

### Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*

I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. If we reflect, sisters, we shall see that the soul of the just man is but a paradise, in which, God tells us, He takes His delight. What, do you imagine, must that dwelling be in which a King so mighty, so wise, and so pure, containing in Himself all good, can delight to rest? Nothing can be compared to the great beauty and capabilities of a soul; however keen our intellects may be, they are as unable to comprehend them as to comprehend God, for, as He has told us, He created us in His own image and likeness.

Let us imagine, as I said, that there are many rooms in this castle, of which some are above, some below, others at the side; in the centre, in the very midst of them all, is the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse.

In a state of grace the soul is like a well of limpid water, from which flow only streams of clearest crystal. Its works are pleasing both to God and man, rising from the River of Life, beside which it is rooted like a tree. Otherwise it would produce neither leaves nor fruit, for the waters of grace nourish it, keep it from withering from drought, and cause it to bring forth good fruit. But the soul by sinning withdraws from this stream of life, and growing beside a black and fetid pool, can produce nothing but disgusting and unwholesome fruit. Notice that it is not the fountain and the brilliant sun which lose their splendour and beauty, for they are placed in the very centre of the soul and cannot be deprived of their lustre. The soul is like a crystal in the sunshine over which a thick black cloth has been thrown, so that however brightly the sun may shine the crystal can never reflect it.

I do not know whether I have put this clearly; self-knowledge is of such consequence that I would not have you careless of it, though you may be lifted to heaven in prayer, because while on earth nothing is more needful than humility. I believe we shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavouring to know God, for, beholding His greatness we are struck by our own baseness, His purity shows our foulness, and by meditating on His humility we find how very far we are from being humble.

Once, while I was wondering why our Lord so dearly loves the virtue of humility, the thought suddenly struck me, without previous reflection, that it is because God is the supreme Truth and humility is the *truth*, for it is most true that we have nothing good of ourselves but only misery and nothingness: whoever ignores this, lives a life of falsehood. They that realize this fact most deeply are the most pleasing to God, the supreme Truth, for they walk in the truth. God grant, sisters, that we may have the grace never to lose this self-knowledge! Amen.

Let us now speak of the sign which proves the prayer of union to have been genuine. As you have seen, God then deprives the soul of all its senses that He may the better imprint in it true wisdom: it neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while this state lasts, which is never more than a very brief time; it appears to the soul to be much shorter than it really is. God visits the soul in a manner which prevents its doubting, on returning to itself, that it dwelt in Him and that He was within it. . . . He enters the innermost depths of our souls without a door.

Forward then, my daughters! hasten over your work and build the little cocoon. Let us renounce self-love and self-will, care for nothing earthly, do penance, pray, mortify ourselves, be obedient, and perform all the other good works of which you know. Act up to your light; you have been taught your duties. Die! die as the silkworm does when it has fulfilled the office of its creation, and you will see God and be immersed in His greatness, as the little silkworm is enveloped in its cocoon. Understand that when I say ‘you will see God,’ I mean in the manner described, in which He manifests Himself in this kind of union.

Now let us see what becomes of the ‘silkworm,’ for all I have been saying leads to this. As soon as, by means of this prayer, the soul has become entirely dead to the world, it comes forth like a lovely little white butterfly! Oh, how great God is! How beautiful is the soul after having been immersed in God’s grandeur and united closely to Him for but a short time! Indeed, I do not think it is ever as long as half an hour. Truly, the spirit does not recognize itself, being as different from what it was as is the white butterfly from the repulsive caterpillar.

By the aid of the Holy Ghost I am now about to treat of the sixth mansions, where the soul, wounded with love for its Spouse, sighs more than ever for solitude, withdrawing as far as the duties of its state permit from all that can interrupt it. The sight it has enjoyed of Him is so deeply imprinted on the spirit that its only desire is to behold Him again. . . . The soul is now determined to take no other Bridegroom than our Lord, but He disregards its desires for its speedy espousals, wishing that these longings should become still more vehement and that this good, which far excels all other benefits, should be purchased at some cost to itself.

The soul makes amorous complaints to its Bridegroom, even uttering them aloud; nor can it control itself, knowing that though He is present He will not manifest Himself so that it may enjoy Him. This causes a pain, keen although sweet and delicious from which the soul could not escape even if it wished; but this it never desires.

She feels a strange loneliness, finding no companionship in any earthly creature; nor could she, I believe, among those who dwell in heaven, since they are not her Beloved: meanwhile all society is a torture to her. She is like one suspended in mid-air.

When our Lord is pleased to take pity on the sufferings, both past and present, endured through her longing for Him by this soul which He has spiritually taken for His bride, He, before consummating the celestial marriage, brings her into this His mansion or presence chamber. This is the seventh Mansion, for as He has a dwelling-place in heaven, so has He in the soul, where none but He may abide and which may be termed a second heaven.

All the graces here divinely bestowed on the soul come, as I said, through no assistance of its own except its total abandonment of itself to God. They are given in peace and silence, like the building of Solomon’s Temple where no sound was heard. It is thus with this temple of God, this mansion of His where He and the soul rejoice in each other alone in profound silence. The mind need not act nor search for anything, as the Lord Who created it wishes it to be at rest and only to watch through a little chink, what passes within. Though at times it cannot see this, yet such intervals are very short, I believe because the powers are not here lost but only cease to work, being, as it were, dazed with astonishment.