

## 18. Prayer of Presence

If we are faithful in preparing ourselves to receive the gift of prayer by applying ourselves, through meditation, to getting to know God better by getting to know God's Son, we will find that our meditative reflections tend to become simpler. This is the way with conversations between friends. It is also the way with God. Teresa writes:

I am not asking you to do anything more than look at him. Who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul towards the Lord? ... He never takes his eyes off you (*Way of Perfection* 26.3).

It is good to reflect for a time ... but we should not always weary ourselves in seeking these reflections, but just remain there in his presence with the intellect quiet. If we can, we should occupy ourselves in looking upon him who is looking at us. Keep him company. Talk with him. Pray to him. Humble ourselves before him. Delight in him (*Life* 13.22).

Teresa speaks of God dwelling within the soul in her *Life* 40.6, and in her *Spiritual Testimonies* 14. In her *The Way of Perfection* we read:

Speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord and a Spouse ... He will teach you what you must do to please Him ... Remember how important it is for you to understand this truth – that the Lord is within us and that we should be there with Him ... The fire of Divine Love is the more readily enkindled in those who pray in this way; for they are so near the fire that, however small the blaze that has been fanned by the understanding, any small spark that flies out will cause them to burst into flame. When no hindrance comes from outside, they remain alone with their God and are ready to become enkindled (*Way of Perfection* 28).

There is nothing to hinder you and your Spouse from remaining alone together, when you desire to enter within yourself, to shut the door behind you and to dwell in that Paradise with your God ... Remember this is not a supernatural state. It is something you can do if you resolve to do it ... We may take a whole hour to say the 'Our Father' once, so long as we realise that we are with our Father, and what it is we are asking Him, and how willing He is, like any father, to grant it to us, and how He loves to be with us and comfort us. He has no wish for us to tire our brains by a great deal of talking (*Way of Perfection* 29).

This simple prayer of recollection can extend over the entire day. God can touch our hearts in this way when we pause during our spiritual reading, or when a particular phrase captures our attention during our vocal or liturgical prayer. Likewise in entering imaginatively into a gospel scene, we may be drawn just to be with God or with Jesus.

This prayer of simple active awareness is to be distinguished from a passive recollection which God produces in the soul. We will come back to this in Part Three, but it is worth anticipating here by quoting Saint Teresa who distinguishes clearly the two forms of prayer: the prayer of active recollection which we can do; and the prayer of passive recollection which we cannot do. Speaking of passive recollection, she writes:

When God grants the favour it is a great help to seek Him within where He is found more easily and in a way more beneficial to us than when sought in creatures, as Saint Augustine says after having looked for God in many places. Do not think that the recollection of which I am speaking here is acquired by the intellect striving to think about God within itself, or by the imagination imagining Him within itself. Such efforts are good and an excellent kind of meditation because they are founded on a truth, which is that God is within us, but this is not the prayer of Recollection because it is something which each one can do – with the help of God, as should be understood of everything. The prayer of which I am speaking here comes in a different way. Sometimes, before one even begins to think of God ... one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward ... This does not come when we want it, but when God wants to grant us this favour (*Interior Castle* IV.3.3).

In Part Three we will see that passive prayer is distinguished from active prayer by its being entirely received. The initiative is solely with God. Of course all prayer, including the simple form of awareness which is the subject of this chapter, is initiated by God. It is for us to welcome the prayer of simple active recollection the way we welcome any form of communion with which God graces us. God is always offering God's self to us in love, but the seed cannot produce a harvest if it falls on hardened ground, or among the rocks that litter the field, or if it is strangled by weeds.

Prayer is a gift from God that always catches us by surprise. However, it is a gift that God is certainly offering to us. Hence the call of Jesus and the advice of his saints, that we engage ourselves on a journey into prayer, a journey of reaching out towards God in order to welcome God and yield to God's love. In the prayer of simple awareness we have gone as far as we can go in active prayer.