

Contemplative Prayer

In her book entitled 'The Interior Castle' St. Teresa of Avila leads us into the deepest valleys and to the highest summits of spiritual experience. She likens the spiritual life of the soul to a castle in which there are many rooms, just as : 'in My Father's house there are many rooms' (Jn.14,2). According to the saint some souls go no further than to the outer court of the castle. She considers prayer and meditation as the door of entry into the castle. There are many rooms to go through before reaching the 7th mansion, and according to St. Teresa few reach it. It is here that the soul enjoys a life of deep union with God - a union which can be likened to that of a spiritual marriage, an all oneness with the Lord, where the person becomes all His and He becomes the person's all.

The Call To Holiness

All of us are called to holiness. 'Be holy as I, the Lord, your God am holy'. (Lev.11,44). However, we need to know TRUE prayer before we can respond to this calling. Otherwise how can we begin to understand what this deep relationship with the Lord, which St. Teresa describes is all about? In our prayer we need to feed on the Word of God, to know that its wisdom and promise stand forever; His Word will lead us to all other springs that we desire.

Be Still

His Word tells us that to know God (that is to know a deep and loving relationship with Him) we must be still. 'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps.46,10).

It is in stillness that the Lord will come to us; it is in stillness that we can listen; it is in stillness where He can speak to our hearts.

In your stillness I shall come to you;

Listen and you shall hear My voice;

Peace and silence prepare the inner you

To hear My words so choice.

There in the quietness I shall teach your heart

The knowledge that I long to share;

Gifts of the Spirit I impart

From My stores so rich, so fair. *(Karin Castle)*

A Sharing

This knowledge that the Lord longs to share is this deep spiritual union with Him where He and the soul become one. 'I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord'. (Hosea 2,19-20). In order to know true prayer it is essential that we know how to SIT in the presence of a loving Lord and friend. Like St. Teresa we need to consider how God sees us. She tells us 'to gaze on Him who gazes at you.'

We pray to Jesus, with Jesus and this is the way to reach His heart. Prayer is truly the way we get to know Him. Although he comes to us in many ways it is never more than when we are in prayer with Him. It is there that we are closer, more intimate than any other time. It is there that He can speak to us; it is there that we grow and are healed. And so when we cultivate prayer in our lives it will be communication with the intimacy of friendship, as we grow closer and closer to Him.

The Gift Of Time

Since time is a gift - a great gift - the Lord values the time that we spend with Him in prayer. We give Him a gift of our time and He repays what we do for Him a hundredfold. The time we spend with Him in prayer is worth much more than all works we can ever do - works that can be seen. Prayer is work that can't be seen and we shall never know the worth of it and what it means to our soul. We can be assured that prayer time is never wasted. What happens when we spend time in prayer? The parable of the growing seed (Mark 4,26-29) may explain the answer somewhat. It gives us reason to believe that growth - spiritual growth - takes place. How? We do not know, no more than the farmer understands how the seed sprouts and grows. But just as there are different stages of development - the shoot first of all, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear, then the reaping of the harvest, so too, while at prayer we are becoming a new creation, more mature spiritual persons, more like the kind of persons God wants us to be. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and as we find fulfilment just by

being with the Lord then the Holy Spirit can cast our spiritual roots deeper and deeper into His soil, so that we bear more and more fruit - the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal. 5,22-24).

Roots And Growth

Trees with strong roots are essential for trees that bear heavy crops. Trees with strong roots may be rocked by storms but they won't fall. They'll scarcely bend; they'll just grow; and so the trials, sufferings, difficulties of our lives, far from damaging us will help us to mature spiritually:

Sowing and waiting,

and growing and waiting,

for blossoms to open,

for fruit to ripen,

waiting for harvest time.

The seeds of love

from heaven above

God has planted in your heart.

The light of the sun

will shine upon

that seed and it will start

to push forth its shoots

and grip with its roots

the soil that we feed with prayer,

for God to create

as we patiently wait ...

(Karin Castle)

Waiting On God

When we have learned to be STILL, when we have learned to SIT, then we shall come to understand that the essence of our relationship with the Lord lies in prayer for that is where we grow in love. Just as prayer never ends so growing in love never ends. Think on these things.

When we have learned to sit it is then that we learn to WALK, to walk in His will for us, along the path he has mapped out for us. Our contemplative stillness moves, as it were, into contemplative action. Since these actions spring from our contemplative prayer, we can readily read the Lord's signposts along the way because He gives us new eyes to see as well as new ears to hear.

When we have learned to sit and walk we are ready to CLIMB His mountain of holiness - even to SOAR to the heights to which he beckons us - in His strength, not in our own weakness, however. But the Lord's mountain is not an easy one to climb. Its paths are not smooth but rugged and need the skill of a mountaineer. Apart from needing the support and encouragement of each other, mountaineers need a leader and special equipment. The leader has to pre-plan, be of good judgment, show wisdom so that his party will reach the summit safely. That is why in Maranatha we choose Jesus as our leader and His Word as our equipment. There are many of us in the team, roped together, so that if any of us should lose a foothold, the rest will come to our aid and send us on our way again.

Since mountaineering is a strenuous activity, at intervals we are given plateaux of rest, plateaux of peace, where we are fed spiritually, where the Lord holds us and fashions us to make us fit for the next stretch of the journey. Hence the need for 'Days of Quiet' from time to time, to be recharged, as it were. At such times we remind ourselves that our goal is the summit of Mt. Carmel, where, like Elijah (1 Kings 18, 20-40) we'll stand in the presence of God, for God gaining victory over the baals - the evil of the world - as prayerful intercessors.

Singlemindedness

If we are to soar to His heights we shall need the singlemindedness of the dove (mentioned five times in the Song of Songs) who has eyes for only one thing at a time; we need to have eyes for Jesus alone; we need to look to Him in all things. Then, in Maranatha, He will renew our strength; he will grant us a new wisdom. Praise Him.

The first step in contemplation is to consider steadily what God wants, what is pleasing to Him, what is acceptable in His sight. And since we all make many mistakes and boldness of our will revolts against the rightness of His, let us humble ourselves under the hand of the most high God: Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.

St. Bernard

If we really want to pray we must first learn to listen for in the silence of the heart God speaks.

God is the friend of silence.

We need to find God and He cannot be found in noise and restlessness. The essential thing is not what we say but what God says to us and through us. Jesus is always waiting for us in silence.

Mother Teresa

Make room for everything which is capable of rejoicing, enlarging or calming your heart, in a childlike spirit; but seek nothing restlessly. What is taken from you, just let go. God Himself you will keep for ever; or rather He will keep you.

Nothing is more beautiful than simply to make room for God - without the aid of forms. In outward and inward detachment from such things, let yourself be permeated by God and His love.

When we are quiet children of suffering, and extinguish all the power of anger in ourselves and in others with pure love, then Jesus comes in and sups with us.

May the Lord bring all that is ours to be a profound silence.

Gerhart Tersteegen

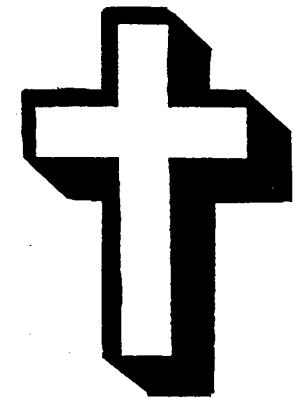
Christ's existence was ruled by a great silence. His soul was listening. It was given over to the needs of others. In His innermost being He was silent, not asserting himself, detached. He did not grasp at anything in the world. Thus he overcame in his life the power of habit and daily routine, of dullness and fatigue, and created within himself a carefree, tranquility, a place for every encounter. He was unreservedly receptive.

Ladislaus Boros

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