer of quiet the soul didn’t desire to move or stir, rejoicing in that holy idleness of Mary; and in this prayer it can also be Martha in such a way it is as though engaged in both the active and contemplative life together”*. So this person is engaged in works of charity or business affairs according to their state in life but their heart is united with God in love. They can fully engage in these works but their happiness does not come from the works neither do they desire this happiness because their true peace and happiness comes from the inner union with God - to be with God is their only desire.

The third kind of “union” is summed up in paragraph 5. The will [and the intellect] are united with God but the memory [and the imagination] are free and causing havoc. This is very painful and distressing and Teresa does not know how to deal with it. This is her prayer to God: *“When, my God, will my soul be completely joined together in Your praise and not broken in pieces, unable to make use of itself”*. The good news here is that these thoughts, distractions, afflictions and fantasies can do no harm. Her image is the moths at night - “bothersome and annoying” but can do no harm.

Whether these are three different stages or different dimensions of the one stage is not important. What matters is the wisdom contained in each of these explanations and that those with experience of this prayer will recognise it and be

helped by it. Teresa is tempted to be totally silent but speaks because she sees the need and recognises that God has given her a precious gift.

At the beginning of Chapter 16 Teresa told us: *“The Lord so desires to help the gardener here that He Himself becomes practically the gardener and the one who does everything”*. These two chapters are both a celebration of this and an explanation. About Chapter 16 Teresa tells us: *“This chapter lifts the soul up in the praises of God and brings wonderful consolations to whoever reaches this stage”*. She cannot contain her joy; she sings, shouts, writes poetry, praises God and wants everyone to share her happiness.

As we saw she experienced this prayer five or six years previously but at that time she did not have the grace to explain it. Now she has been given this grace [L16:2]. In 17:5 she gives an important principle: *“For it is one grace to receive the Lord’s favour; another to understand which favour and grace it is; and a third, to know how to describe and explain it”*. In 17:8 she seems to imply that she is writing this for someone [Fr. Garcia!] who has the experience but does not have the insight to know which experience it is or how to explain it.

Teresa sees this stage of prayer and the gift of explaining it as preparation for the fourth degree. Teresa is now living what she will be describing in the next four chapters and we sense her impatience and excitement to take us there. For Teresa the most important grace of this stage is that it sets the person free [or the person dies to all earthly things 16:1] so as to be ready to enter the fourth degree [4<sup>th</sup> way of drawing water]. We need to understand this teaching so that we will know what a great gift of God it is, that we will celebrate it but most importantly that we will see it as a transition and will long to drink the water of the fourth degree. Now the fullness of God’s grace is about to flow.