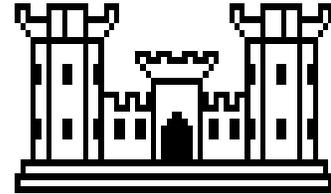


THE SECOND MANSION

by Father Gabriel Barry, O.C.D.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

There is no hard and fast dividing line between one mansion and the next. Although each possesses its own characteristics, one merges almost imperceptibly into the other, like the seasons of the year. Or, to express it in another way, certain latent marks and attitudes which were present in a seminal form right from the beginning, gradually come into the open as the soul grows in grace.



St. Teresa conveys this fact in her own picturesque way: “You must not imagine these mansions as arranged in a row one behind the other, but fix your attention on the center, the room or place occupied by the King. Think of a palmito (a vegetable with thin layers of leaves enclosing an edible kernel.) which has so many outer rinds surrounding the savory part within, all of which must be taken away before the center can be eaten.”² In passing, it is of interest to note that St. Paul too fetched about for words and images to convey some idea of what it means to grow up into Christ, and fell back on the self-same images as St. Teresa, namely the material building. (in his case a temple.)³ The difficulty arises from the fact that no human concepts are adequate to express spiritual realities.⁴ But no one can deny that the chateau with its many courts and the palmito with its layers one about the other, do convey some notion of these profound mysteries. However, St. Teresa is too practical to stick rigidly to any one set of images, as Bunyan did in *Pilgrim's Progress*. She moves from one to another, according as it suits her purpose. Like Shakespeare, she possessed a wonderfully pictorial imagination and she is a consummate master in the use of imagery. Scholars have pointed out that the *Interior Castle* is the riches of all her writings in this respect.⁵ These images come to her spontaneously. She selected them principally for their value in explaining spiritual truths and conveying deep realities. It is hard to believe however, that she was indifferent to the inner beauty of so many of them for hers was the soul of a great artist.

II. CONTENTS OF THE SECOND MANSION

St. Teresa devotes just one long chapter to describing the second Mansion. Her treatment of it is the shortest of the seven. She does not attempt to define its exact nature, which indeed bears a considerable resemblance to what went before and what follows after. Nonetheless, it has certain characteristic qualities of its own. In the main, these can be described as a strengthening of virtue and a simplification of prayer. In that way, it forms a natural transition to Mansions III.

¹Note: In this lesson, all references to the *Interior Castle* are to the *Image Book* paperback edition Doubleday, 1961, unless otherwise indicated.

²*Interior Castle*, ed cit. p. 37

³Eph. 3:16-17; 2:20-22 and some parallel texts.

⁴cf. St. John of the Cross: *Spiritual Canticle*: Prologue 3.

⁵Peers: *St. Teresa of Jesus and Other Essays*; p. 92.

St. Teresa never separates prayer from daily life. If our prayer is authentic, it must be an expression of what we are and what we do. It must mirror our ideals, that is, what we are striving to become; a living hymn of praise to God our Creator, and to be a channel of His love and peace to as many as possible of mankind. As we heard so often in our younger days, we were put into this world to know God, to love Him and to serve Him. This thought dominates Mansions II. There is little enough reference to formal prayer in St. Teresa's treatment of it, but she has much to say about the practice of virtue and the building up of solid convictions.

Naturally, St. Teresa's main concern is to deepen the spirit of faith, love and trust, for these alone put us into contact with God in this life. They enable us to perceive that God is always to us and within us, and that we in turn must be generous in our response to Him. If our faith is weak, we are bound to experience the strong counter-attraction of material things, even when we know well that this leads nowhere except to ill fortune.⁶ So we must place our trust, not in ourselves nor in creatures, but in the mercy of God, and then we will see how He can lead us from one group of mansions to the next and set us on safe ground. And even in this life, those who are faithful will enjoy many more good things than they could ever dream of.⁷

Common sense should tell us how fleeting and worthless are earthly things in comparison with what we are seeking. Faith tells us what we must do to find true fulfillment. Hope shows how all these things come to an end and reminds us that those who derived so much delight from them have passed away. There is only one thing that remains for ever, namely the love and service of God, and in that we find all we need. The will urges us to love One who is so full of goodness. In particular, it shows the soul how this true Lover never goes away but accompanies it everywhere, giving it life and well-being.⁸

It is at this season too that our Lord begins to make known the value of serving Him, and what a really good friend He is. However long we may live, we cannot hope to have a kinder friend or a more loyal one than He. And we can be sure that outside of the Castle where He dwells, we find neither security nor peace. There is no need to visit one strange house after another. Our Father's home is full of good things, if only we would go there and enjoy them. To look for them elsewhere is to stray and end up by eating the husk of swine.⁹

Worldly friendships are a fruitful source of evil for those who are learning to pray. On the other hand, true spiritual friendships can be the greatest help. St. Teresa has much to say on this theme in the *Way of Perfection*. In the *Interior Castle*, she sums it up in these words: "It is a very great thing for a person to associate with others who are walking in the right way; to mix not only with those whom he sees in the rooms where he himself is, but with those whom he knows to have entered the rooms near the center. For they will be of great help to him, and he can get into such

⁶p.49

⁷p.52

⁸pp. 48, 53

⁹p. 49

close touch with them that they will take him with them.”¹⁰ And she points out that one of the best friendships that can be cultivated is with a prudent director.¹¹

At this stage then, those in the Second Mansion must allow themselves to be guided by God and His accredited representatives on earth, and strive to bring their wills and desires into line with the will and mind of Christ. “His Majesty knows best what is suitable for us. It is not for us to advise Him what to give us, for He can rightly reply that we know not what we ask.”¹²

III. OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN

It is only to be expected that after the first flush of fervor, such as is experienced in Mansions I, a reaction is likely to set in. This is both a law of human psychology and divine permission. It can also be availed of by the enemy of all good to turn people back from the road of perfection. This phase is a critical one and needs to be faced realistically. Probably no one has analyzed it more acutely and penetratingly than St. John of the Cross in the opening chapters of the *Dark Night of the Soul*. St. Teresa too has much solid advice to offer, less analytic perhaps than St. John, but no less valuable. For it is important to know why God permits weakness, and what are the appropriate remedies to be taken at this particular time.

First of all, St. Teresa stresses the value of perseverance and stability. “The soul will certainly suffer great trials at this time, especially if the devil sees that its character and habits are such that it is ready to make further progress.... Such a one must have a fixed determination not to allow himself to be beaten, for if the devil sees that he has firmly resolved to lose his life and his peace and everything that he can offer him rather than return to the first room (i.e. First Mansion), he will very soon cease troubling him. Let him play the man and not be like those who went down on their knees in order to drink when they went to battle. But let him be resolute, for he is going forth to fight with all the devils, and there are no better weapons than the Cross.”¹³

Here we note once again St. Teresa characteristic love for manliness, a quality which she advocates for all who are in earnest about growing in prayer.¹⁴ It is not to be confused, of course, with masculine aggressiveness or domination. It is simply another name for the supernatural gift of courage, that gift of the Holy Spirit, which St. Teresa herself possessed in an outstanding degree.

As regards the discovery of our own weakness, which is one of the experience of Mansions II, this much should be noted: God permits it so as to detach us from excessive confidence in our own abilities and to induce us, as it were, to practice the virtue of humility, which no one finds easy. However, we must never forget that this discovery of our real selves gives us a special claim to God’s mercy and help. “I have made up my mind to be proud of my weakness, because

¹⁰pp. 49-50

¹¹pp. 52-53

¹²p. 51

¹³pp. 49, 50

¹⁴*Way of Perfection*, 7 Peers II 35; *ibid.*, p. 86

they mean a deeper experience of the power of Christ.”¹⁵ And Theresa of the Infant Jesus was full of joy when she came before God with empty hands; she knew that He would fill them with the best of gifts.

Self-love, in all its forms, is the poison that can destroy spiritual growth, unless it is eradicated without mercy. It can take many subtle disguises. In the cases of those who set their minds on serving God, its most insidious form is a desire for spiritual favors. We persuade ourselves that we would be full of determination to resist trials, if only if God would grant us inward favors.¹⁶ In the *Life*, chapter XI, St. Teresa had written at length to refute this specious argument. What she says in the *Interior Castle* is brief, but it is worth quoting. “At the beginning, one must not think of such things as spiritual favors, for that is a very poor way of starting to build such a large and beautiful edifice. If it is begun upon sand, it will all collapse; souls which build like that will never be free from annoyance and temptations. For it is not in these mansions, but in those which are farther on that it rains manna; once there, the soul has all it desires, because it desires only what is the will of God. It is a curious thing; here we are meeting with hindrances and suffering from imperfections by the thousand, with our virtues so young that they have not yet learned how to walk---and yet we are not afraid to be wanting consolations in prayer and to be complaining about periods of aridity. This must not be true of you. Embrace the Cross which your Spouse bore upon His shoulders, and realize that this cross is yours to carry too.”¹⁷

The question of reaching out after favors and consolations and spiritual honors is a big one. More particular it comes up in Mansion IV, where unusual experiences are likely to come to the fore. It also enters in the less desirable aspects of Pentecostalism. As St. Teresa remarks, “We know not what we ask.”¹⁸ Like the mother of James and John we don’t see the full implications of our desire to be specially favored by God.¹⁹ Following the Gospel counsels, St. Teresa points to the Cross as the one sure road to the resurrection. The more generous we are in embracing it, the greater will be our freedom. “All other things are of quite secondary importance; if the Lord should grant them to you, give Him heartfelt thanks.”²⁰ If He should not, thank Him too, but the mind of our Carmelite teachers is that we should never aspire to them.

St. John of the Cross shows that the only final remedy for self-love is the deep purification which he calls the dark night of the soul. This intervention from God removes self-seeking little by little, and makes the soul capable of experiencing one of the stages when there is dire need to use plain down-to-earth common sense. Indeed, it is called for at every stage. As spiritual writers have pointed out from time immemorial, the potentialities of the life of grace are so great that they require a zone of clear cold thinking to keep them under control. And so we must learn to balance idealism and the desire for perfection with other things of a more sober nature, principle among them being the gift of Holy Fear. This constrains us to see ourselves as we are, creatures

¹⁵II Cor. 12:9

¹⁶p.51

¹⁷p. 50

¹⁸p. 51

¹⁹cf. Matthew 20:23

²⁰p. 51

in the presence of the Creator. It also reminds us of His bounty and goodness, exceeding anything that the mind of man can conceive.

In the course of her instruction, St. Teresa makes a passing reference to the parable of the prodigal son.²¹ She could not have chosen a better example to bring out our human condition in contrast to the infinite mercy of God. That erring son is Everyman. Is there anyone who has not in one way or another squandered some of his spiritual heritage in quest of false goals? It is often through the bitter experience of failure that one learns to look for God in real earnest. That is how He brings home to us the relative futility of created things. “But if you sometimes fall, do not lose heart, or cease striving to make progress, for even out of your fall God will bring good...If nothing else could show us what wretched creatures we are, and what harm we do ourselves by dissipating our desires, this war which goes on within us would be sufficient to do so and lead us back to recollection. Can any evil be greater than the evil which we find in our own house?”²² But if by the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our undying and unfailing friend, we persevere in this struggle, then the time comes when we will know true peace, first within our own hearts, and then in our relations with others. That is why the process of purification is indispensable. Furthermore, it is the only way to replace the deep discontent of the modern world with the joy and peace of Christ.

IV. PRAYER IN THE SECOND MANSION

As can be seen from all this, the main thrust of St. Teresa’s teaching in Mansion II is to encourage the practice of virtue and to give new confidence to those who were in danger of backsliding. All her advice is summed up in two sentences: “What the beginner in prayer has to do above all else is to labor and be resolute and prepare himself with all possible diligence to bring his will into conformity with the will of God. You may be sure that this comprises the very greatest perfection which can be attained in the spiritual road.”²³ This is reminiscent of similar teaching, explained even more scientifically, by the other great Carmelite doctor, St. John of the Cross. Divine union, he says, consists in the total transformation of the will into the will of God, in such a way that whatever God wills, we will also.²⁴ This is, of course, derived from the teaching of our Savior Himself and of St. Paul. Both of them emphasize the need of deep conformity, “I live, not by my own life, but by the life of Christ within me,” if we are to attain to the full maturity of spiritual growth, and in that way come to love all men with the love of God our Creator.

In the prayer of petition, we ask, not that our will be done but God’s. We place our personal request in the larger context of His will. His prayer becomes our prayer; we try to widen our horizons to coincide with His and we beg to be incorporated in His Kingdom. We pray to know His will, so that we can make it effective in our lives.

²¹p. 49

²²p. 51-52

²³p. 51

²⁴Ascent I 2:3-5

Now God does not ordinarily reveal His will directly to mankind. In our human condition, He speaks through the Church and Holy Scripture. But this does not mean that He is not constantly guiding His children, though in hidden ways. He is ever calling them, and they must respond generously. “As they gradually get nearer to the place where His majesty dwells, He becomes a very good neighbor to them and such are His mercy and goodness that even when we are engaged in our worldly pastimes and businesses and pleasures and haggings, even when we are falling into sins and rising again,---this Lord of ours is so anxious that we should desire Him and strive after His companionship that He calls us ceaselessly, time after time, to approach Him.”²⁵ Those who are familiar with Francis Thompson’s vivid poem *The Hound of Heaven* will find another powerful image of that unrelenting Love which never rest until all men are gathered into their Father’s Home.

During this life, however, the call of God is usually concealed in the appearance of human events and experience. “His appeals come through the conversations of good people, or from sermons, or through the reading of good books. And there are many other ways of which you have heard in which God calls us. They come through sicknesses and trials, or by means of truths which God teaches us at times when we are engaged in prayer; however feeble such prayer may be, God values them highly. You must not despise this first favor, nor be disconsolate even though you have not respond immediately to the Lord’s call. For His Majesty is prepared to wait for many days and even years, especially when He sees we are persevering and have good desires. This is the most necessary thing here. If we have this, we cannot fail to gain greatly.”²⁶

For St. Teresa, prayer is another name for the effort we put forward to keep in contact with God. In Mansion II, the proper kind of prayer is mediation, but the first step towards simplification takes place here. A variety of reflection is replaced by short ejaculations, at first rather numerous, but growing in simplicity and depth as time goes by. Persons who pray begin to appreciate the import of St. Teresa’s statement that prayer is more a matter of loving than thinking. In Mansion II, there begins a shift in the center of gravity from mediation to the cultivation of friendship with our Lord, and expressing our love and desires by means of aspirations. It is interesting to recall that the Fathers of the Desert too made use of short fervent ejaculations as means of deepening prayer their favorite one being. “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.” Their aim was to establish a sense of dependence on Christ, to cultivate a realization of His presence in their midst and in their lives, at every moment of the day. This is how we bring about an effective bond between prayer and action. St. Teresa expresses this thought in her own simple but profound way. “If we never look at our Lord, or think of what we owe Him, and of the death which He suffered for our sakes, I do not see how we get to know Him or to do good works in His service. For what can be the value of faith without good works, or of works which are not united with the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ?”²⁷

V. FILLING IN THE PICTURE

²⁵p. 47

²⁶pp.47-48

²⁷p.53

I have already said that St. Teresa has little enough to say about prayer in the single chapter which comprises Mansion II. We can fill in the picture to some extent by an examination of the *Life* and the *Way of Perfection*. This concluding sections is largely a summary.

For St. Teresa, meditation, in the more generic sense, is the prayer that is proper to the Second Mansion. It is the entrance door to the Castle of the soul, that castle of many mansions, all centering round the innermost one where the King of Glory dwells.²⁸ Meditation is not just fruitless speculation; it is the first step that has to be taken towards the acquisition of the virtues.²⁹ To be authentic, it must be accompanied by Christian self-denial, that is by self-restraint from habits and things that tend to draw us away from God. Prayer and self-indulgence do not go together.³⁰

By meditation is meant a continuous labor with the understanding to come to some appreciation and insight into the truths of God. At this stage, it is the only road. Later on God will lead one on a more spacious way, and impart knowledge of Himself without effort. However, even at the beginning, the one who prays must not put all his energies into the work of mind. This is only the doorway, and the process of entering will gradually become more simplified. And it is well to intermingle acts of worship and praise and thanksgiving. The important thing, according to the mind of St. Teresa, is not a lot of thinking but much loving. This does not mean that St. Teresa is an anti-intellectual. She was unreservedly in favor of using the human mind to its fullest capacity, and in its proper place. But the human mind is not the last court of appeal, and during prayer, it provides a relatively inferior manner of communing with God. What St. Teresa means is that reflection on Divine Truth is subordinated to love. Its purpose is to awaken in us a living response to God's love. But she is very insistent that those who pray should feed their minds with sacred reading, to supplement what meditation has given them.³¹ Everything that fosters a habit of loving converse with God is to be used by those who have taken the decision to follow Christ.

St. Teresa makes an important distinction between two kinds of recollection. One is what is achieved when a Christian collects his faculties and concentrates them on the great Living Mystery within himself. Everyone can practice this for himself with the aid of ordinary grace. The other kind is quite different. God intervenes positively. But as always, he does this in a gentle hidden way. He calls souls with a call so gentle that even they can hardly recognize it, and He teaches them to know His voice. But this call, no matter how quiet it may be, is unmistakable, and the response is powerful. This second kind of recollection, the result of a special divine intervention, is a characteristic of the Fourth Mansion. I mention it here because the preparation for it is already in evidence in Mansion II. It helps one to understand the meaning of certain things we are asked to do, once we know the purpose of it all. Nor must we forget that the elements of even the highest supernatural prayer are present, in an incipient way, in every baptized person.

²⁸Peers II, pp. 202, 203, 241

²⁹*Way of Perfection*, Peers II p. 64

³⁰*Way of Perfection*, Peers II, pp. 15-16

³¹*Life*, Peers I, p. 24

One of the virtues that St. Teresa never tires of stressing at this stage is reverence for God. “When we speak with so great a Lord, as it is right to do, we should take care to think of Who He is that we are addressing and what we ourselves are, if only that we may speak to Him with proper respect.”³² This is vitally important. There can be no real prayer without a deep sense of reverence for God. To make ourselves out to be something other than we are is pride. And the only class of people whom God resists are the proud. We see this exemplified in the attitude of Jesus Christ; no matter how wayward men had been, He was ready to receive them back with open arms, if only they were ready to acknowledge their sins. “Be merciful to me, a sinner.” But the proud and self-sufficient only provoked the most devastating scorn. The prayer of the proud man is no prayer at all. Anyone who aspires to grow in prayer must learn to combine all the liberty of God’s children with the most tender love, and a deep reverence for our Father in Heaven.

For St. Teresa, then, prayer in the Second Mansion is not just an exercise of devotion. It means setting our feet more firmly on the road that leads to God. For that reason, one must be fully in earnest. This does not mean that we have to shut out joy and take life deadly serious. That is the way of rigorism, with its overtones of pelagianism. St. Teresa’s road is that of the gospels. It calls for stability and perseverance, “a determined resolve, based on trust in God, not to halt until we have reached the goal, whatever may come, whatever may happen, whether we die on the road, or the world goes to pieces beneath our feet.” Like our Lord, she does not promise immediate comfort to those who are taking their first steps on the road of prayer. As St. John of the Cross puts it, this work is not for persons who desire to travel to God by pleasant delectable ways.³³ The essence of prayer is love, and love consists, not in the extent of our own happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to please God in everything and to endeavor to avoid all that could offend Him. It consists too in a desire to advance the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, and the growth of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of true love.³⁴

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Please refer to the OCDS *Rule of Life*, Foreword and Articles 1 through 8.
2. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Peers and/or ICS edition.
3. For those who would like to pursue further, here is a short list of books, if they are available:
 - a. Saint John of the Cross: *Ascent and Dark Night*, also *Living Flame*, stz. III.
 - b. Poulain, A.: *Graces of Interior Prayer*.
 - c. Farges, A.: *Mystical Phenomena*.
 - d. Watkin, E.: *Philosophy of Mysticism*.
 - e. Butler, C.: *Western Mysticism*.
 - f. Grandmaison, L.: *Personal Religion*.
 - g. Knowles, D.: *What is Mysticism?*
 - h. Underhill, E.: *Mysticism*.
 - i. O'Brien, E.: *Varieties of Mystical Experience*.

³² *Way of Perfection*, Peers II, p. 93

³³ *Assent*, prol.

³⁴ *Interior Castle*, Peers II, p.233

- j. Lossky, V.: *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.
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