

Prayer in Saint Teresa of Avila: an adventure! An adventure of hospitality...

“To risk one’s life; everything lies in that!”<sup>1</sup> Such is the cry of Teresa at the end of her treatise on prayer describing the four ways of tending the interior garden by the water of that prayer. A little later she adds: “When the soul has reached this stage, what it possesses for God is not only desires; His Majesty gives it the strength to put these desires into practice. There is nothing that comes to mind that it thinks would be of service to Him that it wouldn’t venture to do...”<sup>2</sup>

We can see that, for Teresa, from the beginning, prayer involves life. Living prayer, praying life – these are two inseparable movements: “Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat.”<sup>3</sup> But there is more: if prayer and life are intimately linked, then prayer is a way of taking care of Life, and of the Author of all life. It is taking care of that life which is in us and in every human being, as a gift transmitted from generation to generation. It is a taking care of the presence of “so great a Guest”<sup>4</sup>, a welcoming that is surprised and yet confident in the dwelling within each of us of God One and Triune.

This is an adventure in hospitality. Perhaps before going further together, could we stop a minute? Would you be open to having an experience, right here and now? An experience of hospitality? I invite you to take the time to meet the eyes of your neighbor on the right, then on the left. To shut your eyes and offer them hospitality within yourself, then to become hospitable to each person in this room, to each human being on earth, and finally, last but not least, to Him who looks benevolently and lovingly on you, on me, on us. Let us enter for a few minutes into silence for the experience...

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<sup>1</sup> Life 21.4

<sup>2</sup> Life 21.5

<sup>3</sup> Seventh Dwelling Place 4.12

<sup>4</sup> Way 28.2

You took a risk, no? All hospitality to oneself, to the other, to God, involves risk! It is the risk involved in all relationship. If we think about it, all relationships are by their nature a risk. It was when she consented to risk the relationship with God that Teresa's life, as well as her prayer, changed completely... That was Teresa's passionate adventure: to offer hospitality to the Lord and then discover that He first offers us unconditional hospitality, to live this reciprocal hospitality, whatever the cost, and to discover that this adventure of hospitality is transforming, as is all experience of salvation in Jesus Christ. Then, in our turn, to become hospitable to each other, as a communal space of mercy which opens out a way to the Good News...

### **The mystery of hospitality...**

Alluding to the hospitality Abraham offered his unknown visitors,<sup>5</sup> the letter to the Hebrews charges each Christian: "Do not forget hospitality to strangers, for thanks to it, some people have entertained angels without knowing it."<sup>6</sup> We are warned: hospitality involves a mystery and requires on our part commitment to a relationship. To give hospitality is to make someone feel at home, it is to take someone in, it is to accept the other or the event as they present themselves, without prejudging the transformation that will occur by this gesture of hospitality. When we speak of host and guest, we use correlative terms, one implies the other, so that we speak of reciprocity, if not of symmetry. But the welcomer may become the welcomed and the welcomed may become the welcomer in an exchange of gifts or words or different gestures. Hospitality is also a space where one becomes more oneself in meeting the difference of the other and accepting them as other.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 18.1-16

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 13.2

Let us enter now into our question: how is it that St. Teresa's prayer leads us into the mystery of hospitality? The idea for this question came to me as I observed that Teresa in a number of places calls Christ or the Father and even the Holy Spirit "the heavenly Guest", "such a good Guest", "this divine Guest". And the prayer of recollection is nothing other than a mystery of hospitality: hospitality offered to God One and Triune which opens out to a marvelous discovery – that in fact prayer is the hospitality of God Himself who respects our freedom and waits for us always...

To explore this adventure of hospitality, I'd like to invite into our conversation a small, simple companion who will give us some keys to the mystery of hospitality experienced by Teresa, but also by every one of us. For before being an experience of salvation as Our Holy Mother St. Teresa lived it, hospitality is an experience of wisdom, human and relational wisdom. And I believe that today, our contemporaries seek more an experience of wisdom than of salvation, because they don't see quite clearly from what they can be saved. If that is true, then we must find bridges that can introduce an experience of salvation. Every time this question has arisen in the Church, we have seen the emergence of a wisdom literature as a place of dialogue with all, in order to propose the universality of Salvation. I propose therefore to bring into dialogue, rather freely and in the context of my question, Antoine de Saint-Exupery's Little Prince and what St. Teresa says about her adventure of prayer.

Reading this classic French philosophical tale, it is striking to hear resonances, on the level of human wisdom, with what St. Teresa describes of her relational universe in her major works. Bringing these together may be bold, but if we look closely, there are enough common themes! Let us listen to some:

**Both describe an adventure into the unknown that involves  
a life or death risk:**

Saint-Exupéry tells of a crash landing his plane in the desert: “Six years ago, *alone with no one to talk to*, I experienced a crash in the Sahara desert. *Something was broken* in my engine. And as I had neither mechanic nor passengers with me, I set myself to try the difficult repair all alone. It was a *question of life or death*. I had barely enough water to last a week.”<sup>7</sup>

Here is what Teresa says when she was struggling in a violent interior combat during many years: for her it was a question of choosing between speaking *of* God or speaking *to* God. “*I wanted to live* (for I well understood that I was not living but was *struggling with a shadow of death*) *but I had no one* to give me life, and I was unable to catch hold of it. He who had the power to give it to me was right in not helping me, for so often had He brought me back to Himself; and so often had I abandoned Him.”<sup>8</sup> She explains the reason for this impasse: “I did not put all my trust in His Majesty.”

So, a common feeling of being alone, exposed to a life or death challenge!

**Both speak of a home from which they are exiled:**

For his part, the aviator fallen in the midst of the desert meets “a simple little man who is extraordinary”, the Little Prince who has left his planet thinking he would never return: “I learned a second important thing: his *planet of origin* was hardly bigger than *a house!*”<sup>9</sup> After various misunderstandings with the only rose on his planet, which he tended carefully, the little prince “decides to run away”<sup>10</sup>: “I think he used a migration of wild birds for his escape. The morning of his departure,

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<sup>7</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. P.413

<sup>8</sup> *Life* 8.12

<sup>9</sup> *Le Petit Prince* p.420

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p.435

he put his planet in order...He believed that he would never return.”<sup>11</sup> Thus begins for the little prince a voyage of initiation through visits to different planets: each planet is inhabited by one person, as if being in itself a relational universe. The planet is the house of the person he meets, and by extension, the person himself. He first visits the planet of a king and discovers that “for a king, the world is very simple. All people are subjects to whom he must give orders.”<sup>12</sup> Then the planet of the conceited: “Ah! A visit from an admirer cries the vain one from afar as soon as he sees the little prince. For the conceited, others are admirers.”<sup>13</sup>

Then, there is the planet inhabited by a drinker who is imprisoned in a life of excessive alcohol consumption: that visit is short and plunges the little prince into a deep sadness.<sup>14</sup> The fourth planet is inhabited by a businessman who is so occupied counting that he doesn't even lift his head when the little prince comes. “Five hundred and one million...I don't know any more...I have so much work! I am dealing with matters of consequence. I can't be amusing myself with nonsense!” He adds that to count the stars as he is doing allows him to possess them, and after possessing them, to manage them. The fifth planet is home to a street lamp lighter whose job is getting more and more difficult because “year after year, the planet turns more quickly”<sup>15</sup>: he must always follow the same orders without taking into account the evolution of the planet. The sixth planet is that of a geographer: he maps the discoveries of explorers and believes that the little prince is one of them. He suggests that the little prince visit Earth. On Earth, the little prince experiences the many and the unique: he meets millions of roses like his, he meets crowds of people but not individual persons. But what changes the face of the earth for him is the discovery of friendship when a little fox comes into his life and asks him to tame him. That experience will be the beginning of his desire to return to his own planet, his own house, to care for his rose and to love her.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p.436

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p.439

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.444

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 446

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 452

I have lingered on this voyage to give you a sense of its duration. While the little prince is very concrete and precise in his descriptions, Teresa is more general and evocative. But it is not difficult to see how she, too, had to open up a path through the tapestry of relationships that made up her life, and that first on a personal level. Teresa cannot decide for God and feels herself in exile: "It is one of the most painful lives, I think, that one can imagine; for neither did I enjoy God nor did I find happiness in the world. When I was experiencing the enjoyments of the world, I felt sorrow when I recalled what I owed to God. When I was with God, my attachments to the world disturbed me. This is a war so troublesome that I don't know how I was able to suffer it."<sup>16</sup> This interior warfare lasted twenty years during which Teresa sought ways of entering into contact with the Lord. Reading Osuna's book on recollection was decisive for her. She began immediately putting it into practice and began to pray. In other words, she entered into herself. There she discovered a presence. Her experience in dialogue with her faith helped her to name this presence. "You already know that God is everywhere. It's obvious, then, that where the king is, there is his court; in sum, wherever God is, there is heaven...Consider what St. Augustine says, that he sought Him in many places but found Him ultimately within himself. Do you think it matters little for a soul with a wandering mind to understand this truth and see that there is no need to go to heaven in order to speak with one's Eternal Father?...All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself, and not turn away from so good a Guest but with great humility speak to Him as to a father. Beseech Him as you would a father; tell Him about your trials; ask Him for a remedy against them."<sup>17</sup> Teresa uses an image to express this connection between her experience and her faith in the presence of God within us: "I was like those blind or in darkness; they speak with a person and see that that person is with them because they know with certainty that the other is there (I mean they

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<sup>16</sup> Life 8.2

<sup>17</sup> Way 28.2

understand (experience) and believe this (faith), but they do not see the other); such was the case with me when I thought of our Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

For Teresa, the image of exile is also that of estrangement from God: whether she is at the beginning of her spiritual journey, where she identifies easily with the prodigal son who comes home to his father: “Blessed is He who waited so long for me!” or she has been given graces of union, and wants to leave this earth “Tear through the veil of this encounter”, as her friend St. John of the Cross says. For Teresa, as for the little prince, that image of exile is populated with encounters with persons who become part of the tapestry of her life. I think we can easily find in our own lives echoes of the symbolic figures described in the interplanetary voyage of the little prince. The king’s authoritarian power commands and orders: for Teresa, this image is positive when she identifies the king with the “Lord of all life” whose commandment is that of love. To do His will is to love. The image is more negative when it evokes the customs and pretensions of the royal court. The planet of the vain could be for Teresa all that has to do with “honja”, honor. We know how much the code of honor ruled social relationships, and each one’s place in them, in sixteenth century Spain. The figure of the drinker imprisoned in excessive consumption could echo the interior captivity of the priest bound by a talisman whom she decided to help. Of course, in her time, there were no businessmen! But she mentions several times, notably in the third Dwelling Places, people who believe themselves to be very attached to the Lord, and who, having lost some money without thereby lacking anything, give more importance to that than to their friendship with the Lord.<sup>19</sup> The lamp lighter who cannot swerve from orders even when history evolves and changes could be echoed by the sisters of the Incarnation who murmured against Teresa, saying about her decision to pray, “that I was trying to make myself out to be a saint and was inventing novelties.”<sup>20</sup> The geographer would correspond for Teresa with all the good books she was able to read and

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<sup>18</sup> Life 9.6

<sup>19</sup> Third Dwelling Places 2.4

<sup>20</sup> Life 19.8

which mapped out new paths for her: the Confessions of St Augustine, Osuna's book and many others, until Christ Himself promised "to be her living book". The symbolic figure of planet Earth would be for Teresa the unconditional and loving welcome of the humanity of Christ, of Christ incarnate, who gave his life for love of her. Everything changed for Teresa the day she realized, before the little statue of Christ at the column, that the hospitality of Christ's love for her went so far that he gave his life for love of her.<sup>21</sup>

Thus these two began a return voyage. That voyage was precisely the journey of their transformation. For each of them it was the hospitality of friendship with one other than themselves that set them on the way to return to themselves and to begin to love truly.

### **Both speak of their vulnerability**

When the little prince lands on planet Earth, symbol of a new access to the real, he discovers his vulnerability: " 'I thought I was rich with a unique flower, and I possess only an ordinary rose. That and my three volcanos who come up to my knees, and of which one may be extinct forever, that doesn't make me such a great prince...' And, lying down on the grass, he wept."<sup>22</sup> This happens just before the breaking into his life of a friendship which will change the course of his life and his way of loving his rose.

Teresa is very wordy about her vulnerability. For her, that is a way of highlighting the mercy God has lavished on her and of expressing her gratitude for that mercy. She cannot decide completely for God, and details her vagaries: "I have spoken of this to make known my wickedness and the great goodness of God".<sup>23</sup> Or she looks at the lives of saints whom God has rescued from sin: "Since the Lord had pardoned them, He could also pardon me. But there was one thing that

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<sup>21</sup> Life 9.1-3

<sup>22</sup> Le Petit Prince p.468

<sup>23</sup> Life 7.9



left me inconsolable, as I have mentioned, and that was that the Lord called them only once, and they did not turn back and fall again; whereas in my case I had turned back so often that I was worn out from it. But by considering the love He bore me, I regained my courage, for I never lost confidence in His mercy; in myself, I lost it many times.”<sup>24</sup> Having difficulty deciding for God, in being constant in her relationship with God, Teresa also feared the words of others: “On the octave day of All Saints, I spent two or three very troublesome days over the remembrance of my great sins and because of some fears of my being persecuted that had no foundation, except that false testimony was going to be raised. And all the courage I usually have for suffering left me.”<sup>25</sup>

Both Teresa and the little prince, each in her or his own way, call to mind this vulnerability as a preamble to welcoming the unforeseeable in their lives: the discovery that they are freely loved!

### **Both speak of friendship as a reciprocal hospitality**

There is a familiar passage in Saint-Exupery’s book: the little prince is “lying on the grass” and weeping because “he is not so great a prince”. It is then that a little fox appears who challenges him and enters into conversation with him. We are literally witnessing the birth of a relationship. First, questions are exchanged: to the little prince’s question, “Who are you?”, the fox responds by asking, “What are you looking for?” Questions are always the preamble to all true hospitality to an unknown stranger. Then, a dialogue is established around the meaning of taming. “To tame, says the fox, is something too often forgotten. It means ‘to create ties’...for me, you are still only a little boy similar to a hundred thousand little boys. And I do not need you. You don’t need me either. For you I am only a fox similar to a hundred thousand foxes. But if you tame me, we will need each other. For me, you will be unique in all the world. I will be for you unique in all

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<sup>24</sup> Life 9.7

<sup>25</sup> Relation 53 Seville 1575

the world...<sup>26</sup> Then the fox continues by showing the little prince how his monotonous life will be changed: when he hears the little prince's footsteps, he will not run to earth as he usually does when he hears the hunters. And he adds: the fields of wheat which are of no use to him and remind him of nothing in particular will become a way of remembering the golden hair of the little prince. His whole environment will be transformed! Following this, the little prince then asks what he must do to tame the fox. The fox responds that it requires patience, a progressive getting closer to each other, and also rites to prepare the encounter.<sup>27</sup> After having been tamed and before the little prince leaves to go home, the fox tells him a secret. A secret the little prince will commit to memory. Here is the text: "Goodbye, says the fox. Here is my secret. It is very simple: it is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eyes. What is essential is invisible to the eyes, repeats the little prince, *so that he would be sure to remember.*"<sup>28</sup>

We know that Teresa easily became attached to people; till the end of her life she was making new friends. And she had to discern which friendships were life giving and which took her away from the road she wished to travel. But she most often reserves the word friend for Christ Himself, whom she calls "a very good friend."<sup>29</sup> The place par excellence for friendship with Christ, according to Teresa, is prayer. She says, "If one perseveres (in prayer), I trust then in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an *intimate sharing* between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us."<sup>30</sup> Let us stop for a minute, if you will, to consider the characteristics of hospitable friendship described by the little prince, and question our Holy Mother Saint Teresa: exactly what are you saying, Teresa, when you describe prayer as a friendship with Christ?

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<sup>26</sup> Le Petit Prince p.470

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.472

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.475-476

<sup>29</sup> Life 22.10

<sup>30</sup> Life 8.5

First of all, Jesus Christ has shown Himself to be vulnerable, so he understands: “When one is in the midst of business matters, and in times of persecutions and trials, when one can’t maintain so much quietude, and in times of dryness, Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as human and see Him with weaknesses and trials – and He is company for us. Once we have the habit, it is very easy to find Him present at our side.”<sup>31</sup>

To the question, “Who are you?” Teresa responds, “I understood well that I had a soul. But what this soul deserved and who dwelt within it I did not understand because I had covered my eyes with the vanities of the world. For, in my opinion, if I had understood as I do now that in this little palace of my soul dwelt so great a King, I would not have left Him alone so often.”<sup>32</sup>

To the question, “What are you looking for?” Teresa could say, “His company”! More concretely and in our own words, we might say, to take care of Jesus when he is abandoned. I will let Teresa speak: “I strove to represent Christ within me, and it did me greater good – in my opinion – to represent Him in those scenes where I saw Him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, He had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these. The scene of His prayer in the garden, especially, was a comfort to me; I strove to be His companion there.”<sup>33</sup>

As for needing one another: “What more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us in our labors and tribulations, as friends in the world do?”<sup>34</sup> And Christ has need of Teresa: “O Lord of the world, my true Spouse!...Are you so in need my Lord and my Love, that You would want to receive such poor company as mine, for I see by Your expression that You

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<sup>31</sup> Life 22.10

<sup>32</sup> Way 28.11

<sup>33</sup> Life 9.4

<sup>34</sup> Life 22.7

have been consoled by me? Well then, how is it Lord that the angels leave You and that even Your Father doesn't console You?"<sup>35</sup>

A life transformed: "Represent the Lord Himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you. Believe me, you should remain with so good a friend as long as you can. If you grow accustomed to having Him present at your side, and He sees that you do so with love and that you go about striving to please Him, you will not be able – as they say – to get away from Him; He will never fail you; He will help you in all your trials; you will find Him everywhere. Do you think it's some small matter to have a friend like this at your side?"<sup>36</sup>

Much patience: "You will endure the pain of spending a long while with one who is so different from you when you see how much it benefits you to possess His friendship and how much He loves you."<sup>37</sup> Teresa often insists on the necessity of accustoming oneself to the Lord who is so different from us.

Rites: "As is already known, the examination of conscience, the act of contrition, and the sign of the cross must come first. Then, my daughters, since you are alone, strive to find a companion."<sup>38</sup>

Sharing a secret: ""When the soul is in this suspension, the Lord likes to show it some secrets, things about heaven...It is able to tell of them afterward, for these remain so impressed on the memory that they are never forgotten."<sup>39</sup>

Thus Teresa and the little prince both tell of the breaking into their lives of another with whom they begin a dialogue and to whom they become attached. For Teresa, however, this attachment is part of a conversion which entails reordering her other attachments. Moreover, the One with whom she enters into

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<sup>35</sup> Way 26.6

<sup>36</sup> Way 26.1

<sup>37</sup> Life 8.5

<sup>38</sup> Way 26.1

<sup>39</sup> Sixth Dwelling Places 4.5

a friendship is so different from her that she says that it is He Himself who lessens the distance between them, which she recognizes as an expression of mercy toward her.

Thus, if for a moment we consider hospitality as relational and an experience of human wisdom, it is to affirm that every gesture of hospitality is in itself incarnate, and that the grammar of our relationship with God is found in our everyday relational life. And that is before the Lord Himself transforms us, and our relationship with the Lord becomes the principal grammar of our relations with others and with the created world. It is this second side of the experience that we will now consider.

### **Hospitality toward God, hospitality of God: an entry into the paschal mystery**

For Saint Teresa, the hospitable love of God for her and hers for God is in itself an experience of salvation: “May God be praised who gave me the life to rise up from a death so deadly.”<sup>40</sup> She expresses herself in dialogical as well as spatial metaphors.

It is striking how much the prayer of recollection for Teresa is hospitality toward God which is in fact the discovery of God’s hospitality. In Chapter 26 of the Way of Perfection Teresa describes the movement of prayer beginning with the three essentials of hospitality: “to be with, or in company with”, the exchange of glances, and the shared word. Each time she mentions one of the aspects of the encounter with the Lord, there is an inversion in her language that shows us clearly that the Lord and Teresa are each in turn the welcomed and the welcomer, the received and the receiver, one for the other. Teresa recommends, as we have seen, that first of all we seek the company of the Lord, to welcome Him in love. In the following paragraph, she asks her sisters to get used to this

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<sup>40</sup> Life 9.8

practice, and she says, “I know that the Lord does not leave us abandoned; for if we humbly ask Him for this friendship, He will not deny it to us.”<sup>41</sup> Teresa specifies also that the Lord instructs the soul with love and humility and further, she specifies that the soul strives to keep the Lord near her with love and that she asks for His company with humility. Thus there is a reciprocal hospitality between Christ and the soul who opens itself to his friendship.

Teresa continues to unfold the dynamic movement of this prayer: initially one must make an effort to keep close the friend who, in turn, very soon makes understood His prior desire to have us close to Him. Then we are invited to get to know this friend by looking at Him, and to recognize in His looking on us, His prior desire. Teresa says, “I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him. For who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord, even if you do so just for a moment if you can’t do more?..Well now, daughters, your Spouse never takes His eyes off you...He is not waiting for anything else, as He says to the bride, than that we look at Him...He so esteems our turning to look at Him that no diligence will be lacking on His part.”<sup>42</sup>

Imperceptibly Teresa moves from the exchange of glances to the shared word: “Behold Him burdened with the cross...He will look at you...He will forget His sorrows so as to console you in yours, merely because you yourselves go to Him to be consoled.”<sup>43</sup> The transposition already described in the glance and the “being with” is here also in play: the soul “speaks to Christ” but Christ Himself also “gives the soul what she must say to Him”. The soul must also, according to Teresa, “consider the words that divine mouth speaks”, words of love.<sup>44</sup> Such is the depth of the hospitality of Christ in us: in our most intimate selves, He speaks a word over us that makes clear the shadows and lights within us, but

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<sup>41</sup> Way 26.2

<sup>42</sup> Way 26.3

<sup>43</sup> Way 26.5

<sup>44</sup> Way 26.10

which is always an unconditional welcome of who we are. The ultimate mercy: Christ has made a definitive choice to be hospitable to us.

For Teresa, the hospitality between the soul and Christ becomes the way: “Let us walk together, Lord. Wherever you go, I will go; whatever you suffer, I will suffer.”<sup>45</sup> This way is none other than entry into the paschal mystery of Christ; the mystery of hospitality par excellence, into which Christ draws us in order to bring us back to the Father in the Spirit. Indeed, we find this paschal dynamic throughout Teresa’s adventure of prayer.

Concretely, to begin with, in describing the prayer of recollection, Teresa counsels us to let ourselves be welcomed by Christ during prayer: at the empty tomb if we are joyful, in the garden of olives if we are experiencing trials or feeling sad<sup>46</sup> -- fundamental hospitality in the heart of which develops an intimate relationship. At the empty tomb: “a great kingdom...and all of that, plus Himself, He desires for you.”<sup>47</sup> In the garden of the passion: “He will forget His sorrows so as to console you in yours, merely because you yourselves go to Him to be consoled and you turn your head to look at Him.”<sup>48</sup> In this Christic mystery of hospitality, the concrete life of the one praying (joys and sorrows) and the life of Jesus Christ mutually welcome each other in an “intimate friendship”, a progressive entering into the humanity of Christ.

It is there that the adventure begins. Teresa’s life will take on the form of the paschal mystery. She enters willingly into this mystery by the Passion of the Lord, the place of His vulnerability to which she is very sensitive, but also the place of the greatest love which attracts and delivers her. Her predilection for prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and her radical conversion before Christ at

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<sup>45</sup> Way 26.6

<sup>46</sup> Way 26.4-5

<sup>47</sup> Way 26.4

<sup>48</sup> Way 26.5

the pillar are the entry into the mystery. They evoke also for Teresa the place of the greatest obedience and union of wills: “Not my will, Lord, but yours.”

The vision of Hell, as a descent into the hell waiting for her, showing her from what depths of servitude the Lord drew her, continues to lead her into the lived paschal mystery. She cries: “How obvious it is that You loved me more than I loved myself.”<sup>49</sup> And finally, though Teresa loves to contemplate Jesus in His Passion, it is striking to see how often the visions she is given are of the Resurrected Christ. She sees His hands and face which are the two parts of the body most engaged in gestures of hospitality. For her, Eucharistic communion is one of the privileged places to give hospitality to Christ and to contemplate “the Father welcoming the Son in her” when she receives communion. Thus her life, as well as her prayer, are for Teresa a profound experience of salvation.

Hospitality to Christ in the paschal mystery goes with an apostolic fruitfulness in life and in prayer for Teresa. Hospitality to Christ in her prayer enlarges her relational space: she does not make the adventure without her sisters. That is the meaning of the foundation of Saint Joseph’s in Avila. She presents community life as a mystery of hospitality for the Lord and for each of the sisters. She says, “St. Martha was a saint, even though they do not say she was a contemplative. Well now, what more do you want than to be able to resemble this blessed woman who merited so often to have Christ our Lord in her home, give Him food, serve Him, and eat at table with him (and even from His plate)? ...If contemplating, practicing mental and vocal prayer, taking care of the sick, helping with household chores, and working even at the lowliest tasks are all ways of serving the Guest who comes to be with us and eat and recreate, what difference does it make whether we serve in the one way or the other?”<sup>50</sup> The hospitality of Christ is a mutual hospitality which allows differences and opens up a space for mercy...

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<sup>49</sup> Life 32.5

<sup>50</sup> Way 17.5-6



This mystery of hospitality which flowers in the union of Teresa with Christ expands beyond the circle of community: to Lutherans, natives of the Americas, all who seek God...for whom she would give a thousand lives.”!

In conclusion: We often think of prayer as above all an interior adventure. That is not wrong. Obviously it presupposes an interior, spiritual journey in which the one who prays becomes progressively more able to welcome an amazing Guest and to respond to the welcome of an amazing Host, “God so different from us” Teresa would say. But prayer is not limited to this intimate interior experience. Its universe is much larger than that of interiority: the new heaven discovered in praying discloses equally a new earth. The doors that open to God introduce another perception of the world.

Finally, let us turn to the dynamic of the Interior Castle: mystery of hospitality par excellence. The First Dwelling Places: letting ourselves enter and be welcomed by the One who loves us. The Second Dwelling Places: choosing to whom or what we will offer hospitality, whom or what we must fight to be able to stay. The Third Dwelling Places: keeping control of this hospitality so that it remains reasonable. The Fourth Dwelling Places: welcoming the gift of the Holy Spirit which enlarges our heart to divine dimensions. The Fifth Dwelling Places: Christ welcomes us into His paschal mystery in order to transform us. The Sixth Dwelling Places: Christ welcomes our immense desires and purifies them to teach us how to see the world as He does. Seventh Dwelling Places: offering the hospitality of service and love to the Lord and to all people...

How do we hand on this experience of hospitality in prayer? By friendship, friendship with Christ, friendship among ourselves.



