

**THE INTERIOR CASTLE:
A JOURNEY IN FAITH AND LOVE
TOWARDS SPIRITUAL MATURITY
Part Two**

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This Spiritual talk was delivered on May 25 as part of the Teresian Centre series of lectures for 2014.

It is the second part of a two part theme on growth in the spiritual life reflected in the teachings of Our Holy Mother in the Interior Castle. Other source material is from "I consider the Labor well Spent" (mini course on The Interior Castle) by Joel Giallanza

Part two of this theme deals with the purification and growth in love as reflected in the last four mansions of the Interior Castle.

Each of us has been given by God at our baptism a new life of grace in seed. This spiritual life is dynamic just as our natural life is. It must too grow to spiritual maturity as we grow to natural maturity. It is a dynamic principle - and we must make room for it to grow and flourish in our life. We do this by choosing to undertake the spiritual journey to full maturity in faith and love.

Just as in our natural lives we grow and develop until we reach full adulthood so it is in our spiritual lives. Growth in the spiritual life is not limited to one or two events. It too is a process of growth.

To reach natural maturity we all recognize two identifiable major crises in our growth namely entering adolescence and then the beginning of adulthood. We go through a series of experiences and challenges, one builds on the other, and the whole taken together produces the growth in natural maturity.

Just as in our natural development from infancy to adulthood we pass through many transitions and changes, particularly in adolescence and early adulthood so too in our spiritual lives we must grow in the life of grace from the time of our baptism until spiritual maturity.

This will entail passing through often painful and perplexing situations, many challenges, and transitions in our spiritual life as we search for Christ in the darkness of faith. But this we must do!

Spiritual growth does take place. How aware are we when it is happening? Do we notice the signs that call us to growth in faith and love? Or because of the challenges and difficulties we turn away, stumble over some obstacle, immerse ourselves in distracting external activity, failing to transition or adjust to the call to growth in faith and love in our relationship with the Lord.

There is no better teacher than St. Teresa of Jesus to show us the path for developing the seed of faith and love given us in our baptism until it blossoms into full spiritual maturity.

St. Teresa's synthesis of the spiritual life in her book "The Interior Castle" is considered and regarded as one of the greatest spiritual classics and is based on her own faith and love experience as she grew into spiritual maturity through a life of prayer and contemplation.

Those who desire to seek God through the development of faith and love are encouraged and advised by St. Teresa to enter within themselves (enter into their Interior Castle) for prayer and recollection.

We are offered in “The Interior Castle” a unifying outline of seven dwelling places with many rooms in each one as the symbol of the soul in which we hold these dwelling places within ourselves. We are counseled and called upon to explore and move through these dwelling places until we reach the center where God dwells and unites us to Himself.

If we choose to take the seeds of faith and love given us in baptism and build and beautify our interior castle we will be called upon to renovate this interior castle from top to bottom to make space and room for Him. We are taught that the renovation of our interior castle does not happen all at once, for it takes us time to move through the rooms.

Teresa counsels that we may have to go back again and again and redo what we have already done as we discover the work of the room was not quite complete. It takes perseverance and determination to grow in the spiritual life.

So let us begin this evening by reviewing what we learned in the first part of this lecture where the emphasis was on the purification and strengthening of faith as expressed in the first three dwelling places of “The Interior Castle”.

By providing this context for those of you who were not at the first lecture you will be better able to enter into this evening lecture on the purification and strengthening of love as Teresa takes us through the fourth dwelling place and beyond on the path of prayer and contemplation.

In the year of faith (2013) we addressed the aspect of St. Teresa’s “The Interior Castle” that pertained to the early stages of spiritual growth and development on the journey to

union with God through a life of prayer and contemplation.

The emphasis in the previous lecture was on the growth, purification, and strengthening of faith. St. Teresa addresses this purification of faith in the first three dwelling places of “The Interior Castle” wherein we must begin the spiritual journey of renovating and beautifying our interior castle to make room and space for God.

These three dwelling places we learned were ascetical in nature. In other words we are actively working to renovate our interior castle to make room for the Lord. There is no set time for accomplishing this work. It may be short or it may be years before the work is completed. But at the end we come to a new stability and evident deepening of faith.

The key to the first dwelling place we learned was to enter within through prayer and reflection. There is no other key but this. There are no side doors or hidden passages into your interior castle. You must, I emphasize, use the key of prayer and reflection.

St. Teresa taught us that what prevents us from using the key is sin of every kind. Even when we manage to enter within often some of our snakes and reptiles enter with us. It is the work of the first dwelling place then to strive to remove and avoid anything that will lead us to sin or imperfection of any kind so that we will begin to see more light in our castle. We begin then by cultivating a pure heart and a good conscience.

Now the precise purposes of the crises of faith experienced in these early dwelling places we were taught were to free us, release us from dependency on worldly ways so that we could move toward making

judgments in faith and acting according to faith in our everyday lives.

So as we found ourselves nearing the second dwelling place we were given the key to enter within this dwelling place so that we could begin the ascetical work of freeing ourselves from our worldly ways, and act more consistently from the perspective of faith.

St. Teresa taught us that the key to the second dwelling place was the virtue of detachment. Detachment should be practiced according to our state of life we were instructed. St. Teresa held that it was so important for those who lead a life of prayer and contemplation that without the practice of the virtue of detachment one would never reach the main dwelling place. "It would be impossible she stated."

The virtue of detachment in Teresian Spirituality we were taught was not a negative experience leading us to practices that diminished our love of family, friends, community, or caused us to withdraw from the world but a spiritual practice that gradually allowed us to hold everything in God leading to a deep contemplative presence in Him to everyone and everything. A life of deep faith, prayer and contemplation is always for the world.

When you tell someone you love, I give you my whole heart, you are not handing over a dead heart, but a heart that is now unified and directed. A heart that is even more alive. So it is when we detach ourselves from worldly ways. If you are dissipated among many concerns and worldly activities spilling yourselves out by living outside your interior castle, it is because your heart has not yet found its treasure. Our Lord in Scripture tells us "*Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart.*" (Mt.6:21)

Experience teaches us that it takes effort, perseverance and determination to grow in the virtue of detachment. This is the challenge of the second dwelling place and its rooms. We struggle, make efforts, fail. Then we begin anew the next day.

Through faithfulness to prayer and reflection then coupled with determination and perseverance to respond generously to the various aids available to us such as participation in the liturgical life of the church, the sacraments, and the life of Christian community through our parishes, and the aid of spiritual companions we were taught that we would begin to conquer our snakes and reptiles in the second dwelling place.

As we practiced the virtue of detachment in the second dwelling place we were taught that we would be enabled to hear His voice more easily and recognize His presence in everyday life and thus move forward in faith on the spiritual path that would lead us to the door of the third dwelling place.

Now that we have reached the third dwelling place we must discover the key so that we understand how to make further progress on our spiritual journey.

The key to the third dwelling places we learned was faithfulness on our part coupled with God's mercy and grace.

What was then the profile of someone who had entered the third dwelling places?

Those who have entered the third dwelling places take seriously their life of faith and prayer. Third dwelling place persons were described as guarding themselves against sin, setting aside time for prayer and recollection, and persons who practice

works of charity towards their neighbors. Overall balance, order, discipline, and a sense of stability were part of one's everyday life of faith. (Interior Castle 3, Chapter 1, 5).

However, we were warned that it was possible to get stuck here in the third dwelling place. Just as in our natural development we may pass through adolescence and its crisis, but never reach full natural maturity so it is in the spiritual life. Many in their spiritual life stay spiritual adolescents for their whole life.

We get stuck in the third dwelling places because we become self-satisfied with our well-ordered lives, and we think God owes us favors and special consideration.

It may not even cross your mind that you need more help from God until all these activities and efforts on which you have based your life of faith and prayer start to crumble before your eyes.

We have all been called by God through our baptism to full spiritual maturity and therefore God wants us to move through all the dwelling places to full union with Him in love.

Therefore you can count on it that He will challenge you to grow and deepen your faith and life of prayer in the third dwelling places. It is up to you to challenge yourself to respond.

When we are shaken up in the third dwelling places from our well-ordered spiritual life, it is the Lord calling us to a deeper faith. When you think you are going backwards or nowhere at all, or you feel your prayer life is a mess and full of distractions, and that God isn't listening or helping, you are being invited by the Lord to be less dependent on your own efforts and ways of going to Him.

You wait now with expectant faith and in humility at the door of the fourth dwelling place, knowing that the Lord will grant you entrance when He will, that it is not dependent on you and your efforts but on His great love.

You are now ready for the second crisis of growth in the spiritual life, that of the growth, purification, and strengthening of love in the latter dwelling places. In the teaching of St. Teresa on the spiritual path of prayer and contemplation this second crisis in our spiritual growth leads to and culminates in full spiritual maturity.

In these latter dwelling places which I will address this evening your faith will become more and more penetrated by love, and will lead you to union with God who is love.

So let us begin at the door of the fourth dwelling place. Reaching this door as I have said does not mean that you are of yourself able to unlock the door and enter within.

You were given the keys to enter and pass through the first three dwelling places, namely the key of prayer and reflection which gained you entrance into the first dwelling place, the key to the second dwelling place was the practice of detachment, and the key to the third dwelling place was faithfulness (perseverance) coupled with the mercy and grace of God.

In these dwelling places we were actively striving, acting, doing. We used our time and energy in coming to know ourselves by gaining self-knowledge. We made our efforts to practice renunciation of our worldly ways by slowly and gradually practicing the virtue of detachment. We realized the need for the virtue of obedience and humility. We strived for faithfulness through our efforts to conform our will to

the Lord's will for us. In other words we were the primary source of activity in these early dwelling places.

It is St. Teresa's teaching that from the fourth dwelling place on the Lord is the primary source of activity. We are moving further into the interior castle entering the more supernatural or mystical parts of the spiritual life. Here it is that God acts. "For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires", she states.

What does that mean? It means we cannot generate supernatural experiences ourselves through the use of our faculties, no matter how hard we might try. The prayer of the fourth dwelling place comes not when we want it but when God grants the favor to us.

You were given the keys to the first three dwelling places and you were able to turn the lock in the doors of each with your personal activity and initiative.

However you don't get the key to the fourth dwelling place. The Lord keeps the key, and opens the door from within when He chooses to do so. You simply wait. You must be receptive, open, and still outside the door of the fourth dwelling place.

This is why you will frequently hear this dwelling place referred to as the dwelling place of quiet. You are waiting and watching for the invitation, for the door to open from within. You enter this dwelling place when the Lord grants you the favor of doing so.

St. Teresa describes the fourth dwelling place as one of transition where one may move back and forth between the ascetical and more supernatural parts of the spiritual journey. One's posture during any transition must be one of courage, patience, and belief that one is moving forward even if it feels

uncomfortable, confusing at times, and even somewhat risky.

We are offered several teachings in the fourth dwelling place by St. Teresa which help us to understand, clarify, and above all notice changes in our life of prayer that will enable us to move forward on the journey of prayer and contemplation with greater confidence.

Let us begin by reflecting on the difference in the nature of prayer in the first three dwelling places, and what occurs and develops from the fourth dwelling place on. Further we will examine these two forms of prayer in the light of St. Teresa's teaching on the nature of consolations and spiritual delights.

What does prayer generally look like then in the first three dwelling places?

When we first enter the castle we are usually focused on forms of vocal prayer.

St. Teresa teaches that if we pray our vocal prayer with attention to whom we are praying we are also beginning the practice of making mental prayer. It is the beginning, and it is through this means that the process of growth in self-knowledge and humility begins in the first dwelling place.

Those in the first dwelling places usually do not have a regular prayer practice. There is still much preoccupation with the ways of the world. Prayer takes time and we don't necessarily give it all that much priority. We sporadically try different efforts to develop our prayer life.

Determination and perseverance accompanied by God's grace help us to reach the second and third dwelling places.

In the second dwelling place our prayer begins to shift somewhat. Rather than practicing only vocal prayer we move slowly into a more reflective or discursive prayer. We find ourselves attracted to spiritual reading, reflection, and the joy of having opportunities to discuss our prayer and its development with others who are pursuing a spiritual life. The challenge of the second dwelling place is to develop consistency in our prayer practices.

If we are faithful and with God's merciful love we will find ourselves in the third dwelling places. Having begun the effort of developing a consistent prayer practice in the second dwelling places we find ourselves now in the third dwelling places settled into a spiritual practice. Our facility for meditation and maintaining our focus and attention on the Lord has strengthened.

This prayer is known as the prayer of active recollection. We still recognize that although we are very active with our energy, efforts and time in the third dwelling places it is understood that we are still very much dependent on God's grace and help.

We may experience many consolations through our reading of scripture and in the new insights which occur; we are consoled as we feel we are growing in prayer, and so we enjoy the consolation of joy and a certain peace.

According to St. Teresa teaching these consolations begin in our nature and end in God. We are active, thirsting, working in our seeking of God.

As I mentioned earlier if we are to enter the fourth dwelling places, well-ordered life and the consolations we experience will without doubt be shaken up.

Consolation will turn into dryness and distractions etc. It is through this experience that we learn of our need to depend on God. This experience teaches us humility and prepares us for the prayer of quiet (infused recollection) in the fourth dwelling places which may be accompanied by spiritual delights should the Lord desire to grant these to us.

Spiritual delights are different than consolations St. Teresa teaches, as they begin in God and end in ourselves. The distinction between the two provides us with signposts that our prayer practice is either more active recollection or passive/infused recollection of the fourth dwelling place.

St. Teresa further distinguishes the differences between the two by the effects each one has on the soul. Spiritual delights have the effect of enlarging the heart without our efforts while consolations often are accompanied by some constraint. That is with consolations we may mix them with our own passions causing us to have to work hard to maintain their effects.

St. Teresa draws on one of her favorite metaphors here, namely water to assist us to better understand what she is teaching regarding active recollection and passive recollection.

Picture two fountains with two water troughs! These two troughs are filled with water in different ways; with one the water comes from far away, through many aqueducts, and the use of much ingenuity; with the other, the source of the water is right there, and the trough fills without any noise. There is no need of any skill, nor does the building of aqueducts have to continue, as water is always flowing from the spring.

St. Teresa likens the water coming from the aqueducts to consolations that we draw from our prayer and meditation. For we obtain these consolations through assisting ourselves, through our efforts. Noise (additional effort or striving) is made when the water of consolation needs replenishment just as the aqueduct has to keep working, clacking and moving water through it to reach the water trough.

With the other fount, the water comes from its own source which is God. It is God when He desires to do so, who produces the spiritual delights with the greatest peace, quiet, and sweetness in the very interior part of the soul. This spiritual delight fills everything, this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body. Spiritual delights begin in God and end in ourselves.

Or think of it this way. Let us look at the story of Mary Magdalen in the Gospel when she went to the tomb. Christ wasn't there so she had to actively search for Him. Liken this to our efforts to find Him through our own efforts in reading scripture, spiritual reading, and our meditation. Even when she spoke to the person she thought was the gardener she didn't perceive Him through this effort.

Now think of Our Lord identifying Himself directly to her when He said, Mary, Mary. He drew her attention by identifying Himself through His words. In the first instance we have a likeness to simple active recollection. In the second we see an example of the Lord directly drawing her (passive recollection).

Try to sense or feel the difference between active and passive methods as it is important in one's spiritual journey to recognize the favors the Lord grants in the fourth dwelling

places. If you don't notice the difference in your own experience between the prayer of active recollection and prayer of quiet, how will you give thanks and praise to God for the favors given you in your prayer life?

We must pray for the graces necessary to be sensitive and receptive to God's gifts in our prayer lives. For St. Teresa teaches us that the Lord wants us to advance in prayer, and that He grants many souls the favor to enter the fourth dwelling places.

Entry into the fourth dwelling places signals and makes clearer to one the power of the purification and the transforming power of love that leads to full spiritual maturity. One quickly realizes that prayer cannot be equated with good feelings, lack of difficulties or disturbances and so on.

One begins to realize that it is not so important what happens in prayer itself, but far more important how our prayer effects our everyday life. It is often not in our prayer, but because of our prayer that we discover and discern more easily the love of God and its purifying and transforming effects as we unite our will with His will which is love throughout our everyday life.

Let us listen to St. Teresa's own words in the fourth dwelling places.

“ I only wish to inform you that in order to profit by this path and ascend to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love. Perhaps we don't what love is. I wouldn't be very surprised, because it doesn't consist in great delight but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything, in striving, insofar as possible, not to offend Him, and in asking Him for the advancement of the honor and glory of His

Son and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love.” (IV, 1:7)

St. Teresa also teaches us that the fourth dwelling places are well populated. The Lord, she says, is not sparing in granting His gifts. So we must be attentive in recognizing the gifts of the fourth dwelling places when they are given to us.

We need to be conscious and alert to the fact that we are transitioning; from working, striving and making efforts in prayer, to shifting to being attentive to the subtle leadings of the Lord.

If we have been brought by the Lord into the fourth dwelling places it is our duty St. Teresa teaches to be constant and persevere for in this perseverance lies all our good. We must learn to recognize his graces and favors and give thanks and praise for His gifts which purify and strengthen our love as we advance in our lives of prayer and contemplation.

With constancy and perseverance we will be more prepared to advance as we wait for His invitation to enter the fifth dwelling places.

St. Teresa begins her teachings on the fifth dwelling places by entrusting herself to the Lord because she recognized that it would be a great challenge to explain these dwelling places which she describes as containing riches and treasures beyond any earthly understanding.

As with the fourth dwelling places she offers great words of encouragement to all of us by stating that we will find ample company in these dwelling places as in the fourth dwelling places, although experiences often differ from person to person.

The fifth dwelling place is characterized as the dwelling place of union. The door to this dwelling place is the gift of the prayer of union (infused contemplation).

We may ask then how does the prayer of union differ from the prayer of quiet in the fourth dwelling place. It is the will that was held captive, or suspended in the prayer of quiet. Memory, imagination, and intellect may, as St. Teresa described it, continue to roam or be unsettled.

The prayer of union is a more complete and intense purification of love as all of our faculties both physical and spiritual are suspended.

What exactly does suspension mean? Or how do we understand this?

Suspension of the faculties simply means that they are rendered useless as mechanisms or channels for communication with God during the prayer of union.

For example, if you use your physical sense of sight to view a beautiful garden, or sea, you raise your heart in praise of God's creation. You are going to God through an application of one of your physical senses. If you use your imagination to picture Christ within you, you are using a spiritual sense. If you use your intellect to study the Interior Castle it leads you to a deeper faith in God and in the spiritual journey of prayer and contemplation that you have undertaken. You are using another of your spiritual senses.

Think of all your senses whether physical or spiritual as doorways into your soul or interior castle. You use these faculties to help you enter within to be with your God in a rich and varied way.

In the prayer of union, God does not enter through any of these doorways. As St. Teresa states in the fifth dwelling place (ch.1:12) “God wants to enter the center of the soul without going through any door.”

To deepen our understanding of this, we can look to the Gospels. Recall after the resurrection Christ appeared in the upper room where the apostles were praying without coming through the door. He just appeared within the room.

He can do this with you and with me appear within one of the rooms of our soul without the normal way of entering. That is through one of our faculties.

To assist us even further in understanding the way the Lord leads souls in the fifth dwelling places, St. Teresa illustrates our spiritual path through the purification of love to spiritual maturity by the use of two wonderful analogies. These analogies help us to grow in our understanding of the Lord’s gifts and secret communications with the soul who has reached and entered the rooms of the fifth dwelling places.

The first is the silkworm where she explains the process by which it creates its silk. Silkworms nourish themselves and sustain life by feeding on available mulberry leaves, then having grown to full size, they settle on some twigs. Followed by spinning silk and making very thick cocoons in which they enclose themselves. The silk worm which is fat and ugly, then dies, and a little white butterfly comes forth from the cocoon. (V, 2:2)

This process then by analogy is applied to our spiritual purification in love and our transformation in Christ and union with Him through our life of prayer and contemplation.

We begin by nourishing ourselves like the silkworm through our efforts to grow in our spiritual life through ordinary means such as the sacraments, good reading, prayer, avoidance of sin, and our fidelity.

At this stage the silkworm began to spin silk making a cocoon, then died, and was transformed into a white butterfly. Likewise as we grow in our spiritual lives we reach a point where we have the strength from the nourishment we have taken to begin to spin silk by practicing the virtue of love, detachment from worldly things, and humility. The cocoon we are fashioning is a life hidden with Christ in God. Christ is our cocoon.

But let us remember as St. Teresa teaches that it is always God who leads us into these latter dwelling places, or places us there in the cocoon by His will and His gifts when and how He chooses. It is here in the fifth dwelling places that we experience the prayer of union through the purification of love by dying to self and rising a new creation in Christ. Christ is our life.

To experience this paschal mystery of dying and rising, we must remember that we must be fully engaged in the process of dying and rising. You can’t get there by just observing the process or reading about it. You have to do the work. You have to walk the walk. As the silkworm died from its efforts and work, so you must die to yourself so that you can become Christ in a union of love with the Father.

St. Teresa counsels us to be quick to do this work. “Let us be quick to do this work and weave this little cocoon by getting rid of our self- love and self-will. Let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do.” (V, 2:6)

Therefore if we wish to follow this path of the purification of love in the latter dwelling places we must make every effort not to fail in doing what we are able to do with His grace to prepare ourselves for the prayer of union if and when the Lord chooses to grant the prayer whether it is once or many times in this life on our journey to spiritual maturity.

The second analogy that St. Teresa utilizes to assist our understanding of the prayer of union is the sacrament of marriage and its processes that were prevalent in her culture at the time.

It should be noted that this particular analogy is carried forward into the sixth and seventh dwelling places as St. Teresa felt it lent itself aptly to the purification of love and the progression in prayer and contemplation through these last two dwelling places.

In the time of St. Teresa marriage was preceded by several different stages of varying lengths depending on the couple, the families, and the expectations of the society of the time.

These included initial meetings, exchanging of gifts between the families, the beginnings of love by getting to know one another, being united for short periods of time, followed by engagement or betrothal and finally the marriage.

St. Teresa draws on these stages to enlighten us as to the progression in the purification of love that occurs through the last three dwelling places until we reach full spiritual maturity or spiritual marriage.

Through this analogy of the stages leading to marriage, she teaches us that the prayer of union does not reach the stage of

engagement or betrothal. Rather the prayer of union is an earlier stage; that is precisely that stage in which the potential spouses can come to know one another on deeper levels.

Let us listen to her words. "God grants this mercy (prayer of union) for He desires the soul to know Him more and that they meet together ... and be united." As for the betrothal, it belongs to the dwelling place we shall speak of after this one." (V, 4:5)

The prayer of union St. Teresa teaches is beyond any experiences of the path of prayer and contemplation that we may have experienced in the first four mansions.

This is God's work and beyond our comprehension so much so that one of the greatest frustrations and challenges that souls endure should they enter the fifth dwelling places is the struggle and inability to clearly understand or even clearly explain their experience. We must simply surrender and accept that this is God's work of purification in love.

As we said earlier, God's communication with the soul in the fifth dwelling places takes place deep within by-passing the faculties; for St. Teresa states, it is all a matter of love united with love. (V, 4:3)

Love she states is never idle and the failure to grow would be a very bad sign. (V, 4:10) Works are what the Lord wants! (V, 3:11)

St. Teresa specifies two works that help us to be diligent in our efforts to advance in love towards the entrance of the sixth dwelling place.

"First, we must always ask God in prayer to sustain us." (V, 4:9) We cannot sustain ourselves on these supernatural paths of the spiritual journey. And secondly, we should

always strive to advance in the practice of the virtues.

If we apply ourselves diligently to these practices, we will be drawn deeper into our interior castle, even to the entrance of the sixth dwelling place.

The sixth dwelling place is the dwelling place of betrothal.

St. Teresa describes mainly two aspects of this stage of the spiritual journey through the purification of love as we reach out for full spiritual maturity, namely the great internal and external suffering of the soul, and the extraordinary mystical phenomena which can and may manifest itself as part of the soul's experience in the sixth dwelling places.

Given our time constraints this evening for our purposes and benefit we will focus primarily on the aspect of suffering that Teresa describes as a substantial part of one's purification in love that is experienced in the sixth dwelling places.

Let us first listen to Teresa's own words as she begins to teach us about the sixth dwelling places.

"Now the soul is fully determined to take no other spouse. But the Spouse does not look at the soul's great desires that the betrothal take place, for He still wants it to desire this more, and He wants the betrothal to take place at a cost; it is the greatest of blessings. Oh, God help me, what interior and exterior trials the soul suffers before entering the seventh dwelling place." (VI, 1:1)

From these words of St. Teresa, we come to understand that the purification of love which leads to full spiritual maturity through the life of prayer and contemplation reaches its greatest intensity in the sixth dwelling

places and prepares the soul for the movement from spiritual betrothal to spiritual marriage in the seventh dwelling places.

Sufferings and many trials then are the door to the sixth dwelling place. This is not meant to imply that the cross has not been present in the earlier dwelling places. St. Teresa makes the point that the cross in this dwelling place is far more intense, and can be unexpected given that our experiences in the fourth and fifth dwelling places were often very pleasant and our life of prayer very consoling.

St. Teresa teaches us however that as intense or unexpected our trials or suffering may be in this dwelling place our willingness to embrace these trials is deeply rooted in our desire to be one with God through following the example of Christ.

"Because it would be impossible to speak of them all, or even to explain what they are" (VI, 1:15), St. Teresa identifies several sufferings that offer us a profile sufficient to enable us to understand what may be experienced in the sixth dwelling places as the purification of love becomes more penetrating and all encompassing.

The first suffering that she mentions is "a thousand kinds of ridicule". (VI, 1:3) This criticism can reach such a level that we could begin to fear "that there would be no one who would hear our confession" (VI, 1:4)

The second suffering that she mentions is "praise". She states that praise is just another trial greater than criticism. However, she does point out that praise can eventually become tolerable as it highlights that all goodness "is given by His Majesty".

Thirdly, she informs us is that the "Lord is wont to send the severest illness. (VI, 1:6). In

this case Teresa teaches that “God gives no more than what can be endured; and His Majesty gives patience first.”

Finally, Teresa informs us that if she were to treat of interior sufferings the three external sufferings she just mentioned would seem small in comparison.

What are some of the interior sufferings and trials that may occur? Some examples are lack of consolation and understanding of what is happening in our souls, experiences of deep desolation, the experience of no comfort in our efforts at advancing in our prayer lives, and the experience of poor spiritual direction from others. This one Teresa herself frequently experiences in her own spiritual journey.

The reason for these severe trials in the sixth dwelling places Teresa teaches us very clearly is that “Our great God wants us to know our own misery, and that He is King; and this is very important for what lies ahead.”

St. Teresa teaches that trials, suffering and crosses cannot be avoided in this life. So she offers some very practical advice for enduring such sufferings.

Let us listen to her words. “The best remedy (I don’t mean for getting rid of these sufferings because I don’t find any), but so that we may persevere and endure is to engage in external works of charity and to hope in the mercy of God who never fails those who hope in Him” (VI, 1:13)

As I mentioned at the beginning of the sixth dwelling places the other aspect of the sixth dwelling places is that of the potential for mystical phenomenon such as raptures, locutions, visions of both the intellect and imaginations and so on. We are told that these favors are gifts given when and if the

Lord wills, and we should not seek such favors. These favors are supernatural gifts from God and thus well beyond all human capability and creativity.

St. Teresa comments further that “there are many holy persons who have never received one of these favors; and others who receive them but are not holy.”

She concludes by emphasizing that the soul should think not about receiving more favors from the Lord, but how to serve more for what already has been given. If you want to know more about these favors, you can read the sixth dwelling place and listen directly to St. Teresa’s teaching on these matters.

St. Teresa concludes her teaching on the sixth dwelling place by stressing the importance of courage on the spiritual journey. Pray often for the grace of courage as your soul advances through the purification of its love to full spiritual maturity in the seventh dwelling places.

Why does St. Teresa insist so much on the necessity to pray for courage in this sixth dwelling place?

Our life of prayer often feels like a combination of seemingly advancing in the love of God, and at the same time we experience ever more clearly our distance from Him. Light and darkness alternate in the sixth dwelling places. We tend to move back and forth between the two, and therefore it requires great courage to continue on the spiritual journey.

St. Teresa describes it this way. “The soul sees it is like a person hanging, who cannot support himself on any earthly thing, nor can it ascend to heaven.” (VI, II:5)

Prayer in the sixth dwelling places becomes even more intensely passive.

The effort now is to simply be attentive to what the Lord may ask of the soul, and what he may wish to do within the soul in preparation for the entrance to the seventh dwelling place.

Again it is less of a matter of searching and doing, as it is of keeping the heart open and receptive to both the purification of love one experiences through the trials and sufferings experienced here, as well as to favors and graces given to the soul that ultimately creates a great fire within and longing for intimate union with God in the seventh dwelling place of spiritual marriage.

St. Teresa concludes the sixth dwelling place by emphasizing the truth that the sixth dwelling place is situated deep within the castle, very close to the seventh dwelling place. She observed that “there is no closed door between one and the other. And now, through the suffering and trials as well as any favors received in the sixth dwelling places, the Lord prepares souls to be escorted into the seventh dwelling place.”

The seventh dwelling place is the dwelling place of spiritual marriage. The purification of love that has been reached unites the soul with God completely and permanently.

We are told by St. Teresa that the experiences between spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage are as great as that which exists between two who are betrothed, and two who no longer can be separated. (VII, 2:2)

That is, the union with God that the soul experiences in the seventh dwelling place is significantly different than the grace of union in previous dwelling places.

Let us listen directly to St. Teresa's words.

“In this seventh dwelling place the union comes about in a different way: our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of a favor He grants it.

When the soul is brought into the dwelling place, the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth... Through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power, and one knowledge and one God alone” (VII, 1:6).

The door then to the seventh dwelling place is the intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity. And it is not a passing awareness. St. Teresa states, “Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never seem to leave it anymore, but it clearly beholds... that they are within it.” In fact, “the soul finds itself in this company every time it takes notice”. (VII, 1:9)

Spiritual marriage takes place when “His Majesty desires to show Himself to the soul through an imaginative vision of His Sacred Humanity so that the soul will understand and not be ignorant of receiving this sovereign gift.” (VII, 2:1)

One might conclude that such experience of constant awareness of God's presence would leave one unable to attend to anything else. St. Teresa teaches us that it is just the opposite.

We are given six effects that can be recognized in souls as an effect of spiritual marriage that were outlined by St. Teresa.

Forgetfulness of self, the desire to suffer, interior joy under persecution, a great desire to serve and praise the Lord, detachment for everything coupled with a desire to be always either alone or occupied in something that benefits souls, and finally the soul realizes that God does all that is necessary so it experiences great stability and strong resolution not to deviate from His service in anything.

The soul has passed through the purgation of its love and has reached full spiritual maturity.