

*Greetings to all,*

*Here is the third “reading guide” to assist us in the yearly reading of Saint Teresa which, according to the program, this year focuses on the Book of the Mansions or Interior Castle.*

*Unlike other years, this time we are sending only a guide, the doctrinal. We made this decision because many communities use for communal reading and pastoral work, the files published on the Centenary Web Page and it seemed better to us to focus on the work in them and not to offer some other guide that could be less useful.*

*Communities who do not have internet or who do not have frequent access can ask their Major Superiors to send these files or, better still, to contact the Centenary Commission through the Web Page so that we can send them to an Email address (it is not possible to do this by post).*

*Then, let us begin together this exciting journey to the Castle of diamond or very pure crystal....*

*OCD Preparatory Commission for the 5<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa*

## THE INTERIOR CASTLE or THE MANSIONS of Saint Teresa.

### *Ordered to write*

The Book of the Mansions or the Interior Castle of Saint Teresa is normally considered as her best. More than a history, this book is a biography and even more an autobiography. Once, when discussing the book of her Life with Gracián, he said to the Saint, “Recall what you can and other things and write another book, but put down the doctrine in a general way without naming the one to whom the things you mentioned there happened.”

This other book was the Interior Castle. The author herself, content with her work preferred it to the other: the Mansions to the Life, describing it in terms of jewellery. Even though she treasured the Life, the second work, the Interior Castle, was more precious, with more delicate nuances and work. As she herself said in other words: “It seems to me that what I wrote afterward has an advantage, even though Brother Domingo Báñez says it is no good; at least I had more experience than when I wrote the first”.

The order to write the Mansions came to her from three different persons: Fr Gracián, Doctor Velázquez and from the greatest “glassmaker” (cf. W 19:9) Christ Jesus, whom she considered as her “living book”.

St Teresa’s health at that time was difficult to bear, “such great noise and weakness in my head that I’ve found it a hardship even to write concerning necessary business matters”. The situation of the Order was very risky and Teresa herself was confined in Toledo, as if in prison. However the strength of this women gave her the necessary equilibrium to enable her to write at length. She who had managed to found so many monasteries, despite her bad health and in the midst of so much opposition, went on now to build her castle with the same strength of will.

### *Time of writing, manuscript, the people for whom it was written.*

She herself reveals to us when the first and last stones were laid. In the prologue she tells us, “So I am beginning to comply today, (to the obedience given me) the feast of the most Blessed Trinity, in the year 1577, in this Carmelite monastery of St Joseph

in Toledo where I am at present.” In the conclusion to the book she says, “This writing was finished in the monastery of St Joseph of Avila in the year 1577, the eve before the feast of St Andrew, [29<sup>th</sup> November], for the glory of God who lives and reigns forever and ever, amen (7M, conclusion 5).

From the time she began until she reached the end was a total of six months less two days. A couple of times, at least, she speaks about being interrupted in her writing, “For business matters and poor health have forced me to set this work aside just when I was at my best” (4M 2: 1) and elsewhere she says, “About five month have passed since I began, and because my head is in no condition to read over what I’ve written, everything will have to continue on without order, and perhaps some things will be said twice ( 5M 4, 1). She returned to her manuscript and finished the work on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

Having finished the book she was able to say, “I consider the labour, though I confess it was small, well spent.” The original manuscript of the Mansions has been in the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Seville since October 1618. In 1622 it was carried in procession through the streets of Seville on the occasion of the festivities for the canonization of the author. The last and most prolonged absence of the manuscript in Rome took place in 1961, where it was duly restored by the Vatican’s “Scientific Restoration Institute for books” and the “Institute for Book Pathology” of Italy. It returned to Seville in 1962 and there is preserved in the monastery of the Discalced Nuns in a priceless reliquary container in the form of the walls of Avila, that have become a castle to surround and guard the original manuscript of the Interior Castle. This last work was due to the idea and concern of the then General of the Order, Father Anastasio Ballestrero.

The primary people for whom the work was written are her nuns as she says in this heading at the beginning, “IHS. Teresa of Jesus, a nun of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, wrote this treatise for her Sisters and daughters, the Discalced Carmelite nuns.”

The book was also written for every Christian, called to sanctity from Baptism and by him.

### *A visit to the castle*

It is the author herself who is guiding us as she confesses early on. Pen in hand, wondering how she can begin writing, she continues, “there came to my mind what I

shall now speak about, that which will provide us with a basis to begin with. It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places (Jn 14: 2). For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight (Pr 8: 31)” (1M 1:1).

From this, without any difficulty, we can understand what, or better still, who is for her the interior castle: the human person, and we see how she lets herself be inspired about this by biblical texts, from John and Proverbs.

In order to organize reading, the study of such an important work as this, to assault this Castle (pardon the phrase), there was published some years ago “a great work in which was analysed in minute detail the basic points of Teresian symbolization, the fundamental themes of each one of the mansions, the evolving vocabulary for the process of interiorization, the journey towards the symbolic construction of interiorization itself” (Montserrat Izquierdo Sorli),

This type of study and reading would not be easy for the majority of readers who happen to find the book of the Mansions in their hands. Within easier reach of the hand are some simple yet quite comprehensive outlines. These contain basic doctrinal elements in which, of necessity, two protagonists are in relationship: God and man. *God* who is living and active, and communicates himself within. *Man* (the soul) as the scene and protagonist of the spiritual adventure. Then there is *prayer*, which is the bridge of communication between God and the soul. From this comes the idea, the concept of the “mansions”.

Teresa divided the Castle into seven mansions, but she herself notes, “You should think not in terms of just a few rooms but in terms of a million.” (1M 2, 12), and more clearly, “Although no more than seven dwelling places were discussed, *in each of these there are many others, below and above and to the sides*”(7M epilogue 3).

Going beyond the understanding of the castle in which you find yourself and can come to and visit and travel through various chambers, large rooms, parts, *dwelling places*, it must always be remembered that it is the soul which has in itself these various or different dwelling places; it carries them within itself, it is considered to be divided into seven mansions, and these seven can become seventy times seven, without number. From something she wrote in the *Foundations* 14: 5, this fact is well illustrated, “The less we have here below, the more we will enjoy in eternity, where the dwelling places

will be in conformity with the love with which we have imitated the life of our good Jesus”. This was very much in her mind when she began to write, “In which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places” (1M 1,1). Even though she does not specifically mention it, there is seen here a reference to the Gospel passage, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places” (Jn 14: 2).

The tour through the Castle becomes easy and pleasing in the hands of the author. Having quietly read the Prologue, the reader should peruse the titles to each of the 27 chapters in the book. Saint Teresa had a particular ability to synthesise in these headings what she wanted to say. Even more, as it seems certain that the headings were inserted after the text had been written, we can see even more clearly this ability the author had to synthesise and clarify.

Having read the 27 headings, the reader should then pay attention to the Epilogue, particularly paragraphs 2 and 3, where Mother Teresa once again sums up rules for life and for reading the work, that are scattered throughout the book.

Another fairly simple method of fixing in the mind the doctrine of the Interior Castle is to pay attention to the biblical content used by the Saint in each of the mansions. This means integrated biblical content consisting of passages, types, personalities and biblical themes.

As an example, we find in the Second Mansions: 1. Passages: “Anyone who walks in danger perishes in it (cf. Si 3, 26); “we don’t know what we’re asking for” (cf. Mt 20: 22); “your help is necessary here; without it one can do nothing” (cf. Jn 15: 5); “peace, peace, the Lord said, my Sisters” (Jn 20: 19, 21). 2. Biblical types: “the prodigal son and eating the husks of swine” (cf. Lk 15, 16); “and let the soul be manly and not like those soldiers who knelt down to drink before going into battle” (Gideon’s soldiers) (Jg 7: 5-7, 16-22). 3. Passages and themes at the same time: “No one will ascend to My Father but through Me” (cf. Jn 14: 6); “whoever sees Me sees My Father” (cf. Jn 14: 9).

Throughout all the mansions, this guiding thread is quite easy to follow and very useful. Another thing you should not forget, something which is quite common in the saintly author: the world of her similes, examples or comparisons, in her way of teaching refer to the divine Master. One perfect example of this is her description of the Castle in 1M 1:3. This comparison is not exclusive to the Mansions, (not in her spirit nor in her pen), for she has already used it in the Way: (WV 28: 9-12; WE 48: 1-4; in the Way she does not use the word “castle”, rather she uses “palace”, but the substance

is the same. Another of her comparisons, perhaps the best, is the silkworm in 5M 2: 1-10.

The topic, or it is better to say, the reality of prayer is present throughout the Castle as a guiding thread. The presence of prayer she already set down quite clearly in 1M 1: 7: “Insofar as I can understand the door of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection. I don’t mean to refer to mental more than vocal prayer, for since vocal prayer is prayer it must be accompanied by reflection. A prayer in which a person is not aware of whom he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of whom, I do not call prayer however much the lips move.”

This statement should never slip from sight, taking into account the evolution she is following: basic prayer, as the first attempts; meditation, a simple gaze, to be in the presence of God; infused recollection, prayer of quiet, spiritual delights; prayer of union. God in the depths of the soul; ecstatic forms of prayer, visions, locutions, ecstasy, wounds of love; longings for eternity; perfect contemplation. The combination of all these elements which we are covering, when profitably used, will result in not only mental pleasure for the reader, but an understanding of Teresian doctrine.

Even though it does not particularly pertain to Teresian doctrine, someone from France wrote some time ago, “Prayer comes first of all. It is not what is essential: that is charity, which contains within itself perfection, God himself. However, prayer comes first of all”.

Because of this, José Vicente Rodríguez wrote with very good reason, “Starting with the reality of grace and love, which make the soul pleasing to God, so that it may be ‘a paradise where the Lord says he finds his delight’ (1M 1: 1), the mansions are built up on a basis of love, they will come to be the various grades of love of the soul, ‘Hence, the soul’s progress does not lie in thinking much but in loving much’ (F 5: 2), and in order to ‘ascend to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much but to love much (4M 1: 7). This love is not exclusive but includes other activities, other exercises, and so we must make certain that the soul, established in love, is employed, for example, in self-knowledge and the exercise of humility, then we will enter the first mansions (1M 2: 8-9). There are also differences in the favours received from God (1M 1: 3). This can be clearly seen as the reader continues on, finding in each mansion something typical and basic, for example, in the fourth mansion, the prayer of quiet; in the fifth mansions, the prayer of union; in the sixth mansions, spiritual betrothal and in the seventh, spiritual marriage”.

To understand fully how Saint Teresa arranges all her doctrinal content, it is advisable to read with full attention the last chapter at the end of the book: (7M e.4). Here the impression is given that the Holy Mother is seeking as a basis the most solid foundation of Christian life: fraternal love and becoming like Christ. Without any doubt, the Interior Castle is a splendid handbook for sanctity.

As a help and points of reference in sweeping through the Castle, it is helpful to fix in mind some points in which Mother Teresa condenses doctrine which continues to extend its tentacles throughout the whole book. Some examples are sufficient: *the greatness, dignity, capacity and beauty of the human soul* (1M 1). *The total presence, natural and supernatural of God in the soul*: 5M 1: 10. *Teresian awareness of the diversity of souls*: 1M 1: 3; 5M 3: 4. *Each one is to establish her dwelling place in God*: 5M 2, the title and body of the chapter. *To be truly spiritual*: 7M 4: 8. *Not to remain dwarfs*: 7M 4: 9. *To be fully realistic*: 7M 4: 14. *M 4: 8*. *Do not set a limit to God's work*: 6M 4: 12.

6M 7 must be read as an indispensable chapter on Jesus Christ. Its title states "What a great mistake it is, however spiritual one may be, not to practice keeping the humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ present in one's mind; also His most sacred Passion and life, His glorious Mother, and the saints. The chapter is very helpful". There is a parallel chapter in Life 22.

### *In conclusion*

In 6M 10: 3, the Holy Mother surprises us with her knowledge and at the same time her diversity shown in this passage, "Let's suppose that God is like an immense and beautiful dwelling or palace and that this palace, as I say, is God Himself". From this words we move immediately to something similar "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect: (Mt 5: 48). Here we should say, *Be beautiful castles as your Heavenly Father is*.

The famous Dutch catechism presents to today's believers this Teresian work in this manner, "Saint Teresa wrote a book in which the soul is portrayed as a Castle with seven dwelling places. Passing from one dwelling place to the other we arrive at the seventh in which God dwells, Christ himself. His presence is felt throughout the castle, but when the soul arrives at the centre, it is immersed in the reality itself, feels itself totally invaded or has the tranquil feeling that God is in her. The soul lives within

earthly reality, that becomes magnificent before her eyes, but she knows that God is the ineffable heart of all reality”.

In the Defence prepared for St Teresa’s doctorate, we find the Interior Castle presented as the key element in the report prepared by the Postulator of the cause. To defend the height of the eminent doctrine of the doctoral candidate, a type of resume of the Mansions was presented, in the following manner.

This “is the principal Teresian work, and also—according to some—of all Christian mysticism [. . .]. The book is divided into seven parts, or dwelling places, each one of which has various chapters, except the second mansions, which has only one chapter.

*The first mansions* (2 chapters) concern souls who desire perfection, but are still immersed in the preoccupation of this world, from which they ought to flee and search for solitude.

*The second mansions* (1 chapter) are for souls who possess great determination to live in grace and give themselves therefore to prayer and some mortification, although many temptation remain because they do not totally leave aside the world.

*The third mansions* (2 chapters) are for souls practising virtue and prayer, yet there still remains in them a disguised self-love. What is needed is humility and obedience.

With *The fourth mansions* (3 chapters) begin “supernatural” things”: the prayer of quiet and a beginning of union. The fruits are not yet stable; for this reason souls ought to flee from the world and the occasions of sin.

*The fifth mansions* (4 chapters) now concern full mystical life, with the prayer of union which is supernatural and the prayer God gives when and how he wishes, even though the soul can prepare itself. The true signs of this union is that it is total, and the certainty of God’s presence is never lacking and tribulations and suffering follow in which love for God is proved. It requires great fidelity.

*The sixth mansions* (11 chapters). Great interior purification of the soul is reached, and among the fully supernatural graces that come from it are locutions, ecstasies etc. There is a great zeal for souls that leads to leaving her solitude. Contemplation of Christ’s humanity is necessary to reach the final grades of mystical life.

*The seventh mansions* (4 chapters), the summit of spiritual life, in which the grace of spiritual marriage is received and an intimate communication with the Trinity

from which spontaneously arises a great peace in which the soul lives, being both active and contemplative at the same time. It is not a subjective contemplation, but one which transcends the human person making him forgetful of self and to be committed to Christ and the Church”.

This type of authorized summary is like presenting the Castle in its entirety; and is also an invitation to seek to verify this structure, not in a mental or intellectual way, but in ones life, that is, from Christian practice and experience. All of this comes from the hand of Teresa of Jesus, Doctor of the Universal Church.