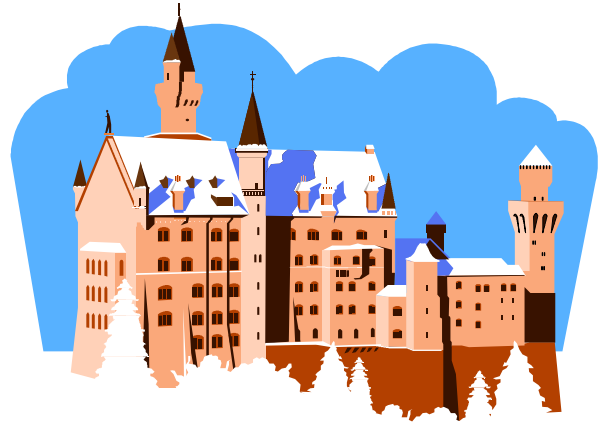


THE FIFTH MANSION

by Father Gabriel Barry, OCD

I. SAINT TERESA AND MODERN MAN¹

It is sometimes asserted that since St. Teresa lived four long centuries ago, it is scarcely possible she could have a real message for our age. After all, does it not seem that the world has come a long way since St. Teresa traveled the dusty roads of Spain in her creaking wagon? How can one expect to find in her books anything that would be relevant to the men and women of our scientific age, who seem to have brought the world under control to an unprecedented degree, and are actually reaching out for new worlds to conquer? Very briefly, the answer to this objection is that, although the human environment has certainly changed immensely since St. Teresa's time, human nature itself is essentially the same, with the same aspirations, the same tendencies, the same restlessness, and the same failings. It is to this "essential man" that St. Teresa addresses herself. It is to him that she tries to impart some understanding of the divine love that Christ showed by His death on the cross. And long before man thought of setting foot on the inhospitable surface of the moon, St. Teresa was training him to explore the wonderful inner kingdom of his own soul, and that other world of God's Kingdom, which eye had not seen nor human mind imagined. The first step across the boundary of this land takes place in the Fourth Mansions. In the Fifth, the exploration has got well under way, and the discoveries constitute one of St. Teresa's important messages to our age. Her knowledge of them has probably never been surpassed. She wrote her books not because she considered herself to be an accomplished literary artist or a scholar; indeed the contrary is nearer to the truth. But like the old Irish scribe, she wrote because she was enchanted with the beauty of certain things in God's Kingdom, and she felt compelled, almost, to put her experiences into writing, and they are ours for all time.



But before we begin to analyze what she has to say concerning the Fifth Mansions, I would like to pursue, for some little time, the other theme of St. Teresa's relevance in our age. For those who know and love St. Teresa, this contains nothing new. All great people are immortal and have a perennial message. When we look more closely at what constitutes true greatness, we find that it is determined by the degree of one's likeness to Jesus Christ. That is why Our Lady, the most perfectly redeemed of all mankind, is "our tainted nature's solitary boast." In St. Teresa's case, there can be no doubt that she attained to a very high measure of spiritual greatness. Her

¹Note: All the page references are to the Peers translation of St. Teresa's Works Vol. II, unless otherwise stated.

mind was illuminated by the Holy Spirit as few have been and much of her teaching is valid for all time. Furthermore, her literary method is one that should recommend itself specially to the men and women of our time. She expresses herself, not in cold metaphysical terms, but in the medium of a real-life experience, full of warmth and human concern and with a charming readiness to admit her own shortcomings. Though she was one of the greatest people that ever lived, she wore her greatness and sanctity with supreme ease: “I do not mind if I write any amount of nonsense provided that just once in a while, I can write sense, so that we may give great praise to the Lord.”² She has no hesitation in telling the world that for many years she found prayer boring and unprofitable: “I was more occupied in wishing my hour for prayer were over, and in listening for the clock to strike, than in thinking of things that were good,”³ and for one whole year she gave up prayer altogether.⁴ She certainly did not imagine she was very important or take herself too seriously, as many of her contemporary reformers were doing. Indeed, those serious-minded saints annoyed her, she had a fear that somehow they were liable to be led astray by the Evil One, who readily takes advantage of melancholy.⁵ “From gloomy saints, the Lord deliver us”⁶

Perhaps one of the most important lessons she has to teach is how one can be in this world and yet not of it. This is a dilemma which has preoccupied the minds of Christ’s followers from the earliest days. The Christians of the sub-apostolic age and after were very partial to a literal flight from the world. But this does not mean that they hated the world. They expressed Christian ideals in a sincere simple manner by their gentle austere way of life and by their earnest efforts to keep as close to God as was humanly possible.⁷ The times in which we live are witnessing a reaction to this philosophy of life.⁸ Taking their lead from a mistaken interpretation of certain passages in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, certain avant-garde⁹ thinkers have not hesitated to brand the old tradition as anti-evangelical, anti-social and sickly. This is what inevitably happens when passages are wrenched from their context and made to stand alone, independently of parallel texts. There are plenty of texts in other parts of the Decrees of Vatican II which clearly envisage a certain amount of withdrawal from the rest of mankind, yet in the heart of Christ there is no separation.¹⁰ St. Teresa had no difficulty in seeing the need for, and value of, a true contemplative life. She picturesquely described it as “living alone with Him only,”¹¹ or again - “It is best to be alone, as our Lord often was.”¹² Not everyone is called to take this counsel literally, but no matter what our way of life may be, it is good to search for times when we can be alone with God. It is no reflection at all on our relationship with the rest of mankind; it is in fact one of the best ways of building up an appreciation of them, and of learning

²p. 249

³Peers I, p. 51

⁴Peers I, p. 37

⁵cf. Peers III, pp. 26 ff

⁶Peers I, p. 80

⁷cf. *The Desert Fathers*, by Helen Waddell

⁸see for example the article “The Contribution of Monasticism to Spirituality” in *Spirituality for Today* ed. Eric James, pp. 114 ff

⁹a-vant-garde (ä’vänt-gärd’) —n. A group active in the invention and application of new techniques in a given field, esp. in the arts.

¹⁰cf. *Constitution on the Church*, par. 48

¹¹Peers I,
p. 260

¹²*Joy of Perfection*

to love them in Christ. As St. Teresa says, it is dangerous to embark on big schemes for helping others unless we are sure of the necessary strength; and no one is ready for this kind of work until he has first found God.¹³ In one of the later Mansions she makes this observation: “This is what prayer is for, and high mystical favors too: always to produce good works and good works alone”¹⁴ Of a certainty, she would not subscribe to the fairly widespread idea that communication with our fellow man is a form of prayer, and that communion with God in solitude is self-love. We shall return later to this point.

Another lesson we can well learn from St. Teresa is how to make spontaneous vocal prayer. We are treated nowadays to volumes of sentimental pseudo-poetic musings that pass for prayer.¹⁵ At private gatherings people are encouraged to formulate extemporaneous prayers. There is nothing wrong in this, but it is very difficult to achieve and maintain a high level of dignity and doctrine. One of the best teachers we could find is St. Teresa. Her writings are full of delightful colloquies with God, reflecting her own deep faith and burning love. Worthy of special mention are the *Exclamations of the Soul to God* - “white-hot embers from the fire of the Saint’s love, which, despite the centuries that have passed since they were first written in the sacred moments after her Communions, can still enkindle the hearts of those who read them.”¹⁶ If they, and the other colloquies that are scattered through her writings, were selected and cataloged, they would be found to contain excellent material for both mental and vocal prayer. If the art of extemporaneous prayer is to be revived in the Church in a safe way - that is, excluding the risk of illuminism - a number of conditions are necessary. First and most important, a deep spirit of interior prayer is required in those who participate in the free vocal expression of worship. Without this, the whole thing is mere rhetoric. Secondly, one needs a sound acquaintance with liturgical prayers or with other exemplars, like the prayers that St. Teresa interspersed in her writing. Thirdly, there must be a proper sense of what inner sentiments can and ought to be expressed in words. Finally, some measure of appreciation of simple yet beautiful literary forms, so as to match thought and words, is needed. Here are a few words of advice from St. Teresa herself, which can well be adapted to this case: “The soul can picture itself in the presence of Christ, and accustom itself to become enkindled with great love for His Sacred Humanity and to have Him ever with it, and speak with Him, to ask Him for the things it has need of, make complaints to Him of its trials, rejoice with Him in its joys, and yet never allow its joys to make it forget Him. It has no need to think out set prayers, but can use such words as suits its desires and needs. This is an excellent way of making progress and of making it quickly, and if anyone strives always to have this precious companionship, makes good use of it, and really learns to love this Lord to whom we owe so much, such a one I think has achieved a definite gain.”¹⁷ This is surely a mini-treatise on the art of making prayer.

It is sometimes suggested that in our days, prayer should be made in common, rather than individually or in private. This point of view is open to two kinds of interpretation. If it means no more than that mankind should express its solidarity when worshipping God, it is perfectly

¹³Peers II, p. 399; Peers I, p. 42; p. 78; p. 112-113

¹⁴Peers II, p. 346

¹⁵e.g. *Are you running with me, Jesus* by Malcolm Boyd

¹⁶Peers II, p. 400

¹⁷Peers I, p. 71

orthodox. The liturgy is the supreme example of this kind of communal prayer. Our Lord Himself has pronounced a special blessing on those who are gathered together in his name. But communal prayer can have certain overtones which, for the most part, have to be guarded against. For example, it can be made to imply that prayer is genuine only when made in a group. This of course is contrary to the teaching and example of our Lord and of all the great spiritual guides since His time. Likewise, it can be interpreted to mean that the horizontal dimension of prayer is the only real one; that prayer is primarily a communication with our fellow man, in whom in some mysterious way we can eventually find God. As we shall see, there is some amount of truth in this, only it puts the cart before the horse. Prayer is first and foremost a going out to God; an encounter with Him; the raising of our minds to Him. If this can take place in the company of others, it is an excellent thing; and certainly, if our prayer does not eventually increase our concern for others, or prompt us to go out in service to them, it is suspect, as St. Teresa points out.¹⁸ But to assert that involvement with others is, of itself alone, a new form of prayer, or a substitute for prayer, is naive. It is in fact based on the naturalistic musings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and is yet another version of the old Pelagian heresy that man is capable of redeeming himself by his own natural goodness alone. Now, it is abundantly clear from the gospels that we must learn to find God in our neighbor; we must also do whatever we have to do in the name of Jesus Christ. But all this is more in the nature of a goal to be arrived at, than a starting point from which to begin. It is very easy to lapse into the assumption (more tacit than formal) that man is already fully redeemed, or nearly so; that he can now undertake the things that he would have done, had there been no original sin. But this happy state is not yet ours, and when we pray we have to realize that we are always learners; not only that, but we need the grace of Jesus Christ at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the way of prayer. Furthermore, we have to learn the *Art of Prayer*. Not even the simplest human skill is acquired without training and self-discipline. Every page that St. Teresa wrote bears out that prayer is no different, in this respect, from any other human art. It is a meeting-place of the divine and the human, and the human side needs proper formation.¹⁹

There have always been persons who seem to think that contemplation can be acquired at will, or at least with only a little effort. Man is now “come of age,” it is said, and his prayer must reflect this inner growth. To continue to act or pray as a child is unworthy of his new-found status. In one sense, this is perfectly true, but in another way it sounds very like the situation of our First Parents when they decided to eat the forbidden fruit; it would make them “like gods, knowing good and evil.” No doubt, contemplative prayer is the kind to which human beings are called. It would have been the normal prayer of the human race in the state of original innocence, even as it will be the normal prayer of the just in God’s Kingdom. But in our present state, fallen and redeemed as we are, it cannot be attained by mere wishful thinking. As St. Teresa said, you may as well try to make the sun rise before its time. Furthermore, as we shall see, it calls for a long apprenticeship and the faithful practice of virtue, particularly humility, poverty and charity.²⁰

¹⁸Peers II, p. 261-263

¹⁹See a book entitled *The Rock and the River* by M. Thornton, which contains some enlightening remarks on the chapter on prayer in Bishop Robinson’s book *Honest to God*, pp. 93-95

²⁰see *Way of Perfection*, Peers II, pp. 15 ff, and p. 72

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE FIFTH MANSIONS

We now turn our attention to some of St. Teresa's important teaching on contemplative prayer, as it is found in the Fifth Mansions. And once again we come into contact with her unique combination of lofty idealism and practical sense. Nor is the characteristically homely touch missing. For instance, towards the end of her exposition, she tells us quite casually that her writing had been interrupted for a long time, but as she was already suffering from a bad headache she did not feel like re-reading what she had already written!

In the earlier conferences on the *Interior Castle*, we have made some attempt to convey St. Teresa's notion of what contemplation is. In brief it can be described as an inflowing of divine knowledge and love. In the course of the Fifth Mansions, St. Teresa uses various expressions to describe it which are worth noting, for they all add something to our understanding of what really evades human words. Prayer in these Mansions, she says, is heaven on earth²¹; a hidden treasure that we carry about in ourselves²²; a foretaste of divine joys.²³ It brings with it a deep peace that nothing can disturb.²⁴ It is the outcome of our Lord's own intervention: "He will come into the center of the soul without using a door, as He did when he came to his disciples and said *Pax vobis*; and when He left the sepulchre without removing the stone."²⁵ This kind of divine favor does not require great bodily strength, but it does call for an inner strength of soul and a readiness to surrender all into the hands of our Lord.²⁶ The ability to do this is probably the real test of our sincerity.²⁷ In other words, the really dependable person in St. Teresa's eyes is not he who has claim to mystical favors, but the one who strives earnestly to discover the will of God and to do it. In another place she says that one cannot be sure of the value of mystical experiences, but virtue - like good currency - is always in demand.²⁸ This passage is worth quoting: "There are persons who are ready to ask God for favors as a matter of justice, a fine sort of humility! For that reason, He who knows all does well in giving it to them hardly ever; He sees plainly they are not fit to drink the chalice." The best sign of improvement is not rapture, ecstasy or sweetness, but plain humility.²⁹

When contemplation is genuine, however, it always brings resignation, peace and harmony in its train.³⁰ The actual duration of a mystical grace may be quite short - never more than half an hour, says St. Teresa.³¹ But its effects are far-reaching. It brings about a profound transformation, and the one so favored has an influence for good, out of all proportion to his own

²¹p. 248

²²p. 248

²³p. 268

²⁴p. 256

²⁵p. 252

²⁶pp. 248, 259

²⁷see also Peers I, pp. 100-102

²⁸Peers II, pp. 163 ff.

²⁹Escorial edition, chap. 31

³⁰p. 257

³¹pp. 248, 255, 265

natural strength. A single Christian who is truly conformed to Christ becomes a docile instrument in the hand of God, who can use him to draw all manner of people to Himself.³²

III. DIFFICULTY IN EXPLAINING

In the Fifth Mansions no less than in the Fourth, the problem of finding words to convey ideas is really acute. St. Teresa admits that the Fifth Mansions is a little obscure, of its very nature. It is not too easy to distinguish many aspects of it from what happens in the Sixth Mansions. Indeed she begins to speak of the Fifth Mansions by saying that “no one can describe them: the understanding is unable to comprehend them and no comparisons will avail to explain them, for earthly things are quite insufficient for this purpose.”³³ Nevertheless, she feels impelled by God to write something about it all. He gives special graces for this task. “For it is one favor that our Lord should grant this gift, but quite another to understand what favor and grace it is, and still another to be able to describe and explain it.”³⁴ Unless the Holy Spirit guides her pen, she will achieve nothing.³⁵ A lot of what she writes may seem to be nonsense, but she doesn’t mind.³⁶ Once more, she falls back on the advice of her learned friends, the *letradas*. They are always helpful she says: “for often if they have not themselves experienced these things, men of great (theological) learning like these have a certain instinct to prompt them. As God uses them to give light to his Church, He reveals to them anything which is true, so that it shall be accepted.”³⁷ She was deeply indebted to these men, and never misses an opportunity to express her admiration and gratitude. By contrast, she cannot refrain from making a half-humorous half-sarcastic tilt at another class of theologian she knew, timid and unlearned, “whose shortcomings have cost me very dear.”³⁸ Were she alive today, she would find that some of them are still with us, only now they are no longer timid. They are the most self-assured of all.

IV. IMAGES AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

To surmount in some measure the problem of communication, St. Teresa, as is her wont, falls back on images. One might almost call them the visual aids that she uses for the understanding of prayer. And as usual she handles them with great skill and delicacy. Even when she does not develop them at length, they are always vivid and effective. For instance, she wants to convey the relationship of the soul to God in the prayer of the Fifth Mansions. The soul is sealed with His seal, she writes, and in this state it has very little to do except to indicate its willingness to receive the divine impress. “It does no more than the wax when a seal is impressed on it . . . and it does not even soften itself so as to be prepared; it merely remains quiet and consenting.”³⁹ Like all images, this one has to be interpreted aright. What St. Teresa wants to bring out is the fact that in the Fifth Mansions, God does most of the work, and the soul’s main concern should

³²pp. 265-266

³³p. 247

³⁴Peers I, p. 103

³⁵p. 268

³⁶p. 249

³⁷p. 250

³⁸p. 250

³⁹p. 257

be to allow Him to go ahead with the purification that must precede its transformation into Christ. But at no stage does one become totally passive. One always retains one's freedom, and the power to make a choice. It was the Quietists who said that any effort, no matter how spiritual, was contrary to the divine will, and Quietists were heretics.

More extensive and developed is another simile, that of the silkworm. It is probably one of the most admired of all. Someone had told her how silk was produced; she admits that she had never actually seen the process herself. She was immensely impressed by this miracle of nature, and she thought the most wonderful feature of it all was the transformation of an ugly caterpillar into a lovely butterfly, after what appeared to be its death. It seemed to her an ideal illustration of what happens to the soul in the Fifth Mansions: it is transformed beyond recognition. The silkworm is like the soul which takes life when, through the heat that comes from the Holy Spirit, it begins to utilize the general helps which God gives us all, and to make use of the remedies which He left in His Church, such as frequent confessions, good books, sermons and meditations. It begins to live and nourish itself on these until it is fully grown. Then it starts to spin its silk and to build the house in which it is to die. The house may be understood to be Christ, for our life is hid in Christ. After some time in this state of prayer and quite dead to the world, it comes out a little white butterfly.⁴⁰ For St. Teresa, the silkworm becomes an image of our transformation into Christ.

The other image which St. Teresa employs at some length in the Fifth Mansions is that of spiritual betrothal. Here she is simply joining a long Christian tradition going back to the Bible itself. The *Song of Songs* which celebrates the espousal of Israel to Yahweh was, in New Testament times, interpreted to refer to Christ's union with the Church, which is His Spouse. This was extended to include the union of the individual soul with God, for each soul is the Church in miniature, and God works in her, all over again, the wonders of His saving grace. The mystics, like St. Bernard, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa herself, have expounded this theme in their commentaries on the *Song of Songs*. In the *Interior Castle*, St. Teresa introduces the same theme without, however, referring directly to the Bible. She is careful to explain that this comparison must be understood in a spiritual sense. She had good reason for inserting this warning. In the Spain of her time, a number of pseudo-mystics were interpreting the image in a grossly literal fashion; it was in fact a recrudescence of ancient sex-cults, under the guise of a sophisticated Christianity. The Church is never entirely immune from these aberrations, and St. Teresa felt obliged to interject: "In this matter which we are treating, there is nothing which is not spiritual. Corporeal union is quite another thing, and the spiritual joys and consolations given by our Lord are a thousand leagues removed from those experienced in marriage. It is all a union of love, and so delicate and gentle that there is no way of describing it."⁴¹

The real betrothal does not actually take place until the Sixth Mansions, but the preliminaries belong to the Fifth "rather like what happens when in our earthly life, two people are about to be betrothed."⁴² The point St. Teresa makes is that in these Fifth Mansions a soul comes to know God better than ever before; they are in fact a turning point in her relations with Him. But even

⁴⁰pp. 254-255

⁴¹p. 264

⁴²p. 264

this is only a foretaste of the joys and blessings that God has in store for her, in the Mansions that lie ahead: “In a secret way, the soul sees who this Spouse is that she is to take. By means of the senses and faculties, she could not learn in a thousand years what she understands by this way, in the briefest space of time.”⁴³

V. PREPARING FOR THE GREAT MOMENT

We have already said that virtue is prayer carried over into action; the obverse of the same coin, as it were. In other words, if prayer is genuine, it will show itself in reformation of life. This transformation is not always spectacular, unless God wishes one to become a witness before the whole Church. More often, it shows itself in the strengthening of existing good habits and the elimination of more serious defects, such as lack of tolerance, humility or self-sacrifice. God however sometimes leaves external imperfections or small involuntary faults in people who are otherwise genuinely virtuous. Since these habits are not deliberate, they are no serious hindrance to the growth of divine love. At the same time they serve to keep one in a lowly estimation of oneself, and help the growth of self-knowledge and trust. This was something that even Shakespeare perceived: “Best men are molded out of faults and for the most become much the better for being a little bad.”⁴⁴ St. Teresa would have agreed, though she also pointed out that those whom God leads along the road of prayer must be very generous, and prepare themselves for future graces. Indeed it is on this note that she opens her discussion on the Fifth Mansions: “Few of us prepare for the Lord to reveal it to us. As far as externals are concerned, we are on the right road to attaining the essential virtues, but we shall need to do a very great deal before we can attain to this higher state, and we must on no account be careless.”⁴⁵ It would seem that not a little depends on the generosity with which we respond. True, God’s gifts exceed all our hopes, but our preparation counts for much.⁴⁶ For, as St. John of the Cross constantly reminds us, whatever we receive is determined by our own capacity, and God bestows His gifts where he finds the vessels empty.

When speaking to those whom God has led into the Fifth Mansions St. Teresa is eager that they should be generous with Him and leave nothing undone to prepare for His coming. What we can do is actually of little account, but small though it be, God requires it. It is His way of acknowledging the freedom He has given us, and allowing us to cooperate with Him even in the work of our own sanctification. We know that everything comes from Him, yet we must act as if it all depended on us. Like the silkworm, we must avail of every help within our reach.⁴⁷ “And before we have finished doing all that we can, God will take this tiny achievement of ours which is nothing at all, unite it with His greatness and give it such worth that its reward will be the Lord Himself.”⁴⁸ St. Teresa never fails to urge the readers forward, but she always made it clear that the perfection of charity could neither be attained nor preserved by love alone, not even by prayer and contemplation. There must be an inner area under the control of the Spirit, and this requires

⁴³p. 265

⁴⁴*Measure for Measure*, V, 1

⁴⁵p. 247

⁴⁶p. 253

⁴⁷p. 254

⁴⁸ibid

virtue, self-knowledge and common sense. At all stages there must be a consistent practice of the theological virtues and the evangelical counsels. If any of these is absent, straight-away a certain imbalance is felt, and spiritual growth is slowed down. St. Teresa, too, recognized that moral perfection must go hand in hand with prayer. And the prayer of the Fifth Mansions touches off vehement desires to serve God better and more faithfully.⁴⁹

One virtue that St. Teresa urges with great insistence is a spirit of obedience to lawful authority, especially to the Church. As always, she herself gives a shining example. On one occasion when some people told her that the Inquisition was showing an unholy interest in her writings she said: “They only amused me and made me laugh, because I never had any fear about this. I knew quite well that in matters of faith, no one would ever find me transgressing even the smallest ceremony of the Church, and for the Church or for any truth of Holy Scripture, I would undertake to die a thousand deaths.”⁵⁰ St. Teresa, like all of God’s good servants, had a healthy attitude toward laws. We in the 20th century are going through a phase when some men believe that since mankind is “come of age” we need no more laws or constraints. The mature human being, they say, will do the right thing of his own free choice. Give him his liberty and you can depend on him to use it well. His natural impulses and instinctive desires are directed to what is good. It is hardly necessary to discuss this, all over again. The evidence of history alone proves it to be untrue. As far back as it goes, it shows that mankind has supped full with horrors, and rarely more than in this century of ours. All of it is due to an abuse of liberty. One may hope that it is not all in vain, that the human race is being purified. But this scarcely justifies one in imagining that we do not need laws. What we need is a correct appreciation of them. It is not a sign of maturity to despise laws. Quite true, a legalistic frame of mind is not virtue, but keeping laws for the right reason is not legalism, only simple common sense. No one can accuse St. Paul of legalism. Indeed his emphasis on Christian freedom has more than once been given an antinomian interpretation (i.e., that Christians living under the law of grace were exempt from keeping the moral law). Nonetheless, there is no mistaking St. Paul’s attitude to lawful authority, even when that authority was vested in pagan Rome. And our Lord himself was obedient to lawful authority, even when those who wielded it were unworthy men. Once again, and not for the first time, the world needs leadership in obedience, the manly humble obedience that is modeled on the example of Him who was obedient unto death. In St. Teresa’s mind, the one best qualified to do this are those whom God is leading in the ways of contemplative prayer and who, for that very reason, are already experiencing something of the true emancipation which is promised to the children of God.⁵¹

One final remark about this theme of preparing for the light. Preoccupation with one’s own progress, if it is allowed to become excessive, can effectively ruin all inner growth. It is indeed true to say that we must make conscious efforts to practice virtue; we must be concerned for our own spiritual development, and so on. But this should ultimately have the effect of turning us away from self. Introspection is not holiness, though some amount of it can hardly be avoided. St. Teresa has an interesting remark about this: “When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing, and so completely wrapped up in their

⁴⁹p. 255

⁵⁰Peers I, p. 266

⁵¹p. 259

prayers that they seem afraid to stir, lest they should lose the slightest degree of tenderness and devotion which they are feeling, I realize how little they understand of the road to the attainment of union.”⁵² And then she gives us one more sample of that unsurpassable good sense for which she is justly famous. A kind of pseudo-contemplation that leads to nothing but self-admiration is not prayer at all. By their fruits you shall know, and what the Lord desires is works: “If you see a sick woman to whom you can give some help, never be affected by the fear that your devotion will suffer, but take pity on her. If she is in pain, you should feel pain too. If necessary fast, so that she may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be God’s will.”⁵³ It would be hard to surpass this evangelical advice. It will be noted that even when we display the utmost concern for others, St. Teresa would have us motivated by the love of Christ. The words that she uses to describe the self-centered contemplative are worth a little attention. They are “muffled up,” their faces covered with a hood - *encapotados*. It conjures up the picture of a thoroughly selfish person, wrapped up in himself. the hood of his coat pulled down over his face to shut out all kinds of interruption, while he concentrates, not on God, but on his own perfection, real or imaginary. Obviously, St. Teresa had little patience for this make-believe type of holiness.

VI. GRIEF AND PAIN

Since contemplative prayer is simply another name for sharing more deeply in the paschal mystery, it is to be expected that it brings an experience both of Good Friday and of Easter Sunday. In other words, the Fifth Mansions bring intense joy and peace, together with a sense of renewal. But before that can take place, there has to be a deep purification which corresponds to our Lord’s anguish and desolation on the Cross. Those whom He loves and who love Him, participate in His redemptive sufferings. Furthermore, this is one of the signs of genuine contemplation. The pseudo-contemplative imagines himself to be in a habitual state of exaltation, which he claims to be a recurrence of the joy of the first Pentecost. We have already spoken of this emotionally-charged kind of prayer, which in fact has no roots and withers when the storms of life assail it. The true contemplative is simultaneously full of a deep quiet and happiness, and nonetheless suffering keenly. St. John of the Cross is the great exponent of these “nights of the spirit,” as he calls them. St. Teresa, too, has some very pertinent comments to make.

First there is the theme of “divine grief,” a very cherished one for contemplatives. At the Last Supper, our Lord told his disciples that He desired with great desire to eat the pasch with them; that is, to lay down his life; and the painful death He was about to die was no deterrent to Him, “because His great love and desire that souls should be saved transcended the pain beyond all comparison, and the very terrible things that He suffered since He came into the world were as nothing compared with the desire to save mankind.”⁵⁴ From her own experience, St. Teresa can bear this out. She tells of “a certain person whom she knows” (namely, herself) who suffered so much at seeing our Lord offended that she would sooner die than endure it. What must it have been like in the case of the good Lord Himself? The constant sight of so many offenses against

⁵²p. 263

⁵³ibid

⁵⁴pp. 257-258

God and the loss of souls must have been so painful to Him that, had He not been more than man, one day of that grief would have sufficed to put an end to his earthly life.⁵⁵

Every genuine contemplative shares in this divine compassion. Yet their trials are of such sublimity and come from so noble a source that, severe though they be, they also bring peace and contentment. They make one delicately aware of the divine call, as it were. But as yet the response is imperfect: “It does not fail to act in conformity with the divine will, but it does so with many tears and with great sorrow at being unable to do more, because it has been given no more capacity.” In other words, it is still inclined to be impatient, in a very subtle way. As St. Teresa points out, a certain amount of self-love enters in even here, and this has to be purified away, as it will be in one of the Mansions yet to come.⁵⁶ But at least it is learning detachment, and every time it engages in prayer, it tends to experience this grief. In the main, it comes from God.⁵⁷ So much so indeed that all the meditation in the world could never bring it to pass. The lesser kind of grief any sincere Christian can know: “this other reaches the depth of our beings, and seems to tear the soul to pieces.”⁵⁸

At this stage a subtle temptation is liable to occur. There are some persons who want to do a lot for God, but as St. Teresa says, they find that their strength does not measure up to their own desires. Hence they tend to be a little dissatisfied with themselves and even with God. Since it seems so important to work for Him, it occurs to some of them to go ahead anyway, to take the plunge, so to speak, counting on God that He won’t let them down. This is a very cunningly-laid pitfall. It corresponds to the temptation of Christ: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for He has given His angels charge over you.”⁵⁹ It must be countered in the manner our Lord Himself met it: “You must not put the Lord to the test.”⁶⁰

To get back to the subject of grief, St. Teresa points out that it can take many shapes. Some may arise from natural causes, or even from the charity we feel for the neighbor. She gives the example of our Lord’s own grief when His friend Lazarus died. This is usually of short duration, and does not cause a restless unquiet spirit, even though it may be very real. Again, the contemplative is liable to suffer from misunderstanding and to be blamed in the wrong. In this century, it is likely to be said of him that he is neglecting the neighbor, when in fact his heart is bleeding with compassion. This may well be one of the acid tests of the genuine contemplative, distinguishing him from the self-styled variety. A man of strong will can put on a good show of heroism, and to some extent keep it going. He may even write books based on the experience of a pseudo-Dark-Night.⁶¹ But by their fruits they are known, and one of the more obvious fruits is patient suffering in union with Christ, and utter loyalty to the Church. This was splendidly exemplified in the life of the Holy Mother, who was severely blamed even by some high-placed Churchmen. There is not a trace of dramatization or self-pity in any reference she makes to it.

⁵⁵p. 258

⁵⁶p. 256

⁵⁷p. 257

⁵⁸ibid

⁵⁹Luke, 4, 10

⁶⁰ibid, 11

⁶¹cf. Daniel Berrigan’s *Dark Night of Resistance*

The *Interior Castle* itself was composed at a time when she was in deep disgrace, and when her entire work seemed to be in danger of collapsing. But not one querulous sentence does it contain. St. John of the Cross, too, is an object-lesson in the face of misunderstanding and persecution. “Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love.” This is the heroism of the Saints.

We have already said something of the way an authentic contemplative is distressed when he sees our Lord offended, particularly by those who were believed to be his good friends or his priests. Their grief knows no bounds in such cases; also when someone dies who was needed by the Church.⁶² They are not concerned what may happen to themselves, but the needs of others touch them deeply. None of this, however, blunts genuine human feelings: “Do not think, for example, that if my father or my brother dies, I ought to be in such close conformity with the will of God that I shall not grieve for his loss, or that if I have trials or illnesses I must enjoy bearing them.”⁶³ Rather the contrary. Human sensibilities become more tempered and refined through contact with Jesus Christ and suffer more keenly for the distress of others and God’s interests on earth.”

In our times, probably one of the most common sources of grief to the sincere Christian is the lack of reverence that is so apparent all round. Reverence is an attitude of respect towards those whom we hold in high esteem. It is predominantly an inner attitude, but shows itself exteriorly in one’s words and bearing. It is also called politeness, courtesy, chivalry; and, when referring to God, the fear of the Lord, or religion. Supernatural reverence is spiritual refinement arising from an appreciation of Who God is. Just as a man acquires a natural culture through living among things that are beautiful and uplifting, so also, one who lives habitually among divine things and allows himself to be influenced by them, is bound to acquire a delicate graciousness towards God and all creation, by a kind of spiritual osmosis. It is not so much a single virtue as the fruit of many, especially faith and humility. It is rooted in the Bible itself.

When Abraham prostrated himself before his mysterious guests, near the oaks of Mambre, when Moses removed his sandals to show his deference to the God of Sinai, when Elijah covered his face in the presence of the Lord, they were setting an example for all who were to follow them. “Who am I, that I should thus speak to my God . . .” is a refrain that runs through all the prophets. Our Lady’s life in the New Testament is a perfect example of spiritual reverence. St. Teresa, on another level, shows a wonderful sense of delicacy in her attitude to God, divine things and human things, springing from her deep sense of God’s greatness and goodness. It can be seen in every department of her life, but especially in her love for the Blessed Eucharist. This sense of reverence increases as the spirit of prayer grows. The soul begins to gain a better understanding of the greatness of God: “It is aghast at having been so bold; it weeps for its lack of reverence; its foolish mistakes in the past seem to it to have been so gross that it cannot stop grieving.”⁶⁴

It is well known that familiarity breeds contempt, and this may be one reason why reverence is a rare commodity in our world of today. Every barrier is down, and this is not always a good thing.

⁶²p. 255, 260

⁶³p. 261

⁶⁴Peers II, p. 303

Admittedly, the needs of our age pose a big challenge: How can we be in the world, but not of the world?? We have the example of Jesus Christ to guide us. Even though he lived very much on the same level as the apostles and disciples, He kept his place. “You call me Lord and Master, and you are right, for that is what I am.”⁶⁵ Then he proceeded to tell them how they were to establish true brotherhood; they too must keep their place, as He had done, yet be willing to do even the most menial service, one for another. The apostles for their part never lost their sense of reverence for Him. He was never a “hail-fellow-well-met,” and His disciples instinctively revered Him. But when God is cut down to our measure, reverence vanishes. We have the ill fortune to live at a time when mankind is going through a phase similar to what St. Paul encountered: “They are lacking in reverence.”⁶⁶ It is considered honest and even commendable to show lack of respect. Art, films, drama, books, fashions, and behavior are infected with it, and it has invaded even the liturgy. In daily life simple sincere greetings and other signs of mutual respect are often rejected as unworthy of this age of equality. That man is made to God’s image, and is a Temple of the Most High, is often forgotten. In fact, however, reverence for God is but another name for religion; reverence for the neighbor is a condition for mutual love; reverence for oneself is humility and modesty. It is hard to see how anyone can really pray, unless he begins seriously to cultivate these basic Christian virtues.

Finally, those whom God has led into the Fifth Mansions grieve for the world. There is a perfectly orthodox and Biblical sense in which this can be understood, and St. Teresa has her own original way of explaining it. Those who are in the way of contemplation begin to perceive that created things, for all their beauty and wonder, carry within them the seeds of their own destruction. They could never fully satisfy the longings of the human soul. True, God has His plans for the world, and human values are real ones. But they have to be transformed by divine love; the heart of man has to learn detachment. This is one of the features of the Fifth Mansions; a kind of “holy dissatisfaction” with the world takes possession of the soul. It longs to fly away and be at rest in God alone, but as yet this is not possible. Nonetheless, its weaknesses are now being healed in a marvelous way, and even turned to advantage. It knows that it can find no true joy in created things.⁶⁷ What is happening of course is that God is taking over the guidance of the inner life of man, and these things are being seen at their true worth. A correct sense of values is being established. Prayer and work, worship and culture, the divine strength and the human are merging into one glorious whole, and God begins to reign in his Kingdom.

VII. THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

In recent times, some irresponsible publications have questioned the existence of Satan, or Evil personified. He is said to be an embarrassment to the enlightened minds who have shed medieval superstitions. No doubt, the existence of evil in a world created by an all-good God is an enormous theological mystery. Nor does the Bible itself offer a full explanation. As always, two extremes have to be avoided. It is not right to be credulous, to the extent of seeing a Satanic intervention in every untoward happening. On the other hand, it is amply evident that Satan does exist and leaves nothing undone to impede the progress of those who are striving to follow

⁶⁵John 13, 13

⁶⁶Romans I, 30-31

⁶⁷pp. 255-257

Christ. St. Teresa expresses this in her own quaint way: “He (the devil) will run a thousand times around hell, if by doing so he can make us believe we have a single virtue which we have not.”⁶⁸ And again - “If we are really fond of foolish things, the devil will send us into transports over them. But these are not the transports of God.”⁶⁹ As usual, he deceives under an appearance of good. He knows that those who are trying to follow Christ will not touch what they know to be evil. But he works craftily, and it is easy to be tricked by him, or by our own selfish nature.⁷⁰ He will marshal all the powers of hell, for if he succeeds in blocking the spiritual growth of even a single person for whom God had great designs he will win a whole multitude. The devil has much experience in this matter.⁷¹

St. Teresa poses, and in great part answers, a question that comes to the mind of all God’s good friends: How can the devil insinuate himself into the lives of those who are dedicated to Christ? Obviously, this question stems from the deeper one: How can evil exist at all, and how can its existence be reconciled with man’s freedom and God’s providence? We must humbly admit that, in this life, we do not know the answers. In the present condition of human nature, the devil has a limited power to work in the lives of men, just as he had a limited power to obstruct that work and encompass the death even of our Lord himself. For although God has been abundantly good to us, He does not grant us complete immunity from temptations. St. Teresa writes: “When I read that Judas enjoyed the companionship of the Apostles and had continual communion with God Himself, and could listen to his very words, I realize that this does not guarantee our safety.”⁷² “For the devil comes with his artful wiles, and under color of doing good, sets about undermining the soul in trivial ways, and involving it in practices which are not wrong, or so he gives it to understand. Little by little, he darkens its understanding and weakens its will and causes self-love to increase, until in one way or another, he begins to withdraw it from the love of God and to persuade it to indulge in its own wishes.”⁷³

St. Teresa adds two sensible remarks. The first is that there is no enclosure so strict and no desert so remote that the devil cannot find his way there. In other words, we must sincerely and realistically face the fact that there is no escape from temptation. Secondly, God seems to permit severe tests to come to those whom He intends to set up as a light for others. If they are going to be a failure, it is better to discover this soon, rather than when it is too late.⁷⁴

In practice then, we must have a wholesome distrust of ourselves, and be vigilant, lest the evil one deceive us. We cannot take it for granted that we or others will instinctively do the right thing. Subjective reactions or feelings are no safe guides, where faith or morals are concerned. Even in the Fifth Mansions, it is surprising how often St. Teresa advises us not to be deceived here. She who encouraged soaring ideals also warns us to walk warily, for in this life there is no complete security: “How many are called to the apostleship, as Judas was, and enjoy communion

⁶⁸p. 262

⁶⁹p. 249

⁷⁰p. 249

⁷¹p. 265

⁷²p. 266

⁷³p. 266

⁷⁴p. 267

with Him, or are called to be made Kings as Saul was, and afterwards through their own fault, are lost.”⁷⁵ Thus, our prayer should ever be, “Lead us not into temptation.” We must continually ask God to keep us in His hand and bear constantly in mind that if He leaves us, we shall at once be down in the depths, as indeed we shall. “Keep me faithful to your teaching and never let me be parted from you.” So we must never have any confidence in ourselves; that would simply be folly.⁷⁶

All this is certainly true and realistic. But it needs to be supplemented by some further remarks made by St. Teresa in other parts of her writing. In one place, she says she cannot understand the mentality of those who are forever calling out “the devil, the devil,” when they might just as easily say “God, God,” and so put the devil to flight.⁷⁷ In other words, there is no reason to be obsessed by fear of the Evil One; God is always more powerful. Then, too, we have the companionship and help of one whose role it is to crush the serpent’s head. In a very real way, our Lady is the patron of those who experience darkness and distress on the road to God. She assumed this role on the day when she stood beside her Son’s cross on Calvary. She will fulfill it until redemption finally dawns for all those who are called to be children of the Kingdom.

VIII. TRUE LOVE

It is only to be expected that in the Fifth Mansions, which are now so close to the central mansion where the King of Glory dwells, the subject of true love should come to the fore. What St. Teresa says of it here is in the nature of practical counsels, to make sure we possess the genuine article, not some counterfeit.

Anyone who comes even as far as the door of the Fifth Mansions has much to be thankful for.⁷⁸ It brings great graces. But they must be careful not to slip back. There is no standing still on this road; either we are for Christ or against Him. If we do not gather, we are in fact scattering the treasures of his grace: “For it is unthinkable that a soul which has arrived so far should cease to grow. Love is never idle, so failure to advance would be a very bad sign.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, a genuinely virtuous person is certain to radiate something of the goodness that God bestows on them. “From its own new spiritual heat, new heat will be transmitted to others,” as St. Teresa vividly puts it.⁸⁰

In these mansions, our Lord asks for two main things, namely love for His Majesty and love for the neighbor. And the surest sign we are keeping these commandments is that we should be really loving the neighbor. For we cannot be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbor. And be certain that the farther advanced you are in this, the greater the love you will have for God. For so dearly does His Majesty love us, that He will reward our love for our neighbor by

⁷⁵p. 259

⁷⁶p. 267, 261, 265, 248

⁷⁷Peers I, p. 165

⁷⁸p. 247

⁷⁹p. 267

⁸⁰p. 259

increasing the love which we bear to Himself, and that in a thousand ways. This I cannot doubt . . . Our nature being so evil, I do not believe we could ever attain perfect love of the neighbor unless it has its roots in the love of God.”⁸¹

This is a very important observation, and shows how solid are St. Teresa’s ideas. It is true that faith without good works is dead, but good works alone are not the fulfilling of the law. I can give away every penny I own, and even give up my very body, but if I have no charity (agape), it is of no avail.⁸² Certainly, the genuine Christian will do good; the better he is, the more good he is likely to do. But he will never succumb to the subtle error of believing that because he does good to the neighbor, he has done everything that is required of him; or that he is, for that reason, dispensed from worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Nor will he be tempted to draw invidious conclusions from comparisons between the theoretical Christian who believes in God but neglects his neighbor, and the non-believer who does all kinds of good but never worships or prays. And he will know too that he cannot truly love his neighbor unless he first loves God, most and above all. As we might well expect, St. Teresa had solid ideas in all those points. She was in no danger of falling into the radical errors of Joseph Fletcher and others of the same ilk, who - under the pretext of exalting love - have ended up by debasing the entire moral law, including the law of love itself.⁸³ Philanthropy, no matter how well-intentioned, is no substitute for divine love. The French reign of terror was inaugurated by men who loudly proclaimed their own virtuousness, and their belief in liberty, fraternity and equality. Human nature alone cannot for long endure the burden of loving other human beings, imperfect and often ungrateful. It soon begins to look about for an excuse to lighten the load, and is capable of finding grotesque ones. Mercy-killing, abortion, disobedience, birth control have all been justified under the pretext of love. Quite obviously, this is not what Christ meant when He spoke of loving the neighbor. If anything stands out in the Sermon on the Mount, it is that love is proved principally by the way it treats those who are imperfect or unworthy. St. Teresa has this to say: “Take no notice of all the fine plans that keep crowding into our minds when we pray, and which we think we will put into practice and carry out for the good of our neighbors. If our later actions are not in harmony with these plans, we can have no reason for believing that we would ever have put them into practice. I say the same of humility, and of all the virtues.”⁸⁴

To do this, we need more than the good will of flesh and blood. “Do not suppose it will cost you nothing, or that you will find it all done for you.” We need the example and inspiration of Him, who in order to redeem us from death, died such a grievous death on the cross.⁸⁵ “So let us ask Him to grant us this perfect love of the neighbor, and allow His Majesty to work, and if we do all we can ourselves He will give us far more than we can ever desire. We must learn to go against ourselves even though this may mean the sacrifice of our rights, or forget our own good for the sake of the common good. If the opportunity presents itself, too, we should try to relieve our neighbor of some trial by taking it on ourselves.” This is certainly not easy: it goes against the

⁸¹pp. 261-262

⁸²cf. I Cor. 13

⁸³See his books: *Situation Ethics*, ed. Westminster Press; also *Moral Responsibility*, ed. West. Press

⁸⁴p. 262

⁸⁵ibid

grain at every level. But this is true, undiluted Christianity: This is the kind of religion and service that God looks for.⁸⁶

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⁸⁶cf. p. 263