

THE INTERIOR CASTLE: Intro

St. Teresa wrote THE INTERIOR CASTLE five years after attaining spiritual marriage, and it is considered the jewel of her writings. She states that she was then able to understand and describe the things of God far more clearly than in her previous works.

The first 3 dwelling places deal with what we can do through our own efforts, as Teresa says, “always assisted by God.”

The 4th dwelling place is where supernatural (infused) prayer begins. This is the area beyond our control, God’s domain.

The 5th is where a certain union of wills takes place.

The 6th is the betrothal.

In the 7th dwelling place, the spiritual marriage between God and the soul is consummated.

These developments are more flowing in everyday life, not as clearly defined as outlined. Also, God often gives foretastes of what is to come to make souls more fervent and urge them onward. These foretastes may not always coincide with Teresa’s descriptions of her experiences.

Teresa used the metaphor of different rooms to signify different effects that she recognized in herself. Teresa wrote of the 6th and 7th dwelling places “there are no closed doors between the two.” But, in the betrothal state (6th), she still suffered from God’s seeming absence, and in the 7th, God and the soul became inseparable (spiritual marriage).

Since the ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT for spiritual marriage is union of wills, it is within everyone’s capabilities. This is repeated frequently by both St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. St. Teresa also recommends patience and strong determination.

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(continued) **THE INTERIOR CASTLE: Intro**

“A great treasure is gained by traveling this road; no wonder we have to pay what seems to us a high price. The time will come when you will understand how trifling everything is next to so precious a reward. Now returning to those who want to journey on this road and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from this water of life, I say that how they are to begin is very important--in fact, all important. They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses.” (THE WAY OF PERFECTION, Chapter 21:1, 2, The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila)

**READ: The Interior Castle (Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. II)
Introduction and First Dwelling Places**

**REFLECT: Use the ‘Reflections on Humility’ - Addendum, pages 13, 14 and 15.
Scriptures: Romans 8:5 Psalm 115:8**

RESPOND: Seek out the people in your life who are less comforting to you personally, rather than those who give you the most pleasure.

Make a greater effort this month to overcome one particular attachment by mortification and self-denial.

Evaluate your activities during one entire week to determine where (and why) you are placing most of your time and energy.

Journal what you recognize in your own prayer experience from Teresa’s descriptions.

REPLY: Fill in the blanks below, referring to the reading material:

The first three “dwelling places” of the castle deal with what is achievable through the ordinary help of and human _____ . (Introduction)

The remaining four “dwelling places” deal with the passive, or _____ elements of the spiritual life. (Introduction)

The Interior Castle is principally the fruit of Teresa’s own _____. (Introduction)

The autograph of The Interior Castle, is at the Carmel in _____ , _____ .

The door to the entry of the Castle is _____ and _____. (ch. 1)

Those trying to enter the first dwelling places are very involved in the _____ , but have good _____ and pray _____.(ch.1)

READ: The Interior Castle Second and Third Dwelling Places

**REFLECT: Scriptures: Hebrews 12:5-13 James 1:12 I Peter 1:6,7
Job 1:21 Psalm 22: 2-6 EccI: 7:9,10 Hebrews 6: 10-12**

Looking back on the last time I experienced dryness in prayer, how did I act, or if it is now, how am I acting? Am I just as diligent in prayer, sacrifices and good works as when I was experiencing fervor in prayer or other consolations? Or less so? Have I really grasped the importance of perseverance? Is there some resolution I need to make in regard to this?

Which has more merit - praying when it is not enjoyable, or when it is consoling to me? At which time do I show the purest and most perfect love of God?

RESPOND: Make a determined effort to pray a little longer than usual when you are not experiencing fervor or consolation of any kind.

Examine your conscience carefully to see if there is anything on your part which could be causing the dryness - such as unrepented sin, too much attention to worldly matters, pride in past favors from God, etc. (If not, try to accept God's purification as the favor that it really is - leading you to greater spiritual maturity, and greater merit.

You may want to try to introduce greater silence into your daily life, eliminating unnecessary conversations, TV, music and so forth. Sometimes in periods of dryness we tend to go in the other direction, *adding* distractions, and these have an adverse effect on our prayer life.

Journal what you recognize in your own prayer life from Teresa's descriptions:

REPLY: Of what does perfection and its rewards consist, if not in spiritual delights? (refer to III: 2 par.10)

Those who are in the third dwelling places and have very well-ordered lives, are cautioned by Teresa to do what in regard to faults of others?

READ: The Interior Castle Fourth Dwelling Places

REFLECT: Spend some time in prayer *with* the following passages from scripture, asking the Lord to reveal their meaning to you:

Songs: “I turn to my Beloved, and his turning is toward me.”
“I sat down in the shade of him when I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate”.

Isaiah: “You shall be carried at the breast of God; upon his knees you will be caressed.”

“See that I will descend and besiege her like a river of peace, like a torrent overflowing with glory.”

Psalms: “My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall be enkindled” “All my bones shall say, ‘God, who is like unto you?’”

REPLY: Write brief answers to the questions below, referring to the Interior Castle:

1. What does one notice at the beginning of the *passive* prayer of recollection? (ch. 3:3)
2. What effects are left by this passive recollection? (ch. 3:9)
3. What does Teresa say will happen to a person who has been granted this kind of prayer, and then turns away from the practice of mental prayer and a virtuous life? (ch. 3:10)
4. Teresa gives several reasons why the work of the intellect should not be set aside in the initial stages of the prayer of recollection. (unless one *cannot* meditate!) Can you find them in chapter 3, sections 5-8?

THE INTERIOR CASTLE Lesson 4

READ: The Interior Castle Fifth Dwelling Places

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal a few minutes on each of the following quotations:

“Always be more disposed toward giving to others than giving to yourself, and thus you will not be envious of nor selfish toward your neighbor.” (St. John of the Cross)

“Have a great love for those who contradict and fail to love you, for in this way love is begotten in a heart that has no love.” (St. John of the Cross)

“Charity consists in disregarding the faults of our neighbor, not being astonished at the sight of their weakness, but in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice.” (St. Therese)

“We must never refuse anyone (service), even when it costs us much pain.” (St. Therese)

“My dear Mother, fraternal charity is everything on this earth. We love God in the measure in which we practice charity.” (St. Therese)

REPLY: Fill in the blanks below:

In the prayer of union there is _____ of the faculties. Even without the experience of this prayer there can exist a habitual union of _____. How much we really love God can be seen in our _____ of _____. Some of the results of the prayer of union are: desires for _____ and for _____. To prepare ourselves to receive this prayer we need to get rid of _____ and all earthly _____. In this prayer, truly God has brought the soul into the inner wine cellar and put _____ in order within her. Even then, the soul must always be diligent in the practice of, and ask God to _____ her.

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THE INTERIOR CASTLE Lesson 4

RESPOND: Make a list of some new possibilities in your life for practicing love of neighbor. Don't forget the passive side, such as accepting hurtful remarks with meekness, etc.

State in your own words Teresa's analogy of the silkworm in the cocoon. What is the essential work that the silkworm/soul needs to perform? Have you made progress here?

THE INTERIOR CASTLE Lesson 5

READ: The Interior Castle Sixth Dwelling Places, Chapters 1 - 6

REFLECT: Meditate a few minutes on each of the following counsels of St. John of the Cross:

“Anyone who complains or grumbles is not perfect, nor is he even a good Christian.”

“The purest suffering produces the purest understanding.”

“If a person has more patience in suffering and more forbearance in going without satisfaction, it is a sign that he is more proficient in virtue.”

And on these from St. Teresa:

“Observe that we gain more in a single day by trials which come to us from God and our neighbor than we would in ten years by penances and other exercises which we take up of ourselves.”

“Those who have arrived at perfection, and especially true contemplatives, do not ask the Lord to free them from trials and temptations. They rather desire and value them as worldly value gold and jewels, for they know that these are to make them rich.”

Col. 1:24 I Peter 2:19-21 and 3:13-17 Heb.12:1-13 II Cor. 1:3-7 Rom. 8:22, 23

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THE INTERIOR CASTLE

Lesson 5

RESPOND: Choose at least two of the following suggestions:

Try to accept one of your habitual trials in a greater spirit of penance, with patience and gratitude. Before the next meeting give yourself a grade on your progress:

A B C D F

Make the Stations of the Cross at least once, asking the Lord for greater generosity in the acceptance of suffering in your life.

Consider making your complaints and grumblings the subject of your next confession. This will give you grace for future trials.

Make a list of the sufferings in your life which you can now see have turned out to be blessings.

Make a list of some of the obstacles in your life to greater solitude. Plan what you can do to overcome them.

THE INTERIOR CASTLE Lesson 6

READ: The Interior Castle Sixth Dwelling Places, Chapters 7-11

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

- 1. Is the delight given in this stage of the prayer life continual? (chapter 7)**

- 2. What is an intellectual vision of the Lord? (chapter 8)**

- 3. What is the difference between an imaginative vision and the one just mentioned? (ch. 9)**

- 4. Of what does Teresa say to be humble consists? (ch. 10)**

- 5. What special kind of suffering increases as one grows closer to God? (ch. 11)**

- 6. What does Teresa say about the suffering of the souls in Purgatory? (ch. 11)**

- 7. What two experiences put a person in danger of death, according to St. Teresa?**
 - a)**

 - b)**

REACT: Someone has told you that a person who has arrived at this advanced stage of prayer should no longer think of the sacred humanity of our Lord, quoting John 16:7. How would you defend St. Teresa's position? (chapter 7)

READ: The Interior Castle Seventh Dwelling Places, Chapters 1-4 and Epilogue

REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1. Try to sort out some of the differences between what Teresa calls “spiritual betrothal” and “spiritual marriage”, stating them briefly here:**
- 2. What is the condition of the soul (in the 7th dwelling) in the midst of trials and sufferings?**
- 3. Why is the soul not so interested now in spiritual delights and consolations? (ch. 3:8)**
- 4. Does Teresa believe that one in this state can ever fall into serious sin again? (ch. 2:9)**
- 5. In what does one (in this stage) wish to be occupied? (ch. 3:8)**
- 6. What two negative factors are missing at this stage? (ch. 3:10)**
- 7. Are raptures experienced in this stage? (ch. 3:12)**
- 8. What does Teresa say about sins and imperfections in this soul? (ch. 4)**
- 9. What is the end purpose of this high degree of contemplation? (ch. 4)**

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ADDENDUM: REFLECTIONS ON HUMILITY

Keeping always in mind that: We are created from NOTHING by God, we are NOTHING apart from God, and we can do NOTHING good without God.

Let us reflect upon the following questions.....

Do I see myself as God sees me? What are my strengths and good points? What are my weaknesses and faults? Am I grateful when I learn of my faults through others? Would I prefer that other people not speak too well of me?

How often do I try to please myself, and how often do I defer to the wishes of others instead?

Do I prefer to serve or to be served?

Am I open to being informed and taught by others, or do I think I already have all the answers?

How do I react to praise? Do I accept it graciously and then forget it? And what about to blame, especially when unmerited? Am I able to react as Jesus did?

Am I completely obedient to the teachings of the Church? To my spiritual director or confessor?

How much do I care about rank, honors and recognition for my efforts?

Do my faults and imperfections upset me, or do I simply entrust them to God's merciful love?

Do I go about proclaiming my humility? (sure to elicit praise!)

Do I fail to accept responsibility out of a false sense of humility?

Do I remember to consult the Lord before taking on a task?

How reverent am I in the Lord's own house? In his Eucharistic presence? As I prepare to pray?

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(continued) ADDENDUM: REFLECTIONS ON HUMILITY

How difficult is it for me to confess my sins? Do I worry about what the confessor may think of me?

When something bad happens to me, do I tend to say, “What did I ever do to deserve this?” Or do I reflect that I deserve worse?

When I strive for perfection, what is my real motive? Is it only to please and glorify the Lord, or is it because I am seeking glory for myself, either here and now, or in eternity?

Do I seek the best for myself, or do I prefer that others have it?

And now, a few Scripture passages for meditation time:

Galatians 6:3 Matthew 18:1 1Cor. 4:7 1Cor. 15:10 11Cor.3:5

Philippians 2:3-4 Mark 9:33-35 Genesis 16:5-9 1Peter 5:5

Isaiah 66:2 Matthew 27:29-30

Do you know how St. Thérèse (and Carmelite nuns of her day) signed her name? *Unworthy Carmelite religious!* (This was in French, of course, and abbreviated.)

In past times the word “unworthy” was used much more frequently than today, by those aspiring to holiness. This may strike us as strange, but perhaps it was a healthy reminder to guard against pride, an ever-present temptation in the beginning stages of a deeper spiritual life.

How many of us, after experiencing God intimately for the first time, have not felt really set apart from the crowd, or perhaps after we have conquered some fault that still plagues others we know?

Granted, little fleeting thoughts of pride which we promptly reject are not actual faults, but simply temptations. They are, however, good indications of just how much we are aware of self, and still good prey for the enemy!

So let us adopt the old way of referring to ourselves, if only in our minds, as a constant reminder of who we really are without God’s grace.

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(continued)) ADDENDUM: REFLECTIONS ON HUMILITY

He who would be first will be last.

Unless you lose yourself by serving others, you will never be humble.

Make God the center of your life, and you will walk in humility.

In confessing even our smallest failings we learn who we really are.

Learn to listen well and speak little if you truly want to be humble.

If you put the will of others ahead of your own, you will learn humility.

To think little of oneself is not humility; rather it is to think of oneself little.

You are only as good as God thinks you are, and you can't be sure of what that is!