

QUIET LOVING

The Prayer of Quiet in Teresa of Jesus

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'I sat in the silence and prayed; ... then a veil lifted and I could see' (Ps 73)¹

PRAY. BE PRESENT to the presence of divine love. 'Pray' is a cry of the yearning heart. It is an expression of our deepest reality. We are human beings created in the ecstatic and tranquil embrace of the Trinitarian love that gives and receives love in an eternal making one. Created from the prayer of the Trinity, for prayer, we long to return to this source of infinite peace. This longing for the quiet of the Godhead is at the source of who we are. As our sacred scriptures identify, Jesus longed to go to a quiet place to rest a while with his God, (Mk 6:31). His followers begged 'Lord teach us to pray' (Lk11:1). Grounded in this same source, we are restless until we learn to 'pray without ceasing' (1Thes5:17). We yearn to be who we really are in 'sighs too deep for words' (Rom 8:26). 'Pray' is an evocation, a demand to be true, to fulfill the desire of Jesus that we be 'consecrated in truth' (Jn17:19), one (Jn17:21) in him as he is one in the infinite silence that spoke him into creation. 'To pray' is to surrender in love into a quiet that makes all things one. In this article we will reflect on how Teresa of Avila teaches us to pray.²

When You Pray Go to Your Room

The foundational teaching about prayer uttered by Jesus 'when you pray go to your room' (Mt6:6) takes on a wonderful nuance in Teresa of Jesus, a doctor of the Church and one of the most celebrated guides for the spiritual journey. She blends together this invitation of Jesus for us to go into our heart and encounter him in the centre of the heart,³ and Jesus' words: 'in my Father's house there are many dwelling places' (Jn14:2). In her first book,

*The Book of Her Life*⁴ Teresa describes prayer as 'an intimate sharing between friends... taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us' (L 8.5). This cherished friendship becomes more intimate as we are faithful to entering into our heart, into the inner rooms of our soul.⁵ In her *Interior Castle*,⁶ Teresa envisages the inner depths of our heart or soul as like a glorious, many roomed castle. She shows us how, through prayer, we enter the castle (C2.1.11), learn to turn our eyes towards the centre (C1.2.8) and take the great pilgrimage into the centre of the castle where Jesus, the majestic king of the castle dwells with the Trinity.⁷ Teresa stresses that all we need to do is 'go into solitude and look at Him within oneself, and not turn away from so good a guest' (P28.2). 'I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him' (P 26.3). In the measure you desire him you will find him (P28.3).

Teresa speaks to us in conversational style as she describes the castle as like 'a diamond or very clear crystal' (C1.1.1). It is 'brilliantly shining and beautiful... a pearl from the orient, a tree of life planted in the very living waters of life—that is—in God' (C1.2.1). Although inside the castle are many dwelling places, Teresa focuses on seven, a symbol for perfection. We journey through each dwelling place through contemplation in the prayer of quiet, until we reach the seventh dwelling place of the castle, or the centre of our soul, our home. This inner centre is full of light and love, as it is the dwelling place of the Trinity. In this silent centre of absolute love we commune with God in quiet in the secret silent language of love.

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The Interior Castle

Before we focus on the prayer of quiet that prepares us to dwell in our deep inner centre, one in the quiet waters of Trinitarian love, it is helpful to have an overview of the seven dwelling places of *The Interior Castle* that Teresa illustrates and the prayer that accompanies each dwelling place. In the first three dwelling places of our soul that is like a many roomed castle, Teresa expounds on the early phases of meditation that prepare us for the prayer of quiet. She vividly describes how, though we choose time for prayer, the outer world has an alluring attraction. Because the courtyards are dark and confusing, creeping with the vermin of poisonous distractions, it can look safer for us not to take this journey to the centre and so remain busy with many things. If we step into the second dwelling place, however, there are chambers set apart for prayer. As we learn how to stay in these quiet places within, we hear the voice of Jesus inviting us to come. Desire increases. Prayer becomes more silent.

Teresa then outlines how once we begin to have a routine of prayer, and open the door into the third dwelling places, we cross a threshold. Though we may expect prayer to become more peaceful, because we must de-centre in order to re-centre in Jesus, prayer feels dry. An inner disquiet undermines certainties. Destabilized, there is a great temptation to seek consolations of the past, but no matter what we do, prayer no longer satisfies. In the confusion between a barren ache to have our thirst quenched in waters of love, and the pull to remain active in the world, Teresa advises compassion (C3:2.2). If, then, we compassionately surrender ourselves for the sake of our God, into the unknown way to the centre, faithful to prayer no matter how searing, and risk entering the unfamiliar fourth dwelling place, we begin a new phase of contemplation.

Midway to the centre of our soul, the fourth cycle of dwelling places, marks a major transition into contemplative prayer. This occurs,



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Teresa explains, because we are closer to where Jesus in the Trinity dwells in the centre. These beautiful fourth dwelling places are filled with things to see and understand, but they are delicate, so gracious, that the intellect cannot find a way to explain them. We begin to sense a loving presence far beyond the limits of sensual knowing and intellectual comprehension. Our desire to be one with the centre becomes stronger than external desires. We seek solitude and our capacity for recollecting matures. Recollection, Teresa explains, is the turning within to the presence of Christ in our soul's depths, gathering together all discursive thought, gently drawing inward. 'I have read where it is compared to a hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into its shell,' (C4.3.3) she says. Recollection gradually deepens into the prayer of quiet that is like water gently flowing into our heart through a spring rising from our depths.

The extravagance of the treasures and delights of divine love saturate us in love in the fifth dwelling place, as we experience more absorption and union with God. We come to know irrevocably that God is in the depths of our soul and our soul is in God. There is a certitude remaining in the soul that only God can place there. Teresa uses the captivating image of the life cycle of a silk worm to describe the metamorphosis we experience as we prepare for union. She outlines how the little seed like eggs of the silk worm lie on the leaves of the mulberry tree. When warm weather comes: 'they go about spinning the silk and making some very thick little cocoons in which they enclose themselves. The silkworm which

is fat and ugly, then dies and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes forth from the cocoon.’ (C5.2.2) This transformation from a silk worm to a butterfly encapsulates for Teresa how, in order to reach the centre we must draw opposites together, integrate our memories, weaving and cocoon. The cocoon then transforms into Christ. ‘Once this silk-worm is grown . . . it begins to spin the silk and build the house wherein it will die. I would like to point out that this house is Christ. . . our life is hidden in Christ or in God. . . , or. . . our life is Christ’ (C5.2.5). This being hidden in Christ, dying in Christ, makes us Christ-like. When the butterfly emerges we are ready to enter the sixth dwelling place, until the butterfly dies again as we reach the centre. Prayer unfolds into a silent and still transforming union.

Knowing that ultimately our life is in Christ, in God we become betrothed to Christ as we enter the more silent atmosphere of sixth dwelling places that are very close to the centre. Intoxicated by the love of Christ our spouse, we now strive for more opportunities to be alone. We seek to rid ourselves of everything that is an obstacle to solitude. In Teresa’s words, ‘the beloved makes us desire vehemently by certain delicate means the soul itself doesn’t understand. . . These are impulses so delicate and refined, for they proceed from the very depth within the interior part of the soul.’ (C6.2.1). Teresa continues: ‘This action of love is so powerful that the soul dissolves with desire’ (C6.2.4). Teresa likens this to being enkindled in a brazier of God where a spark sets the soul aflame. Nevertheless, although this enflaming is delightful, because we are not yet totally enflamed, we feel the pain of the wound, for the purifying work of love is not complete. Teresa describes how ‘just as the soul is about to start, the spark goes out and the soul is left with the desire to suffer again the loving desire the spark causes.’ (C6.2.4). The intensity of pain and joy magnifies, nourishes and inspires. Now espoused, we are ready for the spiritual marriage.

Christ, then takes us to the centre into the seventh dwelling places, where the Holy Spirit enkindles us in the union of the spiritual marriage. In this oneness of all in all we become awakened to our capacity to live in the eternal now. We see irrevocably that the Trinity dwells within us in our deepest centre. There is no need to enter any more doors. We simply abide, surrendering into our beloved. Drawn into an infinite becoming one we experience the sublime secret of love and know we are one in the Trinity as the Trinity is one in us. With all our faculties now absorbed in intimate union in Christ, we come to see how in our centre we are infused in the Trinitarian pattern of giving and receiving love. We long to live permanently grounded in this centre of love. Teresa invites us to realize a real living presence of Christ in the Trinity in our soul and to live from this presence in the enkindling depths of Trinitarian union.

With this overview of Christ in the Trinity as the centre of our soul and the dwelling places that surround this centre, we will now concentrate on what Teresa teaches about how we may turn towards this presence and make our home there through the prayer of recollection, the prayer of quiet and the prayer of union that stabilizes our gaze in this centre. First, we will enter into the garden of our own soul and draw on our deep inner wisdom of our experience of the prayer of quiet. Then, we will focus on the waters of love that quench our thirst in the prayer of recollection and see how recollection unfolds into the over-flowing love of the prayer of quiet. Subsequently, we will concentrate on the tranquil union we experience in contemplation when we come home to the centre of our soul one in the Trinity by looking at a person’s reflection on an experience of prayer. Finally we will draw out implications for living life from this centre of quiet love. We do this from a place of humility and gaze with Teresa through the mirror of humility. She warns: ‘Without it (humility) everything goes wrong’ (CI.2.8).⁸

***Teresa's Way of Prayer: Bathing
in Waters of Love***

In order to awaken the eye of the heart of her readers, so that we, her readers, may identify with the felt sense of what Teresa teaches about prayer, Teresa uses her much loved simile of water (C4:2.2), to signify the flowing love of God within our soul. Vividly, she evokes our imagination to expand and hold together the array of biblical allusions to water such as a deer thirsting for running streams (Ps62), come to the water (Is55.1), the dark waters of Christ's baptism (Mk1:9-11), the living water of the I am (Jn4:10), the healing waters of Bethzatha (Jn5:2), the river of life flowing from the throne of God (Rev22:1) and the beauty of fountains, streams, gardens and pools of the Spanish landscape. In the *Way of Perfection* she describes the journey into the Trinity as the spiritual road we take 'until God engulfs the soul and gives it to drink abundantly of the fount of living water' (P42.5).

We see how these waters of contemplation give life and bring us to union in her first book, *Life*, where Teresa describes the soul as a garden with Christ the gardener. She outlines four ways in which the garden of our soul is watered: 'by taking the water from a well (See L11-13); or by a water-wheel and aqueducts (See L14-15), or by a stream or a brook (L16-17), or by heavy rain, when the Lord waters it with no labor of ours' (L18-19). Teresa delights in these sweet life giving waters as she sings in her *Soliloquies*:

O compassionate and loving Lord of my soul!
 You likewise say: Come to me all who thirst,
 for I will give you drink....(S9.1)
 O life who gives life to all!
 Do not deny me this sweetest water
 That you promise to those who want it.
 I want it Lord and I beg for it,
 and I come to you.
 Don't hide yourself Lord, from me,
 since you know my need
 and that this water is the true medicine
 for the soul wounded in love for you (S9.2).
 Teresa awakens our desire to be quenched with

the waters of divine love through contemplation, where all words become absorbed into the quiet waters of Trinitarian love.

Within this awareness of the waters of contemplation that flow through our soul drawing us to quiet, we will now focus more intently on what Teresa teaches us about the *Prayer of Quiet* and the phases of recollection, quiet and union.

1. Being Quenched in Quiet Waters—The Prayer of Recollection

Teresa's way of prayer is one of presence, of being fully present to God in our prayer, just as God is fully present to us.⁹ She teaches us how to be present within, to gaze upon Christ who dwells in our heart. Her teaching about recollection gives us a way of silencing our body, our mind, our soul, beginning with the outer world and moving within, from body to spirit to the inner depths of our soul. For Teresa, recollection is a collecting together or knitting all our senses into a single thread, to focus the gaze of our heart on Christ who dwells in our centre.¹⁰ At the beginning of this journey to the centre, recollection feels like carrying water with a bucket. Teresa explains how this involves a lot of work on our part, and we tire easily. It takes patience and time to 'get accustomed to caring nothing about seeing or hearing, to practicing hours of prayer and thus to solitude and withdrawal' (L11.9), she says. Act like a wise bee and enter the beehive to make honey and leave the intellect to wander aimlessly alone,(L15.6) she advises. As we have seen, in her *Interior Castle*, Teresa also likens recollection to a hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into its shell (C4.3.3). In the *Way of Perfection*, Teresa explains how in recollection, 'the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God' (P 28.4).¹¹ She qualifies how this: 'is not a silence of the faculties; it is an enclosure of the faculties in the soul' (P 29.4) It is a closing and enclosing. This closing and enclosing awakens the spiritual sight of the eye of our soul, (See P 28) as in

Ephesians (1:18) ‘may the eyes of your soul be enlightened’. Through recollecting we come to be comfortable and at home within our soul.

As time passes, the prayer of recollection feels more like Teresa’s second water of prayer, where we now turn the crank of a water wheel with our arms to draw water up from the well. The water then flows through aqueducts into our heart. Earlier in her *Life*, Teresa likens this phase of the prayer of quiet to water being driven by a waterwheel, emphasizing how the prayer of quiet is a gift of infused grace and cannot be attained by our efforts alone. In this prayer:

the water is higher and so labour is much less than that required in pulling it up from the well. I mean that the water is closer because grace is more clearly manifest to the soul. In this prayer the faculties are gathered within so as to enjoy the satisfaction with greater delight. But they are not lost, nor do they sleep. Only the will is occupied, in such a way that, without knowing it, it becomes captive; it merely consents to God allowing him to imprison it as one who well knows how to be the captive of its lover. Oh Jesus and my Lord! How valuable is your love to us here! It holds our love so bound that it doesn’t allow it the freedom during that time to love anything else but You (L14.2).

The water flows gently with very little work on our part. And we obtain more water. It is as if our senses are acting like channels, where grace can flow gently and freely enabling the water of contemplation to saturate the soul. As recollection becomes more organic, with silence and stillness naturally flowing through our sensual faculties of seeing, smelling, touching, tasting and listening, into the spiritual senses of our soul, we become centered in Christ and filled with his love. We are bound and captivated by his love. Once recollection becomes natural and we gather together our faculties and enclose them in our soul as a matter of course, very subtle changes begin to take place, until our mind and heart become more and more silent and still, infused in loving presence. The prayer of recollection unfolds into the prayer of quiet.¹²

2. Over-flowing Love—The Prayer of Quiet

The waters of love overflowing and infusing our soul in love through commitment to the prayer of recollection, soften the soil in the garden of our heart and prepare us to allow Jesus the gardener to take full charge of our soul. This prepares the way for the third way of collecting water that Teresa portrays in *Life*, where our soul is watered by a river or spring. Here the waters of grace rise up to the throat of our soul because we are no longer moving (L16.1). She then mixes her images and says how this deeper more all encompassing quiet is like ‘a person holding a candle and for whom little is left before dying the death that is desired’ (L16.1). The quiet is so quiet that we feel dead to anything that would disturb us. In her *Interior Castle*, Teresa likens the quality of this quiet to being like a cistern being filled noiselessly by a spring rising from its depths. The trough fills and overflows with water until it forms a large stream (C4.2.3). Prayer feels like being quietly filled with waters of love from the infinite source of the grace within us, without any effort on our behalf. This filling to overflowing occurs when our senses and spirit are recollected over the divine dwelling place within us. Teresa explains:

The water comes from its own source which is God... And since his Majesty desires to do so ...he produces this delight with the greatest peace and quiet and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves. ...the delight fills everything; this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body. (C4.2.4)

This inflow of divine love imbues us in quiet. Soaked in these quiet waters of love we experience peace, calm, and sweetness penetrating within and without. These rising waters of encircling presence imbue us in quiet, as their love captures our desire for God in such a way that we long to be imprisoned in solitude with the one we love. As the quiet of infinite silence, stillness and rest of the Creative One intoxicates our will and breathes life,

beauty and connection into the chaos of depthless abyss, we seek more time for prayer. In the quiet the soothing stirrings of the waters of divine love, whose ecstatic loving culminates in rest, makes us tranquil and serene. These still waters fill and expand as they dilate our being and make us one with God.

Teresa gives a more formal definition of the prayer of quiet in the *Way of Perfection*.¹³

...the soul enters into peace or, better, the Lord puts it at peace by his presence...all the faculties are calmed. The soul understands in another way, very foreign to the way of the exterior senses, that it is now close to its God and that not much more would be required for it to become one with him in union. This is not because it sees him with the eyes either of the body or of the soul... the soul fails to understand how it understands, but it sees that it is in the kingdom at least near the King who will give the kingdom to the soul...The state resembles an interior and exterior swoon (P 31.2).

Notice how both descriptions stress that this inflow of the grace of quiet contemplation is a gift, bestowed by the presence of Christ. This presence floods us in waters of contemplation and we experience peace, a peace the world cannot give. Teresa explains: 'The faculties are still. They wouldn't want to be busy. ...The will is the one who is captive here.... The intellect wouldn't want to understand more than one thing, nor would the memory want to be occupied with anything else' (P31.3). When we are quiet for a long time our will is united with God. Our desire and the divine desire become fused, as one (P31.4). Very close to God in quiet we are as we are. And this fusion of desire joins our active and contemplative dimensions, the Martha and Mary of ourselves into harmony (P31.5). The quiet overflows into our life in all that we are and all that we do. The one thing necessary for us is simply to be present, as we surrender into the quiet waters of love. Our detachment from all that disturbs, scatters and separates as we surrender into love, begins to blind the eye of our soul. We become intuitively aware in our spirit that this infinite source of quiet really is in the depths

of our own soul.

In her *Meditations on the Song of Songs* Teresa extols the silent music of this quiet: 'I call this prayer 'quiet' she says, because 'of the calm caused in all the faculties...it's as though there were poured into the marrow of one's bones a sweet ointment with a powerful fragrance...God enters the soul and does so with the most wonderful sweetness. God pleases it and makes it happy (MSg4.2). The quiet seeps into the marrow of our bones and transform us. Teresa continues to describe how we feel left suspended in the divine arms, leaning on that sacred side of those divine breasts. (MSg4.4). We feel 'completely drenched in the countless grandeurs of God' (MSg4.4). Calm, intoxicated by divine fragrance, drenched through and through in quiet, our Beloved is preparing us for union.

Teresa speaks of her third water of prayer which identifies later phases of the prayer of quiet as like flowing water from a river or stream whereby:

the garden is irrigated, with much less labour, although some labour is required to direct the flow of the water. The Lord so desires to help the gardener that he himself practically becomes the gardener and the one who does everything. This prayer is a sleep of the faculties: the faculties neither fail entirely to function nor understand how they function. The consolation, the sweetness, and the delight are incomparably greater than that experienced in the previous prayer. The water of grace rises up to the throat of this soul since such a soul can no longer move forward; nor does it know how, nor can it move backward. It would desire to enjoy the greatest glory (L16.1).

This is a deep, wide all-encompassing quiet where we are content to allow Christ to be the gardener and to respond to his intimate presence as he tends our soul. In her *Interior Castle* Teresa quotes: *Dilatasti cor meum* 'You have expanded my heart' (C4.2.5)¹⁴ to explain. These boundless waters of grace originate from the deepest inner centre of our heart, expand our heart and flood us in joy. Teresa emphasizes how this spring is not outside our self

but rises from somewhere, deeper than the heart, ‘from another part still more interior, as from something deep. I think this must be the centre of the soul’ (C4.2.5), she says. Notice how the placement of the spring is deep within us not outside us. The sleeping of our faculties creates a stillness that opens and leaves the spring free to flow. The centre is beginning to be firmly established in us.

This dilation occurs, Teresa explains: ‘because the heavenly water begins to rise from the spring...that is deep within us, it swells and expands our whole interior being, producing ineffable blessings.’(C4.2.6). We do not understand how or why, but we experience a fragrance ‘as though there were in our interior a brazier giving off sweet smelling perfumes. No light is seen, nor is the place seen where the brazier is; but the warmth and the fragrant fumes spread through the entire soul...and even... the body shares in them’ (C4.2.6). Waters of grace flow in, and then out of our soul, intoxicating us in the divine fragrance. Dark, fragrant, warm, love quiets. Teresa is speaking metaphorically, of course, to impart to us the spiritual delight that we experience when our will is completely absorbed in the spring of divine love.

This quiet affects our whole being and flows to the outer courtyards of our whole bodily demeanor. As our will becomes more captivated by Christ our memory and mind also are inebriated until recollection infuses all that is scattered in us into union and we passively allow the gardener of our soul to care for the garden. If our mind becomes distracted like doves flitting around a fountain we gently recollect and draw it to the source of the fountain. Teresa observes how the soul no longer desires to ‘undertake any labour, but only to take its delight in the first fragrance of the flowers. In any one of these visits, brief as its duration may be, the Gardener, being, as He is, the Creator of the water, gives the soul water without limit’ (P27). All we are invited to do is receive the gift and dwell in the quiet.

The limitless waters of the ever loving Creator transform, unite and expand our vi-

sion and become womb-like as they enable transforming union. The quiet is more all consuming, until it feels like our heart is awake but we are asleep. Teresa explains in this union our faculties:

... are asleep... - truly asleep - fast asleep, to the things of the world and to ourselves. As a matter of fact, during the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn’t understand how or what it loves or what it would want. In sum it is one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus the death is a delightful one (C5.1.3).

This quiet of sleep, this delicious death, this absorption in God is so all encompassing that it is as if we are not breathing. All our faculties are suspended feeling nothing but an infusion in God. Our seeing becomes naked, dark, blind spirit seeing. Dead in Christ we belong entirely to God. This is the death of the silkworm dying to old ways of relating in order to form a cocoon. This death marks a turning point in shifting our vision and energy into the centre.

3. Tranquil Waters—Union in the Trinity

The gradual surrendering of all that we are into the total love of the gardener of our soul unfolds into the mystical marriage.¹⁵ In *Life* Teresa elucidates: ‘It’s like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other’ (L27.10). Notice how this is a mutual glance between two lovers, not a one way glance. Well beyond the eyes of our body, or soul, this glance unites and melts. It soaks through us to the core of who we are. It is like Teresa’s fourth water of prayer where we are saturated in rain from heaven:

This water from heaven often comes when the gardener is least expecting it. True, in the beginning it almost always occurs after a long period of mental prayer. The Lord comes to take this tiny bird from one degree to another and to replace it in the nest so it may have repose. Since

he has seen it flying about for a long time, striving with the intellect and the will and all its strength to see God and please Him, He desires to reward it even in this life. And what a tremendous reward; one moment it is enough to repay all the trials that can be suffered in life! (L18.9).

It is God's pleasure to rain grace on us, to saturate us in divine love. In response, we become God's pleasure, God's delight, God's joy. The beauty and delight of this rain that creates union 'removes the scale from the soul's eyes and lets it see and understand, although in a strange way' (C7.2.6), Teresa says. This way of seeing seems strange because it is beyond images, beyond thought. It is being illuminated in divine loving in a light, lighter than sunlight, in an enlightenment.¹⁶ We receive the gift of this way of seeing when our spirit is enkindled, set fire to by the living flame of the Holy Spirit. This way of soul seeing with an enkindled spirit frees us to see the indwelling of the Trinity at home in the centre of our soul. Teresa's words are eloquent:

First there comes an enkindling of the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor; and these persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone. It knows in such a way that what we know by faith, it understands, we can say, through sight – although the sight is not with the bodily eyes nor with the eyes of the soul, because we are not dealing with an imaginative vision. Here all three persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain these words of the Lord in the Gospel: that Christ and God and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves and keeps the commandments (7.1.6).

Notice the enkindling of our spirit that is silent, still and quiet and yet dynamic. Once our faculties know how to sleep, the Holy Spirit sets fire to our spirit, enkindling our vision. In our spirit we know we are being 'consecrated in truth'. This seeing Teresa qualifies is not with our bodily eyes, nor the eyes of our soul, but with enkindled spiritual eyes. We are en-

lightened and see the truth of who we are. Our vision is now lost in the vision of Holy Spirit, the one who enflames and enkindles love between the Father and the Son. Teresa identifies the magnificent splendor of this vision of oneness as an intellectual vision. An intellectual vision is not so much knowing, but the wisdom of unknowing. It is an experience of transcendence beyond the limits of the mind that imparts oneness. It is seeing with an 'enkindled spirit' light beyond light. Her fourfold repetition of 'one' is significant. It echoes of the great prayer of Jesus 'Father, may they be one as I am in you and you are in me' (Jn17:17). 'One' in this gracious enkindling, we realize we participate in this living flame of one love. The fruit of this oneness is an irrevocable sense of being one in Christ, in a way that we can never be separated, in Trinitarian love.

Hauntingly, Teresa illustrates how in the spiritual marriage, in the secret centre of the soul, Christ appears, delicately without entering any doors. With echoes of the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples through locked doors in John's gospel, it is if he says 'peace be with you'. In Teresa's words:

What God communicates here to the soul in an instant is a secret so great and a favor so sublime—and the delight the soul experiences so extreme—that I don't know what to compare it to. I can say only that the Lord wishes to reveal for that moment in a more sublime manner than through any spiritual vision or taste, the glory of heaven. One can say no more—in so far as it can be understood—than that the soul, I mean the spirit, is made one with God' (C7.2.3).

This dark, secret love imparts oneness in the quiet centre of our soul where no disturbances can reach. She further elaborates in some of the later writing of her *Spiritual Testimonies* about this enkindling union:

My soul began to enkindle, and it seemed to me I knew clearly in an intellectual vision that the entire Blessed Trinity was present. In this state my soul understood by a certain kind of representation (like an illustration of the truth), in such a way that my dullness could perceive,

how God is three and one (ST13.1).

Teresa's enkindled soul knows that she is participating in Trinitarian presence. She continues:

And so it seemed to me that all three Persons were represented distinctly in my soul and that they spoke to me, telling me that from this day I would see an improvement in myself in respect to three things and that each one of these Persons would grant me a favor: one, the favor of charity; another, the favor of being able to suffer gladly; and the third, the favor of experiencing this charity with an enkindling in the soul (ST13.1).

Enkindled in Trinitarian oneness, Teresa hears silent words in one love giving her the gift of love, a capacity to suffer, and to experience all things with an enkindling in her soul. These are not fleeting gifts but lasting patterns of Trinitarian loving fixed, engraved, imprinted in her soul. Now she knows that we can never be separated from this quiet and yet dynamic inter-relationship of love. Teresa affirms this ongoing presence: 'Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these persons never seem to leave it anymore, but it clearly beholds 'that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it doesn't know how to explain' (IC7.1.8). Teresa is conclusive. The Trinity dwells within the inner depths of our soul.

The Trinity at home in the centre of our soul is no passing vision, but the gift of an habitual awareness of this loving Trinitarian presence. Once we return to our quiet one source of love, the enkindling of the spiritual marriage imparts a new and distinctly Trinitarian appreciation of God, humanity and creation. Teresa uses a whole array of glorious metaphors to describe this one presence:

Let me say this union is like the joining of two wax candles to such an extent that the flame coming from them is one, or that the wick, the flame, and the wax are all one. But after that one candle can be easily separated from the other and there are two candles; the same holds for the wick (IC7.2.4).

Not two flames but one enkindled flame of

love, one in the Trinity. We belong in them and yet are truly ourselves. She mentions the rain again: 'In the spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when the rain falls from the sky into the river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river. Or it is like what we have when a little stream enters the sea, there is no means of separating the two' (C7.2.4). This Trinitarian life is like water fusing into water. Furthermore, it is 'like a bright light entering a room through different windows; although the streams of light are separate when entering the room (C7.2.4). In her *Testimony* she adds: 'I have experienced this presence of the three Persons... They are very habitually present in my soul... It seemed to me there came the thought of how a sponge absorbs and is saturated with water; so, I thought, was my soul which was overflowing with that divinity and in a certain way rejoicing within itself and possessing the three Persons' (ST 14). Each colourful metaphor imparts a maturing sense, of fusion and infusion, in one relational Trinitarian union. On in this mystical marriage, everything now takes place with such quiet and so noiselessly that prayer seems as if we are building the temple of Solomon without a sound. We rejoice in the deepest silence (C7.3.11), Teresa affirms. Trinitarian oneness creates the deepest of deep silence. This pure quiet is cause for rejoicing.

Teresa emphasizes the habitual presence of the Trinity, when in the past she was usually accustomed only to the presence of Jesus. Wondering about the obstacles in her that prevented her living from this Trinitarian awareness, Teresa hears silent words of love resounding in her soul, 'Don't try to hold Me within yourself, but try to hold yourself within Me' (T14). Teresa is identifying an important transition time where mutual reciprocal love comes into our awareness. This shifts our vision. We hold and behold ourselves held in the being of the Godhead, we no longer have the vision of the ego, the butterfly dies in Christ and Christ holds us in the Trinity. Held in the

Trinity our vision is one of *alling*, of union of communion of all things in the Trinity. Teresa says: 'It seemed to me that from within my soul—where I saw these three Persons present—these persons were communicating themselves to all creation without fail, nor did they fail to be with me' (ST 14). Teresa now realizes the mutuality of indwelling presence. Her great pilgrimage to the centre of her soul into the dwelling place of the Trinity imparts an awareness of her soul in the Trinity. Significantly the infusing waters of divine love are intimately part of her life and at the same time are communicating with all creation ceaselessly. This infusing, quiet, all embracing enkindling love holds us personally and communally and cosmically eternally.

Living from the Centre of Quiet

Teresa's teaching about union with God, through her ever revealing image of water has so much to offer our world today, especially when we are so aware of the precious commodity of water. Although there are many wonderful implications for her way of prayer that can quench the thirst of our contemporary culture to learn how to meditate and contemplate, I wish to highlight four: the implications of living a prayer of quiet, of taking the journey to the centre, of living with an enkindled soul and sharing in the fullness of union with God.

- *Living a Prayer of Quiet.* Silence, serenity, calm, quiet are the gifts we receive as the mystery of our intimacy with Christ who dwells in the centre of our heart unfolds. A quiet that is the quiet of God. And as we enter into this quiet through our daily practice of prayer what we discover is that human beings are intrinsically quiet and peaceful. We all have our existential scream, the scream that has its source in our personal communal and cosmic roots and so often we resist coming to quiet for fear of what this scream may mean. Contemplation takes us beyond the scream. It soothes and quietens the scream and transforms it into a

cry of love. Ultimately when we bring the gaze of our spirit to rest on the point of oneness in our centre we encounter intimately silent, unitive love. We awaken to the presence of the infinitely silent divine as the source of our soul, that floods us in quiet waters of love. Contemplative prayer prepares, softens, opens and frees us to receive this contemplative gift.

- *Taking the Journey to the Centre.* Teresa enlightens us. She sparks our imagination and enables us to envisage the journey to the centre of our soul as a glorious frolic through a mysteriously dark, and illuminatingly light, many roomed crystal like palace. She takes us on this journey step by step and shows us how to recollect and become focused in our desire, our gaze, and our actions to contemplate and be infused in the living waters of contemplation. She shows us how to follow the stirrings of love, to take the way of the cross, and like a silk worm who dies only to be reborn as a delicate white moth, to die to all that blinds and scatters so we may be permanently at home in our centre where our Beloved dwells. In this centre all is one. All is infused and fused in love. Time and eternity, dark and light, male and female become one. All that scatters and conflicts is unified in a harmonious oneness. We are one in a love that is pure, strong and serene. The centre then, by its very nature is perfectly silent, still, quiet and at the same time has a centrifugal force that enables us to return to the edges of life and be a point of quiet in lonely, disturbed and wounded humanity. Only one who has journeyed to the centre and dwelt in the embrace of the Beloved in quiet, can truly be 'active' and activate awareness of the indwelling presence in human lives.

- *Living with an Enkindled Soul.* Teresa shows us how, through our union in Christ who dwells in our centre, our soul is enkindled and transformed to see from the perspective of the one enkindled vision of the Trinity. Teresa shows us how to enkindle the eye of our soul through the prayer of recollection and quiet that organically imparts union in our bodily eyes, the eyes of our soul, the eyes of our spirit.

This enkindled vision is bound to the love of the Spirit that unites the three persons of the Trinity. This vision sees unity and oneness. It always looks with eyes of love. An enkindled soul lives in harmony with the loving of the Trinity. Our lives carry the perfume of the divine breath, our words flow from the centre of quiet, our actions are in rhythm with the gentle inter-relating of divine loving. We do not take breath to try to salvage our stressed ego, but rather enhance the life of each other. We live full to overflowing with waters of grace, intoxicated in love, quiet in demeanor, imparting peace wherever we are.

• *Sharing in the Fullness of Union with God.* Teresa shows us how we experience being in the presence of the living God who transforms us into union. Every person has existence within this divine life and reality. She draws us into the centre of our heart to encounter the presence of Christ who in the intimacy of mystical union awakens our inner eye to the presence of the Trinity. Then she awakens us to the birth of an even more unifying breaking through awareness that we are held in the divine life. We come to realize that God not only dwells within us but we dwell within the ever tranquil and ever dynamic life of the Trinity. We are held in that life and receive breath from the intimacy of their loving. Held in this oneness, it becomes violent to flip back into an ego centre. Held and beheld in love we are quiet, stable and serene. We discover that God is a Trinity of relating, so intimately

present, we experience this presence in contemplation. Teresa emphasizes how the Trinity is ‘habitually’ present, reliably and consistently present. And this presence feels like her heart is a sponge absorbed and saturated with water, so much so that she feels her soul overflowing with divinity. This great overflow of divine love infusing her transforms her. It imbibes her in eternal joy.

Teresa gives us permission to be infused in these same saturating waters of love and to become an expression of the overflow of divine grace in our world. Our soul must be flooded in living water full and overflowing from the waters of contemplation of the Trinity. Only a full heart can share the truth of who we are in God. We organically participate in a loving relationship that is one and three. To be one and at the same time relational is intrinsic to what it means to be human. Awareness of oneness in being as the ground that hold us and the energy that gives life to us has enormous implications for the ecological crisis and world peace. May we become a waterfall of divine peace. And in Teresa’s words:

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing affright you,
for everything passes
And God is unchanging
Through Patience
all things are obtained,
who holds fast to God
finds nothing is lacking.
God solely suffices.¹⁷

1. Psalm 73, translation Merrill, Nan C. *Psalms for Praying. An Invitation to Wholeness.* New York: Continuum, 2007, 140.

2. Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in 1515 and died in 1582. She was canonized in 1622 and made the first woman Doctor of the Church in 1970. Teresa was a Christian of Jewish descent through her grandfather, who was a *converso*, a Jewish convert to Catholicism. She joined the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation at Avila and after 27 years when she was 47 began a reform, returning to the Primitive Rule of the Carmelites, the observances of the ancient Order of Our Lady

of Mount Carmel, which dated back to the 12th century. Her reform emphasized a return to simplicity, with time for contemplative prayer. The first new house, dedicated to St Joseph, was established in Avila in 1562. By the time of Teresa’s death in October 1582, she had founded fourteen more houses.

3. Teresa mainly uses the word ‘soul’ rather than ‘heart’. ‘Heart’ in this context is our soul place where we are one with God.

4. All translations are from *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Insti-

tute of Carmelite Studies, 1976-1985), with the following abbreviations in the text: *The Book of Her Life* (hereafter, L), *Spiritual Testimonies* (ST), *The Way of Perfection* (P), *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (MSg), *Soliloquies* (S), Poetry (P), *The Interior Castle* (C). Chapter number followed by paragraph number, are given.

5. Teresa uses the word 'soul' in many different contexts. It can mean person, or the self, or the whole person, or the subject of religious experience, or Teresa herself, or the reader. Technically, she refers to the soul as our inner depths which is God's dwelling place. She distinguishes the difference between our soul and our spirit. Our spirit is the animating life of our soul, where we inhale and exhale with the breath of the Holy Spirit.

6. It is noteworthy that Teresa did not begin to write until she was 47 years old, when she had spent many years praying. She wrote: *The Book of Her Life* (1562-65), at the request of one of her spiritual advisors. *Spiritual Testimonies* (1560-1581) complements *The Book of Her Life*. She composed *The Way of Perfection* (1566-69?) as a book about contemplation, for her sisters. Two of these manuscripts are in Teresa's own hand. 'Escorial' MS is very intimate and conversational, written for her sisters. 'Valladolid' MS is revised after being checked by the Dominican censor. *The Book of Her Foundations* (1573-4) records the first years of the reform of Carmel. *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (1566-75?) tells of the love between Christ and the soul. She writes *Interior Castle* (1577), her last and her most celebrated work, when she is 62.

7. In the *Way of Perfection* Teresa gives weight to her emphasis on Christ's presence within, by quoting Augustine: 'Remember how Saint Augustine tells us he sought Him (God) in many places, but found Him ultimately within himself' (P28.2).

8. Teresa explains that 'humility. . . is an important aspect of prayer and indispensable for all person who practice it' (P 17.1). She stresses: 'This is true humility: to know what you can do and what I [God] can do' (ST 24).

9. *Collected Works*, vol 2, 32.

10. Recollection has a long tradition described in *The Life of Anthony*, Augustine's *Confession* and Gregory the Great's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, where he identified recollection as the first stage of the contemplative ascent to God. Francisco

Osuna, a Spanish Franciscan, who gives one of the fullest treatment of recollection in his *Spiritual Alphabet*, influenced Teresa in her development of recollection. He describes recollection as the calming needed in our intellect, memory and will if we are to attend to the image of Christ within. Teresa acknowledges her indebtedness to de Osuna, (cf. L4). *The Way of Perfection*, Chapters 28 and 29 deal mainly with recollection.

11. In the tradition of Augustine the higher faculties of the soul are memory, understanding and will where the image of the Trinity dwells in the soul Cf. *De Trinitate* XIV.

12. This invitation does not mean, however, that we give up meditating and reading scripture at other times in the day. Teresa would always have kept saying the *Liturgy of the Hours* for example.

13. Chapters 31 and 32 of the *Way of Perfection* give the most detailed description of the prayer of quiet.

14. This is a reference to *Confessions of St Augustine*, X.

15. Teresa acknowledges the influence of Bernardino de Laredo, the author of *The Ascent of Mount Zion*, for her development of the prayer of union, (cf. L23). In Pt.111 ChXIX he speaks of up-lifting our mind and remaining in pure love without any thought, raised on the wings of love united with God. He encourages sleep in quiet contemplation in quiet silence.

16. Teresa follows Augustine *De Genesi ad Litteram* who distinguishes three kinds of visions: intellectual, imaginative and corporeal. Cf. L27.3 for a summary of corporeal, seen with bodily eyes, imaginative, seen with the eyes of the soul, and intellectual visions. She says of an intellectual vision: 'I see with the eyes of neither the body nor the soul. . . . It is not like those who are blind or in dark. . . the vision is represented through knowledge given to the soul that is clearer than sunlight. I don't mean that you see the sun or brightness. . . but that the light without your seeing light, illumines the intellect so that the soul may enjoy such a great good. The vision bears with it wonderful blessings' (L27.3).

17. *Flame of Love. Poems of the Spanish Mystics. San Juan De La Cruz Santa Teresa De Jesus*. Translated by Loren G. Smith. New York: Paulist Press, 93.