

## Saint John of the Cross, "The Ascent of Mount Carmel" book II, C. 29

*Which treats of the first kind of words that the recollected spirit sometimes forms within itself.  
Describes the cause of these and the profit and the harm which there may be in them.*

1- These successive words always come when the spirit is recollected and absorbed very attentively in some meditation; and, in its reflections upon that same matter whereon it is thinking, it proceeds from one stage to another, forming words and arguments which are very much to the point, with great facility and distinctiveness, and by means of its reasoning discovers things which it knew not with respect to the subject of its reflections, so that it seems not to be doing this itself, but rather it seems that another person is supplying the reasoning within its mind or answering its questions or teaching it. And in truth it has good cause for thinking this, for the soul itself is reasoning with itself and answering itself as though it were two persons convening together; and in some ways this is really so; for, although it is the spirit itself that works as an instrument, the Holy Spirit oftentimes aids it to produce and form those true reasonings, words and conceptions. And thus it utters them to itself as though to a third person. For, as at that time the understanding is recollected and united with the truth of that whereon it is thinking, and the Divine Spirit is likewise united with it in that truth, as it is always united in all truth, it follows that, when the understanding communicates in this way with the Divine Spirit by means of this truth, it begins to form within itself, successively, those other truths which are connected with that whereon it is thinking, the door being opened to it and illumination being given to it continually by the Holy Spirit Who teaches it. For this is one of the ways wherein the Holy Spirit teaches.

2. And when the understanding is illumined and taught in this way by this master, and comprehends these truths, it begins of its own accord to form the words which relate to the truths that are communicated to it from elsewhere. So that we may say that the voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hand of Esau. And one that is in this condition will be unable to believe that this is so, but will think that the sayings and the words come from a third person. For such a one knows not the facility with which the understanding can form words inwardly, as though they came from a third person, and having reference to conceptions and truths which have in fact been communicated to it by a third person.

3. And although it is true that, in this communication and enlightenment of the understanding, no deception is produced in the soul itself, nevertheless, deception may, and does, frequently occur in the formal words and reasonings which the understanding bases upon it. For, inasmuch as this illumination which it receives is at times very subtle and spiritual, so that the understanding cannot attain to a clear apprehension of it, and it is the understanding that, as we say, forms the reasonings of its own accord, it follows that those which it forms are frequently false, and on other occasions are only apparently true, or are imperfect. For since at the outset the soul began to seize the truth, and then brought into play the skilfulness or the clumsiness of its own weak understanding, its perception of the truth may easily be modified by the instability of its own faculties of comprehension, and act all the time exactly as though a third person were speaking.

4. I knew a person who had these successive locutions: among them were some very true and substantial ones concerning the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, but others were sheer heresy. And I am appalled at what happens in these days - namely, when some soul with the very smallest experience of meditation, if it be conscious of certain locutions of this kind in some state of recollection, at once christens them all as coming from God, and assumes that this is the case, saying: 'God said to me . . .'; 'God answered me . . .'; whereas it is not so at all, but, as we have said, it is for the most part they who are saying these things to themselves.

5. And, over and above this, the desire which people have for locutions, and the pleasure which comes to their spirits from them, lead them to make answer to themselves and then to think that it is God Who is answering them and speaking to them. They therefore commit great blunders unless they impose a strict restraint upon themselves, and unless their director obliges them to abstain from these kinds of reflection. For they are apt to gain from them mere nonsensical talk and impurity of soul rather than humility and mortification of spirit, if they think, 'This was indeed a great thing' and 'God was speaking'; whereas it will have been little more than nothing, or nothing at all, or less than nothing. For, if humility and charity be not engendered by such experiences, and mortification and holy simplicity and silence, etc., what can be the value of them? I say, then, that these things may hinder the soul greatly in its progress to Divine union because, if it pay heed to them, it is led far astray from the abyss of faith, where the understanding must remain in darkness, and must journey in darkness, by love and in faith, and not by much reasoning.

6. And if you ask me why the understanding must be deprived of these truths, since through them it is illumined by the Spirit of God, and thus they cannot be evil, I reply that the Holy Spirit illumines the understanding which is recollected, and illumines it according to the manner of its recollection, and that the understanding cannot find any other and greater recollection than in faith; and thus the Holy Spirit will illumine it in naught more than in faith. For the purer and the more refined in faith is the soul, the more it has of the infused charity of God; and the more charity it has, the more is it illumined and the more gifts of the Holy Spirit are communicated to it, for charity is the cause and the means whereby they are communicated to it. And although it is true that, in this illumination of truths, the Holy Spirit communicates a certain light to the soul, this is nevertheless as different in quality from that which is in faith, wherein is no clear understanding, as is the most precious gold from the basest metal; and, with regard to its quantity, the one is as much greater than the other as the sea is greater than a drop of water. For in the one manner there is communicated to the soul wisdom concerning one or two or three truths, etc., but in the other there is communicated to it all the wisdom of God in general, which is the Son of God, Who communicates Himself to the soul in faith.

7. And if you tell me that this is all good, and that the one impedes not the other, I reply that it impedes it greatly if the soul sets store by it; for to do this is to occupy itself with things which are clear and of little importance, yet which are sufficient to hinder the communication of the abyss of faith, wherein God supernaturally and secretly instructs the soul, and exalts it in virtues and gifts in a way that it knows not. And the profit which these successive communications will bring us

cannot come by our deliberately applying the understanding to them, for if we do this they will rather lead us astray, even as Wisdom says to the soul in the Songs: 'Turn away thine eyes from me, for they make me to fly away.' That is so say: They make me to fly far away from thee and to set myself higher. We must therefore not apply the understanding to that which is being supernaturally communicated to it, but simply and sincerely apply the will to God with love, for it is through love that these good things are communicated and through love they will be communicated in greater abundance than before. For if the ability of the natural understanding or of other faculties be brought actively to bear upon these things which are communicated supernaturally and passively, its imperfect nature will not reach them, and thus they will perforce be modified according to the capacity of the understanding, and consequently will perforce be changed; and thus the understanding will necessarily go astray and begin to form reasonings within itself, and there will no longer be anything supernatural or any semblance thereof, but all will be merely natural and most erroneous and unworthy.

8. But there are certain types of understanding so quick and subtle that, when they become recollected during some meditation, they invent conceptions, and begin naturally, and with great facility, to form these conceptions into the most lifelike words and arguments, which they think, without any doubt, come from God. Yet all the time they come only from the understanding, which, with its natural illumination, being to some extent freed from the operation of the senses, is able to effect all this, and more, without any supernatural aid. This happens very commonly, and many persons are greatly deceived by it, thinking that they have attained to a high degree of prayer and are receiving communications from God, wherefore they either write this down or cause it to be written. And it turns out to be nothing, and to have the substance of no virtue, and it serves only to encourage them in vanity.

9. Let these persons learn to be intent upon naught, save only upon grounding the will in humble love, working diligently, suffering and thus imitating the Son of God in His life and mortifications, for it is by this road that a man will come to all spiritual good, rather than by much inward reasoning.

10. In this type of locution -- namely, in successive interior words -- the devil frequently intervenes, especially in the case of such as have some inclination or affection for them. At times when such persons begin to be recollected, the devil is accustomed to offer them ample material for distractions, forming conceptions or words by suggestion in their understanding, and then corrupting and deceiving it most subtly with things that have every appearance of being true. And this is one of the manners wherein he communicates with those who have made some implicit or expressed compact with him; as with certain heretics, especially with certain heresiarchs, whose understanding he fills with most subtle, false and erroneous conceptions and arguments.

11. From what has been said, it is evident that these successive locutions may proceed in the understanding from three causes, namely: from the Divine Spirit, Who moves and illumines the understanding; from the natural illumination of the same understanding; and from the devil, who may speak to the soul by suggestion. To describe now the signs and indications by which a man may know when they proceed from one cause and when from another would be somewhat difficult, as also to give examples and indications. It is quite possible, however, to give some general signs, which are these. When in its words and conceptions the soul finds itself loving God, and at the same time is conscious not only of love but also of humility and reverence, it is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working within it, for, whensoever He grants favours, He grants them with this accompaniment. When the locutions proceed solely from the vivacity and brilliance of the understanding, it is the understanding that accomplishes everything, without the operation of the virtues (although the will, in the knowledge and illumination of those truths, may love naturally); and, when the meditation is over, the will remains dry, albeit inclined neither to vanity nor to evil, unless the devil should tempt it afresh about this matter. This, however, is not the case when the locutions have been prompted by a good spirit; for then, as a rule, the will is afterwards affectioned to God and inclined to well-doing. At certain times, nevertheless, it will happen that, although the communication has been the work of a good spirit, the will remains in aridity, since God ordains it so for certain causes which are of assistance to the soul. At other times the soul will not be very conscious of the operations or motions of those virtues, yet that which it has experienced will be good. Wherefore I say that the difference between these locutions is sometimes difficult to recognize, by reason of the varied effects which they produce; but these which have now been described are the most common, although sometimes they occur in greater abundance and sometimes in less. But those that come from the devil are sometimes difficult to understand and recognize, for, although it is true that as a rule they leave the will in aridity with respect to love of God, and the mind inclined to vanity, self-esteem or complacency, nevertheless they sometimes inspire the soul with a false humility and a fervent affection of the will rooted in self-love, so that at times a person must be extremely spiritually-minded to recognize it. And this the devil does in order the better to protect himself; for he knows very well how sometimes to produce tears by the feelings which he inspires in a soul, in order that he may continue to implant in it the affections that he desires. But he always strives to move its will so that it may esteem those interior communications, attach great importance to them, and, as a result, give itself up to them and be occupied in that which is not virtue, but is rather the occasion of losing virtue as the soul may have.

12. Let us remember, then, this necessary caution, both as to the one type of locution and as to the other, so that we may not be deceived or hindered by them. Let us treasure none of them, but think only of learning to direct our will determinedly to God, fulfilling His law and His holy counsels perfectly, which is the wisdom of the Saints, and contenting ourselves with knowing the mysteries and truths

with the simplicity and truth wherewith the Church sets them before us. For this is sufficient to enkindle the will greatly, so that we need not pry into other deep and curious things wherein it is a wonder if there is no peril. For with respect to this Saint Paul says: It is not fitting to know more than it behoves us to know. And let this suffice with respect to this matter of successive words.

### The 3 types of Presence of God in the Soul according to s. John of the Cross

"*Reveal Your presence.*"

2. To understand this clearly we must remember that there are three ways in which God is present in the soul. **The first** is His presence in essence, not in holy souls only, but in wretched and sinful souls as well, and also in all created things; for it is by this presence that He gives life and being, and were it once withdrawn all things would return to nothing. This presence never fails in the soul.

3. **The second** is His presence by grace, whereby He dwells in the soul, pleased and satisfied with it. This presence is not in all souls; for those who fall into mortal sin lose it, and no soul can know in a natural way whether it has it or not. **The third** is His presence by spiritual affection. God is wont to show His presence in many devout souls in diverse ways, in refreshment, joy, and gladness; yet this, like the others, is all secret, for He does not show Himself as He is, because the condition of our mortal life does not admit of it. Thus this prayer of the soul may be understood of any one of them.

"*Reveal Your presence.*"

4. Inasmuch as it is certain that God is ever present in the soul, at least in the first way, the soul does not say, "Be present"; but, "Reveal and manifest Your hidden presence, whether natural, spiritual, or affective, in such a way that I may behold You in Your divine essence and beauty." The soul prays Him that as He by His essential presence gives it its natural being, and perfects it by His presence of grace, so also He would glorify it by the manifestation of His glory. But as the soul is now loving God with fervent affections, the presence, for the revelation of which it prays the Beloved to manifest, is to be understood chiefly of the affective presence of the Beloved. Such is the nature of this presence that the soul felt there was an infinite being hidden there, out of which God communicated to it certain obscure visions of His own divine beauty. Such was the effect of these visions that the soul longed and fainted away with the desire of that which is hidden in that presence.

5. This is in harmony with the experience of David, when he said: "My soul longs and faints for the courts of our Lord." (Ps. 83:3) The soul now faints with desire of being absorbed in the Sovereign Good which it feels to be present and hidden; for though it is hidden, the soul is most profoundly conscious of the good and delight which are there. The soul is therefore attracted to this good with more violence than matter is to its center, and is unable to contain itself, by reason of the force of this attraction, from saying: "Reveal Your presence." (Spiritual Canticle 11,2-5, see also: Spiritual Canticle 1,5-7 and 8,3; Ascent of Mount Carmel II,5,3. Living Flame of Love I,12 and III,24)

#### Teresa of Avila, "The way of perfection" Ch. 26

*Continues the description of a method for recollecting the thoughts. Describes means of doing this.*

*This chapter is very profitable for those who are beginning prayer.*

1- Let us now return to our vocal prayer, so that we may learn to pray in such a way that, without our understanding how, God may give us everything at once: if we do this, as I have said, we shall pray as we ought. As you know, the first things must be examination of conscience, confession of sin and the signing of yourself with the Cross. Then, daughter, as you are alone, you must look for a companion -- and who could be a better Companion than the very Master Who taught you the prayer that you are about to say? Imagine that this Lord Himself is at your side and see how lovingly and how humbly He is teaching you -- and, believe me, you should stay with so good a Friend for as long as you can before you leave Him. If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, and if He sees that you love Him to be there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away, nor will He ever fail you. He will help you in all your trials and you will have Him everywhere. Do you think it is a small thing to have such a Friend as that beside you?

2- O sisters, those of you whose minds cannot reason for long or whose thoughts cannot dwell upon God but are constantly wandering must at all costs form this habit. I know quite well that you are capable of it -- for many years I endured this trial of being unable to concentrate on one subject, and a very sore trial it is. But I know the Lord does not leave us so devoid of help that if we approach Him humbly and ask Him to be with us He will not grant our request. If a whole year passes without our obtaining what we ask, let us be prepared to try for longer. Let us never grudge time so well spent. Who, after all, is hurrying us? I am sure we can form this habit and strive to walk at the side of this true Master.

3- I am not asking you now to think of Him, or to form numerous conceptions of Him, or to make long and subtle meditations with your understanding. I am asking you only to look at Him. For who can prevent you from turning the eyes of your soul (just for a moment, if you can do no more) upon this Lord? You are capable of looking at very ugly and loathsome things: can you not, then, look at the most beautiful thing imaginable? Your Spouse never takes His eyes off you, daughters. He has borne with thousands of foul and abominable sins which you have committed against Him, yet even they have not been enough to make Him cease looking upon you. Is it such a great matter, then, for you to avert the eyes of your soul from outward things and sometimes to look at Him? See, He is only waiting for us to look at Him, as He says to the Bride. If you want Him you will find Him. He longs so much for us to look at Him once more that it will not be for lack of effort on His part if we fail to do so.

4- A wife, they say, must be like this if she is to have a happy married life with her husband. If he is sad, she must show signs of sadness; if he is merry, even though she may not in fact be so, she must appear merry too. See what slavery you have escaped from, sisters! Yet this, without any pretence, is really how we are treated by the Lord. He becomes subject to us and is pleased to let you be the mistress and to conform to your will. If you are happy, look upon your risen Lord, and the very thought of how He rose from the sepulchre will gladden you. How bright and how beautiful was He then! How majestic! How victorious! How joyful! He was like one emerging from a battle in which He had gained a great kingdom, all of which He desires you to have -- and with it Himself. Is it such a great thing that you should turn your eyes but once and look upon Him Who has made you such great gifts?

5- If you are suffering trials, or are sad, look upon Him on His way to the Garden. What sore distress He must have borne in His soul, to describe His own suffering as He did and to complain of it! Or look upon Him bound to the Column, full of pain, His flesh all torn to pieces by His great love for you. How much He suffered, persecuted by some, spat upon by others, denied by His friends, and even deserted by them, with none to take His part, frozen with the cold and left so completely alone that you may well comfort each other! Or look upon Him bending under the weight of the Cross and not even allowed to take breath: He will look upon you with His lovely and compassionate eyes, full of tears, and in comforting your grief will forget His own because you are bearing Him company in order to comfort Him and turning your head to look upon Him.

6- "O Lord of the world, my true Spouse!" you may say to Him, if seeing Him in such a plight has filled your heart with such tenderness that you not only desire to look upon Him but love to speak to Him, not using forms of prayer, but words issuing from the compassion of your heart, which means so much to Him: "Art Thou so needy, my Lord and my Good, that Thou wilt accept poor companionship like mine? Do I read in Thy face that Thou hast found comfort, even in me? How can it be possible, Lord, that the angels are leaving Thee alone and that Thy Father is not comforting Thee?"

"If Thou, Lord, art willing to suffer all this for me, what am I suffering for Thee? What have I to complain of? I am ashamed, Lord, when I see Thee in such a plight, and if in any way I can imitate Thee I will suffer all trials that come to me and count them as a great blessing. Let us go both together, Lord: whither Thou goest, I must go; through whatsoever Thou passest, I must pass." Take up this cross, sisters: never mind if the Jews trample upon you provided you can save Him some of His trials. Take no heed of what they say to you; be deaf to all detraction; stumble and fall with your Spouse, but do not draw back from your cross or give it up. Think often of the weariness of His journey and of how much harder His trials were than those which you have to suffer. However hard you may imagine yours to be, and however much affliction they may cause you, they will be a source of comfort to you, for you will see that they are matters for scorn compared with the trials endured by the Lord.

7- You will ask me, sisters, how you can possibly do all this, and say that, if you had seen His Majesty with your bodily eyes at the time when He lived in the world, you would have done it willingly and gazed at Him for ever. Do not believe it: anyone who will not make the slight effort necessary for recollection in order to gaze upon this Lord present within her, which she can do without danger and with only the minimum of trouble, would have been far less likely to stand at the foot of the Cross with the Magdalen, who looked death (as they say) straight in the face. What the glorious Virgin and this blessed saint must have suffered! What threats, what malicious words, what shocks, what insults! For the people they were dealing with were not exactly polite to them. No, indeed; theirs was the kind of courtesy you might meet in hell, for they were the ministers of the devil himself. Yet, terrible as the sufferings of these women must have been, they would not have noticed them in the presence of pain so much greater.

8- So do not suppose, sisters, that you would have been prepared to endure such great trials then, if you are not ready for such trifling ones now. Practise enduring these and you may be given others which are greater. Believe that I am telling the truth when I say that you can do this, for I am speaking from experience. You will find it very helpful if you can get an image or a picture of this Lord -- one that you like -- not to wear round your neck and never look at but to use regularly whenever you talk to Him, and He will tell you what to say. If words do not fail you when you talk to people on earth, why should they do so when you talk to God? Do not imagine that they will -- I shall certainly not believe that they have done so if you once form the habit. For when you never have intercourse with a person he soon becomes a stranger to you, and you forget how to talk to him; and before long, even if he is a kinsman, you feel as if you do not know him, for both kinship and friendship lose their influence when communication ceases.

9- It is also a great help to have a good book, written in the vernacular, simply as an aid to recollection. With this aid you will learn to say your vocal prayers well, I mean, as they ought to be said -- and little by little, persuasively and methodically, you will get your soul used to this, so that it will no longer be afraid of it. Remember that many years have passed since it went away from its Spouse, and it needs very careful handling before it will return home. We sinners are like that: we have accustomed our souls and minds to go after their own pleasures (or pains, it would be more correct to say) until the unfortunate soul no longer knows what it is doing. When that has happened, a good deal of skill is necessary before it can be inspired with enough love to make it stay at home; but unless we can gradually do that we shall accomplish nothing. Once again I assure you that, if you are careful to form habits of the kind I have mentioned, you will derive such great profit from them that I could not describe it even if I wished. Keep at the side of this good Master, then, and be most firmly resolved to learn what He teaches you; His Majesty will then ensure your not failing to be good disciples, and He will never leave you unless you leave Him. Consider the words uttered by those Divine lips: the very first of them will show you at once what love He has for you, and it is no small blessing and joy for the pupil to see that his Master loves Him.

## CHAPTER 28

*Describes the nature of the Prayer of Recollection and sets down some of the means by which we can make it a habit.*

Consider now what your Master says next: "Who art in the Heavens." Do you suppose it matters little what Heaven is and where you must seek your most holy Father? I assure you that for minds which wander it is of great importance not only to have a right belief about this but to try to learn it by experience, for it is one of the best ways of concentrating the mind and effecting recollection in the soul.

You know that God is everywhere; and this is a great truth, for, of course, wherever the king is, or so they say, the court is too: that is to say, wherever God is, there is Heaven. No doubt you can believe that, in any place where His Majesty is, there is fulness of glory. Remember how Saint Augustine tells us about his seeking God in many places and eventually finding Him within himself. Do you suppose it is of little importance that a soul which is often distracted should come to understand this truth and to find that, in order to speak to its Eternal Father and to take its delight in Him, it has no need to go to Heaven

or to speak in a loud voice? However quietly we speak, He is so near that He will hear us: we need no wings to go in search of Him but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us. Nor need we feel strange in the presence of so kind a Guest; we must talk to Him very humbly, as we should to our father, ask Him for things as we should ask a father, tell Him our troubles, beg Him to put them right, and yet realize that we are not worthy to be called His children.

Avoid being bashful with God, as some people are, in the belief that they are being humble. It would not be humility on your part if the King were to do you a favour and you refused to accept it; but you would be showing humility by taking it, and being pleased with it, yet realizing how far you are from deserving it. A fine humility it would be if I had the Emperor of Heaven and earth in my house, coming to it to do me a favour and to delight in my company, and I were so humble that I would not answer His questions, nor remain with Him, nor accept what He gave me, but left Him alone. Or if He were to speak to me and beg me to ask for what I wanted, and I were so humble that I preferred to remain poor and even let Him go away, so that He would see I had not sufficient resolution.

Have nothing to do with that kind of humility, daughters, but speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord and a Spouse -- and, sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, He will teach you what you must do to please Him. Do not be foolish; ask Him to let you speak to Him, and, as He is your Spouse, to treat you as His brides. Remember how important it is for you to have understood this truth -- that the Lord is within us and that we should be there with Him.

If one prays in this way, the prayer may be only vocal, but the mind will be recollected much sooner; and this is a prayer which brings with it many blessings. It is called recollection because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God. Its Divine Master comes more speedily to teach it, and to grant it the Prayer of Quiet, than in any other way. For, hidden there within itself, it can think about the Passion, and picture the Son, and offer Him to the Father, without wearying the mind by going to seek Him on Mount Calvary, or in the Garden, or at the Column.

Those who are able to shut themselves up in this way within this little Heaven of the soul, wherein dwells the Maker of Heaven and earth, and who have formed the habit of looking at nothing and staying in no place which will distract these outward senses, may be sure that they are walking on an excellent road, and will come without fail to drink of the water of the fountain, for they will journey a long way in a short time. They are like one who travels in a ship, and, if he has a little good wind, reaches the end of his voyage in a few days, while those who go by land take much longer.

These souls have already, as we may say, put out to sea; though they have not sailed quite out of sight of land, they do what they can to get away from it, in the time at their disposal, by recollecting their senses. If their recollection is genuine, the fact becomes very evident, for it produces certain effects which I do not know how to explain but which anyone will recognize who has experience of them. It is as if the soul were rising from play, for it sees that worldly things are nothing but toys; so in due course it rises above them, like a person entering a strong castle, in order that it may have nothing more to fear from its enemies. It withdraws the senses from all outward things and spurns them so completely that, without its understanding how, its eyes close and it cannot see them and the soul's spiritual sight becomes clear. Those who walk along this path almost invariably close their eyes when they say their prayers; this, for many reasons, is an admirable custom, since it means that they are making an effort not to look at things of the world. The effort has to be made only at the beginning; later it becomes unnecessary: eventually, in fact, it would cost a greater effort to open the eyes during prayer than to close them. The soul seems to gather up its strength and to master itself at the expense of the body, which it leaves weakened and alone: in this way it becomes stronger for the fight against it.

This may not be evident at first, if the recollection is not very profound -- for at this stage it is sometimes more so and sometimes less. At first it may cause a good deal of trouble, for the body insists on its rights, not understanding that if it refuses to admit defeat it is, as it were, cutting off its own head. But if we cultivate the habit, make the necessary effort and practise the exercises for several days, the benefits will reveal themselves, and when we begin to pray we shall realize that the bees are coming to the hive and entering it to make the honey, and all without any effort of ours. For it is the Lord's will that, in return for the time which their efforts have cost them, the soul and the will should be given this power over the senses. They will only have to make a sign to show that they wish to enter into recollection and the senses will obey and allow themselves to be recollected. Later they may come out again, but it is a great thing that they should ever have surrendered, for if they come out it is as captives and slaves and they do none of the harm that they might have done before. When the will calls them afresh they respond more quickly, until, after they have entered the soul many times, the Lord is pleased that they should remain there altogether in perfect contemplation.

What has been said should be noted with great care, for, though it seems obscure, it will be understood by anyone desirous of putting it into practice. The sea-voyage, then, can be made; and, as it is very important that we should not travel too slowly, let us just consider how we can get accustomed to these good habits. Souls who do so are more secure from many occasions of sin, and the fire of Divine love is the more readily enkindled in them; for they are so near that fire that, however little the blaze has been fanned with the understanding, any small spark that flies out at them will cause them to burst into flame. When no hindrance comes to it from outside, the soul remains alone with its God and is thoroughly prepared to become enkindled.

And now let us imagine that we have within us a palace of priceless worth, built entirely of gold and precious stones -- a palace, in short, fit for so great a Lord. Imagine that it is partly your doing that this palace should be what it is -- and this is really true, for there is no building so beautiful as a soul that is pure and full of virtues, and, the greater these virtues are, the more brilliantly do the stones shine. Imagine that within the palace dwells this great King, Who has vouchsafed to become your Father and Who is seated upon a throne of supreme price -- namely, your heart.

At first you will think this irrelevant -- I mean the use of this figure to explain my point -- but it may prove very useful, especially to persons like yourselves. For, as we women are not learned or fine-witted, we need all these things to help us

realize that we actually have something within us incomparably more precious than anything we see outside. Do not let us suppose that the interior of the soul is empty; God grant that only women may be so thoughtless as to suppose that. If we took care always to remember what a Guest we have within us, I think it would be impossible for us to abandon ourselves to vanities and things of the world, for we should see how worthless they are by comparison with those which we have within us. What does an animal do beyond satisfying his hunger by seizing whatever attracts him when he sees it? There should surely be a great difference between the brute beasts and ourselves, as we have such a Father.

Perhaps you will laugh at me and say that this is obvious enough; and you will be right, though it was some time before I came to see it. I knew perfectly well that I had a soul, but I did not understand what that soul merited, or Who dwelt within it, until I closed my eyes to the vanities of this world in order to see it. I think, if I had understood then, as I do now, how this great King really dwells within this little palace of my soul, I should not have left Him alone so often, but should have stayed with Him and never have allowed His dwelling-place to get so dirty. How wonderful it is that He Whose greatness could fill a thousand worlds, and very many more, should confine Himself within so small a space, just as He was pleased to dwell within the womb of His most holy Mother! Being the Lord, He has, of course, perfect freedom, and, as He loves us, He fashions Himself to our measure.

When a soul sets out upon this path, He does not reveal Himself to it, lest it should feel dismayed at seeing that its littleness can contain such greatness; but gradually He enlarges it to the extent requisite for what He has to set within it. It is for this reason that I say He has perfect freedom, since He has power to make the whole of this palace great. The important point is that we should be absolutely resolved to give it to Him for His own and should empty it so that He may take out and put in just what He likes, as He would with something of His own. His Majesty is right in demanding this; let us not deny it to Him. And, as He refuses to force our will, He takes what we give Him but does not give Himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to Him. This is certain, and, as it is of such importance, I often remind you of it. Nor does He work within the soul as He does when it is wholly His and keeps nothing back. I do not see how He can do so, since He likes everything to be done in order. If we fill the palace with vulgar people and all kinds of junk, how can the Lord and His Court occupy it? When such a crowd is there it would be a great thing if He were to remain for even a short time.

Do you suppose, daughters, that He is alone when He comes to us? Do you not see that His most holy Son says: "Who art in the Heavens"? Surely such a King would not be abandoned by His courtiers. They stay with Him and pray to Him on our behalf and for our welfare, for they are full of charity. Do not imagine that Heaven is like this earth, where, if a lord or prelate shows anyone favours, whether for some particular reason or simply because he likes him, people at once become envious, and, though the poor man has done nothing to them, he is maliciously treated, so that his favours cost him dear.

## CHAPTER 29

*Continues to describe methods for achieving this Prayer of Recollection.*

*Says what little account we should make of being favoured by our superiors.*

For the love of God, daughters, avoid making any account of these favours. You should each do your duty; and, if this is not appreciated by your superior, you may be sure that it will be appreciated and rewarded by the Lord. We did not come here to seek rewards in this life, but only in the life to come. Let our thoughts always be fixed upon what endures, and not trouble themselves with earthly things which do not endure even for a lifetime. For to-day some other sister will be in your superior's good books; whereas to-morrow, if she sees you exhibiting some additional virtue, it is with you that she will be better pleased -- and if she is not it is of little consequence. Never give way to these thoughts, which sometimes begin in a small way but may cost you a great deal of unrest. Check them by remembering that your kingdom is not of this world, and that everything comes quickly to an end, and that there is nothing in this life that goes on unchangingly.

But even that is a poor remedy and anything but a perfect one; it is best that this state of things should continue, and that you should be humbled and out of favour, and should wish to be so for the sake of the Lord Who dwells in you. Turn your eyes upon yourself and look at yourself inwardly, as I have said. You will find your Master; He will not fail you: indeed, the less outward comfort you have, the [much] greater the joy He will give you. He is full of compassion and never fails those who are afflicted and out of favour if they trust in Him alone. Thus David tells us that he never saw the just forsaken, and again, that the Lord is with the afflicted. Either you believe this or you do not: if you do, as you should, why do you wear yourselves to death with worry?

O my Lord, if we had a real knowledge of Thee, we should make not the slightest account of anything, since Thou givest so much to those who will set their whole trust on Thee. Believe me, friends, it is a great thing to realize the truth of this so that we may see how deceptive are earthly things and favours when they deflect the soul in any way from its course and hinder it from entering within itself. God help me! If only someone could make you realize this! I myself, Lord, certainly cannot; I know that [in truth] I owe Thee more than anyone else but I cannot realize this myself as well as I should.

Returning to what I was saying, I should like to be able to explain the nature of this holy companionship with our great Companion, the Holiest of the holy, in which there is nothing to hinder the soul and her Spouse from remaining alone together, when the soul desires to enter within herself, to shut the door behind her so as to keep out all that is worldly and to dwell in that Paradise with her God. I say "desires", because you must understand that this is not a supernatural state but depends upon our volition, and that, by God's favour, we can enter it of our own accord: this condition must be understood of everything that we say in this book can be done, for without it nothing can be accomplished and we have not the power to think a single good thought. For this is not a silence of the faculties: it is a shutting-up of the faculties within itself by the soul.

There are many ways in which we can gradually acquire this habit, as various books tell us. We must cast aside everything else, they say, in order to approach God inwardly and we must retire within ourselves even during our ordinary occupations.

If I can recall the companionship which I have within my soul for as much as a moment, that is of great utility. But as I am speaking only about the way to recite vocal prayers well, there is no need for me to say as much as this. All I want is that we should know and abide with the Person with Whom we are speaking, and not turn our backs upon Him; for that, it seems to me, is what we are doing when we talk to God and yet think of all kinds of vanity. The whole mischief comes from our not really grasping the fact that He is near us, and imagining Him far away -- so far, that we shall have to go to Heaven in order to find Him. How is it, Lord, that we do not look at Thy face, when it is so near us? We do not think people are listening to us when we are speaking to them unless we see them looking at us. And do we close our eyes so as not to see that Thou art looking at us? How can we know if Thou hast heard what we say to Thee?

The great thing I should like to teach you is that, in order to accustom ourselves gradually to giving our minds confidence, so that we may readily understand what we are saying, and with Whom we are speaking, we must recollect our outward senses, take charge of them ourselves and give them something which will occupy them. It is in this way that we have Heaven within ourselves since the Lord of Heaven is there. If once we accustom ourselves to being glad that there is no need to raise our voices in order to speak to Him, since His Majesty will make us conscious that He is there, we shall be able to say the Paternoster and whatever other prayers we like with great peace of mind, and the Lord Himself will help us not to grow tired. Soon after we have begun to force ourselves to remain near the Lord, He will give us indications by which we may understand that, though we have had to say the Paternoster many times, He heard us the first time. For He loves to save us worry; and, even though we may take a whole hour over saying it once, if we can realize that we are with Him, and what it is we are asking Him, and how willing He is, like any father, to grant it to us, and how He loves to be with us, and comfort us, He has no wish for us to tire our brains by a great deal of talking.

For love of the Lord, then, sisters, accustom yourselves to saying the Paternoster in this recollected way, and before long you will see how you gain by doing so. It is a method of prayer which establishes habits that prevent the soul from going astray and the faculties from becoming restless. This you will find out in time: I only beg you to test it, even at the cost of a little trouble, which always results when we try to form a new habit. I assure you, however, that before long you will have the great comfort of finding it unnecessary to tire yourselves with seeking this holy Father to Whom you pray, for you will discover Him within you.

May the Lord teach this to those of you who do not know it: for my own part I must confess that, until the Lord taught me this method, I never knew what it was to get satisfaction and comfort out of prayer, and it is because I have always gained such great benefits from this custom of interior recollection that I have written about it at such length. Perhaps you all know this, but some sister may come to you who will not know it, so you must not be vexed at my having spoken about it here.

I conclude by advising anyone who wishes to acquire it (since, as I say, it is in our power to do so) not to grow weary of trying to get used to the method which has been described, for it is equivalent to a gradual gaining of the mastery over herself and is not vain labour. To conquer oneself for one's own good is to make use of the senses in the service of the interior life. If she is speaking she must try to remember that there is One within her to Whom she can speak; if she is listening, let her remember that she can listen to Him Who is nearer to her than anyone else. Briefly, let her realize that, if she likes, she need never withdraw from this good companionship, and let her grieve when she has left her Father alone for so long though her need of Him is so sore.

If she can, let her practise recollection many times daily; if not, let her do so occasionally. As she grows accustomed to it, she will feel its benefits, either sooner or later. Once the Lord has granted it to her, she would not exchange it for any treasure.

Nothing, sisters, can be learned without a little trouble, so do, for the love of God, look upon any care which you take about this as well spent. I know that, with God's help, if you practise it for a year, or perhaps for only six months, you will be successful in attaining it. Think what a short time that is for acquiring so great a benefit, for you will be laying a good foundation, so that, if the Lord desires to raise you up to achieve great things, He will find you ready, because you will be close to Himself. May His Majesty never allow us to withdraw ourselves from His presence. Amen.

### CHAPTER 30

*Describes the importance of understanding what we ask for in prayer. Treats of these words in the Paternoster:*

*"Sanctificetur nomen tuum, adveniat regnum tuum."*

*Applies them to the Prayer of Quiet, and begins the explanation of them.*

We must now come to consider the next petition in our good Master's prayer, in which He begins to entreat His holy Father on our behalf, and see what it is that He entreats, as it is well that we should know this.

What person, however careless, who had to address someone of importance, would not spend time in thinking how to approach him so as to please him and not be considered tedious? He would also think what he was going to ask for and what use he would make of it, especially if his petition were for some particular thing, as our good Jesus tells us our petitions must be. This point seems to me very important. Couldst Thou not, my Lord, have ended this prayer in a single sentence, by saying: "Give us, Father, whatever is good for us"? For, in addressing One Who knows everything, there would seem to be no need to say any more.

This would have sufficed, O Eternal Wisdom, as between Thee and Thy Father. It was thus that Thou didst address Him in the Garden, telling Him of Thy will and Thy fear, but leaving Thyself in His hands. But Thou knowest us, my Lord, and Thou knowest that we are not as resigned as wert Thou to the will of Thy Father; we needed, therefore, to be taught to ask for particular things so that we should stop for a moment to think if what we ask of Thee is good for us, and if it is not, should not ask for it. For, being what we are and having our free will, if we do not receive what we ask for, we shall not accept what the Lord gives us. The gift might be the best one possible -- but we never think we are rich unless we actually see money in our hands.

Oh, God help me! What is it that sends our faith to sleep, so that we cannot realize how certain we are, on the one hand, to be punished, and, on the other, to be rewarded? It is for this reason, daughters, that it is good for you to know what you are asking for in the Paternoster, so that, if the Eternal Father gives it you, you shall not cast it back in His face. You must think carefully if what you are about to ask for will be good for you; if it will not, do not ask for it, but ask His Majesty to give you light. For we are blind and often we have such a loathing for life-giving food that we cannot eat it but prefer what will cause us death -- and what a death: so terrible and eternal!

Now the good Jesus bids us say these words, in which we pray that this Kingdom may come in us: "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come in us." Consider now, daughters, how great is our Master's wisdom. I am thinking here of what we are asking in praying for this kingdom, and it is well that we should realize this. His Majesty, knowing of how little we are capable, saw that, unless He provided for us by giving us His Kingdom here on earth, we could neither hallow nor praise nor magnify nor glorify nor exalt this holy name of the Eternal Father in a way befitting it. The good Jesus, therefore, places these two petitions next to each other. Let us understand this thing that we are asking for, daughters, and how important it is that we should pray for it without ceasing and do all we can to please Him Who will give it us: it is for that reason that I want to tell you what I know about the matter now. If you do not like the subject, think out some other meditations for yourselves, for our Master will allow us to do this, provided we submit in all things to the teaching of the [Holy Roman] Church, as I do here. In any case I shall not give you this book to read until persons who understand these matters have seen it: so, if there is anything wrong with it, the reason will be, not wickedness, but my imperfect knowledge.

To me, then, it seems that, of the many joys to be found in the kingdom of Heaven, the chief is that we shall have no more to do with the things of earth; for in Heaven we shall have an intrinsic tranquillity and glory, a joy in the rejoicings of all, a perpetual peace, and a great interior satisfaction which will come to us when we see that all are hallowing and praising the Lord, and are blessing His name, and that none is offending Him. For all love Him there and the soul's one concern is loving Him, nor can it cease from loving Him because it knows Him. And this is how we should love Him on earth, though we cannot do so with the same perfection nor yet all the time; still, if we knew Him, we should love Him very differently from the way we do now.

It looks as though I were going to say that we must be angels to make this petition and to say our vocal prayers well. This would indeed be our Divine Master's wish, since He bids us make so sublime a petition. You may be quite sure that He never tells us to ask for impossibilities, so it must be possible, with God's help, for a soul living in that state of exile to reach such a point, though not as perfectly as those who have been freed from this prison, for we are making a sea-voyage and are still on the journey. But there are times when we are wearied with travelling and the Lord grants our faculties tranquillity and our soul quiet, and while they are in that state He gives us a clear understanding of the nature of the gifts He bestows upon those whom He brings to His Kingdom. Those to whom, while they are still on earth, He grants what we are asking Him for receive pledges which will give them a great hope of eventually attaining to a perpetual enjoyment of what on earth He only allows them to taste.

If it were not that you would tell me I am treating of contemplation, it would be appropriate, in writing of this petition, to say a little about the beginning of pure contemplation, which those who experience it call the Prayer of Quiet; but, as I have said, I am discussing vocal prayer here, and anyone ignorant of the subject might think that the two had nothing to do with one another, though I know this is certainly not true. Forgive my wanting to speak of it, for I know there are many people who practise vocal prayer in the manner already described and are raised by God to the higher kind of contemplation without having had any hand in this themselves or even knowing how it has happened. For this reason, daughters, I attach great importance to your saying your vocal prayers well. I know a nun who could never practise anything but vocal prayer but who kept to this and found she had everything else; yet if she omitted saying her prayers her mind wandered so much that she could not endure it. May we all practise such mental prayer as that. She would say a number of Paternosters, corresponding to the number of times Our Lord shed His blood, and on nothing more than these and a few other prayers she would spend two or three hours. She came to me once in great distress, saying that she did not know how to practise mental prayer, and that she could not contemplate but could only say vocal prayers. She was quite an old woman and had lived an extremely good and religious life. I asked her what prayers she said, and from her reply I saw that, though keeping to the Paternoster, she was experiencing pure contemplation, and the Lord was raising her to be with Him in union. She spent her life so well, too, that her actions made it clear she was receiving great favours. So I praised the Lord and envied her vocal prayer. If this story is true -- and it is -- none of you who have had a bad opinion of contemplatives can suppose that you will be free from the risk of becoming like them if you say your vocal prayers as they should be said and keep a pure conscience. I shall have to say still more about this. Anyone not wishing to hear it may pass it over.

### CHAPTER 31

*Continues the same subject. Explains what is meant by the Prayer of Quiet. Gives several counsels to those who experience it. This chapter is very noteworthy.*

Now, daughters, I still want to describe this Prayer of Quiet to you, in the way I have heard it talked about, and as the Lord has been pleased to teach it to me, perhaps in order that I might describe it to you. It is in this kind of prayer, as I have said, that the Lord seems to me to begin to show us that He is hearing our petition: He begins to give us His Kingdom on earth so that we may truly praise Him and hallow His name and strive to make others do so likewise.

This is a supernatural state, and, however hard we try, we cannot reach it for ourselves; for it is a state in which the soul enters into peace, or rather in which the Lord gives it peace through His presence, as He did to that just man Simeon. In this state all the faculties are stilled. The soul, in a way which has nothing to do with the outward senses, realizes that it is now very close to its God, and that, if it were but a little closer, it would become one with Him through union. This is not because

it sees Him either with its bodily or with its spiritual eyes. The just man Simeon saw no more than the glorious Infant -- a poor little Child, Who, to judge from the swaddling-clothes in which He was wrapped and from the small number of the people whom He had as a retinue to take Him up to the Temple, might well have been the son of these poor people rather than the Son of his Heavenly Father. But the Child Himself revealed to him Who He was. Just so, though less clearly, does the soul know Who He is. It cannot understand how it knows Him, yet it sees that it is in the Kingdom (or at least is near to the King Who will give it the Kingdom), and it feels such reverence that it dares to ask nothing. It is, as it were, in a swoon, both inwardly and outwardly, so that the outward man (let me call it the "body", and then you will understand me better) does not wish to move, but rests, like one who has almost reached the end of his journey, so that it may the better start again upon its way, with redoubled strength for its task.

The body experiences the greatest delight and the soul is conscious of a deep satisfaction. So glad is it merely to find itself near the fountain that, even before it has begun to drink, it has had its fill. There seems nothing left for it to desire. The faculties are stilled and have no wish to move, for any movement they may make appears to hinder the soul from loving God. They are not completely lost, however, since, two of them being free, they can realize in Whose Presence they are. It is the will that is in captivity now; and, if while in this state it is capable of experiencing any pain, the pain comes when it realizes that it will have to resume its liberty. The mind tries to occupy itself with only one thing, and the memory has no desire to busy itself with more: they both see that this is the one thing needful and that anything else will unsettle them. Persons in this state prefer the body to remain motionless, for otherwise their peace would be destroyed: for this reason they dare not stir. Speaking is a distress to them: they will spend a whole hour on a single repetition of the Paternoster. They are so close to God that they know they can make themselves understood by signs. They are in the palace, near to their King, and they see that He is already beginning to give them His Kingdom on earth. Sometimes tears come to their eyes, but they weep very gently and quite without distress: their whole desire is the hallowing of this name. They seem not to be in the world, and have no wish to see or hear anything but their God; nothing distresses them, nor does it seem that anything can possibly do so. In short, for as long as this state lasts, they are so overwhelmed and absorbed by the joy and delight which they experience that they can think of nothing else to wish for, and will gladly say with Saint Peter: "Lord, let us make here three mansions."

Occasionally, during this Prayer of Quiet, God grants the soul another favour which is hard to understand if one has not had long experience of it. But any of you who have had this will at once recognize it and it will give you great comfort to know what it is. I believe God often grants this favour together with the other. When this quiet is felt in a high degree and lasts for a long time, I do not think that, if the will were not made fast to something, the peace could be of such long duration. Sometimes it goes on for a day, or for two days, and we find ourselves - I mean those who experience this state - full of this joy without understanding the reason. They see clearly that their whole self is not in what they are doing, but that the most important faculty is absent - namely, the will, which I think is united with its God - and that the other faculties are left free to busy themselves with His service. For this they have much more capacity at such a time, though when attending to worldly affairs they are dull and sometimes stupid.

It is a great favour which the Lord grants to these souls, for it unites the active life with the contemplative. At such times they serve the Lord in both these ways at once; the will, while in contemplation, is working without knowing how it does so; the other two faculties are serving Him as Martha did. Thus Martha and Mary work together. I know someone to whom the Lord often granted this favour; she could not understand it and asked a great contemplative about it, he told her that what she described was quite possible and had happened to himself. I think, therefore, that as the soul experiences such satisfaction in this Prayer of Quiet the will must be almost continuously united with Him Who alone can give it happiness.

I think it will be well, sisters, if I give some advice here to any of you whom the Lord, out of His goodness alone, has brought to this state, as I know that this has happened to some of you. First of all, when such persons experience this joy, without knowing whence it has come to them, but knowing at least that they could not have achieved it of themselves, they are tempted to imagine that they can prolong it and they may even try not to breathe. This is ridiculous: we can no more control this prayer than we can make the day break, or stop night from falling; it is supernatural and something we cannot acquire. The most we can do to prolong this favour is to realize that we can neither diminish nor add to it, but, being most unworthy and undeserving of it, can only receive it with thanksgiving. And we can best give thanks, not with many words, but by lifting up our eyes, like the publican.

It is well to seek greater solitude so as to make room for the Lord and allow His Majesty to do His own work in us. The most we should do is occasionally, and quite gently, to utter a single word, like a person giving a little puff to a candle, when he sees it has almost gone out, so as to make it burn again; though, if it were fully alight, I suppose the only result of blowing it would be to put it out. I think the puff should be a gentle one because, if we begin to tax our brains by making up long speeches, the will may become active again.

Note carefully, friends, this piece of advice which I want to give you now. You will often find that these other two faculties are of no help to you. It may come about that the soul is enjoying the highest degree of quiet, and that the understanding has soared so far aloft that what is happening to it seems not to be going on in its own house at all; it really seems to be a guest in somebody else's house, looking for other lodgings, since its own lodging no longer satisfies it and it cannot remain there for long together. Perhaps this is only my own experience and other people do not find it so. But, speaking for myself, I sometimes long to die because I cannot cure this wandering of the mind. At other times the mind seems to be settled in its own abode and to be remaining there with the will as its companion. When all three faculties work together it is wonderful. The harmony is like that between husband and wife: if they are happy and love each other, both desire the same thing; but if the husband is unhappy in his marriage he soon begins to make the wife restless. Just so, when the will finds itself in this state of quiet, it must take no more notice of the understanding than it would of a madman, for, if it tries to draw the understanding

along with it, it is bound to grow preoccupied and restless, with the result that this state of prayer will be all effort and no gain and the soul will lose what God has been giving it without any effort of its own.

Pay great attention to the following comparison, which the Lord suggested to me when I was in this state of prayer, and which seems to me very appropriate. The soul is like an infant still at its mother's breast: such is the mother's care for it that she gives it its milk without its having to ask for it so much as by moving its lips. That is what happens here. The will simply loves, and no effort needs to be made by the understanding, for it is the Lord's pleasure that, without exercising its thought, the soul should realize that it is in His company, and should merely drink the milk which His Majesty puts into its mouth and enjoy its sweetness. The Lord desires it to know that it is He Who is granting it that favour and that in its enjoyment of it He too rejoices. But it is not His will that the soul should try to understand how it is enjoying it, or what it is enjoying; it should lose all thought of itself, and He Who is at its side will not fail to see what is best for it. If it begins to strive with its mind so that the mind may be apprised of what is happening and thus induced to share in it,<sup>[6]</sup> it will be quite unable to do so, and the soul will perforce lose the milk<sup>[7]</sup> and forgo that Divine sustenance.

This state of prayer is different from that in which the soul is wholly united with God, for in the latter state it does not even swallow its nourishment: the Lord places this within it, and it has no idea how. But in this state it even seems to be His will that the soul should work a little, though so quietly that it is hardly conscious of doing so. What disturbs it is the understanding and this is not the case when there is union of all the three faculties, since He Who created them suspends them: He keeps them occupied with the enjoyment that He has given them, without their knowing, or being able to understand, the reason. Anyone who has had experience of this kind of prayer will understand quite well what I am saying if, after reading this, she considers it carefully, and thinks out its meaning: otherwise it will be Greek<sup>[8]</sup> to her.

Well, as I say, the soul is conscious of having reached this state of prayer, which is a quiet, deep and Peaceful happiness of the will, without being able to decide precisely what it is, although it can clearly see how it differs from the happiness of the world. To have dominion over the whole world, with all its happiness, would not suffice to bring the soul such inward satisfaction as it enjoys now in the depths of its will. For other kinds of happiness in life, it seems to me, touch only the outward part of the will, which we might describe as its rind.

When one of you finds herself in this sublime state of prayer, which, as I have already said, is most markedly supernatural, and the understanding (or, to put it more clearly, the thought) wanders off after the most ridiculous things in the world, she should laugh at it and treat it as the silly thing it is, and remain in her state of quiet. For thoughts will come and go, but the will is mistress and all-powerful, and will recall them without your having to trouble about it. But if you try to drag the understanding back by force, you lose your power over it, which comes from your taking and receiving that Divine sustenance, and neither will nor understanding will gain, but both will be losers. There is a saying that, if we try very hard to grasp all, we lose all; and so I think it is here. Experience will show you the truth of this; and I shall not be surprised if those of you who have none think this very obscure and unnecessary. But, as I have said, if you have only a little experience of it you will understand it and be able to profit by it, and you will praise the Lord for being pleased to enable me to explain it.

Let us now conclude by saying that, when the soul is brought to this state of prayer, it would seem that the Eternal Father has already granted its petition that He will give it His Kingdom on earth. O blessed request, in which we ask for so great a good without knowing what we do! Blessed manner of asking! It is for this reason, sisters, that I want us to be careful how we say this prayer, the Paternoster, and all other vocal prayers, and what we ask for in them. For clearly, when God has shown us this favour, we shall have to forget worldly things, all of which the Lord of the world has come and cast out. I do not mean that everyone who experiences the Prayer of Quiet must perforce be detached from everything in the world; but at least I should like all such persons to know what they lack and to humble themselves and not to make so great a petition as though they were asking for nothing, and, if the Lord gives them what they ask for, to throw it back in His face. They must try to become more and more detached from everything, for otherwise they will only remain where they are. If God gives a soul such pledges, it is a sign that He has great things in store for it. It will be its own fault if it does not make great progress. But if He sees that, after He has brought the Kingdom of Heaven into its abode, it returns to earth, not only will He refrain from showing it the secrets of His Kingdom but He will grant it this other favour only for short periods and rarely.

I may be mistaken about this, but I have seen it and know that it happens, and, for my own part, I believe this is why spiritual people are not much more numerous. They do not respond to so great a favour in a practical way: instead of preparing themselves to receive this favour again, they take back from the Lord's hands the will which He considered His own and centre it upon base things. So He seeks out others who love Him in order to grant them His greater gifts, although He will not take away all that He has given from those who live in purity of conscience. But there are persons -- and I have been one of them -- to whom the Lord gives tenderness of devotion and holy inspirations and light on everything. He bestows this Kingdom on them and brings them to this Prayer of Quiet, and yet they deafen their ears to His voice. For they are so fond of talking and of repeating a large number of vocal prayers in a great hurry, as though they were anxious to finish their task of repeating them daily, that when the Lord, as I say, puts His Kingdom into their very hands, by giving them this Prayer of Quiet and this inward peace, they do not accept it, but think that they will do better to go on reciting their prayers, which only distract them from their purpose.

Do not be like that, sisters, but be watchful when the Lord grants you this favour. Think what a great treasure you may be losing and realize that you are doing much more by occasionally repeating a single petition of the Paternoster than by repeating the whole of it many times in a hurry and not thinking what you are saying. He to Whom you are praying is very near to you and will not fail to hear you; and you may be sure that you are truly praising Him and hallowing His name, since you are glorifying the Lord as a member of His household and praising Him with increasing affection and desire so that it seems you can never forsake His service. So I advise you to be very cautious about this, for it is of the greatest importance.

Introduction to the  
**ACT OF OBLATION TO MERCIFUL LOVE**

From the Autobiography of saint Thérèse Ms A

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"This year June 9, [1895] the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, I received the grace to understand more than ever before how much Jesus desires to be loved.

I was thinking about the souls who offer themselves as victims of God's Justice in order to turn away the punishments reserved to sinners, drawing them upon themselves. This offering seemed great and very generous to me, but I was far from feeling attracted to making it.

From the depths of my heart, I cried out: 'O my God! will Your Justice alone find souls willing to immolate themselves as victims? Does not Your *Merciful Love* need them too?

On every side this love is unknown, rejected; those hearts upon whom You would lavish it turn to creatures, seeking happiness from them with their miserable affection; they do this instead of throwing themselves into Your arms and of accepting Your infinite *Love*. O my God! Is Your disdained *Love* going to remain closed up within Your Heart? It seems to me that if You were to find souls offering themselves as victims of holocaust to Your *Love*, You would consume them rapidly; it seems to me, too, that You would be happy not to hold back the waves of infinite tenderness within You. If Your Justice loves to release itself, this Justice *which extends only over the earth*, how much more does Your *Merciful Love* desire to *set souls on fire*, since Your *Mercy reaches to the heavens*. O my Jesus, let me be this happy victim; consume Your holocaust with the fire of Your Divine *Love*."

You permitted me, dear Mother, to offer myself in this way to God, and you know the rivers or rather the oceans of graces that flooded my soul. Ah! since the happy day, it seems to me that *Love* penetrates and surrounds me, that at each moment this *Merciful Love* renews me, purifying my soul and leaving no trace of sin within it, and [84v°] I need have no fear of purgatory. I know that of myself I would not merit even to enter that place of expiation since only holy souls can have entrance there, but I also know that the Fire of *Love* is more sanctifying than is the fire of purgatory. I know that Jesus cannot desire useless sufferings for us, and that He would not inspire the longings I feel unless He wanted to grant them.

Oh! how sweet is the way of *Love*! How I want to apply myself to doing the will of God always with the greatest self-surrender!

Here, dear Mother, is all I can tell you about the life of your little Thérèse; you know better than I do what she is and what Jesus has done for her. You will forgive me for having abridged my religious life so much.

How will this "story of a little white flower" come to an end? Perhaps the little flower will be plucked in her youthful freshness or else transplanted to other shores. I don't know, but what I am certain about is that God's *Mercy* will accompany her always, that it will never cease blessing the dear Mother who offered her to Jesus; she will rejoice eternally at being one of the flowers of her crown. And with this dear Mother she will sing eternally the new canticle of *Love*.

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**ACT OF OBLATION TO MERCIFUL LOVE**  
**J.M.J.T.**

*Offering of myself as a Victim of Holocaust to God's Merciful Love*

O My God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to *Love* You and make You *Loved*, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory. I desire to accomplish Your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory You have prepared for me in Your Kingdom. I desire, in a word, to be a saint, but I feel my helplessness and I beg You, O my God! to be Yourself my *Sanctity!*

Since You loved me so much as to give me Your only Son as my Savior and my Spouse, the infinite treasures of His merits are mine. I offer them to You with gladness, begging You to look upon me only in the Face of Jesus and in His heart burning with *Love*.

I offer You, too, all the merits of the saints (in heaven and on earth), their acts of *Love*, and those of the holy angels. Finally, I offer You, *O Blessed Trinity!* the *Love* and merits of the *Blessed Virgin, my dear Mother*. It is to her I abandon my offering, begging her to present it to You. Her Divine Son, my *Beloved Spouse*, told us in the days of His mortal life: "*Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you!*" I am certain, then, that You will grant my desires; I know, O my God! that *the more You want to give, the more You make us desire*. I feel in my heart immense desires and it is with confidence I ask You to come and take possession of my soul. Ah! I cannot receive Holy Communion as often as I desire, but, Lord, are You not *all-powerful?* Remain in me as in a tabernacle and never separate Yourself from Your little victim.

I want to console You for the ingratitude of the wicked, and I beg of You to take away my freedom to displease You. If through weakness I sometimes fall, may Your *Divine Glance* cleanse my soul immediately, consuming all my imperfections like the fire that transforms everything into itself.

I thank You, O my God! for all the graces You have granted me, especially the grace of making me pass through the crucible of suffering. It is with joy I shall contemplate You on the Last Day carrying the sceptre of Your Cross. Since You deigned to give me a share in this very precious Cross, I hope in heaven to resemble You and to see shining in my glorified body the sacred stigmata of Your Passion.

After earth's Exile, I hope to go and enjoy You in the Fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for Your *Love alone* with the one purpose of pleasing You, consoling Your Sacred Heart, and saving souls who will love You eternally.

In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in Your own *Justice* and to receive from Your *Love* the eternal possession of *Yourself*. I want no other *Throne*, no other *Crown* but *You, my Beloved!*

Time is nothing in Your eyes, and a single day is like a thousand years. You can, then, in one instant prepare me to appear before You.

**In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE, asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a *martyr* of Your *Love*, O my God!**

**May this martyrdom, after having prepared me to appear before You, finally cause me to die and may my soul take its flight without any delay into the eternal embrace of *Your Merciful Love*.**

**I want, O my *Beloved*, at each beat of my heart to renew this offering to You an infinite number of times, until the shadows having disappeared I may be able to tell You of my *Love* in an *Eternal Face to Face!***

Marie, Françoise, Thérèse of the Child Jesus  
and the Holy Face, unworthy Carmelite religious.

This 9th day of June, Feast of the Most Holy Trinity,  
In the year of grace, 1895.