

## **Injecting the Teresian Spirit into Lectio Divina**

There is no distinctively Carmelite or Teresian way to pray. St. Teresa drew from many sources. Nevertheless, Teresa comes out of a tradition deeply influenced by monasticism, and her prayer can be most usefully presented in relation to monastic prayer, now fully rediscovered. What she gives us is a network of notions, attitudes, orientations, and some methods complementary to the basic monastic method of the Western centuries. It is truly easy and delightful to take the Teresian spirit to lectio divina.

### **Teresian Lectio: Reading the Word**

**with Teresa.** To practice lectio in the Teresian spirit, we begin by extending Teresa's attentiveness to words to our biblical text, reading and repeating what attracts us, with reverence for every word that comes from the mouth of God. Saying the text to ourselves with attention and reverence already makes for mental prayer. Teresa herself found so much recollection in the words of the Gospels. Over and over again we center ourselves on the word(s), and return to the text at each distraction. We receive each word as it falls from the lips of Christ. He is the one who addresses all of Scripture to the meditator in a most personal way. We ground our prayer in the word of God and feed the presence of God thereby. To remember

Scripture is to remember God and Christ. With Carmelites and other Christians the world over, we mutter the Law of the Lord [i.e., the Scriptures] to ourselves day and night (see Rule of St. Albert, no. 8), and most especially at our more intense sessions of prayer.

### **Teresian Meditation: Meditating with**

**Teresa.** While we continue to say the biblical words to ourselves, we listen carefully to their meaning. There is an objective meaning, a literal salvation-oriented meaning intended by the author. And there is an intimate personal meaning, a spiritual sense that applies the text to me. Intuitively I dwell on the words. Either I hear the words coming from Christ to me or I address the words from myself to Christ. I make the biblical words my own, as when I pray a psalm. Meditation makes the words one's own by identification.

Teresa adds a wonderfully helpful ingredient to aid our meditation: the localization of God with or within ourselves (or of ourselves within God). She teaches us to think of God as very near to us; or as within the self, dwelling in the depths; or of the self in God as in one's element (for it is God in whom we live and move and have our being [cf. Acts 17:28]). Teresa knows that human beings think spontaneously in terms of time and space. It is extremely helpful to direct our attention to God in some localized place. So we think of God as beside us, in the tabernacle, at the crucifix, or wherever there is a sacred image. With Teresa we go to where God is. She preferred to ponder the divine indwelling, because it is so intimate to think of God within the self. Therefore she recites the

words of Scripture to God within, or hears God saying them to her from within the interior castle where he resides in the innermost dwelling place. But her message is to locate God according to one's own inclination. There is no single way we ought to pray. We pray as we can, not as we ought. To put words and localized presence together in meditation is typically Teresian.

Teresa gives us another invaluable lesson. Remember how she wants us to pray habitually to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. She would have our prayer be radically Christ-centered. Thus we localize Christ when we pray, addressing our words to him or hearing the divine words of Scripture as his words, addressed to us. We are attentive to both words and presence as Christ's. Christ is the one present and Christ is the one who speaks. Christ the friend keeps us company and Christ the teacher leads us in prayer. This is an important point. In meditation Teresa makes Christ the object of both thought and affection by centering everything about prayer in Christ.

### **Teresian Oratio: Prayerful Expression**

**with Teresa.** Teresian prayer comes into its own when the heart begins to move. Oratio is the response of the heart to the God of the world. The heart can express itself in a million ways, as we have already seen. But here we implement the Teresian principle of making Christ the object of that prayer. And we learn to pray in and through and with him to the Father. With Christ we enter the bosom of the Blessed Trinity and drink in the Spirit from the very source. Teresa expresses the affectionate self to Christ and thereby finds

her way to the Father and Spirit. It is a great grace to be fixed on Christ, our companion, our exemplar, our teacher, and our saving mediator. Over the biblical word we relate to Jesus Christ. We find him in every part of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation; in every word we detect his mystery and presence. We relate to God only in Christ. Whether we be at the stage of devout conversation with God, or at the level of simplified company-keeping, we keep our gaze on Christ with Teresa. In his name we make our petitions to himself and to the Father. In him we entertain great desires. In his Spirit we learn to look at him who is looking at us. In him we move toward contemplation.

**Teresian Contemplatio: Contemplating with Teresa.** Repetitious reading places the biblical word on the lips. Meditation puts the word in the mind. Prayer takes it to the heart. And then, by the mystical grace of God, contemplation engraves the word in the depths of the spirit. To and fro on the lips, in the mind, in the heart, and in the spirit travels the word of God in personal prayer. With Teresa we have learned to listen both to the words and to the presence. This gentle attentiveness opens us to the subtle influx of contemplative awareness, the gift of God. Slowly an easy facility at prayer becomes ours. We have crossed the obscure borders from meditation to contemplation. At first this contemplation is both subtle and brief. But a new recollection of soul is experienced. We are able to be still at the very core of our being and wait and look and taste and see the presence behind and beyond the words. We encounter the Word himself. We are elevated to know him who knows us through and

through. We are elevated to love and be loved in the new energy of the Spirit that prays within us. Here we begin to witness our own transformation as we enter a new illumination. With Teresa we rest in the presence and take a holiday from the work of meditation. We have come to the font of living water and are given to drink freely from the healing source of the Savior.

**Copyright ICS Publications.**

Permission is hereby granted for any non-commercial use, if this copyright notice is included.



# **PRACTICE OF TERESIAN PRAYER**