

AUTOBIOGRAPHY –ST. TERESA OF AVILA

1. Awakening My Soul to Virtue

I had good and virtuous parents. My father loved books. These books, together with my mother's devotions, awakened holy desires in me when I was six or seven years of age. My father was a man of great charity, good to the sick and to the servants. He could never keep a slave. When his brother's slave lived with us, my father treated her as his own child. My mother endured a life of great infirmity. She was beautiful, and chaste, so she made no account of her beauty. She died at 33, having endured trials throughout her life.

The Family Members

I had two sisters and nine brothers. All, except myself, imitated my parents' virtue. I was my father's favorite. Before I offended God, he had reasons for this. The Lord gave me good inclinations but I profited little from them. I especially loved my brother (who was almost the same age). We read the saints' lives together. When I read of women martyrs, I felt they had purchased the kingdom quite cheaply. So, I wanted to be a martyr, not for love of God but to gain my reward.

I discussed this with my brother. We agreed to go to a Moorish country, and to beg bread for God's love so we would be beheaded. We had enough courage but the hindrance, of course, was our parents.

We were also astonished that pain of hell and the glory of heaven lasted forever. We repeated "Forever-ever-ever!" It pleased God that I receive a lasting impression of this truth. Seeing the impossibility of martyrdom, we decide to be hermits and build a hermitage. Unfortunately, all the stones fell down and we could not accomplish our desires. Yet, God had granted me the gift of devotion very early.

Devout Practices

I gave whatever little alms I could. I also tried to be alone and say many prayers, especially the rosary to which my mother was devoted. With other girls, I built play convents and pretended we were nuns. I wanted to be a nun but not as much as a martyr and a hermit.

My mother died when I was twelve. I went crying in great distress before Our Lady's image. Later in life, I realized how Our Lady helped me and how she brought me back to herself. Unfortunately, I did not keep to my good desires.

O Lord, you who are determined to save me, why did I become so defiled? The fault is mine. You did everything. My parents had every virtue and were anxious for my welfare. As I grew up, I became aware of my natural beauty and I used this to offend you.

2. Gradual Loss of Virtue and Return

Duties of Parents

I want to describe something that did me great harm. Parents should strive that their children see only good things. My mother was very good, but I did not copy her goodness and did some evil things that caused me great harm. My mother was fond of books of chivalry. These did her no harm, but she permitted us to read them, (possibly to keep us occupied so we wouldn't go astray). This amazed my

father. Since I made a habit of this reading, the books cooled my holy desires and led to wrongdoing. I wasted hours, day and night.

Although hiding the books from my father, I did not see any evil. However, I was excessively absorbed and never was happy unless I had a new book. I also took great trouble with my appearance, using perfumes and all the vanities. I never intended to cause anyone to offend God. However, these practices of vanities lasted many years.

My father was careful about who could enter the house. Unfortunately, he allowed my cousins to come. (I wish he hadn't). Although they were ignorant of the world, they aroused desires for the world in me. They were the same age as I, or older, and they told stories of their escapades (which were anything but edifying). My soul became inclined to these attractions.

Another Relative

Parents, be careful of your children's companions. Much harm can result because children follow what is worse not what is better. My older sister was good and chaste. From her I learned no evil. From my frivolous relative, I learned every kind of evil. My mother tried to keep her out but she had too many reasons to come. I talked and gossiped with her. She told me all her pastimes and vanities. I got to be friendly with her when I was fourteen. Before that, I had never forsaken God nor committed a mortal sin. Really, I was concerned about reputation and would lose it for no one. Being concerned with my worldly reputation, I didn't realize I was losing my reputation with God.

False Honor

I was anxious about this worldly reputation but didn't exert myself to live a truly good life. My goal was just not to lose my soul altogether. My father and sister reprovved me for this friendship, but they could not stop her from coming and I was very clever in doing wrong. I would not believe the harm caused by bad company if I had not personally experienced it. This friendship changed me and I nearly lost my natural inclination to virtue.

If I had had good friendships, I would have remained sound in virtue. If someone had taught me to fear God, I would have grown strong. Later, the fear of God left me entirely. When I thought no one would know, I was rash enough to offend both my reputation and my God.

The fault was mine and my own wickedness was enough to lead me into sin. Also, the servants encouraged my wrongdoing. If a servant had given me good advice, I would have benefited.

Delivered By God

I was never attracted to wrong and I had a detestation for anything immodest. However, if an occasion of sin presented itself, the danger was at hand. Fortunately, God contrived to deliver me, even against my own will. After three months of following these vanities, I was taken to a convent to live. My sister had married and I had no mother, so I would have been alone in the house.

My father loved me so much and my deception was so complete that he never found out. I had such a concern for my good name that I made great efforts to keep everything secret. Yet, I could not keep this secret from Him Who sees all things. O Lord, we would avoid sin if we realized our task is not to offend you.

A Return to Goodness

The first week I suffered greatly, not from being in the convent, but from the suspicion that everyone knew my vanity. I became tired of what I was doing, so I went to confession as soon as possible after sinning. Within a week I was happier than at home. The nuns loved me for I could always please people. I had an aversion to being a nun but these nuns were completely blameless in their behavior.

The devil kept tempting me. My outside friends sent me messages (which was not allowed and soon stopped). My soul returned to the good habits of childhood. God was bringing me back through these good people. My faults were so numerous that there were no excuses. However, my confessor and others told me I was not offending God. Fortunately, the Lord began to give me light through a nun who stayed with us students.

3. Affects of Good Companions

I always enjoyed this good nun's holy conversations. She told me that she became a nun just by reading the words of the gospel, "Many are called but few are chosen". She explained the great rewards given to those who leave everything for the Lord. This good nun eradicated all the habits formed by bad companionship. Her words brought back my desires for eternal life and removed the great dislike I had for being a nun. I began to envy anyone who wept during prayer or who showed some virtue. At this point, I could read the entire Passion without shedding a tear. I stayed at the convent for a year and a half and profited greatly, saying many vocal prayers and asking the sisters to pray for me so I would choose the right state. As yet, I had no desire to be a nun. God had not yet given me this desire and I was afraid of marriage.

By the end of my stay, I was more reconciled to being a nun, and a few younger nuns encouraged my vocation. However, I did not want to join this convent (which I felt had excessive practices of virtue). Because I had a friend in another convent, I decided, if I were to be a nun, I would go there. At that time, I thought mainly about the world's pleasures and vanities. Only from time to time, did I think of being a nun.

Because God desired to prepare me for my state of life, He sent me a serious illness which forced me to return home. After recovering, I went to my married sister who lived in a village. She and her husband showed me every kindness. (The Lord always made sure I was well-treated.)

My uncle, a widower, lived on the way to my sister's house. He was a holy man who later became a friar. He talked about God and against the world's vanity. He also read good books and wanted me to read to him. So, I pretended that I liked his books. This ability to be compliant was really a fault of mine (although a virtue in others) because I was often indiscreet. Oh God, in how many ways, even against my own will, did you make me exercise restraint to prepare me for my state.

Determination to Be a Nun

I stayed just few days with my uncle, but the impression made by God's word and by his example recalled the truth that I learned as a child. The world is vanity and will soon pass away. Because I feared I would have gone to hell if I had died in my illness, I saw the life of a nun as the safest state. I could not incline my will but, little by little, I determined to force myself to embrace it.

This conflict lasted three months. I felt that being a nun was not worse than being in purgatory (and I had deserved hell). So, I would spend my life as if in purgatory and go straight to heaven

(which was my desire). My decision was inspired by servile fear not by divine love. The devil suggested that I could not endure the trials of religious life. I countered by saying that Christ suffered and I should suffer. (I thought Christ would help me endure.)

I had many temptations in these days. I also suffered from fainting spells and fevers. However, reading good books, (like the letters of St. Jerome) gave me new life and inspired me to tell my father. Having given my word to Christ, I would never turn back. My father, however, refused his consent, and gave permission only after his death. This was unsuitable for I distrusted myself. So, I achieved my aim by another way.

Becoming a Nun

I convinced my brother to become a friar and we would leave together. I decided to enter the convent where my friend lived. Really, I would have gone to any convent. I was concerned for my soul and not for my own comfort.

Entering the Convent

I left the house in great distress, as if every bone was wrenched asunder. I had no love for God which could overcome my love for my father and my family. If the Lord had not helped me, I could not have carried my resolutions.

When I took the habit, the Lord showed me how greatly He favors to those who force themselves to serve Him. Everyone thought I acted from sheer desire. They did not know my inner struggles. My entrance into religious life gave me a joy that lasts until today, because God changed my aridity into tenderness.

Everything brought joy. I realized I was free of vanities but I didn't know how it happened. Whenever I recall this gift of God, I can do anything, however hard. I know that if I resolve to do something for God's sake and am afraid, then the merit in my decision will be greater.

Do Not Hesitate From Fear

Only by experience, can you learn God's reward for such an act. So, I advise everyone who is fearful, not to hesitate to follow an inspiration that comes again and again. When the soul is detached for God's sake, she has no reason to fear. All will turn out well. Blessed be God. Amen.

O God, these favors should have sufficed. You led me by many devious ways to a secure convent with many sisters giving me good example. When I remember the determination with which I made my profession I shed tears (which should be tears of blood) because, afterwards, I committed offenses against you.

God's Mercy

I should not have sought the honor of a religious vocation. You, God, were willing to be offended for twenty years so I might become better. It seemed as if I wanted to break all my promises, but this was not my intention. Looking back, I do not know what my intention was. This shows the difference between your nature and mine. I have distress over my sins but I also have joy that, through me, your mercies are revealed to many.

My evil deeds have obscured your great favors. Now, your mercy shines forth in me. I have no excuse. I blame only myself. Since I did not have the good fortune to repay your love with my love, only your mercy could help me.

Poor Health

I spent my first year in a poor state of health, suffering fainting fits and heart problems caused by the change of my life and of diet. My condition became serious and most of the time I hardly seemed to be fully conscious. Because my own doctors had no cure, my father arranged for me to see his doctors. The sister who was my friend went with me (our convent had no vow of enclosure).

I spent a year at the hospital. This included three months of the greatest torture due to the drastic remedies they applied. I don't know how I endured them. However, my constitution could not tolerate them. I had left the convent in wintertime but these treatments didn't begin until April. In the meantime, I stayed with my sister.

A Special Book

On the way, I visited my uncle. He gave me a book on the Prayer of Recollection called "Third Alphabet". I did read good books but did not know how to pray. However, I was delighted with the book and resolved to follow this way of prayer.

This book helped me to pray and the Lord granted me the gift of tears. During this time I liked to read, remain in solitude, and go to confession. For the next twenty years I could find no spiritual guide. This harmed me greatly for I had frequent relapses which I would have avoided with a guide. After nine months of this solitude I was not where the book said I should be. I did not want to commit any mortal sin, but I was not troubled by venial sins. This caused my fall.

Prayer of Quiet and Prayer of Union

The Lord led me to the Prayer of Quiet and occasionally to the Prayer of Union. I understood neither, and was not aware of their high value. To understand this would have been a great blessing.

The Prayer of Union lasted only the length of a Hail Mary but its effects were so great that I trampled the world beneath my feet and pitied those who held on to worldly things, (even lawful ones). I was not yet twenty years old.

I prayed by thinking of Jesus being within me. I imagined incidents in his life taking place within. I also loved good books. This was my recreation. I had no talents for reasoning or using my imagination. I never succeeded in imagining Our Lord's humanity.

A Difficult Prayer Method

People can attain more quickly to contemplation by not laboring with the understanding, which is a troublesome process. When the will has no object and the soul has no task, aridity causes distress and great conflicts arise in the soul's thoughts. These souls need a great purity of conscience. Those souls who can meditate on God and His sufferings will find in these meditations a safeguard against sin. Those who cannot meditate are in great danger and should do much spiritual reading, which can be a substitute for a mental prayer. Some confessors forbid a soul to read. However she will not persevere in prayer if she is not permitted to use a book.

Value of a Book

For eighteen years I was not able to meditate and had no one to lead me. Except after Communion, I always needed a book to pray. Without a book, I was fighting a large number of enemies. With the book as a companion, I could battle my thoughts. When I had no book, my soul

would be disturbed and my thoughts would wander. The book was like bait to my soul. I became recollected when I read (little or much as the Lord directed).

In the early stages, if I were alone and had a book I would not lose God's blessing. This would also have been true later, if I had a guide who showed me how to avoid the occasions of sin and how to be freed from them quickly.

The Early Days

I would not have sinned if the devil had attacked me openly. However, the devil was subtle and I was weak. Although my resolutions were of little help, they did enable me to bear patiently the terrible infirmities which came to me.

The great goodness of God! He has always rewarded my good desires, giving great value to my imperfect works. He hides my sins and blots them out of other people's memories. He gilds my faults and makes my virtues shine in splendor.

To describe how the Lord dealt with me in those early days I would need much more intelligence than I have. May He be blessed Who so endured me!

4. Her Serious Illnesses

The Novitiate

In my novitiate, I suffered periods of unrest because I was often blamed for what was not my fault. I accepted these trials imperfectly and with great distress. However, I endured everything because of my great satisfaction in being a nun. However, others saw me wanting to be alone and crying for my sins, so they said I was discontented.

I enjoyed the religious life. However, I enjoyed being well thought of, and could not accept trials that made me seem ridiculous. I was particular about everything and thought this was a virtue. My ignorance was no excuse. The imperfect organization of the convent could be an excuse, but I did what was wrong and neglected what was right.

Asking God for Illness

One nun suffered the painful illness of a stomach obstruction and died. I envied the nun's patience and asked God for any illness as long as He would provide the patience. I had no fear of sickness and wanted to win eternal blessings by any means. This was even before I learned to pray, and when I didn't love God as I do now. Yet, I had light enough to see that passing things had little value and that eternal blessings were of great worth. God heard my prayer. Within two years I had a painful illness that lasted three years.

Confessors

For my comfort, my father took me away from the convent. So I lived with my sister while awaiting treatment. Here, the devil unsettled my soul. I began to go to confession to a priest who had just a little learning.

I am attracted by learning, even though learned confessors have harmed my soul. It is better for a priest to be holy and to have no learning because, knowing his ignorance, he will consult learned confessors. A truly learned priest has never led me astray.

In my life, I had confessors who knew no better and I felt obliged to believe them. They were broad-minded and gave me much freedom. I was wicked and if they were strict, I would have looked for another. What was a venial sin, they said was no sin. What was a mortal sin they said was venial. They did me much harm and I want to warn others against this evil. I have no excuse. I knew I was doing wrong.

God allowed them to lead me astray due to my own sins. I repeated their words to others and also led them astray. I was in this state of blindness for seventeen years until a Dominican priest made certain points very clear. Also, Jesuit priests showed me the seriousness of my unsound principles. I'll explain later.

This Confessor

Since I had little to confess at that time, this confessor took an extreme liking to me. His affection was not bad but there was too much of it. He knew I would not commit sin and he said it was the same with him, so we talked much. I was so in love with God that I would talk about Him. The priest grew confused and explained to me his unhappy condition. For seven years he had an affection for a woman in that place. He still celebrated Mass even though he had lost his good name.

Everyone knew what he was doing yet no one reproved him. Because I liked him, I felt sorry for him. I was blind, thinking it was a virtue to be loyal to someone who likes you. Cursed be a loyalty which militates against our loyalty to God! This folly is common in the world. Although we owe everything to God, we do not break friendships which get us to act contrary to God. O blind world! May I lack gratitude to the world so I can be grateful to You. Unfortunately, exactly the reverse is true.

I made inquiries and discovered that this priest had gotten into great trouble, which was not altogether his fault. The woman had cast a spell over him and asked him to wear a copper figure. No one could persuade him to remove it. I tell this story to warn men against such women. Women are more bound than men to be chaste before God. If they lose all shame before God, they can be trusted in nothing. To gain their own will (an affection planted by the devil), they will stop at nothing. Wicked as I am, I have never fallen into this sin. I never wanted to force anyone's affections in my favor. Only the Lord kept me from this. Without Him, I would do this wrong also. I cannot be trusted.

Helping the Priest

Learning about the spell, I showed greater affection for this priest. My intentions were good, but my actions were wrong. However, my speaking about God helped him. His affection for me did even more. He gave me this copper figure and I threw it into the river.

He became like a man awaking from sleep. He grieved over all his actions of these past years, and hated the woman who had led him into sin. Our Lady helped him for he was devoted to her. He gave up the woman and always thanked God for this light. He died a year later, active in God's service.

I never saw any wrong in his affection for me, (although it could have been purer). He knew that I could never commit a mortal sin and this increased his affection for me. I believe that men love more a woman who is inclined to virtue. I believe the priest was saved. He died devoutly, completely delivered. The Lord wanted him saved by these means.

At The Hospital

I stayed three months and suffered much because the medical treatment was drastic. After two months, the severe remedies almost killed me. The original pain in my heart was worse, as if sharp teeth had hold of me. The pain made me fear that I was going mad. My strength declined. I could take only liquids and had a continual fever.

Because they gave me daily purgatives for a month, I wasted away. Even my nerves began to shrink. The intolerable pain gave me no rest, day or night, and I was in great misery. My father took me away and called in other doctors. They gave up and said I was consumptive. This didn't trouble me, but the pain from head to foot distressed me. Nervous pain is intolerable. It must have lasted less than three months because it was impossible to endure these pains for a long time.

His Majesty did me the great favor of giving me patience to endure this trial (which clearly came from Him). Fortunately, I had begun to read Pope Gregory's book on Job. In my prayers I always quoted Job, "We received good things from the Lord, why should we not suffer evil?" (Job 2:10) This gave me strength.

Her Father and Confession

At the August feast of Our Lady I wanted to go to confession. (I was fond of frequent confession.) Thinking that going to confession was due to my fear of death, my father forbade me to go (an excess of human love). He was a good Catholic, but he might have done me harm. That night I had a fit that left me unconscious for four days. I was dying. The priest anointed me, and the people kept repeating the Creed. I understood nothing.

My father was upset because he had not allowed me to go to confession. Many prayers went up for me. For a day and a half, my convent had an open grave awaiting my body. Another far-away convent performed the rites for the dead. I regained consciousness and wanted to go to confession. I received Communion with many tears. Unfortunately these were not tears of sorrow for having offended God.

I had been misled by those who told me that things were not mortal sins. Although my terrible sufferings made it hard to think, my confession was complete. Since I began to pray, God has given me one grace. I have always confessed all my sins, even venial ones. I believe that my salvation at that time would have been uncertain for I was so wicked and my confessors so unlearned.

Now I realize that God raised me from the dead. I tremble. Oh, my soul, look at the danger from which the Lord delivered you. Oh my soul, if you do not cease to sin from love at least do so from fear. You might have died a thousand other times in even more perilous states. My faults only manifest God's greatness. May I be consumed rather than cease to love Him!

5. Resignation in Trials

After this four day fit, I had intolerable sufferings. Because of my throat, I could not take water and I had bitten my tongue to pieces. My bones seemed out of joint and my head was in confusion. I was doubled up like a ball, unable to move hand, foot or head. I could not endure to see visitors. I could only be moved if they used a sheet. If no one came near me, the pain was alleviated. When rested, I felt I was getting well because the sharp and constant pains had stopped. I still had a distaste for food.

Return to the Convent

I was eager to return to the convent, so the nuns received a living soul instead of a dead body. I was only bones, and my body was worse than dead. I stayed in this condition for eight months. My paralysis kept improving but remained for three years. When I began to get on my hands and knees, I praised God. Nothing compared with the original pains, and I could resign myself to the suffering. I wanted to get well so I could be alone to pray, (an impossibility in the infirmary). I confessed frequently and talked about God. All were astonished at my patience. This was totally a gift from His Majesty who gave me joy in my sufferings.

Her Dispositions

It was wonderful to receive this answer to prayer. My virtues were restored, but they were not strong enough to keep me in goodness. I avoided speaking ill of anyone, because I would not want others to speak ill of me. Others near me were struck by this habit and did the same.

Learning that I would never speak ill of anyone, people felt safe in my presence. However, in other matters, I gave bad example, although my intentions were not as harmful as my actions.

My desire for solitude continued and I enjoyed talking about God rather than having worldly conversations. At my own request, I received confession and Communion much more frequently. I loved good books and was deeply sorry for my sins. Often I did not pray because of my deep distress over my sins.

More Distress

This became an increasing torment. Strangely, this distress came when I prayed and thought of God's favors. I saw that I owed Him so much. I would grow angry and shed many tears because I was not improving. Even with good resolutions, I would fall again. However, I was aware that the Lord was giving me these tears and great repentance.

I confessed my sins as soon as possible after a fall, and did all I could to return to grace. Two problems existed. First, I did not cut the occasions of sin off at their root. Second, my confessors gave me little help. They did not tell me how dangerous was this path. If they did, I would not have stayed in mortal sin for even a day. In prayer, God gave me this gift of fear, but this fear was so swallowed up in love, that I never thought of punishment. While I was ill, I kept a careful watch. Asking for health caused my problem.

I was young and earthly doctors could not cure me. So, I sought a heavenly cure. I accepted my illness with joy, but I desired to be well. I realized it was better to be sick than to get well (and risk damnation). However, I thought I would serve God better if I were well. This is our mistake, not leaving ourselves entirely in the Lord's hands. He knows best.

St. Joseph

I had masses celebrated for this intention and I said approved prayers. I took St. Joseph as my advocate. He delivered me from this trouble and from even greater troubles (which concerned the loss of my soul). He gave me greater blessings than I asked. I never remember him refusing any favor. Through Joseph, God has given me great gifts and saved me from many perils. Some saints help us in certain necessities, but St. Joseph helps us in every need. Jesus was subject to him on earth and in heaven. He still does all that Joseph asks. Many have recently experienced this truth. I observed his feast faithfully, but more from vanity than spirituality for I was very skillful in wrongdoing.

I would like to persuade everyone to have devotion to Saint Joseph. Every soul I know who is devoted to him makes great progress, for he gives very real help. Each year on his feast I have received what I asked for. He even re-directs my petitions for my greater good.

I will not describe in detail all the favors this glorious saint has bestowed. Anyone who does not believe me should put my words to the test. All who practice prayer must have a special devotion to him.

How can a soul think of the Queen of angels suffering so much with the child Jesus and not think of Joseph who helped her? Joseph is a master in teaching us how to pray. I publicly acknowledge my devotion to Joseph and also my failure to imitate him. He cured my paralysis and gave me the power to walk. Unfortunately, I used this favor for ill.

Continued Perils

After being at death's door in peril of damnation, after receiving God's favors, and after being raised up in soul and body, I still fell so soon. I have a life filled with perils. I feel like St. Paul, "I no longer live. My Creator lives in me" (Gal.2:20)

For years now, O God, You have held my hand and given me desires to do nothing against Your will, no matter how small. Whatever comes to me, I will undertake for love of You and, with Your help will successfully accomplish it. I desire not the world but only what comes from You. I believe what I said is true. However, I fear that You may forsake me and I know that only by your strength, do I not forsake You.

I used to think that forsaking You entirely was impossible, yet how often I have forsaken You. Whenever You withdrew even the slightest, I fell to the ground. You would always give me Your hand and raise me up again. When I did not take Your hand at first, You gave it a second time. Still I refused, as I shall now tell.

6. Losing God's Favors

Led into greatest error, she lost God's favor due to lack of enclosure.

I placed myself in so many occasions of sin and indulged in so many pastimes, that I was afraid to approach God in the intimate friendship of prayer. The shame increased as my sins multiplied and I lost happiness in practicing virtue. I saw clearly that I was failing You. However, by false humility, the devil led me into the greatest error. I grew afraid to pray. I said my vocal prayers but I abandoned mental prayer and my conversations with God. By presenting an appearance of goodness, I deceived others.

I cannot blame the convent. I cleverly made the nuns think well of me. This was not deliberate, because I was innocent of vain glory and hypocrisy. When I felt the stirring of hypocrisy, I grew distressed and the devil was confounded. He never tempted me in this way. If God had permitted temptations of hypocrisy, I would have fallen here, too. Because I desired the good opinion of others, I wanted people to think well of me. I inwardly knew what kind a person I was.

Given too Much Liberty

Because I withdrew frequently into solitude, the sisters had a good opinion of me. I liked to read, to speak about God and to have pictures of Him. I refrained from evil speaking and did other things that gave the appearance of virtue. However, I was vain and wanted to be thought well of.

As a result, the nuns gave me a great liberty which was usually reserved for older nuns. They had confidence in me because I always did everything with permission and never wanted to compromise the good name of so many sisters. I was wicked. They were good. Although I acted wrongly, my faults were not premeditated. For me, it was bad to be in a convent that was not enclosed. The freedom which these sisters enjoyed (for they had no vow of enclosure) would have led me to hell. Fortunately, the Lord used his own special remedies to deliver me from this peril. It is a great danger for women in the convent to have this freedom. For the wicked ones, this freedom is a step to hell.

Need For an Orderly Convent

When a convent follows standards which allow worldly recreations, the nuns do not understand their obligations. The Lord, then, must call each nun individually (and this many times), so she can be saved. May they not mistake sin as virtue, as I did! Many do not see this. Parents place their children in convents where there are many dangers. If they follow my advice, they would consider the children's salvation.

Let the children marry beneath their level rather than put them in a convent. They are better at home, where their wickedness is quickly seen. These poor creatures are not to be blamed. They think they are escaping from the world to serve the Lord. Instead they are in ten worlds and have no idea how to get out. Youth, sensuality and the devil incline them to worldly things which are considered "all right". They blind themselves, proclaiming as good what they know is not good.

Two Paths

What terrible harm is done (to men as well as to women) when religious life is not properly observed. There are two paths available, to follow or not to follow the Rule. Both are equally frequented. No, I am wrong. Due to our sins, the broader road is generally favored. For a nun to follow her vocation truly, she must fear the other nuns more than the devil. No wonder the Church has problems. Those who should be models for others are annulling the works done by the former saints of their Order. May God find a remedy for this.

Not Seeing the Harm

When I began to have these worldly conversations, I did not see all the harm they would do to my soul. Many convents received visitors and I thought they would do me no harm. What was not dangerous for some nuns was dangerous for me. These conversations are a waste of time, and the practice always has some danger.

When I was holding a worldly conversation with one woman, the Lord enlightened my blindness and warned me. Christ revealed Himself with a stern attitude, showing me He was displeased. I saw Him with the eyes of my soul, clearer than with bodily eyes. This was twenty-six years ago, but it seems as if He is still present. I was upset and never wanted to see that woman again.

A Harmful Pastime

Unfortunately, I did not know I could see God with the eyes of the soul. The devil encouraged this ignorance, making me believe that I had only imagined His presence. Although I knew that this vision came from God, because I did not follow it, it did not please me. Instead, I again had a

relationship with that person. I was told there was no harm and my name would be enhanced by the friendship. I also got to know others and spent many years in this harmful pastime. It never seemed as bad as it really was, and I knew it was not good. This person caused me the greatest distractions because I was fond of her.

Warnings

Once while we were together, we saw a great toad coming at us but crawling much more quickly in broad daylight. This made an impression on me. It had a hidden meaning which I never forgot. God was warning me, but I did not listen to His warnings. A nun in that convent (my relative, and God's servant) also warned me. I believed her but I didn't like her telling me. This shows my great ingratitude and how I was worthy of hell.

I write this so other nuns might be warned. I say to all nuns. "Flee from these pastimes." Hopefully, some whom I led astray, might be led back. I was blind. I told them there were no dangers. I would never deliberately deceive but I caused a great deal of wrong through bad example.

Leading Her Father to Prayer

In those early days, I had the greatest desire to help others. This common temptation of beginners had good effects. I was so fond of my father that I wanted him to learn the benefits of prayer. So, I gave him books to read. Being virtuous, he took so well to prayer that within five or six years, I praised God. He accepted the greatest trials with resignation. Because he was comforted by conversations about God, he often came to see me.

He thought I was still the same, but I had fallen away from prayer. I had to tell him the truth that I had not prayed for a year. This was my greatest temptation, and it almost caused my ruin. If I were praying and still offended God, I would immediately withdraw from all occasions of sin. It was very difficult to see my father have the false impression that I was communing with God.

Telling Her Father

Without giving the reason, I told him I was not praying and used my illness as an excuse. Although I had recovered from the serious illness, I suffered morning sickness for twenty years and could not eat before noon. (Now that I received Communion more often, I have to bring on the morning sickness at night before I go to bed). I am hardly ever free from aches and pains, but the serious troubles with my heart are rare. For eight years I have been free from paralysis and the feverish complaints. I now rejoice in these troubles and this pleases the Lord.

My father believed my excuse. To make the story credible, I told him that choir offices were all I could attend. Obviously, this was an insufficient reason. Prayer needs no bodily strength, just love and the habit of prayer. If we really want opportunities for prayer, the Lord will always provide them. Even in illness or other obstacles, we can truly pray by being resigned to the hindrance. If we love God, we can pray when we are not well or even alone.

My father felt sorry for me. He had reached such a level of prayer, that he shortened our conversations saying he was wasting my time (while I was wasting so much time on vanities). Besides my father, I helped others to pray. Although I had stopped praying, I thought the knowledge that God gave me should not be lost. How great was my blindness, helping others to profit while doing harm to myself.

Father's Death

At this time, my father grew ill and died in a few days. I watched over him, wanting to help him as he did for me in my illness. Because he had been my greatest comfort, I forced myself to act. I was determined that he not see my grief. When I saw he was dying, I felt that my very soul was being torn away.

I praise God for my father's advice after he received Extreme Unction. He reminded us to pray for him and to serve God always. With tears, he said he grieved that he had not served God better. He would like to have been a Friar in one of the strictest Orders. Two weeks earlier, I am sure the Lord made him realize that he would die, even though the doctors told him he was getting better. He had spent much time putting his soul right with God.

His most acute pain was in the back. I reminded him of his devotion to Jesus carrying the cross, and that God wanted him to feel some of that pain. He was comforted, and never complained again. Although unconscious for three days, he became totally conscious on the day of his death. He died with the Creed on his lips and looking like an angel. I say this to blame myself. After witnessing such a death, I ought to have resembled my father and grow in virtue. His confessor of many years said he had no doubt that he went straight to heaven.

Help From a Dominican Priest

A Dominican priest was a great help to me. I made my confessions to him and he made me aware how close I was to perdition. He made me communicate every two weeks. Eventually, I told him about my not praying. Because he told me that prayer could only do me good, I began to pray and never abandoned the practice.

Because of prayer, my life became full of trials. I saw my faults and what God was calling me to. God had given me great pleasure in spiritual things, but I was still following the world. I tried to reconcile two contradictory things, the life of the spirit and the pleasure of the senses. As a result, I suffered because my spirit was a slave. When I shut myself up in prayer I brought with me a thousand vanities. I did this for years and am amazed that I could go so long without giving up one or the other. I could never give up prayer because God desired me for His own and held me in His hand.

Saving Her Reputation

When God delivered me from an occasion of sin, I would plunge right back in. He even saved my reputation! God hid my wrongs and revealed to others my small virtues. He even magnified my virtues and people held me in high regard seeing only what was good in me. God did this so that later I would have some credibility when I spoke of serving him. He did not look upon my sins but upon my great desires and my grief at not putting these desires into action.

Lord, how can I praise your favors? When I was offending you, you prepared me for greater favors by the deepest repentance. You chose the most delicate and greatest chastisement, you knew what would cause the greatest pain.

Favors As A Punishment

I am not speaking foolishly. After I fell through weakness, God would give me favors which were more painful than punishments. A single fault distressed me more than trials. At least by trials, I felt I was making amends (My sins were so numerous I could repay very little). Receiving favors after my offenses caused me a terrible torture because I knew my own unworthiness. I was aware of my feelings and filled with tears. I kept falling again and again, even though I did not want to.

Needing Spiritual Friendships

In such dangers, the soul should not be alone. I would not have fallen again if I could discuss this problem with someone. I would have been ashamed in this person's sight. Those beginning to pray must cultivate holy friendships. We can help each other by prayer and other means. Do not people find comfort in human friendships? Why, then, should a beginner in prayer not be allowed to discuss his joys and trials with other people who pray? If the person seeks a true friendship with God, he will repel any vain thoughts, will profit himself and will edify his friends.

Someone who is vain in discussing spiritual matters would also be in vain in doing what he is obliged to do, as going to Mass. Souls who are not strong in virtue need spiritual conversations because so many other conversations lead them into sin. I must insist on the importance of speaking about spiritual matters. The devil gets those who serve God to hide their good desires, while he gets sinners to reveal their evil intentions. These days, people glory in openly proclaiming what offends God.

Value of Support

People trouble themselves so little about the things of God that if we are to make any progress, we have to support each other. Few look askance at those who follow worldly pleasures, but if a person devotes himself to God many speak ill of him. So, he needs spiritual companionship until he is strong enough to stand alone. If not, he will have continual difficulties. This is why some saints went into the desert.

Only by humility does a man trust that God will help him by these spiritual conversations. Charity grows when it is communicated and it blesses many. When a person doesn't trust his own strength, but seeks help from another with experience, he will gain much. I had many friends who helped me to fall, but I was often left alone when I tried to rise again. I marvel that I rose at all. It only happened by God's mercy. The Lord had to show me this truth and to give me people to converse with about prayer. Otherwise, I would have fallen right into hell.

I have reasons for dwelling on this period of my life. I desire that every reader hold me in abhorrence by seeing that I received so many favors and yet remained so obstinate. Allow me to describe occasions when I failed God because I did not rely on prayer.

Twenty Years of Falling and Rising

I spent twenty years on that stormy sea of falling and rising again. I took little notice of venial sins. I was afraid of mortal sins but not as much as I should have been. I did not keep free from the danger of falling into them. This is the worst kind of life, to have no joy in God and no pleasure in the world.

When I was amid worldly pleasure, I remembered what I owed to God. When I was with God, I grew restless for the world. I don't know how I endured this conflict for so many years. Yet, I see God's mercy. While I was involved in the world, God gave me the courage to practice prayer. Yes, "courage" is required to deal treacherously with the King, to know that He is aware of your sins and yet never to leave His presence. Persons practicing prayer are keenly aware of God's presence and that He always sees them.

Some Few Good Times

There were periods of many months, even a whole year, when I devoted myself to prayer and took precautions not to offend Him. This is the total truth. I remember little about these times so they must have been few compared with the numerous bad times. However, few days would pass without my spending long periods in prayer. Whenever I was ill, I was nearer to God and made sure to have people around me who were close to God.

Now, twenty-eight years have passed since I began to pray. Eighteen of them have been spent in this conflict which arose because I had a relationship with God and also a relationship with the world. During the other years of which I will speak, there was still conflict, but from quite different causes. All has gone smoothly because I served God and saw the emptiness of the world. I'll describe this later.

7. Benefits From Persevering in Prayer

I tell this to everyone to show God's mercy and my own ingratitude. I also want to show that God's blessings are given to a soul by her love for prayer even when the soul is not properly prepared. If that soul perseveres, in spite of a thousand falls, the Lord will bring her to salvation. As far as I can see, He has brought me this far. God grant that I never be lost again.

Mental Prayer and Conversion

Many saints have described the blessings for those who practice mental prayer. Otherwise, I would not dare speak of it. What I say I know from experience. Anyone who begins this practice should never abandon it, no matter how many sins they commit.

Mental prayer is the means by which we can amend our lives. Without mental prayer, amendment is much harder. So, let no one be tempted (as I was) to abandon prayer from a false humility. Believe Jesus' words. If we repent, He will resume His friendship and restore our favors. Sometimes He grants even more favors if our repentance merits it.

You, who have not begun to pray, do not miss such a great blessing. Have no fear. Have only great desires. Even if you do not reach perfection, you will gain knowledge of the road to heaven. Mental prayer is just friendly conversation and frequent solitary conversing. God always rewards his friends.

A lasting friendship demands certain conditions. The Lord always fulfills his part. We, however, are vicious, sensual and ungrateful. Because of human nature, you cannot love Him as much as He loves you. By prayer you will realize all that His friendship means to you and you will gladly endure the efforts to be with Him (Who is so different from you).

God's Patience

O God, this is how I see You and me. You even bear with those who cannot bear to be with You. What a good friend You are. You patiently wait until our nature becomes like Yours. You remember the times we loved You and You forget how we have offended You. I have seen this in my own life and wonder why the whole world does not come near to You in friendship. We wicked sinners must come close, so You can make us good. A soul should be with You at least two hours each day, even though, like myself, they have a thousand worldly cares. At first, they can do no more than just be

with You. By being in Your company, You prevent the devils from assaulting them. You slay no one who wants to be Your friend. Rather, You give bodily health and life for their souls.

Fear of Mental Prayer

I cannot understand those who fear mental prayer. What are they afraid of? The devil instills this fear to do us harm. By fear, he made me stop thinking of my sins, of the reality of hell and of the trials Jesus suffered for me. While I was subject to all these perils, these had been the topics of my mental prayer. Now, I just thought of when my prayer hour would be over. I would have preferred severe penance rather than practice the recollection needed for prayer.

Either due to my bad habits or to the devil's assaults, I would delay the time for prayer. When I did enter chapel, I became depressed and needed much courage to pray. (I have much more courage than most women. I just have made bad use of it.) The Lord would come to my rescue. When I forced myself to pray, I found more happiness than when I prayed willingly.

Only by His patience was my life put right. If the Lord was patient with such a wicked creature as I, why should any other person have reason to fear? No matter how bad a person is, he will not remain bad for as many years as I did (after receiving so many favors). If the Lord was so patient with me, who can possibly despair?

All I did was to seek a time and a place to be with Him. This often happened without my willing it. The Lord forced me.

Keeping the Door Open

If prayer is good and necessary for those who do not offend God and if prayer cannot cause the harm caused by not praying, why should those who serve God give up prayer? I see no reason. They must want to add more trials to those they already suffer and to shut the door so God cannot give them joy. I feel sorry for such people. They serve God at great cost to themselves. When people practice prayer, God pays the costs. God rewards their small labor by consolations in their trials.

I will say a great deal later about those consolations. Here I only say that prayer is the door to all the favors that God has given to me. If that door were closed I don't see how He can bestow them on me. Although wanting to delight in the soul, He cannot do so. The soul must be alone, pure, and desirous of receiving. How can He come to us if we place obstacles? And then, we want God to give us favors, without even praying!

God Bringing Me Back

To show the great blessing of not abandoning mental prayer and spiritual reading, I will describe the devil's assaults upon my soul to conquer it and the way the Lord brought my soul back to Himself. My readers can see that I myself was not watchful. Always watch for the occasions of sin. God uses these to bring you back because in these occasions of sin, you cannot be confident because so many enemies attack you. You are weak in defending yourself and feel a need for God.

I wish I could describe my soul's captivity. I realized I was a prisoner. My confessors told me that these sins were not serious, yet in my soul I knew they were. One confessor said that even if God were giving me contemplative gifts, such occasions of sin did me no harm. I was coming to the end of this period, and I was withdrawing more and more from grave perils. My confessor felt I was doing well by my holy desires and the time spent in prayer. Yet in my heart, I knew I was not doing what I

should for God. Now, I regret this suffering and the confessor's lack of help. In these actions, I lost many opportunities because I was told they were lawful.

Effects of Sermons

Sermons caused me torture because I loved sermons and I would conceive a special affection for anyone who preached well. I don't know why this happened. I seemed to enjoy every sermon, even those considered bad by others. After I began to practice prayer, hearing about God never wearied me.

So, I found both comfort and torture in sermons. I did not yet have a complete confidence in God or a complete distrust of myself. I wanted to live, but I knew I was fighting with death. No one could give me life and I could not grasp it by myself. God, Who could give life, was right in not helping me. After He had brought me back, I had often left Him.

9. God's Awakening

A Special Image

Due to these miserable habits, my soul was growing weary and could not rest. As I entered the chapel one day, I saw an image of Christ sorely wounded, (it had been procured for the feast day). This image moved me deeply, because I thought how poorly I had repaid Him for His wounds. My heart was breaking. I threw myself down at this image, shedding tears and begging not to offend Him.

I had a great devotion to Magdalene and her conversion. After receiving Communion, I thought of her and I placed myself at His feet, knowing that He could not reject my tears. God was gracious in allowing me to shed tears. However, I soon forgot my sorrow, even though I always asked Magdalene to obtain pardon for me. After seeing this image, however, I made progress. I had lost all trust in myself and placed all confidence in God. I had told Him I would not rise from this spot until He answered my prayer. From then onward, I began to improve.

Describing Her Prayer

This was my prayer. I could not use my intellect, so I inwardly pictured Christ, especially in those moments when He was alone. Since He was in need, I felt able to approach Him. I was particularly attached to Him praying in the Garden. I kept Him company. Although I wanted to wipe the sweat from His face, the gravity of my sins stood in the way. I liked to stay in the Garden, but the thoughts of my sins tormented me.

Before falling asleep, I would think of this garden scene so I would sleep well. I did this even before becoming a nun. I had begun to practice mental prayer without knowing it and these prayer habits prevented me from abandoning prayer.

Let me explain the torture of my thoughts. In my prayer, I made very few reflections. By this type of prayer, the soul either gains much or gets distracted. If the soul advances, it does so by love. However, to arrive at this stage costs the soul much, unless the Lord moves the soul quickly to the Prayer of Quiet. This has happened to a few people I knew.

Difficulty With Her Imagination

Those following this method should always have spiritual reading available to quickly recollect their thoughts. Looking at a field, or water, or flowers reminded me of the Creator and helped me to recollection. They served as a book. However, concerning heavenly things I was stupid. I could never imagine them until the Lord showed me a way.

Unlike other people, I could never picture anything. I could not use my imagination. Even concerning Christ's humanity, I could look at His pictures but I, myself, could never picture Him. I was like a blind person who talks to others but cannot see them. This was why I loved to see pictures of the Lord. May no one lose this grace of delighting in His images.

The Confessions of St. Augustine

God arranged that someone gave me the "Confessions of St. Augustine". I had great devotion to him because, as a young girl, I lived in a convent with Augustinian nuns. Also, he was a sinner and I found comfort in reading the lives of saints who had been sinners. If the Lord forgave them, He certainly would forgive me. One part troubled me. After the Lord called these saints, they did not fall again. I did fall again and this troubled me. However, when I thought of His love, I never doubted His mercy even though I often doubted myself. I am amazed. Despite all God's help, my heart was still hard. It is frightening to recall how little I could do by myself because I could not resolve to give myself to God.

In reading Augustine's Confessions, I saw a picture of myself and commended myself to this saint. When I read his conversion and how he heard a voice in the garden, I felt the Lord speak to me and I dissolved in tears. A soul endures great torments when it loses its freedom, trying to become its own master. How could I have lived in such a state of torment?

The Effects of Tears

His Divine Majesty must have had compassion on my tears. I spent long hours with Him. I drove away the occasions of sin and felt new love. I knew I loved God, but I did not know what true love was. When His Majesty gave more favors, I was not quite prepared to serve Him.

God made me desire to receive immediately what others acquire only by great labor. During these years, He gave me consolations and tenderness in devotion which I never presumed to seek. I sought only pardon for my sins, which were so grievous that I didn't ask for favors. In turn, He welcomed me into His presence. Because He prepared me, I was able to enter. Only once in my life, (amid great aridity), did I ask for consolations. After doing this, I was ashamed. Due to my lack of humility, God granted my request. I thought that only those who did not offend God could ask for favors.

My tears seemed very weak because they did not obtain what I asked. However, they had the benefit of causing me such distress that I prayed more and left aside what was harmful. Although I did not abandon these harmful practices, God helped me to turn from them. To prepare me, He increased His spiritual favors. These are usually reserved for souls with greater purity of conscience.

10. Examining a Mystical Experience

I used to experience in a fleeting form what I will now describe. When picturing Christ or while reading, I would unexpectedly experience God's presence. I knew He was within me and I was wholly engulfed in Him. This was not a vision. I believe it is called mystical theology. The soul seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves, but the memory almost cannot function. The understanding does not reason and is amazed that it can understand at all. God wants the intellect to realize that it understands nothing of what God is doing.

Totally God's Gift

Previously, I had a tenderness in devotion which could be obtained by personal efforts. This new favor did not come from my senses or my spirit. It was entirely God's gift. However, we can do much to obtain this favor by reflecting on our ingratitude and what God has done for us in His Passion and sufferings. We can also rejoice in contemplating His works and His love for us.

A soul who seeks progress will find these helps without even searching for them. When God adds love to this experience, the heart melts and the tears flow. The Lord draws forth these tears and we cannot resist. God repays our small efforts by a great gift of comfort. Do not wonder at this because the soul needs this encouragement and joy.

Comparison of Joys

Let me use a comparison. These are as the joys of heaven. In heaven, the soul sees only what the Lord wants her to see (in proportion to her merits). Since her merits are so small, the soul is quite content in her place. A tremendous difference exists between the spiritual joys of earth and those of heaven. When these heavenly favors are granted in the early stages, the soul thinks there is nothing more to desire. She knows that she is well repaid. This is true. All our labor cannot purchase even one tear. What greater profit than to have this evidence of pleasing God? Let the soul realize her debt. If she does not turn back, God has chosen her to be a member of the kingdom.

False Humility

Don't be troubled about those kinds of humility which would refuse to see that God is giving us gifts. Understand clearly. God gives without any merit on our part. Realizing that we are receiving arouses us to love. Remembering that we are poor makes us richer. Our humility becomes more genuine.

The soul makes another mistake. She thinks she is incapable of receiving. She fears that she sins by vainglory. The devil tempts us to reject these favors. However, God who gives these blessings, also gives us the strength to resist the devil. We need only to walk in simplicity and to desire to please Him.

A Person's Kind Actions

Do we not love a person most when we remember his kind actions? It is very meritorious to remember that God created us from nothing and that Jesus died for us, even before we were created. Why should I not understand His gifts? Before receiving God's favors, I spoke of worldly things. Now, I desire to speak only of God. By remembering that we possess this jewel from God, we are forced to love.

What will happen when we discover that God has given us even more precious jewels, such as contempt of the world and of ourselves? We have even greater debt and realize that nothing comes from ourselves. Acknowledge the Lord's kindness. This first jewel would have been enough, but He granted me even greater riches.

Using His Treasures

Seek to serve Him and always be grateful. If you do this, the Lord will bestow His jewels. If we do not use these treasures, He will take them back and give them to others. We will be poorer than before. How can a man use his money for good if he does not know he is rich? It is impossible.

Anyone who fails to realize that he is favored by God, can never do great things. Attachment to this world is so powerful, that only someone who realizes he can have the joys of heaven will detach himself. By bestowing His gifts, the Lord restores our fortitude which was stolen by our sins.

A man cannot set aside everything and seek to be perfect unless he understands the love that God has for him. Our nature is dead and we can pursue only what we see. Seeing these favors awakens our faith to other gifts of God. Maybe there are some people who can serve God just by believing in the Creed. I, a wretched woman, need God's favors.

Censors

I am describing my experiences (as I have been commanded). If my superior does not approve, he can tear this up when he reads it. I ask that at least the story of my sins be published. They can even publish those in my lifetime, so I do not deceive anyone. I am speaking the literal truth that publishing my sins would give me comfort.

Disguising Authorship

However, concerning what I am about to write, I do not want others to know that I am the one who has had these experiences, so I will try to disguise my authorship. The approval of my learned confessors should suffice for others to accept this. I have no learning. I have not led a good life and I get no information from learned men.

Only those who commanded me to write even know that I am writing. I am stealing time from my spinning while living in a poor house with numerous tasks. I have little memory for what I have read, so if I say anything good it must come from the Lord. Whatever is bad is my fault and can be deleted.

Publishing The Text

During my lifetime, none of the good I have done should be published. After my death, please don't mention me. My sinful life would discredit all the good I describe. Dear father confessor, I believe you will follow my requests, so I will write quite freely. Otherwise I have great scruples about describing the Lord's favors, and no scruples about confessing my sins. Just realizing that I am a woman makes my wings droop, let alone being a sinful woman.

Dear confessor, you must take responsibility because it is at your command that I write about these favors. If they are not according to the Catholic faith, burn this manuscript. If my experiences are not in accord with truth, I am disillusioned but not sinful. At least the devil will have no gain. The Lord knows I have sought the advice of those who could enlighten me.

Hindrances and Dangers

No matter how clear my explanation of prayer, these matters will remain obscure to anyone without personal experience. I will explain hindrances to prayer and some dangers which I have experienced along the road. I have recently discussed all of these with many learned and spiritual people. They saw that during these twenty-seven years, the Lord has given me experiences (even though I lived poorly) for which others needed thirty- seven or forty seven years. May the Lord make use of me. I only desire that He be magnified. He has planted sweet flowers on a dunghill. May I not root them up by my faults.

11. The First Four Degrees of Prayer

Advice for Beginners

We become beginners when we resolve to follow Him in prayer. Just thinking of this dignity gives me comfort. Servile fear will vanish, if we act at once. O God, when a soul resolves to love you

and does all she can do to serve You, why do You not want her immediately to have the joy of ascending to perfect love? Maybe I should complain that we have no desire to ascend! We are at fault in not attaining this perfect possession of true love which brings every blessing. Because we give ourselves so poorly to God, we are not prepared to receive what God wants to give. His gift always comes at a great price!

Need to be Determined

Let's be clear. Nothing on earth can purchase this gift. However, if we did what we could, if we detached ourselves from earthly things, if our conversations were in heaven and if we prepared ourselves as thoroughly as did the saints, I have no doubt that the gift would speedily be ours. We only think we give God everything. Really, we just give Him the fruits but keep the ownership in our own hands.

We resolve to be poor. However, we plan so that we lack nothing. We make friends who will supply all our needs. Also, when we first began to pray, we abandoned all thoughts of our own importance. However, when someone wounds our self-importance, we forget this surrender and revoke it. This happens with everything.

What a nice way of seeking God's love! We expect great handfults but hold on to our own affections, making no effort to carry our desires into actions. Why should people like this have spiritual consolations? The two seem incompatible. Unable to surrender completely, we cannot receive completely. May God give us His graces, even if it cost us everything!

Courage

The Lord has great mercy toward someone who resolves to strive with all his might. He gradually increases the soul's courage until victory is won. "Courage" is demanded. The devil, knowing he will lose many souls, places obstacles so that this single soul does not even begin. A soul reaching the summit of perfection always takes many others with him. God makes him a good captain with many soldiers. This soul needs great courage not to turn back because the devil's dangers and difficulties are many.

Hard Labor at the Beginning

I want to speak here to beginners and later write to the more advanced. The labor is hardest in these early stages. Here, the soul herself labors and the Lord gives consolation only when He pleases. In the higher degrees of prayer, consolation comes at every stage. Also, the cross is always present because the beginner following Christ must take this road or be lost. Yet, even in this life, these labors have abundant recompense.

The Garden Comparison

Because spiritual language is difficult for women, I will use a comparison to convey my ideas. This might amuse my readers. The beginner must see herself as making a garden for the Lord. The soil, however, is unfruitful and filled with weeds. So, God uproots the weeds and places the good plants. This is already completed when the soul has begun to practice prayer. Like good gardeners, we must now water these plants, so that they grow and send forth a fragrance to the Lord. In this way, He will visit the garden and delight in these virtues.

In this task of watering, let's consider three things - the labor, the gain and the length of time. The garden can be watered in four ways - by water carried from a well (which takes great labor), by a

water-wheel (which is somewhat less laborious), by a stream (which means our watering the plants less frequently), or by heavy rain, (when the Lord waters the plants without any of our labor).

Four Methods of Prayer

These four methods of watering the plants are the four degrees of prayer. This comparison helped one priest. In four months, the Lord brought him to a higher prayer than I had attained in seventeen years. He prepared himself and now his garden is watered by all four means. Soon his garden will be submerged in water. He probably laughs at this foolish explanation.

Need for Detachment

Beginners are those who draw the water from the well. This is hard because their senses grow tired from recollection. They are used to a life of distraction and must remove themselves from what they see and hear, so they can practice hours of prayer. They must be alone and think over their past life. Both beginners and proficients must do this frequently, but there are important differences between the two. Beginners experience distress because they are not sure if they have repented (although clearly they want to serve God). They need to meditate on Christ's life, but this wearies them. Although God is obviously helping, our progress seemingly comes from ourselves. Drawing the water signifies this difficult beginning labor. Sometimes the well even runs dry. In those periods, the good gardener does what he can, while God keeps the flowers alive with no water. There are no tears of tenderness or interior devotion.

Responding to Dryness

What if the beginner went for days and experienced only dryness, distaste and little desire to draw water? He would abandon his prayer entirely if he did not remember how pleasing it was to the Lord. He must be anxious not to lose what he has gained. Often, the beginner is unable to have a single thought. Trying to use the understanding is like drawing the water.

What will the soul do? He will take heart and consider the great favor of working for the King. By having such confidence in God, he gives praise to the King. The soul wants nothing to do with earth and would never cease his prayer even if this aridity lasted his whole life. He would never let Christ fall under the weight of the cross. What will happen? His entire reward will come all at once. His labor will not be lost. The Good Master has His eyes upon him.

The Lord Testing the Soul

I endured such trials for many years. If I even drew one drop from the well, I knew God was giving me a favor. These were grievous trials but God greatly repaid me. A single hour in which the Lord allowed me to taste Himself was a recompense for all the afflictions that I endured for many years in trying to pray.

In these early stages, (and even later), the Lord wills these difficulties to test His lovers. He wants to see if they can bear His cross and drink His chalice before He gives them great treasures. God leads us this way so we will know our own worthlessness. We must know our wickedness by experience. Because His favors are so great, in this way, we will not become like Lucifer, fallen from a high state.

No Questions Asked

All You do, Lord, is for the greater good of that soul who has placed himself in Your power. He is determined to bear Your cross and not leave You alone. Anyone so determined need not fear. Spiritual people, once you have reached this high state of desiring to be alone so that you can commune with God and abandon the world, the chief part of your work is done.

Trust God's goodness which never fails His friends. Do not ask, "Why has he given devotion to this person with a few days experience and not to me after so many years?" Let God lead. All is for our greater good. We are His not our own. He has given us a great favor. We are called to be near the Lord of the garden and to work in it.

If He desires that some flowers grow by water from the well and others grow by rainfall, what does it matter? Lord, do whatever you want and let not my virtues perish (if you have given me any). Do not give your most precious gift to those who serve You only for Your consolations.

Describing a Strong Foundation

I know the following by experience. Any soul who is resolute in mental prayer, places little emphasis on consolations, is neither elated when consolations are given nor dejected when withheld, has already traveled a great part of the journey. Although the soul might stumble, she will never relapse. She has a strong foundation. Love for God does not consist of tears, tenderness and consolations, but in serving God with humility and fortitude. Any other love is a receiving not a giving.

Need for Favors

Poor women like myself need to be led by favors. Right now, God is doing this so I can suffer certain trials. Yet, when I hear some learned people complaining that God does not give them devotion, it revolts me. When God grants consolations they should value them because God knows this is good. However, they should not be distressed by not receiving favors. Let them be self-controlled and make progress. In seeking favors, they are mistaken and imperfect. Due to lack of strength and enterprise, they hold back instead of going forward in a freedom of spirit.

Embracing the Cross

I don't say this for beginners (although they, too, should start with both freedom and determination). I say it for those who began some time ago and have never finished their course because they did not embrace the cross from the beginning. When their understanding doesn't work in prayer, they grow discouraged even though their will is being touched by God.

Do not forget. God pays no heed to our nature's weakness. Rather, He knows that some souls are longing to love Him. Others, however, allow afflictions to disturb their souls. Not getting any profit from one hour of prayer, they do not pray for four hours. I know this well from experience and speaking to others.

Bodily Ills

Much difficulty comes from our physical indisposition. The soul shares in the body's ills which impede the soul's good desires. The more we force the issue, the worse it becomes and the trouble lasts longer. Use discretion so your soul is not stifled. The person must realize that when they are ill, they must adjust their prayer hours. This change should continue for some days.

Importance of the Body

On earth the soul must just endure these afflictions. When a soul loves God and cannot fulfill her holy desires because of her bodily ills, she must use discretion. Sometimes, however, these evil effects come from the devil. Prayer should not be given up just because the mind is disturbed or the soul tormented. At times, the person can perform exterior acts, such as spiritual reading or works of charity. The soul must render service to the body so that, at a later date, the body can help the soul.

Engage in some spiritual conversation or take a walk in the country, (as your confessor advises). Experience teaches what is fitting for us. God's yoke is sweet. Don't try to drag the soul along. Lead it gently, so it can make greater progress.

I repeat this important advice. Never be depressed by aridities or distractions. To gain spiritual freedom, the soul must not be afraid of the cross. The Lord will help and the soul will profit from everything. If no water comes from the well, we cannot put any in. Do not be careless. Draw whatever water is available.

12. How to Help Ourselves in Prayer

Ways to Help Ourselves

Before digressing, I was explaining how we can help ourselves in this first stage of devotion. For example, by meditating on the Lord's passion, we can gain compassion and tears that are sweet. If we think about heavenly glory, we can be moved to a virtuous joy that is both spiritual and sensual. These acts of the understanding gain devotion. If God does not lift a soul higher than this, then the soul should not try to rise higher. It will make no progress and only fall backward.

The soul can still resolve to do great things for God and make acts of virtue. She can picture herself in Christ's presence and grow in love for His sacred humanity. She can complain to Him and rejoice with Him. She can set aside formal prayers and speak in her own words, (an excellent way of making progress quickly). If a soul strives to have this precious friendship and to always make good use of it, she will achieve definite gain.

Using the Simple Method

Therefore, do not be troubled about not experiencing devotion. Thank God for your holy desires. These desires of having Christ in our lives are always helpful, but especially in the early stages of prayer. By these acts, the soul quickly reaches the second stage. In the final stages, these acts keep the soul safe.

Anyone who tries to rise above this basic experience and to seek consolations which are not yet bestowed, will lose out because these other consolations are supernatural. The understanding will cease to function, and the soul will suffer aridity. The foundation stone must be humility. Without this virtue we lose everything.

Wanting to Rise Too High

Pride makes us want to rise higher. However, God is already giving us much more than we deserve. I am not referring to the soul meditating on God or on the wonders of heaven. I have no ability to do this. Others, however, profit from this, especially if they are learned and have humility. (A few days ago, I met a learned man who has made great progress in a short time. I wish more learned men were spiritual.)

In saying that souls should not try to rise unless God raises them, I am using the language of spirituality which experienced souls understand. I'll explain later the mystical experiences when God suspends the power of the understanding.

False Conception

We must not think that we can suspend our understanding. We must allow it to keep working, or else we achieve nothing. Later, when the Lord does suspend the understanding, he will bestow a

special gift. Then, we will understand more in a short period of time without any reasoning. However, trying to keep your faculties busy and quiet at the same time is impossible.

These efforts are lost labor and show a lack of humility. The soul gets frustrated. She is putting forth great effort and no ground is gained. Her lack of humility is evident. The humble soul feels no exaltation when an action is accomplished. If the Lord grants the readers an experience of this, they will immediately understand.

God is Her Teacher

For years, I read much and understood nothing. Then God taught me. However, I could not explain His teaching to others. This was a great trial. His Majesty can teach everything in a single moment. Spiritual persons tried to instruct me but I understood nothing. His Majesty wanted to be my teacher, so He willed that I gain nothing from others.

God The Special Teacher

Suddenly, without my desiring or asking, God gave me a complete understanding of the whole matter and people were astounded when they listened to me (even my confessors). Conscious of my own stupidity, I was even more astounded. This happened just a short time ago. Now, I do not attempt to learn what God hasn't taught me (unless it affects my conscience.)

I repeat. Do not lift up your spirits unless the Lord lifts them up. When He does, you will be instantly aware. The devil can foster illusions (especially in women). The Lord never allows any harm to someone who approaches Him in humility. Even when the devil tries to harm the soul, it will profit. I have written a great deal because these teachings are for beginners. While writing, I felt much confusion, but the Lord willed that I should write of these things.

13. Temptations of Beginners

I want to write about the temptations which attack beginners. I myself have had many. In the early stages, the soul should strive to be happy and free. Some feel that they will lose their devotion if they relax a little. Certainly, the soul should not enter the occasions of sin. Obviously, there are few souls who are so perfect that they can relax when experiencing temptations. All our life, we must see our nature's worthlessness. Yet, we can take recreation and return stronger to prayer. In everything, we need discretion.

Courageous Souls

Do not cramp your good desires. Have great confidence and believe that by God's help and continual efforts you shall reach the favor of the saints. Even saints had to believe and carry into action. Otherwise, they would never have reached their high state.

His Majesty loves courageous souls who walk in humility. I have never seen such souls hanging back or acting like a coward. In a few years, they gain what others do not attain in many years. I am astounded by what courageous souls have accomplished on this road. If the soul moves quickly, she can make much more progress, even though she might grow tired and stop.

The Early Resolutions

The words "Everything is possible to God" (Mt.19:26) made me realize that I could do nothing. Augustine wrote "Give me Lord what you command and command whatever you will". I reflected that Peter lost nothing by putting himself in the sea.

Although the beginner must be guided by discretion and his confessor, these early resolutions are important. Hopefully, your confessor will teach you not to be toads, satisfied with catching lizards. We need humility to see that our own strength is not enough.

False Humility

The devil does much harm by encouraging a false humility. This hinders progress. The devil says that pride gives the soul these ambitious desires to imitate the saints and to endure martyrdom. He deceives us, saying that we are sinners and that we must admire the saints but not imitate them.

Certainly, we must discern which virtues to admire and which to imitate. (A weak person should not fast and do severe penances). However, all can seek a contempt of the world and detachment from possessions. We so lack generosity that we imagine the earth will collapse if we forget our body and cultivate the soul.

Little Confidence in God

It distresses me that we have so little confidence in God and let anxieties upset us. We let the smallest things trouble us and yet presume that we are spiritual. This attitude attempts to reconcile body and soul. It tries to gain the kingdom without losing any worldly comfort. We make progress at the pace of a hen and never gain spiritual freedom. A prudent approach seems quite good for married people, but it is not good for others. I tried this and I would still be practicing the slow approach, if God had not shown me a shorter road.

My desires were always ambitious but I wanted both to practice prayer and to have my own pleasure. If someone had encouraged me to soar higher, I would have put my holy desires into action. Concerning sins, very few are overly cautious. This is why beginners do not move more quickly. The Lord does not fail. We are the faulty ones.

Fears About Health

We can imitate the saints in seeking solitude, silence and virtues. This will not kill our bodies. We want everything for the body's benefit and worry little about the soul. Whenever we get fearful, the devil tries to incapacitate our bodies. He persuades us that all these devotions will kill us or ruin our health. He makes us fear to weep, lest we go blind. I have experienced this! Yet, for what better cause could we lose our sight or our health?

Since I have poor health, I was always impeded by fears. I just resolved not to worry about my health. Now, fears trouble me very little. God told me it was the devil's device. When the devil said I would ruin my health, I replied "dying is of little consequence". When he told me to rest, I said, "I need the cross, not rest". Although I have bad health, I saw these thoughts were from the devil, not from my bodily weakness.

Since being less indulgent, I have enjoyed much better health. So, don't be frightened by your own thoughts. This is important. I know by experience.

Another Temptation

Another temptation of beginners is to want everyone else to be spiritual. This is a good desire but much discretion is needed. I found this out for myself. By describing the blessings of prayer, I tried to get others to pray. However, they could see that I had no virtues. This led them into temptations and foolishness. Later, they told me that my prayer and my dissipation seemed incompatible. As a result,

they believed that nothing was wrong with some intrinsically evil things. They had a high opinion of me and saw that I did these acts.

Caring for Our Own Souls

The devil does this. He uses our good points to give authority to the evil that we do. The devil highly values even a small evil. Therefore, over many years, only three people profited from my words. In the past three years, many more have profited because the Lord has strengthened me. Also, when speaking to others we forget to take care of our own soul. We should care for our own soul because, in this entire world, there is only God and the soul.

Seeing Evil in Others

Another temptation comes from the distress we feel by seeing evil in others. The devil tells us that this distress comes from zeal for God's interests. We then act to set things right. We become so excited that we cannot pray. Even worse, we see this excitement as a sign of perfection. I am not speaking of public offenses or of wrongs done to the Church (such as heresies) which cause so many souls to be lost. I am talking about a soul being anxious about anyone and anything. Let the soul watch herself and please God. This is the only safe road. People trust too much in their good intentions.

Our Own Sins

See the good qualities in others. Keep your eyes on your own sins and be blind to the sins of others. Then, you will consider everyone better than yourself. We must beg God for this virtue. If we make efforts, He will surely grant it. This advice is meant especially for those who use their intellects a great deal. Be patient until God enlightens you, because your intellect hinders rather than helps.

Using the Imagination of Prayer

To return to the subject. Those who use their reasoning powers in prayer, should not spend all their time doing so. They need a Sunday rest. They believe that they must always work at prayer. Really simple prayer is a great gain! They should imagine themselves in Christ's presence, conversing and delighting in Him. They must not weary themselves by composing speeches to Him. They must lay their needs before Him and admit that they are unworthy to be in His presence. Prayer time should have diverse acts. Souls should not always eat the same food.

These prayer matters are difficult to understand without a director. So, I will explain further. I should like to write more briefly, but my own stupidity prevents me from saying in few words what needs to be thoroughly expounded. Having gone through so much, I feel sorry for those who begin with only books. What a difference between understanding something and knowing it by experience.

Using the Mind

Let's return to the teaching. While meditating on Christ's passion, the mind seeks the reasons for the great afflictions suffered by His Majesty. It also meditates on the other lessons of this mystery. This meditation method should be the prayer style for all of us. Until the Lord teaches us supernatural methods, mental prayer is a safe and excellent road.

Some souls meditate on other mysteries. There are many roads to heaven's mansions. Some imagine themselves in hell. Others, too distressed by hell, imagine themselves in heaven. Some meditate on death. Others on God's greatness in creation. All of this is good as long as the soul does not neglect the life of Christ and His Passion, which is the source of all good.

Need For An Experienced Director

The beginner needs a director to see what benefits him most. The director must be a man of experience. Otherwise, the soul will make many mistakes and never learn about itself. The soul must see the importance of obedience, and do only what is commanded. I have felt sorry for some souls who are afflicted by their director's lack of experience. They have no idea how to act on their own. One soul had been kept in bondage by her director for eight years. While the Lord was giving her the Prayer of Quiet, he wanted her to gain self-knowledge.

Self-Knowledge

Certainly, self-knowledge must not be neglected. No one is a spiritual giant and the soul must always be a baby at the breast. (Never forget this. I constantly repeat it.) At every stage of prayer, we need to go back to the beginning. Self-knowledge is the bread that must always be eaten. However, take this bread in moderate proportions. When a soul realizes she has no goodness, when she feels ashamed in the King's presence, when she realizes how much she is in debt, then why waste time gaining self-knowledge? Go on to other matters. God knows what food to set before the soul.

Learning, Experience and Spirituality

The director must be of sound understanding and experienced. It is a great advantage if he is also learned. Of the three qualities, the first two are more important. Learning benefits beginners very little. I do not mean that beginners should have no contact with learned men. Certainly, spirituality must be founded upon truth and learning gives us light and teaches us how we should act. From foolish devotions, God deliver us!

I am getting involved in many subjects. This is my failing. I can explain myself only with many words. A nun may have a simpleton confessor who believes the nun should obey him rather than the superior. Or, a priest might be directing a married woman, and will tell her to spend time in prayer, when she should be home. Not being enlightened, the priest cannot enlighten others. Learning may not seem necessary but in my opinion, every Christian should consult a learned person. The more learned he is, the better. The more the person prays and the more spiritual she is, the greater is her need of learning.

Learned Directors

Learned men who do not pray, might still be suitable directors. I have consulted many such men and gotten much from them. Although having no experience, they are not against spirituality. At least, they know about it from their Scripture study. I believe that if a prayerful soul consults learned men, the devil will not deceive the soul. Devils fear learned men who are humble. They know they will be found out.

Some think that learned men without spirituality are unsuitable. I have said that a spiritual director is needed, but one without learning is a great inconvenience. Consult learned and virtuous men, even if they are not spiritual. God will show them what to teach you and he may make them spiritual to be of service to us. I know this from experience. I repeat. Be subject only to a director who is a learned and virtuous man.

Freedom to Choose a Director

A director lacking in all three qualities is a great cross to the soul. I have never been able to subject myself to such a confessor. A lay person has the freedom to choose his director. Let the

religious remain without a director until finding the right one. The Lord will provide one if the soul is humble and desires to succeed. I praise God for learned men.

I am amazed how learned men can explain things and save me time. Yet, many people have no interest in reaping such benefits. God forbid! These learned priests bear the hardships of penances, poor food, religious obedience, and the scant sleep they get. It would be wrong to forfeit the benefits they can give us. We (who are pampered) suppose ourselves to be superior, just because we practice a little more prayer than they.

O Lord, you made me incompetent. However, you enlightened others to enlighten us. We must pray for these learned men who guide the Church in such storms. If some men have been wicked, the good men will shine even more.

An Easy Method

I have wandered but I want to help beginners to keep their feet planted on the true road. To return to the topic. Meditate upon Christ's Passion. Reflect on His pains, on who He is and on why He suffered. At other times, we should not tire ourselves out trying to think. We should just remain at His side in silence, keeping Him company, delighting in Him and remembering that He never deserved to suffer. Even a beginner can derive great benefit from this method. I certainly have.

14. The Second Degree of Prayer

There is a second way of watering this garden. By using the windlass (*a crank or pulley*) and buckets, the gardener gets more water with less labor. In this degree of prayer, the soul does not labor as much and can get some rest. I want to describe this Prayer of Quiet. This state, (by which the soul begins to recollect herself) borders on the supernatural, because the soul could not attain this level by her own efforts.

Although the soul sometimes grows weary at the windlass, she labors less than when she worked at the well. Because the faculties are more recollected and the soul's contentment brings greater delight. The faculties are not lost and they do not sleep. The will alone is occupied and becomes captured without knowing how. The soul is imprisoned by God and knows she is captured by One who loves her. O Lord, at this stage, Your love binds our love so strongly that You leave us no freedom to love anything else.

Intellect and Memory

The intellect and memory help the will so that it can enjoy the blessing even more. Sometimes, even when the will is in union, these two faculties hinder the prayer greatly. The will must pay no attention. Otherwise, the soul loses.

These intellect and memory are like doves who are not satisfied with their food. Therefore, they seek food elsewhere. Being unsuccessful, they come back to see what food the will can give them. Sometimes the Lord gives them food. If not, they fly off again.

These faculties are meant to benefit the will. Sometimes the memory or imagination try to present a picture of what the will is enjoying. This does much harm. The will must be careful in dealing with these faculties, (as I shall explain).

Greater Consolations

At this stage, everything brings great consolation. There is little labor without growing weary. The soul can pray for a long time. The understanding works very little and yet draws much water. Tears flow joyfully. The soul accepts these tears, but does not induce them.

This abundant water of divine favors makes the virtues grow beyond all comparison with the previous state. The soul rises from its miserable condition and gains some foreknowledge of heavenly glory. This brings the soul nearer to God. He now communicates Himself and wants the soul to be conscious of how He is communicating.

The New State of the Soul

At this stage, the soul ceases to covet earthly things. She sees that earthly riches, honors and pleasures cannot grant true satisfaction. The soul understands the source of true joy. On earth, we rarely understand where this satisfaction lies. Because it comes and goes, we have no idea how to get it back. Even with prayer and penance, we acquire very little if the Lord does not bestow it. God wants the soul to know that He is so near. The soul doesn't need to send messages to God. She can speak directly with Him. The soul need not cry out. She must only just move her lips quietly.

God's New Special Work

Certainly, God is always with us. However, the Lord wants us to understand what His presence accomplishes. This work will give us both inward and outward satisfaction. God wants us to know that He alone fills the void in our souls which sin has caused. He shows us the great difference between His consolations and those of earth. This satisfaction resides in the soul's most intimate part. The soul cannot even tell where or how the consolation comes. She does not know what to do, to seek, or to ask. The soul has found everything at once, yet knows not what she has found.

Explaining Particular Help

I need learning to explain the difference between a general or particular help. The Lord wills that the soul see this particular help (as they say) with her own eyes. Learning helps to describe this but I am writing for people who have experience. They will understand what I am saying and will cut out whatever is a mistake.

The Path of Fear

When the Lord grants favors which the soul does not understand and no director leads the soul, fear fills the path. (This is how God led me). I am providing a description, so that the soul knows that she is on the right road and what she needs to do to make great progress. Not knowing what to do, I suffered and lost much time.

I feel sorry for souls who reach this state and are alone. Many books explain very little. If the soul is not practiced in prayer, she will have difficulty in understanding what is taking place, even with many books.

Needing God's Help to Write

I wish the Lord would help me explain these effects, which border on the supernatural. Although we know that these come from the Holy Spirit we must proceed with caution, because the devil transforms himself into an angel with light. The soul needs experience, which often comes only at the very summit of prayer.

God has to explain this. I have very little time to write because of community work. When the Lord inspires, I can write more easily. It is like having a pattern for my sewing. Without that, I write gibberish. To write well, I must be immersed in prayer. Then everything comes out clearly. I do not know how I managed to say it all.

The Garden Image

Let us return to the garden and see how these trees put forth flowers, with their fragrance and fruits. When I was a beginner (I am always a beginner – it is just by comparison with my later life), I delighted in seeing my soul as a garden. The Lord walked there and I always asked Him to keep alive the little virtues which were blooming. They were all for His glory. I asked Him to prune them so they would be much better. I speak of pruning because a time comes when the soul seems so dry. She has no water to refresh her, (as if the virtues never were).

God Withholds the Water

The soul suffers many trials because the Lord wants the soul to think that all her trouble in keeping the garden alive is fruitless. At this time, if the smaller plants are useless, they must be rooted out. God withholds the waters of grace, so we realize that our efforts are useless. By realizing this, we gain humility and the flowers grow afresh.

Delighting in the Lord

O Lord, I say the following with tears and great delight. You are with us in the Blessed Sacrament. So, I make the following comparison. I always rejoiced when I heard, “My delight is to be with the children of men” (Pr.8:31). Even when I went astray, I rejoiced. Is it possible that a soul can still offend you after reaching a state of your consolations and realizing that you delight in her? Yes, I have done this often. May I be the only one to have been so ungrateful! Yet, you brought forth good even from me with all my sins.

Draw me out of myself, so I sing your praise! Without you, I can only be cut off, and this garden will become a dunghill. May this soul, that you purchased and have snatched from the horrible dragon, not be lost. May my director forgive my wandering, but I am speaking with a purpose. As I write, the debt I owe to God rises before me and I cannot refrain from praising Him. My debt is greater because God has forgiven me more.

15. The Prayer of Quiet

The soul feels this quiet by peace and satisfaction. The faculties are at rest and the soul experiences a most sweet delight. Never having gone beyond this point, the soul feels there is nothing left to desire. Like St. Peter on the mountaintop, she wants to make her abode here. She does not even move, fearing that the blessing will slip from her grasp.

The Importance of the Will

The poor creature forgets that she did nothing to gain this favor and that she can only possess this prayer as long as the Lord wishes. In this prayerful recollection, the memory and understanding are distracted, while the will is in union with God. The will does not lose any repose. It recollects the understanding and the memory and brings them back to recollection when they wander. Although not completely absorbed in God, the soul is well occupied and the intellect and memory cannot deprive the will of its contentment. Without any labor, the will has the power to insure that this little spark of God’s love remains burning.

Souls Not Making Progress

May His Majesty help me to explain this because many, many souls reach this state but few move beyond it. I don't know who is to blame. Certainly not God! He has advanced the soul to this stage and will grant her many more favors. The soul, which has arrived to this stage, must see her dignity and the greatness of God's favors. God is making the soul a citizen of heaven. So, she must not belong to earth. May the soul not turn back! If so, she will go downhill, (as I would have without God's mercy). The soul can forfeit such a blessing only through grave faults and gross blindness.

Not Abandoning Prayer

I beg these souls to whom the Lord has given this state. Learn to know yourselves with a humble and holy presumption. Hold yourselves in high esteem. Do not return to Egypt's flesh pots! If you fall through your own weakness (as I did), remember what a blessing you have lost and walk fearfully. Unless you return to prayer, you will go from bad to worse.

Whatever causes the soul to hate this road of prayer is a serious obstacle. Even if these souls fall into sin, they must not abandon prayer. In prayer, God will enlighten them and give them repentance. If they abandon prayer, they will run straight into danger. I am speaking from my own experiences.

The Little Spark

The Lord gives the soul a little spark of true love. He wants the soul to understand both the gift and the joy. Although, this little spark of quiet recollection cannot be acquired, our nature tries to get all it can from these delightful experiences. However, by seeking these experiences, the soul is pouring water on the fire and it grows cold. Although this little spark is small, it makes a loud noise. If we do not quench it (by our faults), the spark will become a great fire (as I will soon explain) and will send flames of ardent love. This is God's gift to perfect souls.

Pledge of Greater Favors

This spark is God's pledge that He is choosing the soul for great things. The soul must prepare herself. This is a great gift and I am sorry to say that few who receive this gift go any further. (Probably there are many who do go further. I am writing about what I have seen). These souls must not hide their talent. God has chosen them for the good of many (especially in these times when God needs strong friends). The soul must fulfill the obligations of true friendship with God. Otherwise, they will harm themselves and possibly others.

Understanding and Memory

In these seasons of quiet prayer, the soul must make no noise. She must not use her understanding to find lots of words. The will must control the understanding and memory. These faculties indiscriminately pile up logs which only destroy the spark. The soul must pray very simply, saying "Lord, what can I do? What does earth have to do with heaven?" Let the soul utter words of love and take no notice of the understanding (which just makes itself a nuisance).

The will tries to communicate its joy to the understanding but the understanding is distracted. The will should leave the understanding alone and not run after it. Just enjoy the favor. Be recollected as a wise little bee. Bees do not try to get all the other bees into the hive. Otherwise, there would be no honey.

Leaving Aside Words

A soul with a lively understanding must be careful. She will lose much by talking with herself and believe her own clever reflections have accomplished much. The understanding must know only one thing. God grants the soul this favor by his own choice.

The soul must stay near to God and pray for the church and the souls in purgatory. This prayer of great desires achieves more than any words of the understanding. Let the soul make acts of love, saying what it will do for God. Let the understanding not use clever reflections just to make noise. A few little straws of humility enkindle the fire much better than logs of wood) which will put out the fire).

This advice is good for the learned men who are commanding me to write. May they reach this state. Then, they can apply their verses of Scripture and use their learning, before or after prayer. (They will have little need for learning during their prayer). While at prayer, their learned applications will only make them lukewarm. Absorbed in prayer, the understanding can see everything with the greatest clarity. It needs no learning. Even I seem to be quite different.

Putting Aside Learning

I grasp almost nothing from the Latin psalms. However, during this state of quiet, I understand the text as if it were in Spanish. I can even penetrate the meaning. When these learned men preach, they must use their learning to help ignorant creatures like myself. In this Prayer of Quiet, let the soul repose and put aside her learning. A time will come when she will use her learning for the Lord.

In the sight of Divine Wisdom, a single act of humility is greater than all the world's knowledge. In this quiet prayer, we recognize ourselves in simplicity before God. He wants the soul be a fool in His sight. That is what we are. The soul is exalted only because God desires her to be near Him.

Vocal and Mental Prayer

In vocal and mental prayer the understanding is active and gives thanks in set words. The will, like a publican, dares not lift its eyes. It gives thanks without using any rhetoric. If we are able to use vocal and mental prayer, they must not be given up. Sometimes the state of quiet is intense and speaking becomes difficult.

From Self or the Devil

In my opinion, the soul can tell if this state comes from God, or has been acquired by the soul's own efforts, or comes from the devil. When we try to enter the Prayer of Quiet, and are left in aridity, then we are using our own efforts. If the state comes from the devil, there is disquiet and lack of humility, the state does not prepare the soul for God's gift. It leaves no light, understanding or steadfastness.

The Soul's Protection Against the Devil

The devil can do little harm if the soul directs this sweetness toward God and fixes her desires upon Him. Because God permits these actions of the faculties, the devil gains nothing and the soul enjoys great delight. She will come to prayer seeking God, not eager for joys but attached to the Cross. She will ignore the devil's pleasures and will value what comes from God's Spirit. When the devil sends his pleasures, the soul will humble herself and the devil will refrain.

When the soul begins to experience this quiet, she must be detached from all consolation and be determined only to help Christ with His cross. These souls serve the king without pay. They know that their final reward is the everlasting kingdom.

Beginning Truths

In the beginning, the soul must always remember that human life is short, that earth is empty and that heaven has eternal value. Later, these truths become so impressed upon the soul that she cannot forget them. This seems like a low ideal and it is. More advanced souls would be ashamed not to have renounced all earthly goods.

Within these experienced souls, a highly developed love is at work. However, for beginners, these lowly considerations are of greatest importance. Really, they are not lowly, because they bring great blessings.

Needed Even By Experiences Souls

I recommend these thoughts even to those who have reached great heights. They will need them when God tests them. Do not forget. The soul does not grow like the body grows. After gaining the stature of adulthood, a person cannot become a child. His body does not grow small again. In spiritual matters, the Lord enjoys our growing small again (at least as I see it). He humbles us so that we do not grow careless in our exile.

The higher a soul has climbed, the more fearful she should be. Even a soul completely abandoned to God's will, when assaulted by temptations and persecutions, must use prayer to recall these beginning truths. All things end. Only a heaven and a hell remain.

Seeking the Cross

To avoid the devil's snares and pleasures, the soul must be determined not to desire his pleasures. From the very first day, she must walk the way of the Cross. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me". (Matt.16:24) If we obey His counsels, we need fear nothing.

By improving their lives, souls will know that these favors are not the devil's work. Even when they fall, they will rise speedily. This shows that the Lord is with them. I want to describe other signs of the Spirit working in them.

Humility From Revelation

When God's Spirit is at work, the soul does not need to search for humility. The Lord reveals humbling truths far beyond our puny reflections. This produces a humility and a confusion which overwhelm us. God bestows this self-knowledge. The greater His favors, the greater we see our nothingness.

We also receive a burning desire to persevere in prayer no matter what the trials. By giving ourselves to God, we experience security. God gives us a mature fear based on faith which casts out servile fear. Realizing that true love for God is devoid of self-interest, the soul seeks greater solitude to gain this blessing.

Ready To Bloom

Let me say it again. This prayer is the beginning of all blessings. Because the soul is conscious of God being within her, the flowers are ready to bloom. Later, she will be conscious of her failings and will rightly grow fearful of everything. Yet, her confidence in God brings blessings greater than her

fears. Remembering God's favors turns the soul to God, despite all the imagined punishments of hell. This is what happened to me, wicked as I was.

Later, I will describe the signs of true spirituality. (It cost me much to learn them clearly.) I can do this from my own experiences and from what learned men explained to me. Souls who have reached this stage need this teaching, so they do not grow fatigued as I did.

16. Third Degree of Prayer

The third method to water the garden is to have water running from a river (or spring). The soul must direct the water but this irrigates the garden with much less effort. In a sense, the Lord does everything and becomes the gardener Himself. In this prayer, the faculties are asleep. They are not lost and do not understand how they work. The pleasure, sweetness and delight are incomparably greater than the former prayer.

The water has risen to the very neck of the soul. She cannot move forward because she does not know how to do so. Also, she cannot turn back. At this stage, the soul seeks the enjoyment of heavenly glory. She is like a person at the point of death who rejoices with ineffable joy in the death agony.

To me, this state is a complete death to the world and a complete enjoyment of God. This is the only way I can explain it. The soul does not know what to do whether to speak or to be silent, to laugh or to weep. This state is a glorious folly, a heavenly madness. By delighting in joy, the soul gains wisdom.

A New Ability to Describe

Six years ago, the Lord gave me this prayer in abundance. Although I received it many times, I neither understood it nor was able to describe it. This prayer was not a complete union of all my faculties with God, yet it was obviously higher than my previous stage of prayer. Yet, I could not understand the difference. After I received Holy Communion today, the Lord granted me this prayer (not allowing me to go higher) and gave me comparisons. Now I can explain everything and describe what the soul must do. I was astonished. In a single moment, I understood everything. Because of this Divine love, I was often inebriated, yet I could never understand its nature. I knew the gift came from God but could not grasp His methods. Although the faculties are in almost complete union with God, they can act. At last, the Lord has helped me to understand.

Shouting Loud Praises

The faculties have only one power. They can only give themselves totally to God. They do not stir. Many praise words are spoken but not in any order, (unless God arranges it). The understanding is useless. The soul cannot contain herself. She enjoys a delectable disquiet and wants to shout loud praises. The soul wants others to see her glory so they, too would praise God. She is like the woman who called all her neighbors to rejoice (Lk.15:9), or like David playing his harp. I am deeply devoted to King David. (His feast is in the Carmelite Calendar.)

Words While Enjoying the Bliss

The soul in this state is all tongue, praising the Lord, uttering a thousand follies to please him. Although I am not a poet, I was able to compose verses which were filled with feeling and descriptive of my pain. These words helped me to enjoy the bliss which came from this delectable pain. I was willing to be cut to pieces to show what joy the pain caused. The gift was so delectable that I could

have endured any torments. I realized that when the martyrs suffered, they did almost nothing by themselves. The soul knows that her fortitude comes from outside.

A Holy, Heavenly Madness

What happens when the soul regains her senses and has to return to the world's occupations? I cannot exaggerate these experiences! In fact, I fall short in describing this rejoicing. Please help me, Lord. Even as I write, I am not yet recovered from this holy, heavenly madness (a favor you gave through no merits of my own). May others also become mad through your love.

May I have nothing more to do with this world. Take me from it. I can no longer endure the trials that come when I am without You. If I live, I want no repose in this life. I want to see myself as free. Eating kills me. Sleep brings me anguish. Although I spend time on comforts, only You can comfort me. I seem to be living against my nature. I no longer desire to live for myself but only for You.

Heavenly Crosses

You have prepared a cross, both light and heavy, for those who reach this state. Light because it is sweet, heavy because, at times, no patience can endure it. The soul never wants to be free from this cross. Only through this cross, can she find herself with You.

Realizing that she has done little and still has time to serve You, the soul seeks heavier crosses. She would gladly stay on earth until the end of time. The soul does not value her own repose. She gladly sacrifices it to serve You. Not knowing what she seeks, the soul knows only to desire You.

Effects of Holy Communion

You, my confessor, who commanded me to write, may you alone see the teachings which go beyond my proper limits. My own my reason knows no limits when the Lord takes me out of myself. Since receiving Holy Communion this morning, I cannot believe that it is I who am speaking. I seem to be dreaming and I wish all were suffering from my same madness. Let us all be mad for Him Who was called mad for our sake! I want to help you, the reader, to receive this favor from God.

Five People Meeting Secretly

Recently, many have gathered to contrive evil and heresies against God. May we five (two priests, a layman, a laywoman and Teresa) meet "secretly" to advise one another how to amend our lives and please God.

I say "secretly" because it is no longer fashionable to correct another. Even preachers try not to offend. Their intentions are good but few people amend their lives. Why do the listeners not abandon their open sins? Because preachers use too much worldly wisdom. They are not like the Apostles who caught fire with love. Many preachers' flame gives little heat.

We must consider our reputation as unimportant. We must say what is true and be indifferent whether we gain or lose everything. Whoever is truly bold in God's service will gladly accept gain or loss. I wish I were that kind of person!

The Lord's Freedom

What freedom the Lord gives us when we see that living by the world's laws is captivity. Any slave would risk all to gain his ransom and return to his country. We must not linger on this road of earth because our great treasure lies at its end. My confessor is free to rip this up for my being so bold to speak of these things.

17. Third Degree of Prayer (continued)

I have said enough about this mode of prayer and of what God does when He becomes the Gardener and the soul becomes idle. The will must consent to the favors and submit to what Wisdom desires to accomplish. The soul needs great courage because she actually gets to the point of leaving her body. (What a happy death that would be!)

Total Abandonment

In this state, the soul must abandon herself into God's arms. If He takes the soul to heaven, then she goes. If He takes the soul to Hell, she is not distressed, as long as He goes with her. If the person is to die immediately or to live a thousand years, does not matter. The soul now belongs to His Majesty and whatever God wills. She is no longer her own. The soul ceases to worry. When God grants this sublime prayer, He can do all He wants. Such is the effect.

The soul realizes that God does this with no fatigue to her understanding. She sees that God is a good Gardener, and is astonished that she is not asked to do any work. She just delights in the flowers' fragrance.

Much Gain

God's visits are brief. However, during his visitations, the Creator gives the soul water without limit. What the soul could not gain in twenty years of labor, God gives in a single moment. Because the fruit grows, the soul gains enough nourishment from her own garden. God allows the soul to share this fruit with others only when she is strong enough and does not need all that is available.

The soul must constantly receive these benefits. Otherwise, she will feed others while dying from hunger herself. People of intelligence will understand this explanation perfectly and apply it better (for I am growing tired).

Greater Than the Prayer of Quiet

The virtues are now stronger than in the Prayer of Quiet. The soul sees she is different. However, she does not realize that these benefits come from the flowers' fragrance. The Lord wants the flowers to open. In this way, the soul can see her virtues. She knows she could never have acquired them, because she failed to do so for many years. The heavenly Gardener gives them in a short time. Her humility is also greater because the soul sees that she has done absolutely nothing except to consent to God's actions.

This prayer is definitely a union of the entire soul with God, except that His Majesty allows the faculties to understand and to enjoy His actions. Very often when the will is in divine union, the soul can realize that the will is captive and rejoicing. Only the will is quiet. The understanding is free to attend to works of charity or business.

Differences

Although they seem to be the same, this Prayer of Union is different from the Prayer of Quiet. In the Prayer of Quiet, the soul must be a Mary, remaining still and contemplative. In the prayer of union, the soul can also be a Martha, occupied in both the active and contemplative life at the same time. She can read, do works of charity and conduct business. However, those in this state of union are not their own masters. They know that the important part of their soul is elsewhere. It is like speaking to one person, while another is speaking to us. The soul cannot be completely absorbed in either conversation.

The soul clearly apprehends her state and receives great satisfaction. The Prayer of Union also disposes the soul for the state of quiet, providing moments of solitude when the soul is free from business. It works this way. After a person has eaten and is well satisfied, they do not seek ordinary food. However, if they see a special dessert, they will taste it. So it is in this prayer. The soul has no desire for worldly pleasure. She has greater joys within herself and seeks only to satisfy her desires in God.

Another Prayer of Union

Another kind of union exists which is closer to complete union than the union I have just described. (However not as close as that described in the third water). A soul which experiences these states is glad to read a written description ahead of time. There are three types of souls. Some are able to receive this gift. Others can also understand it, and others can even describe it. Certainly, the soul only needs to receive the favor so she can walk without fear and to crush the world's temptations. However, the soul benefits much from understanding the gift. Praise God that some can even describe these favors so that many can profit.

A Frequent Prayer of Union

I want to describe a kind of union which frequently comes about in the following way. (This is especially true of myself.) This is how I receive it. While constraining the will God also constrains the understanding, so that it does not reason but just enjoys God. Sometimes, a soul can see so much, that she does not know where to look next. By seeing one thing, the soul loses sight of another thing and can give no description of anything at all. Also, the memory and the imagination remain free and cause turmoil upsetting everything. I get weary and beg the Lord to set me free from these faculties. "My God, when shall I be taken up with praising you, instead of being helpless and torn apart?" This shows me the harm done by sin which has bound us and does not permit us to be occupied all the time with God.

Turmoil Caused By the Faculties

Like today, my soul became upset because it wanted to be totally where its superior part was. Yet, it knows this is impossible because the memory and imagination make a great turmoil and leave the soul helpless. The other faculties can do nothing because they have no strength and cannot concentrate. The understanding gives the soul no help by what it presents to the imagination. Like those restless moths at night, the understanding flies from one thought to another. This is a good comparison. Although I am tortured by these inner actions, God has not yet revealed a remedy to me. The faculties that are free cause us trouble. The faculties that are tied to God give us rest. This shows our wretchedness and God's powers.

The Remedy

After many years of fatigue, I finally discovered a remedy. The soul must take no more notice of the will as it would of a madman. Leave the will do its work. Only God can set the will free because the will is a slave. After Jacob bore patiently with Leah, the Lord allowed him to enjoy Rachel.

The will is a slave because it cannot control the other faculties. In fact, they compel the will to come to them. Seeing the will's restlessness, God sometimes has pity. He allows the will to be consumed in his divine candle. This candle has already reduced the other faculties to ashes and has made them almost supernatural from His blessings.

In all these types of prayer which come from the spring, the soul's glory and repose are so great that even the body is blessed and the virtues are highly developed. May the Lord who granted you these favors, also help you to understand them.

18. The Fourth Degree of Prayer *(Reviewing the First Three Stages)*

In the third stage of prayer, the soul realizes that she is not completely dead, and is still in the world. Although the soul must labor in every stage, in the third stage, the soul would never abandon prayer because of her bliss. To describe this water in the fourth stage is even more difficult.

The Fourth Stage

In this fourth stage, the soul has no feeling and rejoices without understanding the reasons. She realizes that her joy lies in some Good Thing, (which comprises all good things at once). However, she cannot comprehend what this Good Thing is.

All her senses share in this rejoicing. None is free to wander, either interiorly or exteriorly. In previous stages, they could indicate their great joy. Now, the soul's rejoicing is beyond comparison and cannot be expressed. The body and the soul have no power left to communicate this joy because this would hinder and disturb the soul's rest. I assert the following: If there is a true union and all the faculties are united to God, the soul cannot communicate its feelings. If it can, then the prayer is not full union.

Trying to Explain the Union

I cannot explain the nature of this union or how it comes about because I do not know the difference between "mind", "soul" and "spirit." They all seem the same to me. Sometimes the soul leaps up from itself, like a burning fire which leaps up and increases in force as it becomes totally aflame. Although the flame rises above the fire, it is not different from the fire. The flame in the fire and outside the fire is the same. So, the soul seems to leave itself but remains itself.

The Soul's Feeling

I want to explain the soul's feelings when she is in this Divine union. Union happens when two different things become one. How blessed are you, Lord, that even in our exile, you communicate with souls. I am amazed that I am able to understand these truths. Do you grant these favors to great sinners? I am overwhelmed and I cannot go on. These favors are so great that I can only utter some foolish thanksgivings.

Her Cry

When I have just received these favors, (or when God is beginning to bestow them), I am powerless and I cry out, "God, consider what you are doing and do not forget so quickly my evil deeds. Limit these favors. Do not pour your precious liquor into this broken vessel, for so many times I have seen it be lost. Do not put the treasure where there is still present a desire for this world's comforts. Otherwise, it will be wasted.

"O Lord, how can you trust the keys of the castle to such a cowardly defender as myself, who allow the enemy to enter at the first onslaught? Let not your love imperil these jewels. People will despise them when they see that you grant them to such a worthless creature. Even though I strive not to lose them, I cannot bring profit for others. In short, I am a woman and a wicked one.

“When talents are placed in such vile earth as myself, they are buried and do not profit others. If you would just give these favors to someone who will gain greater profit, I would gladly forfeit this greatest blessing on earth.” I have often said this and later I became conscious of my lack of humility. If He did not grant me these great favors, the Lord knows that I would have no power to gain my salvation.

Difference Between the Union and the Election

I want to speak of the graces that remain in the soul and also what the soul can do by itself to reach this sublime state. This elevation of spirit (or divine union) usually comes with heavenly love. However, the union itself is different from the elevation (which happens during the union.) The Lord seems to work differently in each. In the flight of the spirit, the soul’s detachment from creatures is greater. This is a special grace.

A small fire is as much fire as a large one, but there is great difference between the two. In a small fire, a small piece of iron becomes red hot only after a long time. In a large fire, even a large piece of iron becomes red hot quickly. So these two favors are different. Whoever has attained to rapture understands this well. An inexperienced soul will see this as ridiculous. Maybe even my trying to describe this is ridiculous. Most important, I want souls to covet this divine blessing.

Trying to Explain the Fourth Degree of Prayer

Because speaking of this fourth water is very difficult, I will write only what I have abundantly experienced. First, I put the writing aside and went to Communion. Blessed be the Lord! He gave me words and showed me how to use them. His Majesty explains what I cannot express. All the good teaching comes from Him and all the bad comes from myself.

This fourth water is like rain coming from heaven which saturates the whole garden. If the Lord always sent this rain, the soul could always rest. If there were no winter the flowers and fruits would never die and we would be delighted. However, this is impossible during life. So, when one water fails, we must think about getting another.

Rewarding the Soul

This heavenly rain comes when the soul least expects it. At first, it comes only after a long mental prayer. However, as one degree of prayer succeeds another, the Lord sees that the little bird has been flying for a long time, always seeking to serve the Lord with all her strength. So, in this fourth stage, the Lord gives the soul her reward. What a great reward! One moment makes up for all the trials.

While seeking God in this way, the soul realizes that she is fainting almost completely away, in a swoon of sweet delight. She gradually ceases to breathe. The bodily strength fails. She cannot move her hands without pain. The eyes close involuntarily. If the person tries to read, they cannot see a single letter. If she sees the letters, her understanding does not function. She can hear but cannot understand. She apprehends nothing by the senses, because these hinder the soul’s joy. The mind cannot form a single word, nor the lips pronounce them. All outward strength vanishes while the soul’s inner strength increases. The soul clearly recognizes this outer joy.

No Harm

No matter how long it lasts, this prayer does no harm. I have never felt any ill effects, even when I was sick. Usually, I am much better after receiving the favor. How could such a blessing do any harm? The outward effects show that a great gift has been given. The experience is such a delight that my strength grows greater.

Cannot Detect

In the beginning, this prayer is so short that the soul cannot detect it. Yet, the exceeding abundance of favors shows that the sun's great brightness has melted the soul. The length of time when the faculties are suspended is short. (A half hour would be a long time.) Really, the soul cannot judge time because it is not conscious. Soon, one of the faculties becomes active again. Even though the intellect and memory distract the will, it stays in contact with God. If the will just stays calm, these two faculties (understanding and memory) will again become inactive. They will to come back to life after another short period. With all this happening, the prayer can last for some hours. Once the understanding and memory are inebriated by this taste of Divine wine, they are ready to lose themselves to gain more. They keep company with the will and all three rejoice together. This state, (in which they are completely lost) is of brief duration. Like someone who is inebriated, the understanding and memory remain in disorder and do not recover fully for some hours (because God continues to gather all three faculties to Himself).

Examining the Intimate Part

Let us examine what happens in the soul's most intimate part. Only those who know this prayer can speak of it. (I have just received Communion and have been experiencing this very prayer while writing). The Lord told me what the soul does during these hours. He said, "She dies entirely to herself so that she may fix herself more and more upon Me. She no longer lives, but I live. She cannot comprehend. Hers is an understanding which does not understand". This expresses it clearly. In this prayer, everything is obscure. The soul abides so closely to God that she has to believe the favor is true. The faculties are not active and the soul cannot remember her meditation.

The memory (that importunate little butterfly) can no longer fly. The will, totally concerned with loving, doesn't understand how she loves. The understanding does not know how it is understanding. Even I cannot understand this.

Present In All Things

I was ignorant of one thing. I did not know that God was in all things. I was conscious of His presence, and I believed that He was present in all things, but I thought that this was impossible. At last, a learned Dominican helped me. He said that God is present and he described how God communicates Himself to me. This heavenly water leaves behind great benefits. I will now explain.

19 -The Effects of This Prayer

After experiencing this union, the soul feels a great tenderness and she would gladly be consumed in joy. She finds herself bathed in tears, (not even knowing when or how she shed them). The tears assuage the vehemence of the divine fire and make it burn even more brightly. This sounds like nonsense but it happens. After finishing the prayer, I am completely beside myself. Did I have a dream or did this happiness really come to me? It could not have been a dream. I was bathed in tears which came with a vehemence, as if from a heavenly cloud.

The Greater Benefits

The soul is so filled with courage that she makes heroic promises and resolutions. She becomes filled with strength, abhors the world and realizes its worthlessness. The benefits are far greater than from any previous stage of prayer. She gains greater humility because she could never gain such a favor from her own efforts. She also feels extremely unworthy. The sunlight shows up every cobweb. After this, the soul could never be guilty of vainglory.

She sees with her own eyes that she can do nothing. She hardly even consented to the favor. God just closed the doors of her senses against her will. Being alone with the Lord, the soul could only love Him and see God's mercy because her past life is totally revealed.

God prepares the meal and the understanding need not search for food. The soul realizes she deserved to go to hell. Yet, for her punishment, she tastes glory. She becomes consumed with God's praises (as I am now experiencing). "O Lord, from my slime You have drawn water pure enough for Your table! "

Sharing the Benefits

These benefits remain for some time. The soul can even share them with others and lack none for herself. She is now a guard of the heavenly treasures. Desiring to share these with others, the soul asks God that she be not alone in these riches. Without even being aware, the soul benefits her neighbors, who experience the powerful fragrance of her flowers and want a share in the desirable fruit of her virtues.

If the ground is well-dug by trials, criticisms, back-biting and illnesses (few obtain this state without these), and is broken up by detachment from self-interest, the water will sink deeply and the ground will never be dry. However, if the earth is full of thorns (as I was at first), and the soul is not yet free from the occasions of sin and not grateful for God's favors, the soul will become dry again.

Becoming Careless

If the soul becomes careless, the Lord will not send the rain again and the garden will be ruined. I experienced this several times and was amazed. I would not believe this if I did not experience it. I write to console weak souls (like myself). Never despair of God's greatness. If a soul should fall, (even after reaching this high state), they must not be discouraged and think that they are lost. Tears achieve everything. One kind of water attracts another.

Not Giving Up Prayer

I write this under obedience. I have led a wretched life and still the Lord has granted me these favors. I wish I were a person of great authority so people would believe me. I repeat. No one who has begun to pray should be discouraged saying "If I am going to fall again, I might as well not pray." If the soul does not give up, prayer will bring her to a haven of light.

However, the devil still plagued me. Because I prayed even while sinning, I thought I lacked humility. I did give up prayer for a year, (possibly just six months). I was plunging into hell. No need for a devil to send me there. How blind I was! How well did the devil succeed! The deceiver knows that he will not gain any soul who perseveres in prayer. Even when the soul falls into sin, she can still make great strides in God's service. The devil is very concerned about this.

Raised Up Again

O Lord, what a sight to see You raise up again a soul which has fallen after reaching this fourth degree of prayer. That soul will become conscious of her own sins and of Your wonders. Consumed with shame, she dares not raise her eyes except to acknowledge all that she owes to You. She asks the Queen of Heaven to help and invokes those saints who also fell. She knows that all is a gift, even the ground she walks on.

She seeks out the sacraments. Seeing the powers You have placed there, she praises You for leaving such medicines and ointments for our wounds. These do not just heal superficially. They eradicate our wounds. O Lord, you meet our treason with Your mercy and favors! Why does my heart not break when I write this? By my tears (which I am now shedding,) I seem to make payment for my attempts to blot out Your favors. O Lord, give my tears some efficacy. Cleanse me so that others do not judge me as I often judged others.

I always wondered why you overlooked holy people. They always served You and were true religious (not like myself, who am a religious only in name). Why did you not show them the same favors? Then I realized. You are holding their reward for heaven. My weakness demanded that you give this to me now. They are strong and can serve without these favors. You treat them as brave souls.

Opening the Treasures

You know that I would pray for those who spoke against me (They had such good reasons). You led me away from everything that could displease you, and then, You opened Your treasures. You were waiting until I was ready to receive. You gave them to me and wanted others to know about my gift.

Those who did not know my wickedness began to think highly of me. Others began the evil-speaking and persecution (with great justification). I conceived no evil toward them and told You that they were justified. They said I wanted to be a saint and was inventing newfangled practices. Yet, I wasn't even keeping the Rule nor gaining the holiness that other nuns had. (Indeed I only gain a holiness which the Lord brings about). On the contrary, I was about to abandon the good and take up evil. I had a great ability to do wrong. You even permitted lay people to reveal things about me that were true.

Hearing Her First Locution

After being tempted for some time, I read "You are just, O Lord, and so are your judgments". (Ps 119: 137). After that, the devil could not shake my faith. I never had a doubt that you were granting me favors. Yet I wondered how there could be so many faithful nuns and You would give these favors to me. You said to me, "Serve Me and do not meddle with this". Since this was the first time I heard you speak, I was very afraid.

I will describe this method of hearing later, so I will not digress here. I digress so much, because I lose the thread of my thoughts when I consider how God has been patient and brought me to this state. May my foolishness always be of this kind! May I never be able to resist His Majesty. May He consume me at this very moment just as I am.

Being Deluded

His forgiving me so many times shows His mercy. He forgave Peter once, but he forgave me many times. No wonder the devil wants me not to aspire to close friendship with God. How blind I was! Where else, but in You, could I find the help I needed? What foolishness to flee from the light when I was stumbling in the darkness! What proud humility to forsake the pillar whose support I so much needed! As I write, I make the sign of the Cross. Never did I go through such a great peril as when the devil told me to forsake prayer. The devil would say "After you receive such favors, you are still so wicked. How can you approach God? You should just recite the prayers that other nuns do.

Even these you don't say properly, why do more?" I was right to think about these things but I was wrong to put them into practice. Praise God Who aided me!

Twenty One Years

This is how the devil tempted Judas and he would have gradually brought me to the same fate. To all who practice prayer I say this. The worst life I ever lived was when I abandoned prayer. What a fine remedy and humility the devil provided! I moved further away from any peace. I was conscious of God's favors and felt a loathing for earth's pleasures. Only hope sustained me. During these twenty-one years, I never swerved from my resolution to return to prayer. However, I waited to be free from sin. How this hope led me astray!

Until Judgment Day

The devil would have encouraged that hope until Judgment Day. Then he would have taken me to hell. However, I decided to pray and read. Even though I read and prayed and saw how disastrous was this road, and even though I asked the Lord (often with tears), I was so wicked that these devotions did not help me. So I even abandoned prayer and gave myself to pastimes which led me into occasions of sin. This only helped me to fall more. What else could I expect?

Fortunately, a learned Dominican awakened me from this sleep. He made me receive Holy Communion every two weeks and do less wrong but I began to return to my senses. I continued to offend God. I stayed on this same road, falling, rising, and making little progress. However, if someone keeps walking and always advances, he will reach the goal, (just later than usual). Giving up prayer is to lose the way entirely. May God deliver us.

Not Trusting in Self

Please note, even if a soul receives great favors, she must not trust in herself nor expose herself to the occasions of sin. Even though a favor undoubtedly comes from God, the devil can practice deception. He can use the favor against those souls who are not detached or not strong in virtue.

Although their resolutions are sincere, these souls are not sufficiently strengthened against trials. God has taught me this doctrine. Even souls in this fourth stage should not go forth into battle. They still need arms to defend themselves against the devil. The power to trample upon the devils comes in a future state (which I describe later.)

Devil's Deception

The devil wins his prey by deception. The soul is near to God, sees the great difference between Heaven and earth, and experiences the Lord's love. She believes she is secure and will not fall away. She has a clear vision of her reward and does not believe she could ever forsake the delightful gifts of heaven for the soiled pleasures of earth.

Because of her self-confidence, the devil can take away her misgivings and the soul runs into many dangers. In her zeal, she gives away her fruit, thinking she now has nothing to fear. This does not come from pride because the soul understands that she is nothing. It comes from a confidence in God which knows no discretion. The soul is an unfledged bird, able to come out of the nest (God is drawing it) but unable to fly. Her virtues are not strong. Having no experiences to warn her of dangers, the soul is unaware of harm coming from self-confidence. This ruined me.

The Soul's Need

The soul needs both a director and the companionship of spiritual people. Unless she completely abandons God, He will always help her and not let her be lost. If the soul falls, she must not abandon prayer. The devil tricked me into doing this by false humility. I repeat often. Trust God. His goodness is greater than our evil. When we return to Him, He remembers not our ingratitude or misuse of His favors. We are members of His household. He chastises us for our sins so he can forgive them more readily. Remember what He did for me. I wearied of offending Him before He wearied of forgiving me. Her mercies are never exhausted, so do not grow weary of receiving them.

20. – The Difference Between Union and Rapture *(Describes the nature and blessings of Rapture and its effects)*

Various Names

With God's help, I would like to describe the difference between Union and Rapture (also called, Elevation, Flight of the Spirit or Transport). These names refer to the same experience which is also called ecstasy.

Being Carried Away

The soul realizes she is being carried away, but does not know where. Although rapture brings delight, our weak nature is afraid at first. The soul must be more courageous even than before. No matter what happens, the soul must be resigned to be in God's hands and go willingly wherever she is carried.

Often, I would be glad to resist and used all my strength to do so, especially when I was in public (or even in private when I feared deception). Occasionally, I have resisted but with great exhaustion. Later, I felt like I had been fighting a giant. At other times, resistance is impossible. My soul, and even my head, has been borne away and I could not prevent it. My whole body has been affected. Sometimes, I have been raised off the ground, (levitation).

Being Lifted Up

This levitation happened once when I was on my knees in choir, getting ready to receive Communion. This experience was extraordinary and I ordered the nuns (I was Prioress at the time) not to speak about this. On other occasions, when I knew the Lord would rapture me (once at the sermon on our patronal feast when honorable ladies were present), I have lain on the ground and had the sisters hold me down.

Even with these precautions, the raptures were noticed. I asked the Lord not to give me favors with external signs. I was exhausted with worry. After all, He could grant these without others knowing. He was pleased with my prayer and I never again received such favors (but this was just a short time ago).

When I tried to resist these raptures, I found force beneath my feet more powerful than anything I have experienced. It came with greater vehemence than any other spiritual experience. I felt like I was being ground to powder. In this terrible struggle, going against the Lord's will avails little. No power is greater than His. At other times, His Majesty shows me ahead of time that He wants to grant this favor. If I resist from humility, the effects come as if I gave my consent.

The Effects of Raptures

In these raptures, He shows His power. I cannot resist His will (in body or soul) because I am not my own master. He is stronger and I can do absolutely nothing. This imprints a great humility.

At first, I had a great fear at seeing my body lifted from the ground. If the spirit drew my body very gently I did not resist. In levitation, I always have sufficient consciousness to realize I am being lifted up. The Majesty of God is manifested. My hair stands on end and I greatly fear offending Him. He loves this loathsome woman so much that He draws not only her soul but also her body, (mortal and sinful as it is).

A New Detachment

This favor leaves a strange detachment (which is different from that produced by only spiritual type favors). The body shares in the detachment. Both the body and soul experience an estrangement from earthly things. This produces a difficult distress which I can neither bring about nor remove. I will try to describe this distress.

Please note that these are the most recent experiences of all my visions and revelations. Also, the previous consolations and favors have not ceased. I want to describe this distress which now happens more frequently and more habitually, being sometimes more severe and other times less so.

Describing the New Distress

I will speak of the maximum severity of this distress. Later, I shall describe the violent impulses which accompany the raptures. However, these impulses and this distress are not connected anymore than a physical experience is connected with a spiritual one. I am not exaggerating. Although this distress is experienced primarily by the soul, the body also feels it. Both share in this distress which causes an extreme sense of abandonment. I have no part in producing this abandonment. A desire arises unexpectedly (in a way I cannot explain). In a single moment this desire pierces the soul's depths, and wearies her. The soul soars upward, far above herself and all created things.

Complete Abandonment

God causes the soul to be completely bereft. The soul can find nothing on earth to keep her company. She would rather die in solitude. Although others speak and the soul tries to speak, she cannot escape this solitude. God seems far away. Then, suddenly, He reveals Himself in unimaginable ways. This cannot be described and is believed only by the experienced soul. This communication does not comfort the soul. Rather, it shows her that she is weary because she is so far from God, Who is the Good containing all good.

By this communication, desire grows. The soul experiences an extreme loneliness, a subtle and piercing distress. The soul is in the desert and says "I have watched and become a sparrow all alone on the housetop". (Ps.102:7) This verse is fulfilled in me, and gives me comfort that the prophet also had the same experience.

Neither Heaven Nor Earth

The soul seems to be on the roof of her own house, far above even the highest created good.

The soul also goes about in great need. I remembered the words "Where is your God"? (Ps 42:3) I also remembered Paul's words about being crucified to the world. This is true. The soul has no heavenly comfort (and she is not in heaven) and she desires no earthly comfort (and she is not on earth either).

She suffers greatly, crucified between Heaven and earth. Help comes from neither side. Heaven's help is a knowledge that God is far above all we can desire. This thought brings an even greater

torment. Her desires grow so much that the distress sometimes robs her of consciousness. This lasts just a short time.

At Death's Threshold

Although the suffering brings incomparable happiness, the soul seems at the threshold of death, a severe but delectable martyrdom. The soul will accept nothing earthly. What she loved most, she flings away immediately. The soul wants only God. Her love does not center on any one attribute.

She desires the whole of God. She has no knowledge of what she desires, because the imagination forms no picture. The faculties are inactive. They are suspended in this distress just as they are suspended in the joy of union or rapture.

Death-Like Yearnings

Because my soul is now plunged continually in this state, I wish I could give my director a clear explanation so he could tell me what this is. When not occupied, I am always plunged into these death-like yearnings. When they begin, I grow afraid. However, once into the experience, I would like to spend my whole life there, even though I can hardly bear the excessive pain. The sisters tell me that my pulse almost ceases, my bones are all disjointed, my hands are stiff and I cannot clasp them together. For a whole day, I have pain in the wrists and the entire body, as if my bones were wrenched apart.

A Yearning for God

I often think that if things continue this way, the Lord must intend to end my life. The stress is certainly great enough to kill me. When I am in this state, I yearn only to die. I do not think of purgatory or of my great sins that merited hell. I so yearn to see God that I forget everything. My solitary state is better than the companionship of the whole world. The greatest comfort is to speak with someone who has suffered the same torment, for no one else would believe me.

The Soul's Torment

The soul is also in torment because she no longer desires solitude as she did before. She only wants companions to whom she can complain. She is like a person who is being strangled and who is trying to breathe.

I believe that this desire for human companionship comes from human weakness. This distress certainly imperils our mortal life (it is as grave as any human illness). The person's desire to live is a voice crying out in the desert. By complaining and distracting herself, the soul seeks to live, even though her spirit prefers to die.

No Joy In Solitude

What rest can I have in this life? I used to enjoy solitude when the Lord consoled me. Now solitude is an habitual torment. Yet, this experience is so delectable and of such value that the soul believes she is safe and desires this more than any other favor. This is the way of the cross because the body receives only distress. Even though suffering, the soul rejoices in the happiness which the suffering brings.

I don't know how this happens, but I would not exchange this favor (which is certainly supernatural and not acquired by me), for any of the others which I will describe. I don't say for all

other favors but certainly for any one favor. Remember that this state (where the Lord now has me) came after all the other favors described in this book.

Fear of This New Favor

As with any new favor, I was afraid. The Lord told me to value this favor more than any of the others because this distress purified the soul as gold in a furnace. It cleanses the soul from the impurities which purgatory washes away. I realized this but His words made me more certain. Also, my confessor assured me that all was well. It was the greatness of the blessing which caused my fear.

Characteristics of Raptures

I have wandered because I began speaking of raptures, but what I have described is greater than rapture, and leaves greater effects. Let us return to the usual characteristics of raptures. After a rapture, my body seemed light, as if weightless. Sometimes, I could hardly tell when my feet touched the ground. During the rapture, the body is as dead, incapable of acting.

After the rapture, the person remains still (as in a sitting position). I seldom lost consciousness (and then only for a short time). Although incapable of action, I could hear and understand but only dimly. At the highest point of the rapture (when the faculties are lost by their close union with God), I could not hear and understand. This complete transformation in God lasts just a short time. During this, I could not perceive what was taking place. God does not want us to understand because we have no capacity to do so.

An Engulfing

How come the rapture lasts for so many hours? With me, the gift is felt intermittently. The Lord engulfs my soul and keeps it for a short time. After that, He retains only the will. The other two faculties are never motionless, although the Sun of Justice can make them stay still.

This engulfing lasts just a short time. However, the uplifting of the spirit has been violent and the will remains engulfed. The other two faculties begin to move but the will stays in control and prevents the other senses from acting. This is God's will. The eyes remain closed. When they open, the person pays no attention to what they see.

The person can do little, even when the faculties become active. Even if the body cannot move for hours and the understanding and memory wander, the person must not be discouraged. Usually they are absorbed in praise or in trying to realize what happened. Even so, they are not wide awake. They are like a person not yet fully awakened from a long dream.

Why Writing at Length

I am writing at length because I know there are nuns in this convent who are right now experiencing these favors. If their directors have no experience and are not learned, they may think that these nuns, when enraptured, ought to be as if dead.

My teaching is clear. However hard I try, my body cannot move for considerable periods. The soul takes away all its strength. After a rapture, an ill person with severe pain, finds themselves healed and stronger than ever. Sometimes, the Lord wants the body (because it is obedient) to share in the soul's gift. After recovering consciousness, the person (if the rapture has been deep), may remain absorbed for two or three days. The person seems to be in a state of stupor and no longer themselves.

Returning to Life

Now comes the distress of returning to this life. The soul can fly because she has new wings and has lost her unformed feathers. In Christ's name, the standard is lifted high, as if the captain has mounted the fortress' highest tower and places the standard there in God's name. Looking down, the captain feels secure. He even desires perils, because he is assured of victory. The soul gives no importance to earthly matters. These are seen as worthless.

Because raised on high, the soul has no desire to possess free will. She gives the keys to her will to the Lord. She was the gardener but now she is the captain of the fortress and doesn't want to be her own master. She doesn't even seek an apple from the orchard. Let His Majesty distribute the fruit. She seeks only God's will and God's glory.

Permanent Effects of Raptures

If the raptures are genuine, these advantages will remain. If these effects are not present, I doubt if the raptures are from God. They are probably the frenzies described by St. Vincent Ferrer.

I see in my own experience that the soul, while enraptured, is mistress of everything. In one hour, she gains such freedom that she doesn't recognize herself and does not know who gave this blessing. She does see the great benefits of the raptures.

Unfortunately, nobody believes the poor soul. She is wicked, yet aspires to heroic deeds. She is no longer content with small deeds. Others think that this is a temptation, not knowing that the power comes from the Lord who now holds the keys to her will.

The soul need not speak or act. God takes care of everything. How clear is the verse, "If only I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and find rest" (Ps.55:6). This refers to the flight of the spirit (a gentle, joyful and silent flight) whereby the soul flies above all created things including herself.

Trying to Teach Others

How powerful is a soul which can see everything and not be ensnared. How ashamed of the times when she was attached to everything! Amazed at her blindness! She pities those who are practicing prayer but are still blind. Sometimes she cries aloud to them and receives a thousand persecutions. Others see the soul as lacking in humility and trying to teach those from whom she should learn (especially if the soul is a woman). They know nothing of the force impelling the soul. She cannot help herself. She sees clearly that life on earth is a prison and tries to free others from this prison.

She is upset by the moments when she paid heed to honors. She values genuine honor and despises what passes away. Whatever displeases God is worse than nothing. She laughs at the time she coveted money (I never had to confess this sin). The blessings which I have, I cannot gain with money, only by abandoning everything.

If money buys nothing truly lasting, why do we desire it? Money brings ease and very often it buys hell and endless affliction. If everyone considered money as useless dross, things would go well. If nobody sought money, we would all be friends. This would remedy everything.

Seeing Her Own Sins

The soul sees the world's blindness concerning pleasures. What disquiet, discontent and useless labor in seeking pleasures! The soul sees all her own great faults. God's sunlight is so bright, that she sees every speck of dust. The sun has come and the soul sees herself as unclean.

In the state of ecstasy, the soul thought she was careful in not offending God. At this new stage, the Sun of Justice opens the soul's eyes. The soul sees so many faults that she wants to close her eyes again. She cannot yet look fully at this Sun. While keeping her eyes open, she see her uncleanness and recalls the words, "Who shall be just in Your presence?" (Ps.143:2).

While looking at this Sun, she seems blinded by earthly clay. The little dove is dazzled by all the wonders she sees. She acquires a humility which will never permit her to say anything good about herself (or allow others to do so). The Lord, not the soul, distributes the fruit. All is directed toward God. Nothing remains in the soul's hands. When she shuts her eyes to earth and opens them to the truth, she sees by direct vision.

21 - The Four Degree of Prayer (Completed)

A True Friendship

In this state, the soul has already surrendered herself into the hands of Him who cannot deceive. This is different from a world filled with deceits. Sometimes, people profess their friendship and later you discover that this is not true. The soul, however, is free. She does not even fear losing her life for God. How great a state this would be for kings who must lead the people. Because the heavenly kingdom has no end, I would give up a thousand kingdoms to save one soul. A single taste of heaven's water gives the soul a loathing for everything earthly. What will it be like when the soul is completely engulfed?

O Lord, you call me to proclaim this to all. Yet, people will not believe me. If only I could make people understand a single truth. I have a great impulse to say this to people in authority. Really, I can do no more. I would rejoice if you took away my favors and gave them to kings. If they had them, they would act much differently they than do. Make kings realize how great are their obligations, because You have singled them out and they must to imitate You.

I am being very bold. If I thought that kings would believe me I would say it better in their presence. I would risk my life because the gain would be so great. When I see the great delusions the world is following, my life becomes unbearable.

Power to Act

While the soul is in this state, His Majesty gives her the power to fulfill these holy desires. The soul flings herself into everything set before her. She sees that nothing is of value except to please God. Oh God, may you give me a few tasks so I can repay a few pennies of what I owe! May your handmaiden serve you in some way. Other women have done heroic deeds. I seem to be able only to talk and not to act. My desire to serve you seems to end with only words. Even here, I may fail altogether.

O Jesus, prepare my soul and then give me something to do, because I have received much and have nothing to pay in return. Do not permit me to come to judgment with empty hands. A soul's reward is in accordance with her deeds. I give you my life. Use me as you will. I am capable of little. However, I have now mounted this watch-tower and I can do all things if you do not withdraw from me. Otherwise I shall go to hell.

Returning to Daily Life

With what difficulty does the soul in this state return to her ill-organized life. She has to spend time sleeping, eating, and caring for bodily needs. Everything wearies the soul. She is captive and feels her imprisonment most keenly. The soul joins with St. Paul in seeking God's deliverance "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom.7:24)

With vehemence, the soul begs for freedom. She desires to leave the body because no one else is delivering her. She wanders about as in a strange land and finds no one to join her prayer because most want to live on this earth. If we were detached, our distress from living on earth would free us from fear of death.

If I, a woman with little charity and few works, am sad because I have this understanding, what must the saints have felt? What about Paul and Magdalene in whom this fire burnt so vehemently? They had one continuous martyrdom.

Works Not Words

My only relief is to find others who share the same desires and also do "works". I say "works" because some people proclaim they are detached since they have walked many years in the way of perfection. Yet, I can distinguish (even from a distance) those whose words are confirmed by works. How little good is done by the first, and how much good by the second. Anyone with experience can discern.

Effects of Rapture

These effects of raptures are both greater and less. By "less" I mean that these effects do not immediately bring forth good works. It takes time for perfection to grow and the cobwebs to be swept away. As love and humility grow, the flowers' fragrance benefits the soul and others.

During these raptures, the Lord can work in such a way that little remains for the soul to do to acquire perfection. No one without experience can ever believe what God bestows. Certainly, I do not mean that those who labor for years according to spiritual principles will not attain detachment and perfection. However, this will not happen as quickly. Through raptures, the Lord draws the soul away from earth, without any cooperation. He gives the soul dominion over all earthly things, even though the soul has no more merit than I did.

According to God's Plan

His Majesty does this because He wants to. He prepares the unprepared soul to receive. He always comforts those who prepare and who strive after detachment. However, He doesn't bestow His favors just because the soul deserves them. Sometimes, He manifests His greatness to the worst of souls, and prepares her.

After the favor, she can never return to sin. Her mind is so set upon eternal truth that all else is child's play. She laughs as she sees prayerful men worried about their honor, as if they need this to show their authority. If they just subordinated their authority to God's love, they would do more good in one day than they do now in ten years.

The Soul's Watchfulness

The soul's life is filled with crosses, but also with great growth. Her neighbors think she has reached the summit but they soon see her even higher. God is always giving her new favors. God is

the soul of that soul and has her in His keeping. He sheds His light and continually watches so that she never offends Him.

When God gave me this favor, He also gave me strength to escape my troubles. Occasions of sin and distrustful people had no effect on me. Previously, they harmed me. Now they helped me. Everything became a means to love God and to realize what I owed Him.

The Lord's Work

I knew this was not due to myself. I did not have enough time to accomplish it. From the beginning of these raptures until now, my strength has increased and God's hand has held me so I do not turn back.

By myself, I hardly do anything. All is the work of the Lord. Souls who have received these favors, if they realize that all is due to the Lord, can safely mix with any kind of company. Even distracting and vicious company will have no effect but will cause greater profit. The Lord chooses these souls and gradually communicates His secrets so they can help others.

True revelations, favors and visions occur in this state of ecstasy. By these, the soul despises earthly things and sees clearly the reward prepared by the Lord. May the Lord's immense bounty to me, a sinner, influence those who read this to give up everything for God's sake. If His Majesty rewards us so much in this life, what will He do in the life to come?

22 – The Humanity of Christ

Teachings By Some Authors

Some books say that the soul needs the Lord's help to reach this supernatural state. However, after many years in the Purgative and Illuminative way, the soul can get some way towards it by raising her spirit above created things.

These books say we should put aside all mental images and contemplate the Divinity. They say that even Christ's humanity will hinder souls from perfect contemplation. They quote Jesus' words about the Spirit in John's gospel. (16:7-14).

Not Withdrawing from Christ's Humanity

These writers see perfection as entirely spiritual and look down on the body, as if Jesus' humanity impedes spiritual progress. They tell contemplatives to see themselves circumscribed in God Who is everywhere. In this way, they can be absorbed in Him. To pray this way might be alright sometimes. However, it is wrong to withdraw entirely from Christ and to see His sacred humanity on the same level as other created things. May God help me to explain this.

I will explain the danger I found by following these books. If I had acted on their teaching, I would never have reached my present state. Therefore, I believe the teaching is mistaken. I will relate what happened.

Teresa's Mistake

Having no director, I thought I was learning from these books. Fortunately, the Lord began to teach me by experience that what I had learned from these books was nothing. When I attained the Prayer of Quiet, I put aside everything corporal and maintained a state of recollection. Because I

experienced a delight, I saw the humanity of Jesus as a hindrance. O Jesus, how painful to recall my opinion. I was committing an act of high treason (although in ignorance).

I had always been devoted to Christ and this mistake happened recently (before the visions and raptures). I remained that way only for a short time and then returned to my rejoicing in the Lord. Especially at Communion, I had His image before my eyes, because it was not deeply impressed on my soul. How could I think that your humanity hindered my greatest good when all good comes from You? I was in ignorance. By frequently letting me see You, You cured me of this error. In this way, I could tell others. I'll describe this later.

No Progress or Freedom

I believe that setting aside Christ's humanity is the reason why many souls, (after experiencing the Prayer of Union) do not achieve greater progress. This is wrong for two reasons. First, my soul was in a bad way until the Lord enlightened me. My joys had come in little sips. When these were over, I did not experience the Lord's companionship.

In setting aside Christ's humanity, the soul seems to lack humility. Why should I not consider myself (a great sinner) abundantly rewarded to stand with John at the cross and see the sacred Humanity? How could I not be contented with this? Really, I lost out when I should have gained.

Passion, Resurrection, Ascension

We don't always need to think of the Passion. We can also think of the Resurrection. Here, we do not see His bleeding body (for we cannot always think only of His sufferings). In the Resurrection, we see His glory, especially as He ascends into heaven. In the Eucharist, He is our companion and never leaves us.

Yet, by this error, I thought that I could leave Him and His sacred humanity. How mistaken was this path! It was no path at all! When I see You near me, I can bear every trial with so good a Friend and Captain at my side.

The Sacred Humanity

Since that time, I have always seen clearly. We can please God and receive His favors only through the sacred Humanity of Jesus in whom the Father is well pleased. My experiences have taught me (and the Lord Himself has told me) that we must enter by this door. Only then, can He reveal His secrets. Even at the summit of contemplation, the soul must seek this road (the only safe one).

What more do we need? We have a friend at our side who will lead us through all earthly trials. Consider Paul who always had Jesus' name on his lips. After learning this truth, I looked at the lives of the saints. I saw St. Francis (with his stigmata) and St. Anthony (with the Divine Infant). St. Bernard and St. Catherine of Sienna. They all followed this same road.

Certainly proficient souls can practice withdrawal from the corporeal. However, we must not consider Christ's sacred Humanity as a corporeal object. I wish I knew how to explain this.

Presence Taken from Us

When God suspends all the faculties in these various modes of prayer, this presence of Christ's Humanity is taken from us. However, we do not desire this. We let this happen because, having sacrificed this attachment, we receive a greater enjoyment and are occupied in loving Him Whom the

understanding strives to know. The soul loves what she does not comprehend and rejoices in the fruits of having lost herself.

However, we should not deliberately try not to have the Lord's Humanity before our eyes. The soul is left in the air. While thinking herself to be full of God, she has nothing to lean on. While living as human beings, we must always have Christ's humanity before us. Otherwise, we lack humility and desire to rise high, even before the Lord raises the soul. We are dissatisfied being a Martha before becoming a Mary. When the Lord wants you to be a Mary, you will go about it carefully and will not fear from the very first day. This deficiency in humility seems harmless but it can do great harm to those who want to make progress.

Needing this Good Friend

The second reason for remaining attached to Christ's humanity is that we are not angels. We have bodies. We cannot be an angel while on earth. Our thoughts need something to rest upon. At times, the soul will be so full of God and will need no created thing to aid her prayer. However, this is not usual. In trials, busyness, and aridity we need this good Friend. We can see His moments of human suffering and He can become our Companion.

By doing this habitually, we find Him at our side. We must strive for the Cross and not for spiritual consolations. Let us stay with Christ in His sufferings. He will raise us up much better than our own efforts. Let Him decide when to withdraw and lead the soul out of herself.

Foundations of Prayer

God delights to see the soul take His Son as Mediator. Even when raised to the highest contemplation, the soul still says, "Depart from me, Lord. I am a sinful man" (Lk,5:8). This is how God has led my soul. Others can take another road but I have learned this. The foundation of all prayer is humility. The more the soul lowers herself, the higher God lifts her. Later, I will describe outstanding favors, but God never gave me these outstanding favors until after I was consumed by the shame of my own wickedness. After that, God revealed faults which I could never have imagined.

Spirit of Poverty

A soul who tries to further her own progress in this Prayer of Union, might gain some immediate benefit but will quickly fall back from lack of a foundation. She will never gain a spirit of poverty which seeks not her own comfort. Progress comes when we endure trials and are calm in aridities.

Some souls suffer distress because they always labor with their understanding and strive for feelings. They believe that their labors merit God's blessings. Certainly we must work at prayer but we shouldn't worry even if we cannot get a single thought. We are all unprofitable servants. What do we have the power to accomplish?

Taking the Lowly Office

We are like the donkeys at the waterwheel. When our eyes are closed, we draw more water than the gardener. Place yourself in God's hands and walk this road freely. If His Majesty raises us up to His private council, let us go. If He asks us to do some lowly office, we will accept the lowest place. God cares for us and knows what we are capable of.

Why try to govern yourself after surrendering to God? At this stage of prayer, this does great harm, because these blessings are beyond our power. A man with a bad voice will never get a good one by practicing. If God grants him a good voice he doesn't need to practice. Let us trust God's

greatness. The soul has the privilege of sitting at Christ's feet. Be content with that and imitate Magdalene. When the soul is ready, God will lead her into the desert.

Not By Our Own Efforts

Do not believe people who say that they are receiving consolations because of their own efforts. God doesn't need our puny efforts to reveal Himself. He transports our spirits like a giant picking up straw. What a strange belief! If God wills a toad to fly does He have to wait for the toad's efforts? Our spirits are weighed to earth by a thousand impediments and wanting to fly is of no help! Through our own fault, our spirits (which are made for flying), have lost their ability.

When we think of Christ, let us remember God's favors and His pledge of love in Christ. Even though we are beginners, let us awaken this love because when He implants this love in us, we get things done with little labor. May God, who knows how much we need it, grant us this love.

Not Perfect At Once

There is a question. When God grants these sublime favors which lead to perfect contemplation, why does the soul not become perfect at once? By rights it should. Any soul receiving these favors should seek nothing on earth. Rapture and the soul's habitual receiving of favors produce a growing sublimity. Why doesn't the Lord just completely sanctify the soul the moment He comes? Why does the Lord lead the soul into perfect virtues only later?

I will explain the reason. At the beginning stage of raptures the experience lasts just a twinkling of an eye and would not be noticed except for its lasting effects. In the latter stages there is a more bountiful measure. During this time, the soul grows in fortitude. Therefore, the reason why the Lord delays perfect sanctification is because the soul cannot prepare herself at once. The Lord must train the soul, and give her courage to trample everything under foot. He did this very quickly with Magdalene. He deals with each soul as they allow Him to work. We cannot realize that God rewards us a hundredfold, even on earth.

A Comparison

The following is a good comparison. The same food is given to both advanced souls and beginners. Some just taste it. Others get some sustenance. Others eat a great deal and derive much strength. Some can eat of this food of life so frequently, that they seek no other. The soul becomes so accustomed to its sweetness that she would rather die than have different food. Spiritual conversation with good people profits us more if we talk for many days rather than just for one. Although God chooses the person, whoever begins to receive these favors must detach themselves and cherish the gifts.

Faith in Future Gifts

His Majesty tries to prove those who truly love Him. He reveals Himself and shows what He will give us. He says, "See, this is just one drop of a vast ocean". He does everything for those whom He loves. He is a good Friend, loving all those who love Him. "Oh, God, I am lost for words to explain what you give to those who trust you and what is lost by those who do not give themselves to you. In Holy Communion You give Yourself completely and You expect the soul to do the same."

Dear confessor, please only discuss these things with truly spiritual persons. Someone who knows only one path has gone only halfway, and will not discover their meaning. God leads a few souls by exalted roads. Others think they can travel the same road. They make no progress and become like

dry sticks. Others reach a degree of quiet and think they can do everything. They lose out because they lack experience and discretion.

23. Resumes the Story of Her Life.

I have digressed only so the reader can understand what is to come. I will return to an account of my new life. Until this point, I had led my own life. Now I lead the life of God living in me. My new life has to be from God because it is impossible for me to have escaped such wicked deeds on my own. Praise God who delivered me!

Fears About the New Gifts of Prayer

After I abandoned the occasions of sin and gave myself to prayer, the Lord frequently granted me the Prayer of Quiet and even the Pray of Union (which lasted a long time). There had been stories of women subjected by the devil to serious illusions. Because I experienced such great sweetness, I grew afraid. However, I developed fortitude and had an inner assurance that my experiences were from God. When, distracted from prayer, I would again fear that it was the devil who had given these favors because he wanted to deprive me of mental prayer. I thought I was losing out. Really, I just did not understand.

Fears of Approaching a Jesuit Priest

God increased the light. I grew more fearful and did not want to offend Him. So, I sought out some Jesuit priests who had come to Avila (the Jesuits founded a college there). But I held back, feeling unworthy to discuss these matters and too weak to obey what they would tell me.

After experiencing much inner strife, I determined to talk to this priest concerning these prayer experiences. I had to see if I had gone astray. I was determined not to offend God but my lack of fortitude made me timid. My fears were a mistake. I was giving up what God had given to me. I couldn't put an end to these fears and I couldn't make a decision to seek advice. The devil knows that seeking spiritual advice is a great means of progress.

Another Mistake

I made another mistake. I decided to wait until I amended my life, because I was attached to my little habits and could not see them as bad. Really I needed the help of others.

The more I progressed in prayer, the more I feared. I decided that this prayer must either be very good or very bad, because the experiences were supernatural. I could neither resist them nor bring them about. All I could do was to avoid all venial sin. If these experiences came from God, I was the winner. If they came from the devil, at least I was trying to please God and the devil would be the loser. For a few days, I tried to live this way. However, my soul was not strong enough, for I was attached to some innocent things that spoiled my efforts.

Meeting A Holy Priest

I got to know a learned and holy priest, (Father Gaspar Daza who helped found St. Joseph). I got to know him through a saintly married man in Avila (Francisco de Salcedo). This was the beginning of my salvation. This man had practiced prayer for over 40 years. His wife also was saintly, chosen by God to help her saintly husband. Their relatives were married to mine. They arranged for me to talk to this priest.

When he came, I was in confusion at being in the presence of this holy man. I wanted him to be my confessor, but he would not hear my confession for he was much occupied. I told him my method of prayer and he treated me as a strong soul. This is what I should have been, due to these prayer gifts. He said that I should never offend God and was determined to attack these little habits of mine. I became distressed because he was trying to make me perfect immediately. I saw I would have to be more careful.

Making A Different Decision

I realized I could not improve by using his means (which were for more perfect souls). Although I enjoyed many divine favors, I was still a beginner in virtues and mortifications. If I had had no one else to consult, I would have given up all hope, because I was unable to do what he wanted. This amazes me. He had a gift to lead beginners but God did not intend for him to direct my soul. Meeting him was for my good, because I got to know other members of the Jesuits.

Talking With the Married Man

Instead, I talked with this holy married man. He agreed to come regularly, even though I am as wicked as I am! He encouraged me, saying that God would help me get rid of these problems, which he himself had experienced for years. To help me, this saint (for I think he is) described his own weaknesses. These would be grave faults for a religious, but for a married man they were not even imperfections.

I am going into detail, but this is important for beginners and I want to benefit many souls. My whole salvation was due to this gentleman. He knew how to treat me and he was patient, even when I was not amending my life. Gradually, he showed me how to conquer the devil. I loved him so much that nothing was more beneficial than to see him, though I could do this only on a few days. When a long time passed without his visit, I thought he would not come back (because I was so wicked).

When I told him of the favors I received from God and how serious were my imperfections, he told me that these two things were not consistent. Such favors were given only to those more advanced. He asked me to describe these experiences. I could not do this because God had not yet given me this understanding. He was not sure and feared that these gifts came from the evil one. When he said this, I wept greatly. I could not believe that this was the devil's work. However, because of my sins, I feared that I was blinded.

Finding An Exact Description

I looked through books and found an exact description of my experiences in "The Ascent of the Mount" (written by a Franciscan Lay-brother, Bernardino de Laredo). It described a union in which the soul could think of nothing. I marked the relevant passages so that this holy man and the priest could tell me what to do. If after twenty years of prayer I was being deluded, then I would give up prayer altogether (if they so advised). This would have been difficult, for I knew what I was without prayer. I was like a person who had fallen into a river, with danger on every side and in every direction. This might seem unimportant but these experiences show how spirituality is tested.

Need for Secrecy

Women suffer much when we are told that we are deluded by the devil. We need to be protected and should keep these experiences secret. Also, their advisers must keep secrecy. I speak from experience. Many to whom I have gone for advice have divulged secret things and greatly harmed me. Even if this was not in confession, they still should have kept silent. Even so, I have never hid

anything. Women need to be encouraged. The right moment will come when the Lord will help them (as He helped me).

Their Decisions

When I gave this holy man the book, he and the priest considered what would be best for me. I awaited their decision with great distress. He came and said that they believed this was from the devil and I should discuss this with a Jesuit at the college in Avila. I should make a general confession so the priest could understand my life. I should obey the priest because I was in great peril if I had no director.

I wept and went to chapel where I found a book (placed there by the Lord) which quoted St. Paul. "God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will provide a way out so you may be able to bear it" (1Cor.10:13). This greatly comforted me and I began to prepare a very detailed account for my general confession.

I was distressed at seeing so many bad points and so few good points. I also worried that the sisters would see me consulting such saintly Jesuits and I would have to abandon my pastimes. Therefore, I arranged for the sacristan and the portress to say nothing. This was useless. Another sister saw me and talked about it all over the convent. (Those approaching God must expect many obstacles set by the devil).

Conference With the Jesuit

I told everything to the priest. (Fr. Juan de Pradanos S.J.) He encouraged me and told me what was wrong. He said that I was led by the Spirit of God and I had to return to prayer. I needed to work on a good foundation and to understand mortification. (This was true. I didn't even know what it meant.) I must not give up prayer. Just the opposite. God was giving me favors and I should work hard at prayer. Perhaps, the Lord wanted to use me to help many others (I feel he was prophesying about what happened later.) I would be blamed if I did not respond to these favors. I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking through him because his words made a deep impression.

He led me along a path that made me a different person. What a gift to understand a soul! My daily prayer was to center on an event from the Passion. I was to think only of Christ's Humanity and to resist the desire for recollection and consolations until further instructions.

Results

I was comforted and strengthened. The Lord had shown him how to guide me. I was determined to obey, a determination which remains to this day. The Lord always gave me the grace to follow my confessors (almost always chosen from the Jesuits). My soul began to grow as I will now explain.

24. - God's Ever-Increasing Favors

Led By God's Love

After this confession I felt prepared for everything. Although my confessor didn't seem to worry about my imperfections, I made many changes. His approach moved me even quicker. He led me by God's love and brought me freedom. I stayed this way for two months and did all I could to resist God's favors (as I was commanded). Everyone could see the changes in my life. The Lord encouraged me to sufferings, which the other nuns thought were extreme. They were right. They were extreme compared to what I had been doing, but they fell far short of my religious obligations.

When I resisted His consolations, God Himself taught me. Before, I thought I needed solitude to receive His favors. Now, I saw that solitude had little to do with favors. Even when I was not praying, the Lord would completely envelop me in His glory. Then, I could not flee in any direction. As this continued, I grew more troubled.

God Increases the Favors

During these two months, God decided to increase His favors. I understood that to resist was not in my power. I fell in love with the Sacred Humanity. My prayer life took shape, like a building with a solid foundation. I grew to love of the penances which I had neglected because of sickness.

The priest said that certain things could not hurt me and that God sent illnesses as penances. He commanded me to do certain mortifications, which I did not find agreeable. I performed these because his commands seemed to come from the Lord. I could not be recollected until I gave away everything I did not need. I asked God for the grace not to turn back.

An Interview with St. Francis Borgia S.J.

At this time, Father Francis Borgia, S.J. (later canonized) came to Avila. My confessor asked that I explain my prayer experiences to Fr. Borgia, because he also had received great favors from God. Fr. Borgia said that I was led by God and should stop resisting God's favors. (Until now, I had done so under obedience). Also, I should begin each prayer by meditating on the Passion. If the Lord transported my spirit, I should not resist. This counsel came from his own experiences. I was greatly comforted by no longer having to resist.

A Different Director

After two months, my confessor was transferred and I thought I could never find another like him. I was fearful. I was in a desert, and did not know what to do. A relative arranged for me to stay with her. There, I met a prayerful widow who knew many Jesuits. I made my confession to her confessor (Father Alvarez, one of her best directors from 1559 to 1564). Being so near to these holy men brought many benefits.

This priest told me to leave nothing undone so I could become entirely pleasing to God. He was very gentle because I was reluctant about abandoning certain friendships which did not offend God. There was much affection in these friendships and I feared I would hurt the persons if I abandoned them. He told me to commend the issue to God for a few days and to say the "Come Holy Ghost".

Her First Rapture

I began that hymn and a sudden transport carried me away. I could not be mistaken. This was the first time God had given me the rapture. The Lord said, "I want you to converse with angels, not with men". I was amazed. God moved my soul by speaking these words in the depths of my spirit. Although these words made me afraid, they gave me a comfort, which remained after the strangeness of the experience vanished.

These words came true. From then on, I had friendships only with people who loved God. I cherish no private affections for anyone, even relative or friends. If they do not love God and pray, I experience suffering in dealing with them.

The Effects

Since that day, I have been courageous enough to give up everything for God. In that single moment of my first rapture, He made me a different person. My confessor did not need to give me

more commands, he just let the Lord take over. I never thought I could set aside these friendships because I had already tried and failed. The Lord set me free and gave me determination. When these friends saw I was so determined, they were edified.

Blessed be God! In one moment, He gave me a freedom which I could not gain in years. My efforts were so violent I had become ill. His work caused me no distress.

25 – God’s Locutions

I should explain these locutions and what the soul experiences so the reader can understand. Since my first experience (between 1555 and 1557), these locutions have become quite common, (as will be seen.)

Cannot Be Resisted

The words are perfectly formed. Even though the ear does not hear them, they are clearly understood. Even if the person resists, she still hears them. On the natural plane, we can turn away from the speaker, so that we do not hear, or do not understand. When God speaks, there is no such remedy. I must listen whether I want to or not, because God wills that I understand. I have long experience with locutions. For two or three years I tried to resist them but with little success. Sometimes I try even now.

Avoiding Deception

I should like to describe the different kinds of deceptions. Locutions can come from good spirits, from evil spirits, or from the person’s own spirit conversing with itself.

Concerning locutions from God, I had heard God’s voice two or three years before the events which He foretold took place. Not a single one proved deceptive. There are other things in which God’s Spirit can be perceived. (I’ll explain later).

Not Coming From God

There is a great difference between a true locution and a false one. Sometimes a person who has asked God for a favor, believes that they have heard God telling them it would be granted or denied. If the locution is invented (even in a subtle way), the soul realizes that their understanding (not God) is speaking. This is like a person making up a speech. Their understanding is not listening to God, but is actively creating words which do not have the clarity of true locutions. In these cases, we can turn our attention away (as in natural speech). In a true locution, our attention is total.

A Better Indication

A surer indication that the locution comes from self is that it has no effects. When the Lord speaks, effects follow. Even if the Lord reproves the soul, she is moved, given light, and made tranquil. If the soul is in turmoil or aridity, God’s words set it free and the soul realizes their power.

True and False Locutions

The difference between a false locution and a true one is the same as between speaking and listening. While I speak, my understanding is composing. When someone else speaks, I listen and this costs me no effort.

With a false locution, we cannot be sure of what we hear (as when we are asleep). With a true locution, we do not lose a single syllable. In a true locution, the understanding and the soul can even

be disturbed and unable to piece together a single sentence. However, the soul remembers long speeches which she could never compose. Also, the soul is changed by the very first word. If she is in rapture and the faculties are suspended, the soul understands things she never thought of. This must be from God because the memory is not working and the imagination is in a stupor.

Locutions and Raptures

When I am in union during rapture, I never see visions or have locutions, because all my faculties are lost. There is no seeing, hearing or understanding at all. During that actual state of rapture, the soul is entirely in the power of Another. The Lord leaves her no freedom.

Concerning locutions, I am speaking about when the state of rapture is over. At this time, although the faculties are not lost, they can do nothing. They are still absorbed and incapable of reasoning. We have many reasoning processes to figure out these locutions. We may be mistaken once, but not often.

Different Criteria

If the soul is experienced and alert, she will see the difference between human locutions (which she does not accept) and divine locutions (which she must accept even against her will). The soul recognizes human locutions and takes no notice. We listen to Divine locutions as we do to a holy and learned person who will not lie. Sometimes these words are majestic and make us tremble (if they are a reproof) or they are majestic and fill us with an all-consuming love. Sometimes they are long speeches and said so quickly that the soul could never have composed them. No experienced person will be deceived.

Resolving Doubts

After the experience was over, I often doubted the words and thought I had imagined them. Then, after a long interval, the words would all be fulfilled. Also, God so impressed these words on my memory that I could never forget them. Human words I easily forgot. Certainly, some of God's words can be forgotten, but only after a long time.

To pretend to have this favor would be very wrong. The soul will know quite well if she is just making up the words. However, if the soul has never really heard God speak, and cannot tell the difference between true and false locutions, she might be deceived all her life.

Discerning Divine Locutions

I wanted to be quiet in my prayer, but even against my will, I would still hear. Sometimes the words were what I didn't want to hear. I could never have made up these speeches because there was not enough time. Time is very important. Divine words instruct us at once with no lapse of time. Also, I was astonished at what I understood. Experienced souls will know what I mean.

Let me conclude. If these locutions came from our understanding, we could hear them whenever we wanted. With Divine locutions, this is not true. I could desire to hear for days, but would hear nothing. Then, when I have no desire to hear, I am forced to listen. These words are not heard by bodily ears. Only after I experienced God speaking did I realize that there was another way to hear.

From the Devil

A locution from the devil leaves evil effects. This happened to me on two occasions, but the Lord warned me immediately. These locutions left me in a state of aridity and disquiet. The disquiet

tortured me because I could not discover its source. I was afflicted without knowing why. The devil says good things. That is what deceives.

The Devil's Joys

I believe that the devil has diverse joys and pleasures. If someone has never experienced God's joys, then the devil can deceive them. God's pleasures are a sweet refreshment, which invigorate and leave lasting results. Beginners are refreshed by mild feelings, which bring forth tears. Although these sweet emotional outlets are destroyed by the first persecution, they are a good beginning and lead to holy desires. However, I do not call them true devotion. They are not signs which can be used to distinguish a good spirit from an evil one. We must proceed with caution. A beginner who experiences visions and revelations can easily be deceived.

I only experienced these favors after I received the Prayer of Union. There is one exception. Many years ago I saw Christ. What a great blessing! If only I had known then that this was a true vision.

Satan's Locutions

Satanic locutions are different. The soul becomes bewildered, discontent and not the least docile. However, if the soul does not trust in herself and never denies a single article of faith, God will not allow her to be deceived. By this love for the faith, the soul always acts in conformity with the Church. Also, she consults learned people. Despite any revelation, she never budes one inch from the Church's teachings (even if she saw the heavens open). If the soul begins to waver, the devil begins to lead her into deception. However, this first step will not adversely affect the soul. The Lord will strengthen the soul to defend even the smallest of Church truths.

I'll explain. If the soul is not strong in faith and is not helped by devotion or by visions, she must not feel secure. Otherwise, great harm can happen slowly. The soul must accept revelations from God only if they accord with Scripture. If they diverge, I would consider them as coming from the devil. No need to seek for signs. The signs are clear that this does not come from God. When revelation comes from the devil, the soul becomes restless, peevish and experiences no good effects. There is a false humility, with no tranquility and with no strong desires for good works. Those experienced in the good spirit will understand.

Six Learned Men

Because the devil can play many tricks, we must always be cautious, choose a wise director and hide nothing from him. If we do this, no harm will occur. However, I did suffer excessive fears. Once, my confessor told me to speak freely about my gifts to a group. After I did, they thought I was deluded and wanted to help me. Really, after each favor the Lord always assured me.

My confessor told me that these six learned men decided that I was deluded. I was to receive Communion less frequently and try to distract myself. I didn't believe what they said and developed a serious scruple by believing I had no humility. These were holy and learned men. How could I not believe them?

After many days of not receiving Communion and having no solitude, I went to chapel. Everyone was against me and I had no one to talk to. Some even warned my confessor, and said that the devil deceived me. Only my confessor comforted me. He was siding with them only to test me. He often said that even prayer from the devil could do me no harm, if I did not offend God. I should just ask to be delivered from that prayer. For two years I did ask His Majesty to take me by another path.

Comfort From God

When I thought that God's words might be from the devil, nothing comforted me. I dared not spend hours in prayer, so the Lord just spoke to me during the day. He told me He was pleased and I could do no harm. I had no choice. I had to listen to Him.

When alone, I could not pray. I was too stunned by fear that the devil was deceiving me. I was upset, worn out, and had no idea of what to do. For me, this is a familiar situation but never like this. I was in prayer for five hours and had no comfort from heaven or earth. The Lord permitted a thousand fears. Oh, how faithful He is! How delicately He handles the sufferings of His friends. Oh Lord, you give severe tests so that in the trial's greatness, we can learn the greatness of your love.

Oh, Lord, if only I had words to express Your works! Let all the learned men rise up against me. Let all the devils torment me because I know Lord, that you deliver those whom you love. In my terrible state of exhaustion, you spoke all the words I needed to hear. You said, "Be not afraid, daughter, for it is I and I will not forsake you. Fear not."

His Calming Words

In that state, I would have needed several hours to become calm. Yet, these words calmed me instantly. They gave me courage, tranquility and light. My soul was transformed in a single instant and I was ready to proclaim to the whole world that this work was of God. What a good God who gives solace (not just advice). His words are powerful acts.

I would often recall the Lord's power over the sea. Then, I would exclaim "Who is this that all my faculties obey Him?" In an instance, light comes upon total darkness, a heart of stone is softened and the water of tears overcomes aridity. I asked, "Who gives me these desires and this courage? What am I afraid of? I seek only to serve the Lord. I seek only the bliss of doing this well"

A New Authority and Power

I went on proclaiming, "If the Lord is powerful and the devils are his slaves, what harm can they do me who am the King's servant. I can fight against all hell". I took a cross in my hand and God gave me the courage. In a short time I was another person. I could conquer them all. I shouted, "Come, all of you, I am the Lord's servant and I want to see what you can do to me".

I must have frightened them all. I was calm and lost all the fears that had terrified me. The Lord had given me an authority. Even though I see devils, they are just like little flies. They are cowards, fearful of anyone with authority. They attack directly only those whom they see giving in. Sometimes, God allows them to attack His servants for their greater good. May we fear God and realize that one venial sin does greater harm than all of hell combined.

Our Attachments

The devils can terrorize us when we are attached to honors, possessions or pleasures. By these attachments, we are our own enemy and he uses our own weapons against us. This is the great pity. If we embraced the cross and hated everything, the devil would flee, as from a plague. He loves lies and does not deal with someone who loves truth. But when our own understanding is darkened, he helps us to become completely blind. When someone is blinded by the world's vanities, the devil continually tests him.

No Fear of Devil

May I only seek comfort and honor in what is true comfort and honor. I don't give a snap of my fingers for all the devils in hell. They fear me. I don't understand people saying "The devil, the devil, the devil". We should say "God, God" and make the devil tremble. He cannot move a finger without God's permission. I am more afraid of people who fear the devil than I am of the devil. He cannot harm me. However, other people (especially if they are confessors) can upset me. This was my trial for several years.

26 – Losing Her Fears

This courage to fight was a great favor. Why should the soul be a coward? Our King is all-powerful and we should only fear offending God. Not for a moment would I offend Him. If He is pleased, our adversaries fear. Yet, what soul is upright before the Lord? This is my only fear. Certainly, my soul is not upright, but God understands. He gives us inner instincts to make us aware that we do love Him.

Love is Evident

At this stage, the soul's love is no longer hidden (as it was for beginners). The soul experiences vehement desires to see God (which I will describe later). Everything wearies, fatigues and torments the soul. Her only rest comes from God. Her love is evident and cannot be hidden because she feels that her rest is far away.

Power of His Words

I was maligned by everyone in the convent and by the Order over a certain matter. Numerous things took away my peace of mind. The Lord spoke "Why do you fear? Do you not know I am all-powerful? I will fulfill what I have promised." Indeed, the promise was completely fulfilled. However, even before the fulfillment, I was so strong that I could have accepted new undertakings and further trials. This has happened innumerable times.

When I commit imperfections God reproves me and this is difficult to accept. However, His words help me to amend. They are both counsel and remedy. Before granting some favor, God first recalls my past sins and I feel as if I am at the Judgment. His knowledge is so complete that I cannot hide from it. Sometimes, God's locutions reveal perils to myself or to others. They foretell events which are three or four years away. These have all come true. Because of the signs, I cannot doubt that these locutions come from God.

The Safe Course

I follow the safest course. I describe all of my spiritual experiences and favors to a learned director and I obey him. If you do likewise You will not run into danger and will gain great benefit.

Experiences With Confessors

One confessor would try me by unsettling my mind. Yet, he (Father Alvarez) is the one who has done me the most good. I loved him but often thought of leaving him. Then God would reprove me and cause me more confusion than the confessor. I had questions from my confessor and reproofs from God. I was exhausted. Yet, I needed them all. My will was not yet bent to obedience. The Lord told me that I had to be determined to suffer, if I was to obey. I find everything easy when I fix my eyes on His suffering.

A priest in my early days told me not to reveal these experiences. This seemed like good advice. Speaking of these favors to my confessor was more painful than confessing serious sin because I thought he would not believe me. By speaking of God's wonders I felt I was treating them with irreverence. I realized this was bad advice. In confession, I must hold nothing back. Only in this way could I be safe.

Resolving Contradictions

If the Lord told me one thing and the confessor commanded the opposite, the Lord would tell me to obey the confessor. Then the Lord would change the confessor's mind and he would say what the Lord had commanded me.

Once, the Inquisition banned many books which gave me great pleasure. The Lord spoke, "Do not be distressed. I will give you a living book". I could not understand His words because I never had had any visions.

The First Vision

A few days later, I did understand. I saw before my eyes a vision which gave me much opportunity for recollection. The Lord taught me by many methods and I had very little need for books. His Majesty has become my book. He impresses upon me what to read and what to do in a way that I can never forget.

Who can see the Lord covered with wounds and not desire these sufferings for himself? Who can see the glory that the Lord gives and not realize that their suffering is nothing compared to the reward? Who can see the torments of the damned and not see that by comparison earth's torments are pure joy? Who cannot realize that we owe all to the Lord for saving us from damnation?

I will now continue to recount my life. May what I have written please the Lord. The experienced will see I have described some of their gifts. The inexperienced will think all of this is nonsense. Since I am the writer, they are without blame and I will blame no one.

27 – Revelations Without Words

Another Path

To return to my life! Because of my distress, I prayed that the Lord would lead me by another path because I had so many doubts about this one. Although I was beseeching God, I realized I was entirely different and I saw the benefits of this path to my soul. So, I put myself in God's hands. What else could I do? I saw this road was leading me to heaven, whereas before I was going to hell. I could not believe that the devil was the source of these divine favors. Yet, I continued to ask for a new road and asked all my favorite saints to deliver me from the devil. I conceived a fresh devotion to St. Hilarion and St. Michael the Archangel and importuned many other saints.

A Vision

Because these locutions had become very frequent, I prayed for two years that either the Lord would lead me by another way or make plain the truth evident. Then, I had the following experience. On the feast of St. Peter, I saw Christ at my side. I should say that I was conscious of Him, because I saw nothing with either the eyes of the body or of the soul. I thought He was quite close and I saw that He was the one speaking to me.

Being completely ignorant of such visions, I was very afraid and began to weep. At His first word, I became quiet and free from fear. Although Jesus Christ seemed right beside me, this was not a vision of the imagination because I could not discern any form. I just felt He was there and witnessed all I did. Whenever I became even slightly recollected I was forced to be aware of His nearness.

Difficulty In Describing

Greatly troubled, I ran to my confessor. He asked me what form I had seen. I said I did not see Christ. He asked how I knew it was Christ. I did not know how. I just realized that He was beside me. I saw and felt this clearly. My soul was more deeply and continuously recollected and the effects were greater than previous experiences. All of this was quite clear to me.

To explain this experience I just drew a comparison. Really, no comparison can describe this vision. That is the point. This is one of the highest visions possible. I learned this later from Peter of Alcantara. Other learned men said the same thing. In this vision, the devil has the least power to interfere and it is difficult even to describe.

How Be Certain?

In these visions, I do not see Christ because they are not visions of the imagination. How then can I be certain that this is He? A person might be blind or in the dark and still know someone is with him. This is not a good comparison because the person can know by other senses, (like speaking or touching). There is nothing like that in this vision. In fact, there is no darkness. He presents Himself as brighter than the sun. Although this brightness is not perceived, a light illumines the understanding and the soul is filled with blessings.

This vision goes beyond the consciousness of God's presence as experienced in the Prayer of Union or the Prayer of Quiet. In these types of prayer, we seem to find Him immediately. We know He is present by spiritual feelings, by the effects of conscious love and faith, and by resolutions made with deep emotion. This is a very lofty form of prayer, but it is not a vision. His Majesty makes His presence felt by effects.

Explaining the Difference

A vision is different. In a vision, the soul sees that Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, is present. In the other prayer, the influence comes from the Godhead. In this experience, the sacred Humanity becomes our companion and grants the favors.

My confessor asked, "Who told you it was Jesus Christ?" I replied "He often tells me so Himself, but even before He told me He impressed that truth on my understanding. Before that, He would say He was there, but I could not see Him. Suppose I were blind and a person whom I had never met came and told me who he was. I should believe him but I couldn't say it as confidently as if I had also seen him. Yet here I am confident because the knowledge impressed on my soul leaves no doubt. Do we not sometimes doubt what we see? Here, there is complete certainty.

Heavenly Language- Another Type of Vision

God teaches the soul in another way. His language is so heavenly, that it is difficult to explain to mortals. The Lord must teach us by experience. In this case, the Lord places in the innermost part of my soul what He wants me to understand. He does this, not by images or by forms or by words, but by a vision. In this way, God causes the soul to understand His will, the great truths and the great mysteries. By these visions, the Lord taught me much of what I understand. The devil has little power to interfere.

This kind of vision and this kind of language are so spiritual that they cause no turmoil and the devil can take no advantage. They occur from time to time and are quickly over.

Other Visions

At other times, the faculties and the senses are not suspended. They remain active. When this happens in contemplation (which is seldom) we accomplish nothing by ourselves. The entire work is of the Lord, as if food got to the stomach without our eating and we do not know how it got there. In this experience, I know Who put it there but not how. I see nothing and don't know how it happened. I never desired the gift or even knew it was possible.

Two Different Types

In the locutions previously described, God made the understanding attentive (even against its will). The soul seems to have new ears. God forces her to listen and prevents distractions. It is like a person with good ears being forced to listen to people talking too loudly. The soul is active and listens to what is said.

In this second kind of locution, the soul does nothing. Even the ability to listen is taken away. The food is already cooked and eaten. She need only enjoy. She is like a person who has never read or studied but discovers that she has all knowledge. She doesn't know how. She did not work. She didn't even learn the alphabet.

The Soul Becomes Learned

The soul discovers that she is learned. The mystery of the Trinity and other lofty truths are so clearly explained, that no theologian would contend with her concerning these truths. The soul is so astounded, because one single favor can totally change her and make her love God alone. Without any work on her part, He has made her capable of great blessings, has communicated intimate secrets and has treated her with indescribable friendship.

These favors are so wonderful and are granted to such an undeserving soul, that only a soul with lively faith would believe it were true. Unless commanded to say more, I will confine myself to describing some visions. This will help others from thinking that they are impossible (as I used to do). They will also explain to these souls the method and the road which the Lord used.

How This Happens

To return to this method of understanding. Certainly, the Lord wants the soul to know what is happening in heaven. Souls in heaven know one another without speaking (The Lord revealed this to me in rapture.). In this gift, God and the soul understand one another. This is God's will. No other means are needed to express this love between two friends. As in life, two people in love can understand each other without words. In this gift, God and I, (without seeing each other), look at each other face to face. This is like the two lovers in the Song of Songs.

Having Seen the Lord

O loving God, You allow my sinful eyes to look upon You. After this vision, may they never look on base things or be content with anything but You. From experience, I know that this describes only the smallest part of what You do for the soul when you lead her to the heights. O souls that have begun to pray, what blessings can you find in life equal to these? I do not even mention the eternal blessings.

Please reflect. God will give Himself to those who abandon all. He respects no person. He loves all. He excludes no one, no matter how wicked. Look at me whom He has brought to this high state. I described only the vision itself. I have not described the soul's feelings, a joy above all earthly joys. Yet what are these joys? Just a single drop of the ocean which is prepared for us in heaven.

Carrying the Cross

This makes me ashamed. Why must we desire blessings and eternal joy, at the expense of the good Jesus? If we are not helping Him to carry His cross, can we not at least weep with the daughters of Jerusalem? (Lk.28:26,28) Pleasures cannot lead us to what He won by His blood! By accepting vain honors, do we follow Him who was despised? That is not the right way. We are going far astray and will never reach our goal. I want to proclaim these truths aloud and forever. As will be seen from what I have written, it took me so long to respond. I am ashamed and prefer to keep silence. Therefore, I shall speak only of some things.

Giving Everything

May the Lord bring me to heavenly glory. What a joy for the blessed in heaven when they see that they have left nothing undone and have held back nothing. Even if they began late, they did all they could, according to their power. The more they had, the more they gave.

How rich is someone who has forsaken all for Christ! What honor comes to those who sought no honor. What wisdom is given to the one who rejoiced at being called mad. No longer does the world call them mad, because they see their heroic deeds.

Contempt of the World

We think that God is pleased when we are considered wise and discreet. This depends. We believe we edify others by acting with great wisdom and a show of authority. Even the priest and the nun feel it a scandal if they wear old or patched clothing or are greatly recollected and given to prayer. We have forgotten the saints' vehement longings for perfection. The religious would do no harm if they practiced what they preached. They should hold the world in little esteem and scandalize the world by their religious practices. The Lord uses such scandals for his advantage. Some might be scandalized by religious devotion. Others, however, might feel remorse.

Blessed Peter of Alcantara

We should present a picture of Christ's sufferings to others. God has given this picture in St. Peter of Alcantara (died 1562). The world cannot bear his perfection. They say that people these days are more feeble and the times are different. Yet, he lived in these times and his spirit was as strong as in days past. All need not perform such severe penances, but the Lord will teach different ways to those who have courage. What courage God gave to Peter of Alcantara to perform those penances for 47 years. I know this is all true.

His Sleep

Peter of Alcantara stood up in my defense and encouraged me in times of need. He told me the following story. For forty years he slept only an hour and a half each night. Conquering sleep was his hardest penance. To do this he was always on his knees or on his feet. He slept sitting down, with his head against a piece of wood which he nailed to the wall. He could not sleep lying down (even if he wished) because his cell was only four and a half feet long.

His Mortifications

During these years, no matter how hot the sun or how heavy the rain, he never wore his hood or any sandals on his feet. His habit was of sack cloth, with nothing between it and his flesh. He wore this tightly against his flesh, with a mantle above it. When it was very cold, he would remove the mantle and open the windows of his cell. When he closed the windows and put on the mantle, he would experience the satisfaction of increased protection.

Commonly, he took food once every three days and said this was quite possible, once he had gotten used to it. Sometimes he went a week without food. This probably was when he was experiencing great raptures and the violent impulses of love. I myself witnessed this once.

Early Penance

Even when he was young, his poverty and mortification were extreme. He told me he spent three years in a friary and he never raised his eyes. He could recognize others only by their voice. The same was true when he went outdoors. He never looked at women for many years.

I only met him when he was old and weak. He seemed like a root of a tree, made from nothing. He was affable but a man of few words except when answering a question. It was a delight to hear him for he was extremely intelligent. He died as he lived – preaching and admonishing his brethren.

Appearances After Death

Since his death I have spoken to him more times than when he was alive. He advises me on many subjects. At his first appearance after his death, he spoke of the blessed penances that had won his reward. One appearance happened a year before he died. I knew he would die soon and told him so.

On the day he died, he appeared to me in a vision and said he was going to his rest. I told this to some people. A week later, news came that he had indeed entered eternal life. His austere life ended in great glory. Now he comforts me more than when he was on earth. The Lord told me to ask for things in Peter's name and I have seen many requests granted.

I write all this so that the reader grows determined to pay no attention to the things of earth. They must put this determination into practice, for I see so many people in the world going to perdition.

28 – Her First Vision

For days afterward, I recalled that first vision and it profited greatly. I prayed unceasingly and tried not to displease God (Who certainly witnessed it). I was given much advice and I began to fear, but the Lord reassured me.

Gradual Revelation

One day at prayer, the Lord revealed to me only His hands. These were indescribably beautiful. As always, this new experience made me fearful. A few days later, I saw the Divine face. This left me completely absorbed. Later, I saw the whole Christ. I could not understand this gradual revelation. Then, I realized that He was leading me according to my natural weakness. I could not bear to see all His glory at once. So, He prepared me by degrees.

The reader might think that I needed little effort to see those hands and that face. However, when a soul sees the beauty of glorified bodies and their supernatural loveliness, she experiences confusion. I was plunged into turmoil, but soon had a security that ended my fears.

Seeing the Risen Jesus

At Mass on St. Paul's day (January 25th), I saw a complete representation of Christ's Humanity in His resurrected body. At my confessor's command, I wrote a full description. This writing was difficult and caused a great inner disruption, so I will not describe it again. I will just say this. There would be the greatest happiness even if heaven contained only glorified bodies. Seeing Christ's glorified Humanity gives a special happiness. If His limited revelation to us on earth is so great, what will be the full revelation in heaven? I saw this vision (and every vision) only with the eyes of the soul, not those of the body.

Three Types of Visions

There are three kinds of visions. The intellectual vision is closest to perfection. The vision of the imagination is second. The visions seen with bodily eyes are the lowest visions and most open to the devil's delusions. I did not know this and I wished I had seen this vision with bodily eyes. In this way, my confessor would not say I was imagining it.

As soon as the vision passed, I immediately thought I had imagined it and wondered about deceiving my confessor. I talked to him and he asked me if I intended to deceive. I said that I always told the truth. He knew this and managed to calm me down. I cannot imagine how I let the devil make me think I was inventing this, when the Lord made this favor so real. Soon, my doubts left me. I see how silly I was. I could never invent anything so beautiful. Even its whiteness and radiance surpass all we can imagine.

Describing the Whiteness and Radiance

The vision's soft whiteness and infused radiance cause great delight to the eyes without wearying them. Even the brightness of the Divine beauty does not weary them. The revealed brightness makes the brightness of the sun seem dim. The light is like a clear stream in a bed of crystal. Compared with this, the sun seems like a muddy stream overshadowed by clouds. In fact, the vision seems like natural light and the sun seems artificial. The vision's light is never replaced by night and is disturbed by nothing.

Not even the most powerful intellect can imagine this light which God can reveal so quickly. Trying to open our eyes to see would be too slow. If the Lord so desires, our eyes, open or closed, will see this (even against our will). No power can divert our attention and no diligence can resist it or attain to it. I have proved this by experience. Let me tell you the story.

No Attempt to Describe How

I want to speak of how the Lord reveals Himself through visions. I will not describe how He places this strong light in the inner sense, or how He gives the understanding such a clear image that the vision seems like reality. Only learned men can do this. The Lord hasn't taught me and many men have tried to explain this to me, but I still don't understand how this happens.

My mind has to be spoon-fed. My confessor was often astounded by my ignorance of how God did these things. I never wanted to know and never asked questions. I only asked learned men if certain things were sinful or not. Concerning the favors, I knew that God did everything and I should praise Him without any fear. Difficulties always arouse my devotion. Greater difficulties arouse greater devotion.

What She Has Learned

I will describe what I have learned by experience and I will let others describe how the Lord brings this about. Sometimes, I thought that I was seeing an image. At other times, the brightness was so great that I thought it was Christ Himself. Sometimes the vision's indistinctness caused me to think it was an image, although it went far beyond any earthly painting. Obviously, a living person is quite different from his portrait, (which can never look natural).

A Living Image

This is the actual truth not a comparison. The vision was living and was not like a portrait. It is a living image, because the living Christ is not a dead man. He shows me He is both God and man. He was not as He was in the tomb, but as He was after He had risen.

Especially after Holy Communion, I cannot doubt He is the Lord. When faith tells me He is present in Eucharist, He comes with majesty. So complete is the revelation that my soul feels dissolved and consumed in Christ. O Jesus, if only I could describe how you reveal yourself. How completely you are Lord of the whole world and of the heavens which you created. Your revealed majesty is so great, the soul sees that to be Lord of the universe is nothing for You.

How trifling are the devil's powers compared with You. Someone pleasing to You can trample on all of hell. The devils trembled when You descended to claim the souls. They longed for a thousand deeper hells to flee from You. You reveal to the soul both the greatness of your Majesty and also the power of your Humanity united to the Divinity.

As if the General Judgment

Each vision is an image of the General Judgment when we will see Your judgment against the wicked. The vision of You gives true humility. Because each soul sees their wickedness, there is true repentance. As God reveals His love, the soul finds nowhere to hide and is confounded. The Lord reveals much and the vision has great power.

Unless the Lord sent the soul into rapture or ecstasy, the soul could not endure the vision. During this blessing, the vision of the Divine Presence is lost. Afterward, the soul forgets the vision but cannot forget the beauty of God (which is so deeply imprinted). Later, when God allows the soul to suffer loneliness and aridity (which I will describe later), the soul seems to forget God Himself.

Comparing the Two Types of Visions

Through the visions, the soul has become a new creature, continuously absorbed in God. A new love of God works in the soul to a very high degree. The former vision (which reveals God without any image) is higher. Still, so the soul can retain a memory, the Divine Presence must be presented to the imagination and remain there. Invariably, these two kinds of visions (of the intellect and of the imagination) occur simultaneously. The eyes of the soul see the beauty and glory of the Sacred Humanity. The soul also sees how He is God, and able to do all things. He can rule and fill all things with His love.

The soul should esteem this vision. There is no peril because the devil has no power over the vision. Three or four times, the devil has presented to me a false likeness of the Lord by taking flesh. In this way, he attempts to destroy the effects of the genuine vision. However, he cannot counterfeit the glory which comes from God.

Seeing the Difference

The soul resists this vision given by the devil. It becomes restless and despondent, and loses its joy and devotion. This happened three or four times at the beginning of my experiences. The soul (even if just in the Prayer of Quiet) will see the difference in the effects. This is easy to perceive. If the soul walks in humility, she will see clearly. Anyone who has already experienced a divine vision will know immediately. The devil gives consolations at once but the soul will reject them. The devil's consolations are clearly different from God's. The devil cannot harm an experienced soul.

These two visions can never be a work of the imagination. This is impossible. Seeing the beauty of His hands transcends the power of any imagination. In a single moment, we could never see what we have never experienced and have never thought about.

Not From Self

We could never be responsible for these visions. If the vision came from our own understanding, there could not be the striking effects (or any effects). It is like a man who wants to go to sleep, but cannot. Wanting to sleep can never bring the effects of sleep. His brain will not be refreshed. So, the soul trying to produce a vision will grow weary. We cannot exaggerate the vision's effects upon a soul. God also gives health and refreshment to the body.

When people tried to tell me I was being deceived by the devil, I used this argument. Also, the Lord gave me some comparisons to use. All to no purpose! Some people (much holier than I) were not led by God in this way. They thought these experiences were due to my sins. They told others and soon everyone knew my experiences. I told them only to my confessor and to those he commanded me to tell.

Telling Others

I told these people that if they told me that someone who was my friend did not really exist, I would believe them instead of my own eyes. However, if my friend had given me some jewels as a pledge of his love and suddenly I was rich instead of poor, I could never believe that this was a delusion. I could show them the jewels, because my soul was changed. My confessor said so.

This difference in my life was great and was not just in my imagination. If the devil was doing this to drag me to hell, why would he use means to defeat his own purposes? These experiences had changed me for the better. The devil would be removing my vices and giving me virtues.

The Confessor

My saintly Jesuit confessor gave these people the same answer. His great humility caused me a trial because he did not trust his own opinion and God had not given him these experiences. He also suffered much. They told him to be on guard lest the devil deceive him also. Fearing I would lose my only confessor, I could only weep.

He was a great servant of God and persevered with me. He told me not to offend God. I also had to do what he told me. If I were careful, God would not fail me. He told me that if I hid nothing, the devil (if this were the devil) could never harm me and the harm would do good. I was so fearful. For three and a half years, this confessor suffered much during the grievous persecutions that I suffered. People brought him all kinds of tales about me and he would be blamed because of me.

He was holy and the Lord gave him courage to endure. Many people did not believe him. They thought I was going to destruction. He dealt with them and, at the same time, soothed me. He had to

constantly reassure me. With every new experience, God left me in great fear. My confessor would comfort me. If he had trusted himself more, I would have suffered less, but God showed him the truth and in the sacrament of confession he received light.

Misunderstandings

Some people were not convinced because I explained some things carelessly and they misunderstood them. One was a holy man to whom my soul was infinitely in debt. I suffered much because he did not understand.

I spoke without thinking and my words seemed to lack humility. Seeing my many faults, they condemned me outright. They asked questions. I answered plainly but they thought I was making myself a person of learning. They told my confessor and he began to find fault.

This went on for a long time. However, the Lord continued His favors and I endured everything. I describe all this to show how great is the trial of having no one with any experience of this spiritual road. Only the Lord got me through. I had enough troubles to deprive me of my reason. Now, after the battle, the opposition of these good people to a wicked and timid woman seems like nothing. However, this was one of my greatest trials. I hope this served God's purpose for I know these people were acting for my good.

29 – The Lord's Favors and Words

I have strayed from my purpose. I want to show why these visions are not the work of the imagination. How could we picture Christ's Humanity or form an impression of His beauty by our own imagination? Certainly, the imagination can form such a picture. The memory can store that image and the understanding can fashion it. However, these faculties can never bring about a true vision. The Lord gives the vision when He wills. We have no control. We only see what He wills to show us. We can neither add to nor subtract from the vision. We cannot choose to look or to refrain from looking. If we try to look at a particular part, we just lose the vision.

For two and a half years, God regularly granted this favor. Three years ago, He removed this (as a continual favor) so he could give me a higher kind of vision (which I'll describe later). In these visions I saw that He was speaking to me. Although I looked upon His great beauty and experienced the sweetness of His words, I also wanted to see the color of His eyes and His height so I could describe this to others. I never succeeded. If I tried, I would lose the vision.

No Option to Want or Not To Want

Although Christ looks at me compassionately, His gaze has such power that I cannot endure it. My soul remains in a sublime rapture and loses the beautiful vision in order to gain its fruit. There is no question of our wanting or not wanting to see this vision. The Lord demands humility, and wants us to accept whatever He gives.

This refers to all visions. None are excepted. We can do nothing. We cannot see more or see less. By our own efforts, we can neither call them up nor banish them. The Lord wants us to realize that He alone produces them. We cannot be proud of them. They humble us and make us fearful. When He removes them, we are completely lost. As a result, we must always walk in fear during our earthly exile.

Visions in Tribulation

Almost invariably, the Lord showed Himself in His resurrected Body. This is how I also saw Him in the host. When I was in tribulation, He would strengthen me by showing me His wounds, or He would appear on the cross, or in the garden. On a few occasions, (due to my needs) I saw Him with the crown of thorns or carrying the cross, but this was always in His glorified flesh.

By recounting these visions, I have suffered many persecutions. Some people were sure I had a devil and wanted to exorcise me. This did not trouble me. What did worry me was when my confessors were afraid to hear my confessions. Still, I could not regret having these visions and would not exchange them for any earthly delight. The Lord would reassure me that these were His greatest treasures. My love for Him grew exceedingly. When I told Him of my trials, I would come away with new strength. I did not argue with my critics. This made matters worse. I did discuss these visions with my confessor who comforted me.

Advice of Another Confessor

The visions became so numerous that one priest (who heard my confession when my confessor was not available) said I was deceived by the devil. He told me that, at every vision, I had to make the sign of the cross and snap my fingers. In this way, I would know it was the devil. He said God would protect me and take the vision away. This was terrible because I knew the visions came from God and I could not possibly want them to be taken away. Yet, I did what they told me. I even invoked Peter and Paul (the first vision came on their feast day). I often used to see Peter and Paul at my left side. These two saints were my guides.

Snapping my fingers at the Lord was my greatest distress. I couldn't believe the vision was from the devil. This was a heavy penance. To avoid always crossing myself, I just carried a cross in my hand. I didn't always snap my fingers. It hurt too much. I asked Jesus to forgive me. I was just obeying His minister. Jesus told me to obey and He would make sure my confessor learned the truth. However, when they told me to stop praying, He grew angry and said I should tell them that this was tyranny. He showed me how to know the visions were genuine. I'll describe that later.

A Transformed Rosary

Once I had the cross from the rosary in my hand. The Lord took it from me. When he gave it back, it had become four large stones, much more precious than diamonds. On the cross, the five wounds were portrayed with exquisite workmanship. He told me that my rosary would always look like this (and it did). I could never see the wood (of which it was made) but only these stones. However, nobody else could see this but myself.

Favors Increased

The more I tested my visions (as I was commanded) the more numerous became God's favors. I always prayed, seemingly even in sleep. This increased my love. I complained to the Lord that I could no longer bear this. I could not cease thinking of Him. I always obeyed (because the Lord never permitted me to disobey) but I could do little. He told me what to say to my critics. He still does this. His arguments were very conclusive and made me feel secure.

More Violent Impulses

His Majesty gave me even clearer signs (which He had promised). God's love grew so strong in me that I did not know who was inspiring me. I was dying to see God and I knew of no way but death to gain this. This love came with violent impulses (of less worth and less unbearable than others). This removed all my power to act. Nothing gave me satisfaction. I could not contain myself because I

felt my soul was being torn from me. “O Lord, you worked with subtle diligence, hiding from me and oppressing me with a death so delectable that I never wanted to escape.”

Anyone inexperienced in these violent impulses can never understand. They bring no physical restlessness or uncontrollable devotional feeling. In the lower kinds of prayer, we must limit the emotions, so the soul can be recollected, hushed and stilled. Such prayer is like sobbing children who just need a glass of water so the emotions are checked. Reason must limit these feelings because much comes from the person’s temperament or from imperfections.

This prayer is hushed by loving caresses, not by the pointing of a fist. This devotional love must find an outlet in recollection and not be a pot boiling over because the fire is too hot. The fire must be controlled and the flame needs to be quenched by gentle tears. These are not tears of affliction, (which I shed at the beginning of my prayer life and which did me much harm). These early tears wearied my spirit and I could not pray for a day or more. Beginners need great discretion so all goes gently and leads to interior recollection.

Quite Different Impulses

These other violent impulses (which I am describing) are different. We do not put on more fuel because the fire is already kindling and we are thrown in to be burned up. The soul does not even try to feel the wound caused by the Lord’s absence. It is like an arrow thrust within the entrails, even into the heart. The soul does not know what is the matter or what she desires. The arrows seem dipped in a drug which leads the soul to hate herself for love of God and lose her life for Him. No words can describe the way God wounds the soul and the distress He causes. This distress is more delectable than any other satisfaction. The soul would gladly die of this illness.

Bewildered By Simultaneous Distress and Bliss

It bewildered me to experience both the distress and the bliss at the same time. The wounded soul can understand that it has been wounded for an excellent cause. Her exceeding great love has come from the Lord’s love for her. A spark has suddenly fallen upon the soul and set her totally afire. I recall David’s words “As a deer seeks the fountain of water, so my soul thirsts for you, O God” (Ps. 42:1).

When these impulses calm down, the soul seeks relief but does not know not what to do. She does certain penances but cannot feel them. No physical torture which I know can drown the pain. She could shed all her blood, as if her body were dead. She wants to express her inner love, but the initial pain is so great that no physical suffering can drown it. Penances are too weak a medicine for this illness. If the soul asks relief from God, some might come. In truth, the soul sees death as the only means to gain the complete fruition.

Effects of the Impulses

At times, the impulses are so strong that the soul can do nothing. The entire body contracts and the limbs cannot move. If standing, the person cannot move and seemingly cannot breathe, due to the pain. She can only groan inwardly. Sometimes the Lord showed me the following vision. There was an angel in bodily form on my left. He was short and beautiful. His face was so aflame with love that he must be of the highest type, possibly the cherubim.

They do not tell me their names but there are great differences among the angels. This angel held a golden spear with fire on its iron tip. He seemed to pierce my heart several times, penetrating to my entrails. When he withdrew the spear, it seemed like my entrails were also coming out. I was

completely afire with love for God. The sharp pain caused me to moan, but the sweetness was so great that I never wanted to lose the pain that caused it.

After Affects

After this, the soul is content only with God. The pain is spiritual but the body shares it. The conversations between the soul and God are so sweet that, if anyone doubts this, I will ask God to let them experience it. This continued for days and I went about in a stupor, wanting to speak with no one. I only wanted to hug my pain. It gave me greater happiness than all creation.

The Lord was pleased to send me these raptures on several occasions. At times, they were so deep that, even when I was with people, I could not resist them. Soon, they were being talked about (to my distress).

Since having these impulses, I do not feel this pain so much. In Chapter twenty, I spoke of a different pain that is of greater worth. Concerning this particular pain, the Lord transports the soul into ecstasy and it feels no pain. May God, who gives so many favors to one who is so unworthy, be blessed.

30 – Temptations and Trials

Seeing that I could do nothing to stop these violent impulses I grew afraid. I did not see how distress and contentment could go together. Certainly physical distress and spiritual contentment could both be present. However, in this case, intense spiritual distress accompanied intense joy. I still tried to resist but grew fatigued and sought protection in the Cross. No one understood, so I spoke only to my confessor.

St. Peter of Alcantara

The Lord granted relief from many trials. Then He brought Fray Peter of Alcantara here for a time. This freed me of all my trials. For twenty years he wore a shirt of iron and authored many little books (Only his booklet on “Prayer and Meditation” is still extant). He kept the Primitive Rule of St. Francis in all its rigor.

The wife of my lay friend (who never believed that these visions came from the devil), knew I was in distress. Because she was a suitable person, my confessor gave me permission to speak with her. She even shared in the same favors that the Lord gave me. She got permission for me to stay in her home, so I could talk with Fray Peter. I had many talks with him.

His Own Experiences

I gave him a clear account of my life and method of prayer, (I always told my confessors even the most dubious things about myself without any duplicity or concealment). I saw quickly that he understood everything from his own experiences. That was all I needed, someone who had gone through all this and could interpret my experiences. I could not understand what the visions could mean, but he enlightened me wonderfully. I didn't see how I could understand visions which I saw only with eyes of my soul. (I thought visions affected only the eyes of the body).

He explained everything and told me that this was the work of the Spirit. He said I could believe these visions and that only the truths of faith could be more certain. He was happy with what I related, and afterwards, he took great interest in me.

Comfort From Him

When he saw that I had desires which he had already put into effect and found I was full of courage, he delighted in our conversation. Anyone whom the Lord brings to this state finds no comfort that equals meeting another who has already traveled the first part of this road (that was all I had traveled by then).

He had great compassion, telling me that the opposition by good people was a severe trial and that there would be more trials. Because there was no experienced person in the city, He would talk to my confessor and also to the holy layman who opposed me. He spoke to both of them and showed them why they should be reassured and cause me no disquiet. My confessor quickly agreed. The holy layman was not convinced, but at least he stopped frightening me.

His Advice

Father Peter arranged for me to write often and tell him everything. He asked for my prayers. This humbled me greatly. I was comforted and very happy. He told me not to doubt that my prayer came from God. I should report any doubts to my confessor and, if I did this, I should feel safe all my life.

However, I could not feel complete security because the Lord was leading me by a road of fear. As a result, I would believe anyone who said the devil was deceiving me. In truth, none of my advisers made me feel afraid enough or secure enough. Rather, I had to trust the feelings implanted in my soul by the Lord. Although Fray Peter comforted me, I did not trust him enough to be without fear, especially in the future trials that I will now describe. Yet, he did comfort me and I thanked St. Joseph who brought Fray Peter here.

Spiritual and Bodily Trials

I still had to endure the greatest spiritual trials and bodily pains. When I had no spiritual trials, I bore the bodily pains with joy. When spiritual and bodily trials came at once, I experienced deep depression. I would forget all the Lord's favors. They became like far-away memories.

I was tormented by a thousand doubts, thinking that I misunderstood everything and that these visions were all my imagination. It was bad enough to delude myself without deluding good men as well. I felt so evil and believed that all the heresies were due to me.

The Devil's Works

The devil invented this false humility to unsettle me and drive me to despair. Now, he tortures me much less because I can see his tricks. I detect his presence from the disquiet and unrest (which happens at the very beginning) and from the turmoil (that lasts until the end). He is also evident from the darkness and affliction which plunge the soul into aridity and a distaste for prayer. He stifles the soul and constrains the body, making them both powerless.

Although, we should see ourselves as the worst possible sinners, genuine humility does not produce inner turmoil, nor does it cause unrest, darkness or aridity. True humility produces quiet, sweetness and light.

God's Humility

When God shows us our sins we are comforted. Encouraged by His mercy, we praise God who has forgiven us. In the devil's humility, the soul is in darkness and sees God as someone Who always wields fire and sword. During the devil's trials, the soul does not have enough faith in God's mercy to

experience consolation. In fact, considering God's mercy only increases the soul's torments and brings greater obligation.

The devil invents this grievous trial, and learning cannot save the soul. After escaping from his tricks, I see that the Lord gives him permission to tempt us as he did Job.

Temptations

I experienced one temptation on the vigil of Corpus Christ. It lasted until the feast. On another occasion, it lasted three weeks or longer. The temptation also came in Holy Week. On these occasions, the devil lays hold of my understanding and does whatever he wants with this faculty. My soul is fettered, no longer in control. I can think only of what the devil presents. These temptations neither bind the soul nor let her be free. They enslave the soul. She is stupefied, with no control over self. The devils behave as if playing a ballgame and the soul cannot free herself.

The sufferings are indescribable. The soul seeks relief but God provides none. She cannot reason clearly, as if her eyes were blindfolded. The soul is like a person traveling a very familiar road at night. She knows by experience where she is likely to stumble and guards against that danger. The soul knows not to offend God and walks by good habits. God, of course, has the soul in His safekeeping.

Faith and Reading

Faith (like the other virtues) is numb and asleep. The soul firmly believes in the Church's truths but is stupefied and feels God is far off. Her love is so lukewarm, that even when she hears of God, she retains no memory of her experiences of Him. Prayer and solitude cause great anguish because the inner torture is intolerable and bears some resemblance to hell. (The Lord revealed this in a vision). The soul burns inwardly. She doesn't know who started the fire, how to flee it or how to put it out.

The soul seeks a remedy in reading, but this is useless. I once picked up a saint's life to see if I could be absorbed in the book and comforted by the saint's sufferings. I read four lines four times and understood less than when I began. I gave up reading, (as I have on many occasions).

Words From Others

Trying to talk to someone was worse. The devil made me ill-tempered and I wanted to snap at everyone. In this condition, the Lord must help the soul from offending God or harming others. Going to my confessors was useless. They spoke very harshly to me. When I pointed this out later they were astonished that they had said those things. They had not at all comforted me.

Their words, although not offensive, showed great displeasure. Their aim was to mortify me. At other times, I could accept this, but during this trial their words were pure torture. Also, I feared I might be deceiving them and I warned them about this, (even though I would never lie). One confessor realized I was being tempted. He told me not to fear. He had discernment and would not be deceived. This comforted me.

Holy Communion

Very frequently, I found relief in Holy Communion. Approaching the sacrament made me feel well in body and soul. All the darkness would leave. The sun would come out and show me the stupidity of my deeds and words. At other times, the Lord just spoke a word, "Be not troubled; have no fear" and I was cured. Sometimes I would see a vision. Suddenly, nothing would be wrong with me.

Effects of the Trials

I complained to God about such tortures. However, I also told Him that I was well rewarded with abundant favors when they were over. My soul emerged from these fires like gold, brighter and purer. I found the Lord in the flames. These trials, although unbearable, became light. My soul became anxious to suffer again to serve the Lord. No matter how numerous our troubles if we rejoice to suffer for His sake, they all work together for our gain (even though I bear them quite imperfectly).

Other Temptations

Temptations came in another way (and they still do). I am deprived of the power to think a single good thought or the desire to practice it. My soul and body are completely useless, merely a burden. Fortunately, all these temptations do not happen at the same time. Sometimes, I feel a dissatisfaction and my soul can take no pleasure in anything. Then, I would force myself to do exterior good works. (I know how little a soul without grace can do).

From these temptations, I gained a realization of my own worthlessness. At other times, I could not think about God or engage in prayer (even when alone). Still, I felt I know Him.

Harm Done By Intellectual Faculties

My understanding and imagination do me much harm. My will is well-disposed but my understanding seems like a raving lunatic and I cannot keep it quiet. Sometimes I just laugh and keep an eye on the understanding to see what it will do. Glory to God that it never seeks evil things just indifferent ones, looking around everywhere. I then appreciate the Lord's favor when he binds the intellect and allows me to enjoy perfect contemplation.

What would people think if they could see my inner distraction! I am grieved by keeping such bad company. I say to God, "When will I see all my faculties united in praising You? Don't let my soul be broken into fragments which go their own way". My poor bodily health contributes to this experience. Original sin (and our own sins) have caused such harm that we are incapable of enjoying God's favors all at once.

Setting Aside Books on Prayer

I went through another trial. I thought I understood all the books on prayer. When the Lord bestowed this prayer gift, I thought I no longer needed to read them. So, I read only the lives of saints which would spur me on to do better. Then I thought that this showed a lack of humility in thinking I had this gift of prayer. I was greatly distressed until Fray Peter told me not to worry. I now realize that God, on granting these favors, treats me as if I were good even though I have not even begun to serve Him. I do love Him but my imperfections discourage me.

Feeling Like a Donkey

At other times I am troubled by a kind of foolishness. I follow the crowd, doing neither good or evil, and experiencing neither suffering or bliss. I don't care whether I live or die, whether I experience pleasure or pain. I feel nothing. My soul is like a little donkey, eating unconsciously whatever food is given. In this state, the soul can only feed on God's favors. The soul just accepts her existence with equanimity, not knowing how to understand her condition.

Making Great Progress

This is like sailing with a calm wind. I make great headway without knowing how. In the other experiences, the effects are noticeable and the soul sees her improvement immediately. These violent impulses are like springs which constantly gush up. The desires are aroused and the soul thirsts.

Love is continually bubbling up and the soul always thinks of what she will do. The soul cannot stay quiet any more than the spring water can stay on the earth. The soul has so much love that she finds no rest. Unable to contain herself, she saturates the earth and wants others to drink (for she has an abundance). I have always loved the gospel story of the Samaritan woman and have often said “Lord give me this water”.

A Fire Which Needs to Be Fed

This love is also like a great fire that must be fed so it does not go out. These souls are always bringing wood for the fire no matter what the cost. For myself, I would be content to just have straw to throw on.

Sometimes, I am laughing. Other times, I am greatly troubled. I want to serve God, but except to sweep or do trifling things, I am useless. My penances are so insignificant, I scoff at them myself. The great trial is to receive this fire from God and then to lack bodily strength to do anything. Because the soul cannot throw wood on the fire, she fears it will go out. The soul is consumed, turned into ashes or melted into tears. Though delectable, the torture is severe.

Doing Nothing and Receiving

Let the soul which has come this far praise the Lord. She will have no knowledge of the blessing she possesses if she has not learned by experience that she can receive His favors, even though she does nothing in the Lord’s service.

Maybe I am speaking much about trifles, but my confessor has told me not to worry about the length of this book and to omit nothing. I describe everything I remember. I do omit much or else I would need much more time.

31 – Attacks of the Devil

The Devil’s Attacks

Having explained the devil’s secret disturbances, I will describe what he did to me in public.

Once, while I was in chapel, he appeared to me in an abominable form. As he spoke, I looked at his mouth,(which was horrible). A great flame was coming out of his body, intensely bright but casting no shadow. He told me I had escaped but that he would get me. I made the sign of the cross and he disappeared. However, he came back immediately. This happened twice. I flung some holy water and the vision never came back.

At another time, the devil was with me five hours, torturing me with terrible pains and with disquiet (inward and outward). The sisters were frightened to death and didn’t know what to do.

Internal Prayer

When the suffering became intolerable, I asked God to give me patience (with that I could suffer to the end of the world). So, on this particular occasion, I made these internal acts. The Lord made me realize that this suffering came from the devil, because I saw a hideous little man snarling in despair at losing me. Seeing him, I laughed and was not afraid. The sisters with me were helpless, because the devil had made my body, head and arms shake. I could not resist. Even worse was my inner turmoil because I could not regain my peace. I didn’t ask for holy water lest I should frighten the sisters.

Fleeing Holy Water

From experience, I know there is nothing like holy water to put the devil to flight and to keep him away. Devils also flee the cross but then they return. Holy water has greater power. When I take holy water, my soul feels a refreshment. I have experienced this time and again, like a thirsty person who drinks cold water. I delight in the Church's words which impart power and make this water so different from other water which is not blessed.

Because the tortures continued, I asked the sisters for holy water. However, when they sprinkled it, it did me no good. So, I sprinkled some in the direction of the hideous little man. He disappeared and all my troubles went, as if some hand had lifted them. I was tired from having received many blows. When the Lord permits him, the devil can do real harm to a soul and body that is not his. I then thought about what he does to possessed souls. I had a great desire to be free from the devil's companionship. Quite recently, the same thing happened. I used holy water and the devils left. Immediately, two sisters entered the room and noticed a very bad smell like brimstone.

In Choir

On another occasion, I was in choir and felt a vehement impulse to recollection. I left quietly, however, all the sisters heard the sounds of heavy blows where I was. Then I heard voices. I was not the least afraid because I was so deeply immersed in prayer. These disturbances always happen when I am helping some soul to make progress. I will now describe another incident. My confessor has a written report about it.

A Priest's Sins

A priest came to me concerning a serious sin he had been committing for two and a half years. He told other sins in confession but could not speak of this. He wanted to give it up but could not do so. I felt sorry for him and was distressed that God was offended. I prayed for him and got others to pray. God bestowed his mercy and the priest confessed at the first possible moment.

The priest wrote saying that he was doing much better but still experiencing the temptations. His anguish made him feel like he was in hell. I got all the sisters to pray as before. (None could guess who he was.) I asked the Lord to lift these temptations and let the devils tempt me, (as long as I would not sin). This led to a month of tortures and the two incidents that I have described.

The Devil's Wrath

I wrote to the priest and told him what I was suffering. From his letters, I knew that the devil had left the priest. I was tempted but he remained completely free. He thanked the Lord and myself (as if I had done something). When he was tempted, he would read my letters and the temptations would leave him. He was astounded to hear of my sufferings. Really, I would have endured this for many more years to set him free. The devil had loosed his wrath on me.

One night, I thought the devils were choking me. The nuns sprinkled holy water and I saw a large crowd of them run away over a steep hill. These creatures torment me but I am no longer afraid of them. I see that they cannot stir without God's permission. Enough said.

Let the true servant of God take little account of these horrors which are supposed to make us fear. When we pay little attention, they lose their power and we gain control. We even derive benefits (but I will not write of these).

The Devil Interrupting Prayer

I want to describe my experience on All Soul's Day. I was in chapel, saying some devotional prayers in my office book. The devil alighted on the book to prevent my prayer. I made the sign of the cross and he went away. He came back three times. I finished the prayer only after using holy water. I then saw several souls leave purgatory. Obviously, the devil tried to stop my prayer and impede their deliverance. I seldom see him in bodily form. In these visions, I do not see any form but I know he is there.

On Trinity Sunday, in the convent choir, I was in rapture when I saw a battle between the devils and the angels. I could not understand the meaning of this vision. Two weeks later, I realized there was a conflict between those who practiced prayer and those who did not. This conflict did the convent much harm, and lasted a long time.

On other occasions, I saw a multitude of devils around me. Because I was enveloped in light, they could come no nearer. God was guarding me so that I would not offend Him. I realize now that devils have very little power if I am with God. They only have strength against cowardly souls who surrender.

Weaknesses Re-awakened

During these diabolical temptations, I often feel as if all my past weaknesses were re-awakening. Until my confessor comforted me, I thought I must be wholly possessed because I had these thoughts. I believed that someone with my favors should not experience a single impulse towards an evil thought.

Even to this day, I am tormented by finding myself highly thought of by important people. In these moments of being praised, I think of Christ and the saints. I realize that I am traveling in the opposite direction, since they experienced only contempt and insults. This causes me to proceed with great fear.

Becoming Publicly Known

When I suffer persecutions, my body is afflicted but my soul is in control. The soul has its own kingdom and all is beneath her feet. This has happened often and lasted for a number of days. I thought this was a virtue, but a Dominican explained that this was a temptation.

When I thought these favors would become publicly known, the torture became excessive and disturbed my soul. This reached such a pitch that I wanted to be buried alive. When the raptures began, I could not resist them, even in public. After they were over, I would be so ashamed that I didn't want anyone to see me.

The Lord asked me why I was afraid. He said that only two things could happen. People would speak ill of me or give praise to Him. The non-believers would condemn me (without my doing wrong). Either course would benefit me and I should not be troubled. This calmed me. Thinking of his words still comforts me.

Temptations to Go Elsewhere

The temptations were so great that I wanted to go to a well established convent which was more strictly enclosed than ours, but it was a great distance away. This would be a relief because no one would know me. My confessor refused permission.

These fears robbed me of my freedom of spirit. Later I saw that my restlessness was not true humility. God revealed a truth. If I truly believed that everything good in me came from God, I would not be troubled by praise, just as I wasn't disturbed when praise was given to others. I must not be troubled when God shows His power in me.

Fall Zeal, Fears and Imperfections

I also fell into an excess of zeal. If a person saw good in me, I would ask God to reveal my sins to them. My confessor told me not to do this. However, I still do it until this day. If someone thought well of me, I would somehow manage to make them aware of my sins. That seemed to bring relief.

These feelings came from temptations, not from humility. Although I had no desire to deceive, it seemed as if I were deceiving everyone. So, I said nothing about these to my confessors. To do so would have caused scruples.

I now realize that these fears and apparent humility were imperfections. A soul abandoned to God does not care if good or evil is spoken about her. By God's light, the soul sees clearly that she owns nothing. Just let the soul receive the Lord's favors and get ready for persecution. This will certainly come when people learn about these favors. A thousand eyes are upon a special soul, while no eyes are upon lesser souls.

The Criticism of the World

I should not have been afraid. I was being pusillanimous. A soul should be prepared to be martyred by the world. The only good I see in the world is that it perfects good people by speaking ill of them. More courage is needed to follow the way of perfection than to be martyred, because perfection cannot be acquired quickly (unless the Lord grants that privilege).

The world, seeing God doing his work, expects the soul to be perfect all at once. The critics form their judgments through their own vices. They expect the soul not to eat or sleep (or even to breathe) and forget that she still has a body. No matter how perfect, the soul is still on earth. While trampling on earth's limitations, she must still use them.

She must have courage. She has not yet walked, and the world expects her to fly. She hasn't yet conquered her passions, and the world expects her to be heroic like the saints. This causes us to praise the Lord. It also causes sorrow because many souls turn back, not knowing how to help themselves. I also would have turned back except for the Lord's compassion. Until He acted, I just fell again and again.

Trying to Fly Without Wings

I wish I knew how to express this. Many souls want to fly before God gives them wings. The following comparison is much to the point. The soul begins with fervor and determination to advance in virtue, and gives up everything for God. Then she sees others who are more advanced, with fruits given by the Lord. She reads books and sees all she must do to rise to that level. Because the soul cannot manage to do so, she loses courage.

She knows that she must not worry about what people say, or to seek her own reputation, or to be attached to family members. She must be a person of prayer and not converse with everyone. Also, other things are needed. These virtues must be given to her by God. They are supernatural blessings which contradict her natural tendencies. This soul must hope that what she now desires will be hers, if

she prays and does what she can. Her weak nature must have confidence and not be dismayed. She must believe that she will be the victor.

Stern Advice

Since I have much experience, I will say this. No person has any virtue unless it is tested by the opposite vice. We must never grow careless because so much of the world clings to us. God must help us to understand that everything in this life has many dangers.

A few years ago, I thought I was not attached to my relatives. I could not even put up with their conversation. Then, because of an important matter, I had to live with my sister (of whom I was extremely fond). I could not enjoy our conversations. She was married and we could not always speak of what I should have liked.

I always tried to be alone. However, when she was troubled, it affected me very much. I was quite concerned about her. I realized I was not as detached as I supposed. I needed to avoid the occasions of sin, so that this detachment could grow. I have done this ever since.

Attached to Reputation

When the Lord begins to implant a virtue, we must esteem it and not risk losing it. Concerning our reputations, we are not as detached as we think. If someone seeking perfection is worried about their reputation, let her put this attachment away. This is a chain which no file can sever. Only God can break it, (with help of our prayer and effort). This impediment does great harm. I see people who do holy deeds and others admire them. What blocks their perfection? They worry about their reputation. They do not realize that they are guilty because the devil tells them that their reputation is important.

Removing the Caterpillar

Let such persons believe me. They must remove this caterpillar. It may not hurt the whole tree, but the virtues that remain will all be worm-eaten. The tree will not prosper or allow the nearby trees to prosper. Its fruit of good example is not healthy and will not last. Our concern for our reputation is like playing a wrong note on the organ. The whole song becomes discordant. In a life of prayer, such concern is a pestilence (and harms the soul whenever it occurs).

Two Divergent Ways

If we are following a Christ who was insulted, why are we anxious to keep our good reputation? His way and our way diverge. We cannot have union with God and our reputation. When we give up our rights, the Lord quickly comes. Some say, "I have nothing to give up". Stay determined and you will not lose the blessing. His Majesty will soon arrange many ways to gain this detachment. Set to work. Root out what seems to be of little or no importance. I did this when I began. They were just straws which I threw the on the fire, but the Lord accepted them.

Needing Help in Choir

I had this fault. I knew little about my office book, or what to do in choir or how to behave. I was just careless and absorbed in other concerns. Other novices could have taught me. However, I didn't ask so that they wouldn't learn how little I knew. God opened my eyes and I began to ask the other girls' opinions. Doing so did not damage my reputation.

I was bad at singing. If I did not practice, I felt it very deeply. I worried about what the other nuns thought. Perturbed about my own honor, I sang even worse. Later, I changed. If I did not know the part real well, I asked for help. At first, this was painful. Later, I took pleasure in it. When I ceased worrying about whether my ignorance was known or not, I did much better. This concern for my honor prevented me from the true honor of praising God.

Gathering the Mantles

By means of these “nothings” (that is what they really are) my actions become more worthy. By being faithful in little things, God helped me to do greater ones. This is true concerning humility. Once, I saw all the nuns were making progress except myself. So, I would collect their mantles when they left. I felt I was serving angels. Then, they heard about this and I felt ashamed. I wasn’t humble. I was just afraid they would laugh.

I am ashamed to confess all these little grains of sand which your waters of grace (beneath the sands) had not yet stirred. All the readers can see how poor I am, in spite of your great favors. I speak of these humble beginning steps toward perfection to encourage others. You, Lord, take notice of these humorous steps of a beginner. May I not always remain a beginner.

32 – Her Place in Hell

A Trip to Hell

One day, a long time after being granted so many favors, I was in prayer. Suddenly, without knowing how, I found myself (I thought) plunged right into hell. The Lord wanted me to see the place which the devils had prepared for me and which I merited by my sins. This was extremely brief, but if I live many years, I will never forget it. The entrance was like a furnace. It was a long, narrow passage, low, dark and closely confined. The ground was filled with filthy, evil-smelling mud, which had many wicked-looking reptiles. At the end, the wall had a hollow space like a cupboard. Here, I was confined. The sights were pleasant compared to what I felt.

Attempt to Describe Sufferings

My feelings could not be exaggerated or even understood. I cannot describe the fire in my soul. Although I have endured bodily sufferings on earth, these sufferings in hell were intolerable. I have had shrinking of the nerves during paralysis and even bodily sufferings caused by the devil, but these are as nothing compared with what I felt in hell. This doesn’t include that they would be endless and never cease.

Even more, these bodily sufferings were as nothing compared with the sufferings of my soul. I felt an oppression, suffocation and affliction. These were accompanied by a hopelessness, too forcible to describe. To say the soul is continually torn from the body is very little. In this case, the soul tears itself to pieces. I cannot describe the interior fire and despair, far greater than any pain. I felt as if I were being both burned and dismembered. However, the interior fire and despair were the worst torments.

Powerless and In the Dark

I was powerless to hope for comfort. In that little cupboard I had no room to sit or to lie. I was in a hole in the wall, and the walls completely stifled me. I was in the blackest darkness. Although there was no light, I could see every affliction. At this time, I did not see all of hell. Since then, I have seen the punishment of various vices. These seemed more dreadful, but because I felt no pain I had less fear of them.

The Favor of Vision

In the earlier vision, the Lord wanted me to feel as if my body were suffering the torments. I don't know how, but I knew immediately that it was a great favor to see the place from which His mercy delivered me. To read about these tortures (as devils using pincers) is as nothing compared with the reality. I have rarely thought of the different kinds of torture because I make little progress on the road of fear. Any earthly burning is as nothing compared to this fire of hell.

This happened six years ago and, as I write, I am still terrified. At this moment, fear deprives my body of warmth. None of my sufferings on earth has the slightest importance in comparison to these torments. I repeat. This vision was a special favor. One of its greatest benefits was to remove all fear of earthly tribulations and disappointments. The vision also strengthened me to suffer. I give thanks to the Lord who delivered me from these never-ending torments.

Since then, all has been easy, compared with a single moment of that experience. After reading so many books on hell, I still was not afraid and underrated the pains. What was I thinking of? How could I be attracted to anything which was driving me there? O God, how you loved me, rescuing me from that gloomy prison when I would have made straight for it again.

Not Wanting Anyone to Go There

This vision caused me great distress, because I realized how many souls bring damnation upon themselves, especially Lutherans who by Baptism are members of the Church. I had a new zeal for souls. After this I would gladly suffer many deaths, to deliver even one soul from those tortures. After all, do we not have compassion on our loved ones who suffer here on earth? Who could even look at the soul's endless sufferings in hell? Every heart would be afflicted. On earth, suffering ends with death. In hell, suffering has no limit. We cannot just look on calmly, as the devil carries away souls every day.

In such an urgent matter, we cannot be satisfied with less than a total effort. Let us leave nothing undone! Although I was a wicked creature, I refrained from doing certain things which the world considers legitimate. Also, I bore serious illness with patience. I did not gossip or speak against anyone. I did not covet and was never envious. I abstained from other faults and lived in constant fear of God. Just look at what the devils were preparing for me! And my faults deserved an even heavier punishment!

Eating Stronger Meat

I repeat. The torture was terrible. How perilous for a soul to be content when it is falling into mortal sin at every step. Keep free of the occasions of sin and God will help you as He helped me. Now I see where my sins would have led me. O God, do not let me out of your hands. God forbid! After these visions and the secrets which the Lord was pleased to reveal concerning the happiness reserved for the good and the afflictions of the wicked, I wanted to do penance for all my evil deeds and become worthy of this blessing. I wanted to withdraw from others and to flee the world. My soul was both disturbed and at peace. God gave me this ardour to digest stronger meat than I had been eating.

Examining Her Way of Life

I wondered what I could do for God? Obviously, I could keep my Rule with the greatest perfection. At this Convent of the Incarnation (Avila) many sisters served God well. Yet, we would often leave the convent for other places where we could still keep our vows. Also, the Rule was not

lived in its primitive vigor but according to the Mitigated Rule (1432). There also was an excessive amount of comfort because the house was large.

However, the most serious setback was the habit of frequently going out (of which I did a great deal). Some lay persons liked me. They would importune the superiors, who would order me to visit them. I was in the convent very little. The devil must have arranged this. However, the people were good and taught me much.

The New Idea of Establishing a Convent

One day, someone asked about becoming discalced nuns. It was possible to establish another convent. I desired this, so I discussed the idea with the widowed lady (the one who introduced me to Fray Peter). She had the same desire and she thought of how to acquire the needed money. I was happy in my present convent and this held me back. Still, we commended the project to God.

One day, at Communion, the Lord gave me very explicit commands to pursue the project with all my might. He promised that the convent would definitely be founded, would give great service and would be called St. Joseph. He promised to watch one door, while Our Lady watched the other. The convent would be a star, giving off brilliant light. I had to tell my confessor that he should not oppose or hinder the work.

Foreseeing the Trials

The vision was so great and the words were so powerful, that I could not doubt the Lord spoke them. Still, I was distressed because I could foresee all the trials ahead. Also, I liked my present convent. Although I had spoken of a new foundation, I had no real determination to do this.

Now a burden was placed upon me and I became doubtful of what to do. The Lord appeared to me again and again. He put before me many motives and arguments. I saw that these were valid and that He willed this project. I knew I had to speak with my confessor and give him a written account.

The confessor did not tell me to abandon the project. However, he saw, humanly speaking, that the widowed lady really had scant resources. He told me to talk with my Superior and to do what he advised. The widowed lady spoke to him and to my Provincial. He liked the idea, promised all the necessary help and said he would approve the house. They discussed the needed revenue. We decided for many reasons that the number of nuns would never exceed thirteen. We wrote to Fray Peter of Alcantara. He told us not to abandon this work.

The Persecution Begins

As soon as the project was known, the terrible persecution began. People laughed at us and said the idea was ridiculous. I did not know what to do and felt that, in some way, these people were right. Worn out, I went to His Majesty, who consoled me. He said not to worry because all the founders of Religious Orders had suffered persecutions. He told me what to say to my companion. We were both comforted and had the courage to resist everyone. They were all against us.

Because of the commotion, the Provincial changed his mind and refused to sanction the plan. We were sorely distressed (especially myself) at finding the Provincial against me, since his previous approval had justified me in everyone's eyes. My companion was even refused absolution unless she dropped the plan. She was told to remove the scandal.

A Dominican Priest's Intervention

We had no one to advise us and people said that this all came out of our own heads. My companion had spoken with a Dominican priest, even before the Provincial withdrew his support. She explained the amount of revenue and hoped that he could help us. I myself told him what we were trying to do and why. I did not speak of the revelations but gave him only the natural reasons. He wanted a week to consider this and asked if we were committed to following his advice. I said we would. I never lost confidence that we would have the new convent. My companion had even greater faith. Nothing could persuade her to abandon it.

Abandoning the project seemed impossible, because I believed the revelation was true. Yet, if this learned man had said we were offending God and acting against our conscience by having the convent, I would have abandoned the project and found some other way, even though the Lord had shown me no other way.

His Decision

Later, the learned man said that he had thought about asking us to abandon the project because of the popular clamor and lack of revenue. Also, a certain gentleman heard that we had sought this priest's advice. The man told him to be careful and not to help us. Nevertheless, as he saw our intentions, the way we were proceeding, and our concern for our Order. He became convinced that this was a service to God and should be done. Our income was small, but we trusted God. Anyone who objected, should talk to him. He always helped us, as I'll describe later.

Conclusion

We were greatly comforted. Some who had opposed us now started to help. The saintly gentleman, (who had been opposed), now felt the project was based on prayer and would lead to perfection. Although the means seemed impractical, he decided the idea might be from God. God also inspired the priest with whom I spoke first. He, also, began to help in this matter. With people continually praying, we completed negotiations to buy the house. It was small but the Lord had told me to start the work and I would see what He would do. How clearly I have seen this.

33 – The New Convent Project

Just when the deed was to be signed, Father Provincial changed his mind. God willed this change because the Lord was arranging this work to be accomplished in a different way. Without the Provincial's sanction, my confessor forbade me to go on. When the project was given up and not accomplished, all were certain that this was an idea of a ridiculous woman.

The Trials

For wanting to found a more strictly enclosed house, I became unpopular in my own convent. The nuns said that I was insulting them, that I could serve God where I was, that I did not love my convent, and that I should have gotten the money to fix up the present convent. Some said I should be in our prison cell. A few, very few, agreed with me.

Her Abandonment to God's Will

I tried to see where they were right. However, I had to hide the most important truth, that I had been told to do this by the Lord. I had to keep silent. God was good and I gave up the project as easily as if it cost me nothing. Nobody could believe that this was possible. They thought I would be distressed and shamed. Even my confessor could not believe. I had no further obligation because I

had done all I could. I remained very happy in my own convent. I still believed the task would be accomplished although I could not see how or when.

Upset and Consolation

What did upset me was a letter from my confessor. He suggested that I had acted against his wishes. This was very painful but the Lord did not want me to be immune from even these trials. I expected my confessor to console me. Instead, he wrote that I had to see that my plans were just a dream. I had to lead a better life and not do anything more, since I had already caused scandal.

This troubled me more than anything else. I began to wonder if I had offended God. If these visions were delusions and all my prayer a deception, I was deluded and lost. These thoughts plunged me into the deepest affliction. However, the Lord comforted and strengthened me. He told me not to worry. I had not offended Him. Rather, I had given Him great service. He told me to obey my confessor and to keep silent until the project was resumed. With His comforting words, all the persecution seemed as nothing.

Others Take Action

He showed me that suffering persecution for His sake is a special blessing. My love and other virtues grew so much. I was astounded and continued to desire trials. Others thought I was very much ashamed, but due to the Lord's comfort that was not true.

At this point, I began to experience the vehement impulses of love (already described) and deeper raptures. I never spoke of these increased favors. The saintly Dominican (Fr. Pedro Ibarra, O.P.) continued to believe the project would be accomplished. To obey my confessor, I took no further part in the project. However, he, the Dominican priest and my woman companion wrote to Rome to gain a solution.

The Inquisition

Somehow, the devil brought it about that many people learned that I had received a revelation about the project. These grew concerned. They told me that these were bad times and I might have to go before the Inquisitors. This made me laugh, for I had no fear of them. I consoled them, saying that in matters of faith I never transgressed. I would die a thousand deaths for any truth of the Church or of Scripture. I told them my soul would be in terrible shape if I had done anything to fear the Inquisition. In fact, I would go and report myself if I had transgressed. If anything were alleged against me, the Lord would deliver me.

The Role of the Dominican

I discussed these matters with the saintly Dominican. I told him of my visions, of my way of prayer and the great favors of the Lord. I asked him to think all this over and let me know his feelings on the matter. He reassured me that our discussions helped him. He gave more time to prayer and, for two years, went to a monastery where there was more solitude. His superiors then commanded him to leave the monastery because the Order needed him.

I was sorry when he went to the monastery, because I needed him. I did not dissuade him from this, for I knew he would profit. The Lord told me he was led in the right way. When he returned, his spiritual growth was great and I also benefited. Before this, he consoled me by his learning. Now he had ample spiritual experience of the supernatural. Because he was needed in the foundation of the convent, God brought him back at just the right time. For six months I remained silent and did nothing because the Lord had given me no command. I did not know why, but I could not get rid of my belief that the convent would be founded.

A New Jesuit Rector

At this time, the rector of the Jesuits was changed. Fortunately, the new rector was a spiritual man with courage and great learning. I was in dire need. My Jesuit confessor understood my spirit and desired my progress. However, in the Jesuits, they are very particular about acting in conformity with the will of the superior. So, on certain matters, my confessor was not definite. My spirit, which was experiencing the most vehement impulses, was greatly troubled by this constraint. Still, I obeyed him.

One day, when I thought my confessor did not believe me, the Lord told me that the distress would soon be over. I was happy because I thought He meant I would die (I was always happy when I thought of this.). Later, I realized he was talking about the new Rector who placed no restrictions on my confessor. He told him not to fear, or to lead me on such a narrow path. Instead, he must allow the Spirit to work because these strong spiritual impulses were even preventing my soul from breathing.

An Important Visit

When the Rector came to see me, my confessor told me to be totally frank with him. When I entered the confessional, my spirit had a unique feeling which I never had in anyone else's presence. I experienced spiritual joy. Here was a priest who understood me and would be in harmony with me. I don't know how I knew this, because I never had spoken with him or even heard stories about him.

Later, I realized that my instinct was correct. My contact with him has always been to my benefit. He knows how to treat advanced souls. He makes them run, not walk one-step at a time. The Lord has given him a great aptitude to lead souls in detachment and mortification.

I realized immediately that he had a pure and holy soul and a special gift for discernment of spirits. This comforted me greatly. Soon after coming under his direction, the Lord told me to take up the convent project again and to place all my goals before the Rector and my Confessor.

I said some things that made them afraid. However, the Rector, having studied the possible effects of the foundation, never doubted that I was led by God. In short, after hearing my reasons, they did not hinder me.

Taking Up the Task

My confessor gave me permission to take up the task with all my might. I saw clearly that I was accepting a great burden, since I was alone and could do little. All had to be done in secrecy. I asked my sister to buy and furnish a house, as if it were for herself. The Lord had provided the money for the purchase. (To describe how the Lord provided everything would take a long time).

I wanted to do nothing against obedience. However, if I told my superiors, everything would be ruined. Getting the money, finding a house, getting it purchased and having it furnished cost me many trials. I was alone. My companion's task consisted only of allowing the work to be in her name and with her approval. The difficult tasks were mine and I do not know how I get them done. I would cry out, "Lord, why do you command the impossible and I am only a woman? If only I were free. Instead, I am bound in so many ways. What can I do, Lord?"

Appearance of St. Joseph

Once, when I couldn't think of what to do or how to pay the workman, St. Joseph appeared to me. He told me that money would be provided and I should move ahead with the arrangements. I moved ahead without the money. The Lord provided and people were amazed.

Appearance of Jesus

I thought the house was too small for a convent and I wanted to buy another one, but I had no money. There was a house next to ours, but it also was small. At Communion, the Lord appeared and said, "I told you to do the best you can." Then, He exclaimed, "Oh the greed of mankind. You think there will not be enough ground for you. I slept in the open air because I had nowhere to lay my head".

This amazed me, but He was right. I looked at the little house and saw it could be a convent. After that, I never thought of another site, but arranged to have the house made ready. Everything was rough, but we fixed it just enough so that no one got hurt. This principle should be followed everywhere.

Appearance of St. Clare

On St. Clare's day, I went to Communion and the saint appeared to me in great beauty. She told me to do all I could and she would help. I conceived a great devotion to her. Her words proved true because a Poor Clare's convent near to us is helping to maintain us. More important, she brought my desire for poverty to a great perfection. The poverty that she observed is now kept in our convent. We live on alms. It cost me much to get this principle definitively approved by the Holy Father. (Permission for the Convent to live totally on alms with no fixed income was granted in July 1565.) At the request of Saint Clare, the Lord is providing for all our needs.

A Vision of Having Been Cleansed

In the same period, on the feast of the Assumption, I was in a Dominican monastery (St. Thomas, 1561), thinking of the sins I had confessed there. Suddenly, a vehement rapture almost drew me out of myself. I could not see the Elevation nor hear Mass. I saw myself clothed in a garment of the greatest whiteness and brightness. Later, I saw Our Lady on my right and St. Joseph on my left putting the garment on me. I understood clearly that I was cleansed of my sins.

After being fully clothed, I experienced the greatest joy. Our Lady took my hand and told me how pleased she was that I was serving St. Joseph. She told me to be confident that the convent would be accomplished and that Jesus, Joseph and she would be greatly served.

The project would not fail. Joseph and she would keep us safe and Jesus would go with us. She said she would give me a jewel, as a sign. Then, she seemed to place a beautiful gold collar around my neck, which held a most valuable cross. The gold and stones have no comparison on earth. We cannot imagine their beauty, comprehend the nature of the garment, or imagine the brightness of the vision. Compared to these, everything on earth is a smudge of soot.

Effects of the Vision

The beauty I saw in Our Lady was wonderful. Her face was so lovely and her vestments had a whiteness and amazing splendor. I did not see St. Joseph as clearly, although I could see that he was there. To me, Our Lady looked like a child. Her being with me a short time caused me more happiness than I have ever experienced (I wish never to lose it.)

After I saw them ascend into heaven with many angels, I remained quite alone. I was so comforted, exalted, recollected and filled with such tender devotion that I stayed for some time. I was unable to speak and quite beside myself. I had a vehement impulse to melt away in love for God. The way everything happened, I could never doubt that this came from God.

Under the Bishop

The Lord told me not to give the convent to the Order. This caused me grief. He gave me reasons and told me to send to Rome and follow a certain procedure (which he described). I did as the Lord said and all turned out well. It proved very wise that we are under the Bishop. At the time, I didn't even know who he was. In face of all the opposition, he was very helpful. (I shall tell this later.) Blessed be God who has brought this all about!

34 – God Intervenes

In spite of all my efforts to keep everything a secret, a few people heard about my work. Some believed and others did not. I feared that they would speak to the Provincial, who would stop everything. The Lord provided in the following way.

A Lady's Request

In a large city (Toledo), a lady was in great distress due to her husband's death. Her grief was so great that people feared for her health. Since God had people speak well of me, she had heard about me. She knew the Provincial and also knew that we could leave the house. The Lord gave her a great desire to see me. She used every means, even sending a messenger to the Provincial. He ordered me to go with a companion. I received this news on Christmas night.

I was distressed that she believed there was some good in me. I commended myself to God and was in deep rapture during Morning Prayer. God told me not to listen to people who would advise me not to go. My going would mean trials, but God would be served.

Concerning the convent project, it would be good for me to be absent until the brief had arrived, because the devil organized a plot against the Provincial's arrival. I was to fear nothing, because the Provincial would help me. The Lord's words greatly assured me. I told the Rector. He advised me to go. Others told me that this was the devil's way of bringing evil upon me.

I obeyed the Rector and went without any fear. I was in great confusion, but I knew that the others were mistaken. I asked God even more not to abandon me. The Jesuits had a house there. So, I felt safe, because I would come under their direction.

Gift to the Woman

The Lord wanted this important woman comforted. She immediately grew better every day. This was a notable achievement because the distress had caused her great depression. She was God-fearing and her Christian spirit made up for what was lacking in me. She loved me and when I saw how good she was, I loved her.

Everything was a cross. Even the earthly comforts were a real torment. I feared about growing careless (because she showed me great favors). The more comforts I saw, the more I despised them. God also gave me a great inner freedom. I felt like an equal, even in the midst of all these important women. By seeing others also subject to weaknesses, I gained great profit and learned to esteem great rank very little.

Her Problems

Those with rank have many more trials. They have to be careful to behave according to their state. This leaves them little freedom to truly live. Their position rules their schedules and meals. I came to hate any desire to be a great lady. Yet, the woman I was consoling was very humble.

Seeing how she must live, I felt sorry for her. There are difficulties even with servants, if one is favored over another. This is slavery. The master really is a slave to all this. While I was in the house, many of them served the Lord better. However, some were jealous of me because this lady loved me. They thought I was working for my own interests. Fortunately, the Lord allowed these problems to free me from any absorption in the comforts of that house.

A Long Time Friend

While I was there, a religious of great importance came. I had been in touch with him for many years. I wanted him to be a great servant of God, and desired to know the state of his soul. However, I was recollected in prayer and this seemed to be a waste of time. After all, what right did I have to interfere? Three times I got up and then sat down. Finally, my good angel overcame the evil angel and I spoke with him.

We questioned each other about our past lives, for we had not met in years. I told him I had many spiritual trials. When he asked me to explain the trials, I told him that I could not describe them. He said his friend, a Dominican, (probably Fr. Garcia de Toledo O.P.) understood these trials, and if I described them, he would ask him about them.

Her Desires for His Holiness

Despite all the shame I used to feel about these types of conversations, I was not the least distressed to tell him everything under the seal of confession. He had always been a learned man, but now I could see his great talents. For years, I had felt he would do great good if he gave himself to God. Whenever I like someone, I always wish they would give themselves wholly to God. Often, I am powerless over this desire. I want all to serve God. With those I like, the desire is vehement and I importune the Lord for them.

Her Prayer for Him

Because he asked me to pray for him, I went to my place of solitude and began to speak to the Lord in my silly way (not knowing what I am saying). At these times, my soul is transported and I see no distance between God and myself. In the love I know God has for me, I forget myself. He and I are one, so I talk nonsense.

This time, I shed many tears so the priest would give himself to God's service, for I wanted him to be even better. I ended saying, "Lord, do not refuse me. Think what a good person he is to have as a friend". Oh, the humanness of God who sees our good will and allows a person like me to speak so boldly.

The Result

I was troubled in these prayers, thinking I might have offended God. I did not know if I were in the state of grace or not. I wanted to die because there is no worse death than to offend God. This caused great depression. After dissolving into tears, I felt quite happy again. I soon learned that I could take comfort that I was in grace. God was working in my soul and was giving me feelings which He would not give to a soul in mortal sin. I was confident that God would help this person.

It troubled me that the Lord told me to say certain things to him. I have great difficulty in taking messages to a third person, not knowing how he will receive them. Yet, I knew I had to do this and promised God I would. I was so shy, I could only write the message down and hand it to him.

Clearly From God

Clearly this was from God, because he resolved to give himself to prayer. The message had contained truths which were so apropos that he was astounded. The Lord had prepared him to believe. I continued to beg the Lord to bring him back, away from the pleasures and affairs of this life. God did this. Now, every time he speaks with me, I am astounded because God has granted him great favors in a short time. He is so immersed in God, that he seems no longer alive to the things of earth. May God hold him in His hands, for if he continues to advance he will be a great servant and bring help to many souls.

In a short time, he has experienced many spiritual favors which God grants as He wills. Certainly years of service are important, but God sometimes grants less contemplation to someone in twenty years than to another in one year. God knows why. Sometimes we think we can learn things in years, when really they can be learned only by experiences.

The Learned Director

A person cannot discern the spirits if they are not themselves spiritual. A learned man can direct a person in spirituality, but his direction will be intellectual. He can only make sure that the person acts in accord with the Scriptures. In other matters, the Director must not think he understands and must not quench the Spirit, because these souls are being directed by a greater Master.

The learned director must not think that the experiences I have described are impossible. All is possible to God. The learned man must humble himself. Sometimes the Lord makes an old woman like myself more trained in the Spirit than he is. If he has this humility, he will help souls and himself.

However, I repeat, if he has neither experience nor humility and he does not understand what is possible to God, he will gain little and souls will gain less. If he is humble, the Lord will not let him fall into error.

Good Qualities of this Priest

This priest had certainly studied and learned all he could about prayer. When he did not understand, he consulted others. Besides this, the Lord gave him great faith to be of service to others, including myself. When God, by death, took someone who directed me (probably Peter of Alcantara), he provided others to help me in my trials.

Now, the Lord has completely transformed this priest and he hardly knows himself. Before, he had poor health. Now, he has strength to do penances. God has given him new courage and has even given him a new vocation. All of this good came to him by the favors he received in prayer.

You cannot mistake this reality. The Lord has tested him in many situations and he has proved his merits. May much good come to his Order through him. The Lord has given me great visions and revealed many things about this priest (and also about the Jesuit rector and two other Dominicans). To one of these the Lord has taught the same things that He had earlier taught me. From him, I have learned much.

A Conversation Filled With Love

I will relate one experience. I was with him in the speaking room and I felt such great love in my soul, that I almost became absorbed. I thought about the wonders of God Who had lifted this priest's

soul so high so quickly. I was confused when I saw him listening to me speak about prayer. The Lord allowed this because I had such a great desire to see him make progress.

I received so much. He left my soul ablaze with new fire to begin afresh. How much a soul can do who is ablaze with love! What value we must set on love. Anyone who has such love should follow after whatever souls he can.

Finding A Companion

Someone who is sick from love gains a great gift when she finds another with this same illness. Then she is not alone. The two help each other in their sufferings and desires. They stand shoulder to shoulder, ready to die a thousand times and longing to lose their lives. They are like soldiers seeking for rich booty who know that they must fight wars to be rich. This toiling is their profession.

It is a gift to know the great gain in suffering for Christ's sake. We cannot understand this until we have given up everything. If a person clings to anything, he suffers distress when he must give it up. There is an appropriate saying "Whoever follows what is lost, is himself lost". What is a greater loss or greater blindness than to value what is really nothing?

Cause for Deep Rapture

Looking at this priest, I rejoiced. The Lord let me see the riches He had in store for him. Then, I realized that these favors came through my intervention and how unworthy I was. I prize all the favors given to him, even more than if they had been given to me. I praised the Lord that he fulfilled my desire to awaken this priest. Because I could no longer endure this joy, I went out from myself and lost myself for even greater gain.

I abandoned my meditation because I heard divine language caused by the Holy Spirit. I fell into a deep rapture. This caused me to lose my senses (just for a short time). I saw Christ in His majesty and glory, showing me His great satisfaction at what had happened. He told me that He was always present in these conversations and found pleasure when people delight in Him.

Another Vision

At another time, I saw the priest being carried in great glory. I understood by this that he was making great progress because a person, whom he had helped much, had begun to slander him. He had endured this joyfully, had given service to God and endured other persecutions. I will stop here and write more if my confessor (who knows the whole story) wants me to.

Prophecies Fulfilled

All the prophecies about this house and other matters have been fulfilled. Some prophecies were given three years before they became known. I always told these to my confessor and to the widow. She repeated them to others who can verify that I am not lying.

Going to Her Sister

Once, I was in great distress. My brother-in-law had died without going to confession. The Lord told me that my sister also would die without confession and that I had to go visit her. I told my confessor but he would not let me go. However, the Lord repeated this on several occasions, and my confessor let me go. I did not tell my sister that Lord spoke to me. I gave her all the light that I could. I got her to go frequently to confession and to think of her soul's profit. She did as I said. Four or five years after developing these good habits, she died when that the priest could not be available.

However, according to her habit, she had made her confession just a week earlier. Hearing this, I rejoiced. She spent just a short time in purgatory.

Prophecy Fulfilled

A week after her death, right after I received Communion, the Lord appeared to me and showed me that He was taking her to glory. From the time of the prophecy to the time of her death, my companion and I always remembered what the Lord said. At my sister's death, my companion came to me. She was amazed at how the prophecy was fulfilled. Praise God who takes care so that souls are not lost.

35. Establishment of the Convent in Holy Poverty.

A Special Woman

During my six month stay with the lady, a woman attached to our Order heard of me and went out of her way to visit. The Lord inspired me and also inspired this woman to found another convent of this Order. She sold all she had and walked barefoot to Rome to obtain the needed permission. (The woman's name was Maria de Jesus). She received permission, but her attempts to found a convent in Granada failed. So, she came to see Teresa.

She was greatly devoted to prayer and penance, and had received many favors from the Lord. Our Lady appeared to her and told her to undertake this task. She had done so much that I was ashamed to be in her presence. She showed me the permission she received from Rome. During these two weeks we formed our plans about founding these convents.

Convents Without Revenue

By speaking to her, I realized that our Rule, (before its mitigation), ordered us to possess nothing. I had no idea about founding a convent without revenue because I wanted no anxieties about necessities. I forgot the anxieties involved in having possessions.

Although this woman couldn't read, the Lord had taught her spiritual truths. I had read our Constitutions, but she knew better than I did. I liked the idea about possessing nothing, but thought that people would see the idea as ridiculous and would say that I should not cause others to suffer. As for myself, Christ had given me a love for poverty and I would rejoice in keeping the counsels. I always believed that poverty was the most solid of foundations.

I wanted to beg alms for God and have no possessions. I feared if others did not have the same desires, they would be discontent. This would cause distraction. I have seen very poor monasteries where there was no great prayer. Their lack of prayer was not due to the poverty, but their poverty came from their lack of prayer. Distractions never made people richer and God will bless those who serve Him. I had little faith, but this woman had great faith.

The Debate

On this matter, I sought the opinions of others. They did not agree with me. I did not know what to do and learned men gave me many arguments against the idea. However, I knew the Rule and knew the way that led to greater perfection. So, I could not allow any house to have revenue. At times, people convinced me otherwise. However, every time I prayed and saw Jesus on the Cross, I could not bear to be rich. I asked Him with tears to make me as poor as He.

I discovered that having revenue involved many inconveniences which cause unrest. I wrote to the Dominican friar who was helping us. He responded with a letter, two sheets long, which tried to

dissuade me from the project. I wrote back saying I had no interest in theology nor in his learning. These would dissuade me from following my vocation to poverty and Christ's teaching on perfection.

Those For and Against

I delighted to find anyone who would support me. The lady I was staying with was for me. However, many who had originally approved the plan, now urged me to give it up. I told them that they had changed their opinions but I would keep mine. At this point, Fray Peter came to the lady's house. Having practiced poverty for so many years, he told me to carry out my plan and he would help. With his opinion and help (no one could be better) I sought no other opinions.

Jesus' Opinion

One day, the Lord spoke clearly, and said that I must found the convent on poverty. This was the Father's will and He would help me. This certainly was of God because I was in deep rapture at the time. At another time, He told me that money only led to confusion and assured me that we would have all the necessities if we served Him. I was never afraid of being without things. The Lord also changed the heart of the Dominican Friar who had written that I needed money to make the foundation. I was delighted by the support of these decisions. I became rich when I resolved to live only on God's love.

My Provincial then released me and I was free to go where I wished. At this same time, there was an election at the convent and I was told that many nuns wanted to elect me superior. This was a great torment. Although I was resolved to suffer martyrdom, I could not persuade myself to accept this. There were so many nuns to care for, and I had never desired to hold office. My conscience would be in great peril. So, I wrote to my friends and asked them not to vote for me.

Told to Go Back

Then, suddenly, the Lord told me I must go back. If I wanted a good cross, this was it. I was not to reject this and He would be with me. I was to go at once. All I could do was cry and think of the burden of being Superior. I could not see how this would do any good for my soul. When I told my confessor, he ordered me to go at once, since this was the way of greatest perfection. However, since the weather was hot, he permitted me to wait a few days. The Lord disposed otherwise. I grew restless, could not pray and feared I was not obeying the Lord.

By refusing to offer myself for this work, I was giving God only lip service. If this was greater perfection, why not accept it? If I had to die, let me die. These thoughts caused oppression and the Lord removed all joy in prayer. I was in such torment that my confessor told me to go immediately. God moved him just as He moved me.

The woman who owned the house was very sorry that I was leaving, especially since she had worked so hard to get the permission for me to come. She made a great sacrifice to allow me to leave. She loved God and I told her that I could do Him great service. I gave her hope that possibly I might see her again.

Setting Out

Although distressed at leaving the lady and my Jesuit confessor who helped me so much, I no longer had any regrets. This was for my greater perfection and for God's service. The sacrifice of all this comfort caused me greater happiness, although I did not understand how this was possible. I had two opposite feelings. I found joy and comfort in something that oppressed my soul.

I was calm and could spend hours in prayer. I saw clearly that I was about to fling myself into a fire. I was going to bear a far heavier cross than what I imagined. I went off gladly. The Lord wanted me to enter the battle. .

I thought of an example. Suppose I had a precious jewel and I discovered that someone whom I loved more than myself wanted this jewel. My happiness in pleasing my friend would be greater than in having the jewel. Although I wanted to feel sorry for leaving these people (I am a grateful person by temperament), I could not do so.

Importance of Her Return

What transpired was so important for the affairs of this house that I don't know how they would have been settled if I had delayed. How anxious God was that I carry out this task! Once in prayer, He told me that this house was the paradise of His delight. He had drawn together chosen souls.

I felt ashamed. I never expected souls such as these to live in strict enclosure with poverty and prayer. Each sister thinks she is unworthy of having come to such a place, especially those whom the Lord called from the vanity of the world, where they could have been happy by the world's standards. In this convent, the Lord has multiplied their happiness. They see that they have received the hundred-fold. The Lord changed other sisters from good to better.

To the young, the Lord gave fortitude and knowledge. To live detached from the goods of this life is really maximum repose. To the older and those in poor health, He gave strength to endure the austerities and penances.

The Lord's Road

O Lord, You so abundantly manifest your power that we need not seek reasons for what You will. With You, all things are possible and we need only forsake everything. You make everything easy.

Lord, I do not know how the road to You can be called "narrow". To me, it seems like a royal road and whoever sets out in earnest will travel securely. Mountain passes and falling rocks (occasions of sin) are far distant. What I call a cruel path and a really narrow road is the one with a deep valley on one side and a precipice on the other. If the traveler relaxes his care, he falls and is dashed to pieces.

The True Choice

Whoever loves you, O God, travels securely on a royal road, far from any precipice. When he stumbles, You give him a hand. If he loves You and not the world, even his many falls will not lead him to hell, for he will travel in the valley of humility. Why are people afraid to set out on the way of perfection? May the Lord make us realize how perilous it is to follow the crowd. Our true safety lies in pressing toward God, our eyes fixed on Him without fear that the Sun of Justice will set or that we will get lost by needing to travel by night. This only happens if we forsake Him.

People don't fear to walk among the lions of the world's delights, but the devil uses his scarecrows to scare us away from prayer. I would weep until I could weep no more and I would cry aloud to tell everyone how blind I was, if only I could open their eyes! May God do this and never let my eyes be blind again.

36 - Opposition and Persecution

On my way back to Avila, I was happy and resolved to suffer willingly. On the night I arrived, both the permission and the Brief from Rome also came. I was astonished, as were all those who knew

that the Lord had hastened my return. How necessary it was. The Lord brought me back just in the nick of time. Here, I found the bishop and the saintly Fray Peter and another gentleman.

Persuasion of Fray Peter

These two persuaded the bishop to sanction the convent's foundation. This was difficult because the convent was founded on poverty. However, the bishop liked the people, because He saw that they were determined to serve the Lord. So, he agreed to help with the plan. All of this was due to saintly Fray Peter who kept persuading people to help us.

If I had not come back early, this could never have been accomplished. Fray Peter was very ill and only stayed a few days. Soon, the Lord took Fray Peter to Himself. God had prolonged his life to get this settled, for he had been in poor health for two years.

Secretly and Speedily

Because the people were opposed, we did everything in secrecy. The Lord had my brother-in-law fall sick and he needed help. Because his wife was not present, I stayed with him. This prevented anything being discovered, although some people were suspicious. Remarkably, his illness lasted only for the time needed for the negotiations. When it was important for me to be free again, the Lord made him well. He was amazed at this.

With many people opposed, I had trouble getting the foundation sanctioned. The workmen had to act quickly because much had to be done to make the convent suitable. My woman companion was not here. She had to stay away, so the secret would be hidden. Speed was necessary for I feared being sent back to my own convent. This was my cross, but it seemed much lighter than what the Lord told me I would bear.

Opening the Convent

When all was ready, the Lord arranged for the Blessed Sacrament to be placed in the convent and for certain sisters to take the habit on St. Bartholomew's Day. So, in 1562, this Convent of St. Joseph was established with full authority. I, with two other nuns, gave the habit to the new sisters. Since the house was owned by my brother-in-law, I was living there by special permission.

Every decision was made in obedience and I always asked the advice of learned men. They saw the great benefits and they told me I could do everything in secret, keeping it from my superiors' knowledge. If there were even the slightest imperfection, I would have given up a thousand convents. Although I desired this convent so I could withdraw from the world and fulfill my vocation more perfectly, I would have abandoned everything if the Lord would be better served.

It was heaven to see the Blessed Sacrament in the convent and to take in four orphans (women without dowries). These were great servants of God. We received those women whose lives would serve the foundation. In this way, we could build a community of prayer and perfection, with service to God and the Order. I yearned for this and felt great comfort in doing what the Lord commanded. There was now one more Church dedicated to St. Joseph.

All was done by the Lord. My part was so full of imperfections, I should have been blamed more than thanked. In this great work, I was comforted to see that His Majesty had chosen me as His instrument. I was so happy that I was carried away by the intensity of my prayer.

Qualms From the Devil

Three hours later, when all was finished, the devil plunged me again into a spiritual battle. He made me wonder if all this was a mistake. Did I act against obedience by not having the Provincial's mandate? I knew the Provincial would not be pleased by my placing the convent under the Bishop's authority without his knowledge. Yet he didn't want to sanction this and I had not changed my plans.

The devil also asked if the nuns could be contented if they did not have enough to eat. Also, why did I get involved? Didn't I already have a convent? At that moment everything left me. All that the Lord said, all the opinions I had gotten and all the prayers that were said seemed gone. All I remembered was my own opinion. I had no defense against the devil's thoughts.

Inner Struggles

The devil also asked why I endured such penance when I was already ill and why I wanted to leave a comfortable convent where I had friends. Possibly, I could not live with these other nuns. He suggested I had taken on too much and would soon abandon it. He even said it might have been the devil himself who induced me to do this. As a result, I would be unable to pray and would lose my soul.

These thoughts came one after another. I could think of nothing else, and my soul was plunged into indescribable darkness. Although I went to the Blessed Sacrament, I was unable to commend myself to God. It was like a death agony and I could speak to no one, since I had not yet been given a confessor.

The Torment Resolved

How miserable is a life on earth! Everything changes and nothing is secure. A short time ago, I was the happiest person in the whole world. Now, the cause of my happiness was tormenting me. If we really think about this life, experience will show that there is little happiness or unhappiness to be had. This was one of the worst times in my life. My spirit was sensing all that I would have to suffer.

However, the Lord shortens all my tribulations and He did not allow me to suffer long. He gave me light so I could see that this was the devil who was trying to frighten me. I recalled my firm resolutions and my desires to suffer. To fulfill these, I shouldn't look for rest. Trials were needed to win merit. I could use my unhappiness as a kind of purgatory. What was I afraid of? I wanted trials and here were some good ones. My gain would be even greater due to this opposition. Why was I lacking in courage? By these reflections before the Blessed Sacrament, I promised to do all I could to get permission to enter this new house and make a vow of enclosure.

Joy After the Trial

At this, the devil fled and left me quite happy, (as I have been ever since). All our rules about enclosure and penance I find quite easy. I often ask what I could have chosen on earth that would be so delightful. Maybe I am happy because I am in better health, or because I have to do what the others do. The Lord has enabled me to keep the Rule, although at a great cost. This ability to keep the Rule astonishes everyone who knows my infirmities.

After this conflict, I saw clearly that this was the devil's doing. Since I had never been discontented in my twenty-eight years of being a nun, the Lord permitted this trial to see what a favor He did in calling me to this vocation. In the future, I could console anyone in this state.

Meeting With the Superior

After dinner, I sought some rest because I had been troubled by night and worn out in the day. However, the Superior sent for me. I went to her immediately, leaving my nuns upset. I knew there was plenty of trouble in store for me, but I cared little because the matter was now settled. I asked St. Joseph to bring me back to this house and I was happy to offer some sufferings to the Lord. I went, thinking I would be put in prison. I rejoiced in this. I would be alone and could get a little rest because all these discussions had worn me to pieces.

Provincial's Decision

After I gave the Superior my version of what happened, she sent for the Provincial. I went to hear his decision with great joy, thinking I would have something to suffer for the Lord. I had committed no offense against the Lord or against the Order (which I was trying to strengthen). I only wanted the Rule observed with all perfection. The Provincial gave me a rebuke (although less severe than the report given to him would justify). I did not excuse myself but begged him to forgive me and to punish me.

Their condemnation was unjust. They said I did this to win esteem. Yet, in other ways, they were speaking the truth. They said I was more wicked than other nuns and asked how I could keep a strict Rule when I didn't keep the other rules. None of this distressed me, but I pretended that it did. I was then told to present my version to the nuns.

In speaking to the Superior and the Provincial, I remained calm and said nothing by which they could condemn me. Later, I spoke privately with the Provincial. He promised to give me permission to go back to the house, once the city grew quiet. I will now describe the commotion that had taken place.

The Persecutions

Three days earlier, the Mayor, the City Council and the Chapter agreed that this new convent must not be sanctioned and the Blessed Sacrament had to be removed. They summoned two learned men from each of the Orders. Some said nothing. Others condemned the project. They decided the Foundation must be dissolved immediately.

Fortunately, one Dominican priest (Father Domingo Banez) although objecting to the poverty of the convent, said that there was no reason for dissolving it, because this was the bishop's decision. This did a lot of good. Fortunately they did not dissolve the foundation on the spot. The convent was the Lord's will and all of them were powerless. They gave reasons for what they did. Without offending God, they made us all suffer. A number of these persecutions took place.

The Continuing Problem

This question of the convent was all that the people spoke about. Everyone was condemning me, speaking to the Provincial and visiting my convent. What they said about me caused me no distress. What I really feared was losing the convent. I was also upset to see that all the people who were helping me had to suffer such trials. I didn't worry what they said about me, although I was deeply distressed during those two days. Once, when I was worn out, the Lord said, "Do you not know how powerful I am? Why do you fear?" He told me the convent would not be dissolved. The people sent the information to the Royal Council which asked for a full report.

Legal Proceedings

Now, we had to begin legal procedures. The city sent representatives to the capital. The convent, too, had to send representatives. We had no money, but the Lord provided. Father Provincial allowed

me to stay involved with the project. However, until everything was settled, he did not permit me to live at the convent. My nuns were alone. Their prayers were more effective than my negotiations.

Although, I was diligent about the negotiations, everything seemed to go wrong. Before the Provincial arrived, the Prioress ordered me to have nothing more to do with the matter. I went to God and said, “This house was founded for You. Since no one can now carry on the negotiations, You must do it”. After that I felt quite calm, as if the whole world was handling the negotiations for me.

Some Special Priests

A priest (Fr. Gonzala de Arandra) took the initiative and went to the capital to negotiate. Also, the saintly gentlemen did all he could. Those who helped me were inspired and worked as if their own work and reputation were at stake. His Majesty was also helping the cleric who represented the bishop at this important meeting. Standing alone against the others, he made suggestions that brought about an agreement, even though they put their whole weight into smashing us. This priest (Fr. Gasper Daza) who gave us the habit and the Blessed Sacrament was sorely persecuted. I cannot give a full description of all the trials we suffered.

Agreeing to Accepting Money

I was astonished at all the trouble that the devil was taking to harm a few women. I reminded these people of how far we had come. How could twelve women and a prioress do any harm when they were living in enclosure? There could be no harm to the city.

Eventually, they agreed to allow the project if the convent had an endowment. I was so weary (mostly from the troubles experienced by my helpers) that I thought of accepting some money until the storm subsided and then to give it back. Being an imperfect woman, I often wondered how we could exist without an endowment. Therefore, I agreed to the arrangement.

Visions From the Lord and Fray Peter

However, the night before the negotiations were to conclude, the Lord told me not to agree to such a thing. Once we had an endowment, we could never give it up. That same night Fray Peter (already dead) appeared to me. Before his death, he had written to say that he was delighted with all the opposition we were meeting. All these efforts of the devil were a sign that the convent would serve the Lord. Two or three times in his letter, he had insisted that we must have no revenue. If I were firm, all would turn out well. I had seen him twice since his death. He always appeared in his glorified body and gave me the greatest joy. He said his penances had won him a great reward.

However, in this third vision, he spoke to me with severity. He said I must not accept any endowment and asked why I wasn't following his advice. Then, he disappeared. The next day I told the gentleman who helped us not to allow the agreement about our endowment to be concluded. He was to let the lawsuit continue. This man was even more definite than I and regretted giving his approval to the endowment.

Finally Resolved

A devoted priest suggested that this matter should be placed before learned men. I was uneasy because some of my helpers had agreed to that course. The devil was entangling us. The Lord always helped us. In this summary, I cannot possibly give a full description of these two years. The first six months and the last six months were the most troubling.

The city finally calmed down and the Dominican priest helped us. First, the Lord brought him to the city explicitly to help us with this issue (He said he heard of the matter by accident). He stayed as

long as was needed and, somewhat impossibly, got the Provincial to allow me to live in the convent. Other nuns were also allowed and we could say the office together. It was my happiest day when we went into the convent.

A Flourishing Convent

Before entering my convent, I prayed at Church and went into rapture. I saw Christ placing a crown on my head. Later, while praying Compline with the sisters, I saw Our Lady sheltering all of us under her white mantle. From these visions, I saw the great glory that the Lord would give to these nuns.

Once we recited the office regularly, more nuns were received. People (even those who persecuted us) gave alms. Gradually, they abandoned the lawsuit and realized that the work came from God. Now, everyone agrees that the foundation was a good idea and all are providing alms. We have no problem supplying the necessities. The nuns are few in number, and I am sure God will never fail them if they do their duty. They will never be a burden. The Lord will provide.

Her Happiness

How happy I am to be among Religious who practice detachment. Their life consists of learning how to serve God. They find happiness in solitude and are troubled to converse with those in the world, except to enkindle love for God. No one visits us unless they have the same goals. We speak only of God. We keep the Rule of Our Lady of Carmel without mitigation, according to the 1248 form approved by Pope Innocent IV.

All our trials have served a good purpose. The rule is rather strict. No meat is eaten (except for necessity). There is an eight month fast and other ascetical practices. These seem light to our sisters and we observe other rules so that our Rule is kept perfectly. I hope our beginnings will prosper as God promised.

Purpose of Writing

The other house founded by the holy woman in Alcola also met with great opposition, but is now flourishing. Here also, the observance of the primitive Rule is observed to praise Mary, whose habit we wear.

This is a long account of the convent, but it is short compared to all the trials and all the blessings which the Lord sent. There are many witnesses to these events. I am writing these things so that, after my death, the sisters who come later will receive encouragement. This will prevent this work from failing. It will prosper when the sisters see the importance that His Majesty has attached to this house, founded by a wicked creature like myself.

No Mitigation

Since the Lord gave us special help, I believe that anyone who attempts to mitigate the Rule will do much harm and will be punished severely by God. The Rule is easy to endure and pleasant to carry out. It can be kept permanently by those who want to rejoice with Christ in solitude. This is our aim – to be alone with Him.

There will be only thirteen nuns in each house, (later increased to twenty-one, with eighteen as choir nuns). To preserve our spirituality, we cannot admit more, because we must live on alms and never beg. May always the best women (who arrange things by their prayers), be accepted.

It is evident that we have had great happiness and few trials during the years in this house. Also, our health has been far better. Anyone who thinks the Rule is harsh must blame her own spirituality. It can be accepted quite easily, even by delicate people, if they have sufficient spirituality. Let others go to different convents where they can save their souls according to their own spirituality.

37 – The Effects of Divine Favors

It is painful to describe the Lord's favors because they have been so numerous and given to someone so wicked. In obedience, I will speak of these for His glory. May some soul profit from seeing favors given to such a lowly creature. Let all strive to serve Him Who gives us such pledges, even in this life.

In all these favors, there are greater and lesser degrees of glory. I am amazed that some visions exceed others in glory and happiness. With each favor, the soul believes that nothing on earth could be greater.

Valuing Every Degree of Glory

The Lord has explained to me that, even in heaven, each soul experiences a different fruition and that these differences are vast. In this, I can see the greatness of His Majesty's goodness. I do not want to deprive myself of a single degree of blessing. I would gladly suffer all the trials until the end of the world to gain one more degree of glory rather than to die now with no further trials. I see now that whoever understands God best loves Him best.

Certainly, I would be happiest with the lowest place in heaven. Since I merited hell, anyplace in heaven is a great favor. I mean, if the choice were mine, I would not want to lose any degree of glory even though I had lost everything through my fault.

Favors From the Visions

My soul profited from every favor coming from either a vision or a revelation. Sometimes, there were many blessings. After one vision of Christ, I retained an idea of His beauty, even to this day. If one vision gave this, what is the power of all my visions? I will describe one special benefit. I had a very serious fault. If someone liked me, I would grow fond of him and would always think of him. Without offending God, I would delight to see him. This was harmful and ruining my soul. After I saw Christ's beauty, no one could compare with Him and I never again dwelt on anyone else. Whenever I turn my soul's eyes to that inner image of Christ, I experience such freedom that everything else appears as nothing.

Also, no earthly consolation compares with a single word coming from Christ's lips. It is even more wonderful when I hear many words. When deeply absorbed in something. I just return to this vision and I regain my freedom.

Detachment From Affections

I always have had a great affection for my confessors. Seeing them in God's place, I always follow their advice. When I felt safe with them, I would show my pleasant side. Since they feared God, they worried about my being drawn to them by spiritual bonds of affection and treated me quite unpleasantly. I only started being attached after I started obeying them.

I laughed. They were so mistaken because I had no attachment to anyone. I would reassure them. Their qualms always came at the beginning, because when they got to know me better, they saw my debt to the Lord.

Greater Love for Christ

After I began having visions and was in continual converse with the Lord, my love grew greatly. I saw that Christ was also a man and understands man's weakness due to original sin. Although He is the Lord, I speak to Him as my friend. Earthly lords, because of their powers, have appointment hours. A poor man cannot approach the king, but must seek out the king's favorites. However, these favorites will not risk themselves. Those who speak the truth are not in king's palaces because they fall out of favor.

Contrast With Earthly Kings

O King of Glory, your kingdom is infinite. I do not need a third party to have an audience with You. You alone deserve to be called Lord. You convince us that You are the king without having a retinue. In contrast, an earthly king cannot be recognized just by his own person. He needs signs to distinguish himself from others. They need to maintain this artificial authority or nobody would recognize them. Their authority and power comes from others.

Just seeing you, O Lord, convinces the person that you are a great Emperor. Your Majesty strikes terror. That terror is even greater when I see the love You shower on such a creature as I. We can talk with You whenever we want and about whatever we wish. When we lose our initial fear of You, we gain an even greater fear of offending You – not a fear of punishment but a fear of losing You. These are the benefits of having a vision. If a vision is from God, its source can easily be seen by its effects.

Describing Another State of Soul

Recently, for a full week, I lost all sense of my debt toward God and could not recapture it. I could not remember His favors. I became so stupid and incapable of thinking that I had to laugh. I found it pleasant to see how low I could sink when God was not working.

In this state, the soul sees clearly that God is still with her (not like the other severe trials). The soul collects the wood but cannot kindle the fire of divine love. Only by God's mercy, can the soul see the smoke. This means that the fire is not dead.

Then the Lord comes back and kindles the soul because she is going crazy trying to blow on the fire and rearrange the wood. The soul must just accept her helplessness because her actions only harm the fire. Sometimes, the Lord withdraws the soul's power to pray, so the soul will know by experience how little she can do.

A Complaint to the Lord

Speaking with the Lord today, I complained, "It is not sufficient for You to keep me in this miserable life where I must eat, sleep and do business with so many people. How few are the moments when I can enjoy communion with You. And now, even in these moments, You hide Yourself. Does this agree with Your mercy? How can Your love endure this? If I hid myself from You Your love for me could not endure it. Lord, this is not fair. Consider what a wrong You do by hiding Yourself from me who loves You so much".

I said all this while realizing how merciful God was in assigning my place in hell (which was better than what I deserved). Love made me foolish and I did not know what I was saying. However,

the Lord put up with me. Would we be this bold in approaching earthly kings? We would not dare to speak this way to the king. So as not to offend, royalty, we always have to learn the new customs of correct behavior. When I see all of this going on, I just make the sign of the cross in dismay.

Worn Out by Trying to Please

When I came to St. Joseph Convent, I did not know how I was going to live. When we don't give people their honor, we affront them. Then we must apologize and tell them that our intentions were right. I repeat. When I came here, I was worn out. I was supposed to occupy my thoughts with God. Yet, I also had to think of etiquette, and try to observe all the points of honor.

I was worn out because my attempts to satisfy people were never ending. I tried to please them, but I made mistakes which were always seen as important. In religious Orders, shouldn't we be excused from this respect for honors. "No", they say, "convents should be courts, schools of good breeding". I don't understand this. They probably misinterpreted some saint who said that we must prepare for the courts of heaven.

The World's Changing Rules

If we are careful to please God and to hate the world, I don't see how we can please others and live by etiquette rules that are always changing. Even to address a letter we need a university degree! Lectures would need be given on worldly manners!

What are we coming to? I am not even fifty and I have seen so many changes in my short life. I don't know how to live. I feel sorry for pious people who must live in the world. If they would all agree to remain ignorant of these worldly manners, they would escape a great deal of trouble.

I am writing nonsense! I was speaking about God's wonders and now I am describing the world's pettiness. Since the Lord allowed me to renounce the world, I will end this chapter. Let those who are concerned with such trifles settle the issues. .

38 – Heavenly Secrets, Visions and Revelations

A Trip to Heaven

Not feeling well one night, I excused myself from mental prayer and said the rosary, trying to be recollected in mind. Yet, when the Lord wills otherwise, my efforts are useless. I had just begun the rosary, when I experienced a vehement spiritual impulse which was impossible to resist. I was being carried up to heaven. First, I saw my mother and my father. So many things happen in a short space of a Hail Mary. I was completely lost to myself and thought that this was too great a favor. I was afraid it was an illusion, but it did not seem so.

I was ashamed to go to my confessor fearing he would laugh and say to me "What a Saint Paul she is with her heavenly visions. Quite a St. Jerome!" These saints had these kinds of visions, where as I could only shed many tears. It seemed impossible for me to share their experiences. In the end, I went to my confessor to avoid being deceived. When he saw I was troubled, he gave me many words of comfort.

Further Revelations

As time went on, the Lord revealed further great secrets and still does. In each vision the soul wishes to see more, but can only see what is pictured. I always saw only what the Lord showed me. What I saw was so great and did my soul so much good, that I consider all earthly things of little worth.

I wish I could describe these visions but I cannot. There is no comparison between earthly light and heavenly light. Even the sun's brightness seems dull. In short, the most skillful imagination cannot describe this heavenly light nor a single truth that the Lord taught me. All was accomplished by a joy that dominated me. My senses rejoiced with an indescribable sweetness. I will say no more.

The Lord's Opponents

Once, while I was in this state for an hour, the Lord showed me wonderful things. Seemingly, He was going to leave me, but He continued, "Daughter, be sure to tell my opponents what they lose". His opponents are those blinded by their own actions. How little my words can do, unless His Majesty gives them light.

Lord, these people see Your revelations being given to a wicked person. It is a miracle if anyone believes me. I have found that my own soul has notably profited from these revelations. After these visions, I did not want to return to this life, for I had contempt for everything earthly. All seemed like dung.

On one occasion, I stayed with that lady and I had heart trouble. She was generous and had very valuable golden trinkets and diamonds set before me. Since they cost much, she thought they would cheer me up. I laughed to myself, that people would value diamonds when the Lord has greater treasures stored up for us. I could only value these diamonds if the Lord made me forget His favors.

Dominion and No Fear of Death

The soul who sees this has a great dominion over herself. Others cannot understand. The soul has a natural detachment, achieved without any labor, and brought about totally by God. God impresses these truths on the soul in ways she could never do by herself.

These visions also left me with very little fear of death, (previously I was very afraid). In a single moment, my soul was freed from this prison and set at rest. These transports are very much like death, when the soul leaves the body, and, in a single instant, finds herself in possession of all good things. For those who love God and have put away the world, death comes very gently.

Life in Heaven

These experiences taught me where my true home is. On earth, we are pilgrims. The visions showed me what is awaiting us and where we are going to live. A person traveling to a strange country can easily accept the burdens of the journey, if she knows that she will live in complete comfort in her new country. If we think about heavenly things and have our conversation in heaven, we can die easily.

When the Lord reveals some part of heaven, the soul can dwell upon that secret. How comforted I am to be with people who live in heaven. These people are really alive. Those who live for earth are so dead that they are no companionship at all, especially when these vehement impulses come upon me.

The Great Blessings

What I see with my bodily eyes is a mockery. Really, I desire death because I want what I have seen with my spiritual eyes. The Lord gives this great favor to those who experience His visions. He also gives them a great cross, because nothing on earth can satisfy them. I can live only because, the Lord allows me (at times), to forget these visions.

Blessed be God! He has granted me understanding of these blessings and allowed me to enjoy them. May I not share the lot of Lucifer who lost them all. At times, I fear that I will lose everything. Generally, God's mercy gives me assurance. Having delivered me from many sins, He will not allow me out of His hands.

Even though all the favors I have mentioned are not as great as the one I will describe now, nothing can be compared with any of these favors.

A Gift on Pentecost

After mass, on the vigil of Pentecost, I went to a solitary spot and began to read a book about Pentecost (Life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony). I read about the signs which help beginners, proficient and perfect to know that the Holy Spirit is with them. As I read this, I knew that the Holy Spirit was with me. I had read this passage before; but now, I could see my progress and could see the Lord's favor. I meditated on my place in hell which I deserved for my sins. I praised God. I was so changed that I could not recognize my soul.

Then, a strong impulse seized me. This impulse was greater than on previous occasions. I was totally helpless. My soul was about to leave my body, because the body could not contain the soul. My soul could no longer wait to die to gain heaven. I did not know what was the matter with my soul. What did she want? I even needed physical help because I couldn't remain seated.

Then, I saw a dove over my head, much different than earthly doves. This dove was very large and had no feathers. Its wings were shells which gave off a great brilliance. I could hear the rustlings of its wings. After my soul became lost to herself, I could not see the dove. A gracious Guest calmed my soul (which was alarmed by this marvelous favor). As my soul rejoiced, fear left, tranquility returned and I stayed in rapture.

The glory of this rapture was overwhelming. All during the Pentecost season, I was so bewildered and stupid I did not know what to do or how I could receive any grace. My inward joy was so great, I could neither hear nor see. From then on, I became conscious of the greatest progress in love for God and virtue. May He be blessed!

Other Visions

Later, I saw the same dove over a Dominican priest. It had even greater rays of brightness coming from its wings. This meant the priest was to draw souls to God.

On another occasion, I saw Our Lady put a white cape on a Dominican (Father Ibanez, O.P.). She told me that he received this vestment because of his help in founding St. Joseph Convent. It was a sign that he would never commit mortal sin. This came true. He died a few years later and his life had been marked by penitence. He told a confrere at his death bed that St. Thomas was with him.

Since his death, he has appeared to me in great glory and told me many things. He was weak before he died, but he could not stop praying because he was in rapture so often. Previously, he had written to me for advice, because he went into rapture for such a long time after celebrating Mass. In the end, God gave him his reward.

The Jesuit Rector

I also saw the favors the Lord was giving to the Jesuit Rector. I will not describe them all because there are too many. One time, he was persecuted and in great distress. At the elevation of the host at Mass, I saw Christ on the Cross. He gave me words that I was to repeat to the Rector. He told me of future events in his life and reminded him of his past suffering. He had to prepare for more suffering. This gave him great courage and everything happened as the Lord foretold.

Other Jesuits

I have also seen great things concerning other Jesuits. I have seen their souls in heaven with white banners. I had other visions about another Order for which I have great veneration. I have dealt with many of its members, who lead lives in conformity with their rule.

Divine Rebukes

One night, the Lord reminded me of my sins and made me feel much distress and sorrow. A single word from Him causes greater growth in self-knowledge than years of meditating. He showed me how foolish were the early movements of my heart. He also told me to prize my desires, which are now totally fixed on Him.

On other occasions, He reminded me how I used to oppose His honor. At other times, He recalled His mercy to me while I was still offending Him. Whenever I commit any faults, (and these are many), His Majesty makes me conscious and fills me with shame. Sometimes my confessor rebukes me and I go to prayer for comfort. There, Jesus also rebukes me.

Then the Divine Favors

Let me return to the teaching. As the Lord recalled my past sins, I shed many tears and thought I had achieved nothing. After these feelings, the Lord bestows favors because I realize that I do not deserve them. Soon after this, my spirit became so completely transported as to almost leave the body completely. At least, I could not tell if I was still in my body. I saw the Sacred Humanity in far greater glory than I had ever experienced, a clear representation in the Father's bosom.

I cannot explain how this happened but I saw myself in the presence of the Godhead. I was so amazed that several days passed before I was myself again. I had the continual presence of Christ's Majesty. This remained so indelibly printed in my imagination that for some time I could not rid myself of it. It comforted me and did me a great deal of good.

The Great Benefits of this Vision

On three other occasions, I had this same sublime vision which brings the greatest benefits. It purifies my soul and destroys the power of sensual nature. It is a great flame consuming and annihilating all life's desires. I was shown that all is vanity, especially worldly dignities. This vision teaches my soul to have desires in pure truth. It impresses a reverence upon the senses which is different from any earthly experience. The soul is astounded that she ever offended God or that others still offend Him.

I speak often of these effects produced by visions and other experiences because each experience brings profit. This vision gave the greatest profit. Whenever I received Communion, I remembered the vision and realized that He was present in this Holy Sacrament. Often, the Lord would reveal His presence in the host. My hair would stand on end and I felt completely annihilated.

O Lord, if you did not hide your greatness in the Sacrament who would dare seek this union with your Majesty? You limit your favors so we are not frightened by Your great power. Otherwise, we might have the same experience as a peasant who found a great treasure, far greater than he could understand. (I know this actually happened). Having this treasure brought on a melancholy. The peasant died from worry, because he had no idea what to do with the money. If he had been given the money little by little, he could have lived on it and not die.

Limits Favors So They Can Be Received

O Wealth of the poor, you reveal your riches gradually. You do not permit souls to see them all at once. Since that vision I have never seen His Majesty in the host without marveling at His wisdom. I don't know how the Lord gives me strength to approach Him. I must proclaim aloud such marvels.

I am a wicked woman, weighed down with abominations. I have gone through life with little fear of God. Now I approach God and He wills that I see Him in visions. My mouth has said so many words against Him and yet I open it to receive His glorious Body. Knowing I have not served Him, I am grieved by His love shining in His face.

What must have been my feelings on the two occasions which I will now describe? I do not know what I am saying because I write as if I am not doing the speaking. I am troubled as I recall these things. I cannot say these feelings come from me. You, Lord, are the source of all good and I am the debtor.

Devils at a Priest's Throat

Once, as I was receiving Communion, I saw two hideous devils with their horns around the priest's throat. I saw the Lord in the host in the priest's hands and knew that his soul was in mortal sin. What a sight – to see the Lord's beauty between two hideous devils! They were afraid and would have fled if You allowed them. I was upset and could hardly receive Communion. I felt that God would not allow me to see such evil in the priest's soul.

God told me to pray for the priest. He allowed me to see this so I could realize the power of the words of consecration. Even when a wicked priest pronounces these words, God is still present without fail. Also, I was to appreciate His goodness to me and to others that He would place Himself in the hands of a sinful priest. I saw clearly that the priest's obligation to be virtuous is much stricter than ours. I also saw how terrible it is to receive this Sacrament unworthily, and how complete is the devil's domination over someone in mortal sin. This was a great help to me and gave me full knowledge of what I owed to God.

Devils at a Funeral

On another occasion, I had an experience which frightened me. I was in a place where a person had died after many years of a bad life. He was ill for two years, seemingly had mended his ways but did not make a final confession. In spite of all this, I did not think he would be damned. While his body was being wrapped in a shroud, I saw a great many devils taking a hold of it and treating it roughly. I was horrified as they were dragging it around with large hooks. When I saw it taken for burial and given all the honor that is paid to the dead, I thought of God's goodness. He permitted the fact that the man was His enemy to be concealed.

After seeing that, I was half crazy. At the grave, a crowd of them waited to take possession of the body. I was beside myself and needed courage to hide the fact. If they were taking possession of the body, what would they do to the soul? I wish everyone who is leading an evil life could have seen this.

It would move them to amendment. I realize now what I owe to God and what He saved me from. Until I talked to my confessor, I was terribly frightened. I wondered if it was an illusion produced by the devil to dishonor this soul (though he was not considered a good Christian). Illusion or not, it still frightens me.

A Vision of a Dead Superior

Since I am talking of visions about the dead, I will speak of what the Lord has revealed to me. I will describe just a few of these. I was told of the death of a former Provincial who was very kind to us and had many virtues. I was worried about his salvation because he had been a superior for twenty years. (It is dangerous to have a care for souls). Greatly distressed, I went to chapel and offered all my life's merit so he would be released from purgatory.

While praying, I saw him rise up on my right hand from the earth's depths and ascend into heaven. Although he had been old, I saw him at age thirty. His face was bright and shining. After that, I could not grieve for his death, although many others did since he was much loved. Nothing troubled me. I knew that the vision was true and not an illusion. Although, I asked people to pray for him, I could not pray for him with fervor, because I had seen him in heaven. Praying for him was like giving alms to a rich man. Later, I discovered his death was very edifying. He was so repentant and humble that all were astounded.

Visions of Deceased Nuns

Two days after that, a nun (a great servant of God) died in our house. I was standing in the choir while the office for the dead was being said. I saw the dead sister. Her soul seemed to be rising on my right (as in the preceding vision) and going to heaven. This was not a vision of the imagination (as was the previous one) but there was no reason for doubting it.

This happened again with a twenty year old nun who had served God while in poor health. She was virtuous and I thought she certainly would not go to purgatory. Four hours after her death while we were praying for her, I saw her ascending into heaven.

Other Deaths

Once I was in a Jesuit college, suffering greatly in soul and body and incapable of a single good thought. That night a Jesuit brother died. When I was hearing Mass the next day, I saw him ascending into glory and the Lord ascending with him. It was a special favor for the Lord to accompany him.

On another occasion, a Carmelite priest was very ill. I was at Mass and saw that he had died and ascended to heaven without passing through purgatory. Later, I discovered he had died at that very hour. I was amazed that he had spent no time in purgatory. Then I discovered that he faithfully observed the Rule. This had saved him from purgatory. I learned this so I could tell others that wearing the habit is not the greatest perfection, but being a true friar.

Even though the Lord has given me many such visions, I will recount no more. From none of these visions have I seen anyone who escaped purgatory, except for priest, Father Peter of Alcantara and the Dominican priest I have mentioned (Father Ibanez). The Lord has shown me the degrees of their places in heaven, among which there are great differences.

39 – Great Favors Through Intercession

Healing A Blind Man

I asked the Lord to give sight to someone who was almost entirely blind. I owed an obligation to him and I felt sorry for him. The Lord appeared to me and showed me the wound in His left hand. Then, with His right hand, He drew out the large nail imbedded in it. In doing so, he tore the flesh and I was deeply grieved at His pain. He said that since He suffered that for me, He would also do whatever I asked. He promised me He would always grant what I asked because I would only ask for what tended to His glory.

The Lord reminded me that even when I did not serve Him, He always granted what I asked in a better way than I could plan. How much more readily He would do this, now that I loved Him. Also, I must have no doubt. Within a week, the Lord had restored his sight.

Other Stories

On another occasion, my cousin was very ill with two months of intolerable sufferings. Being in such pain, he would lacerate his own body. My confessor went to see him and told me to pay him a visit. Since he was a relative, I could do this. I began to importune the Lord. The next day, my cousin was free from pain.

Once I was deeply afflicted. I learned that a person (to whom I owed much) wanted to do something which greatly offended God. I did not know how to dissuade him. I asked God what to do. I went to a lonely hermitage which contains a picture of Christ being scourged. There, I begged this favor. A soft voice whispered to me. My whole body quivered and I tried to hear what was said, but I could not. Soon it was gone. My fear left and I was calmed by an inner delight. I was surprised that these words (heard with my bodily ears) had such an effect on my soul. My distress was removed. I realized that the favor would be granted

A Man Reflects

A person whom I deeply loved resolved to serve God. During several days of prayer, God granted him many favors. However, he got involved in occasions of sin and gave up his prayer. This caused me great distress. For an entire month, I begged God to turn this soul to Himself. One day while at prayer, I saw a furious devil tearing up some papers. I knew this meant my prayer had been answered. Afterwards, I learned that the man had made a contrite confession and turned to God. Hopefully, he will make continual progress.

Other Favors

In answer to my prayers, God frequently delivered people from serious sins and led others to perfection. Concerning freeing souls from purgatory and other notable things, the favors are so numerous I would fatigue the reader by listing them.

Most favors concerned the health of the soul more than of the body. There are numerous witnesses to this. This caused me scruples because I believed that it was due to my prayers. Now, these favors have become so numerous and known by so many people that it no longer causes me distress to believe this. I am ashamed because now I am more in God's debt than ever.

What God Wants and Does Not Want

The Lord sees that some favors are not good for me. No matter how I try, I cannot beg for these. When I do try, my prayer lacks power, spirituality or concentration, (even if I force myself). However,

when the Lord intends to grant something, I ask for this often and with power, even when I don't even try to think of it.

I don't know how to explain these two ways of praying (which are so different). When I pray for what the Lord does not want, I do not feel the same fervor, even if I force myself to pray. It is as if my tongue is tied. I desire to speak but cannot. If I do speak, I cannot make myself understood.

God's Freedom in Granting Favors

When I pray for what God wants, I am speaking clearly to someone who listens eagerly. The first type is like vocal prayer. The second is like contemplative prayer. Because the Lord reveals Himself, we know that He listens, rejoices at our request and will give it. When I ask for so little, He gives so much. What can I accomplish unless I abase myself? But I do not do this and I do not live as I should. At times, I want to be devoid of sense so that I can understand all the evil within me. May God help me!

When I was with that rich lady, I had to be careful of my behavior because of the high praise given to me. There was so much praise that I could have become attached to it, but God kept me in His hands. A great suffering comes when a person who lives in truth, has to deal with others. The Lord told me once that there is so much dissembling on earth.

Sources of Writing

Much that I write does not come out of my own head. God told it to me. So, when I say "I was told this" or "the Lord told me", I am careful not to add or to subtract a single syllable. When I don't remember exactly, then some words come from me. Other parts come totally from me. They were not given to me in revelation.

God's Mysteries

O God, why do we interpret even spiritual matters in our own way and thus distort their meaning? We measure our progress by the years of practicing prayer. We even measure God Who bestows His gifts. God can give more gifts to one person in six months, than to another after many years. I have seen this so often. Why then do we judge God and act so pettily?

Advancing Qualities

Anyone with the gift of discernment of spirits will not be deceived for long. He will judge the spirit by their fruits, their resolutions and their love. The Lord does not look at how many years a soul has prayed, but how much the soul has advanced. The Lord gives to whom He wills and to the one who is best prepared to receive.

I see many young girls in this community to whom God gives consolation in prayer. They were not expecting this. They forget even their meals. They have shut themselves up in a convent that has no money. For love of God, they take no account of themselves. They give up everything. They have no wish to follow their own desires. It never occurs to them that they might grow discontented in strict enclosure. They give themselves totally as a sacrifice to God.

I gladly admit that they are better than I. What He has not given me in my many years, God has given to them in three months – (even in three days)! While amply rewarding them, He gives them fewer favors than He gives me and they are still quite satisfied in serving Him.

Prayer that Produces Fruit

Let those who have practiced prayer for many years recall the memories of their early years. I do not want the beginners, who have made great progress, to go at our slow pace. I do not want those who are soaring like eagles to move like hens with their feet tied. If these souls are humble, then give them free rein. Our Lord will not allow them to fall. Because they trust God, their faith has great power.

We must trust these souls and not measure them by our low and petty standards. If we cannot produce fruits as they do, let us not condemn them. Otherwise, we will lose the opportunity of humbling ourselves and seeing our faults. We will fail to realize that they are more detached and nearer to God because He is drawing near to them.

Real Accomplishments

I want to show you why I value a prayer which, in a short time, produces such apparent fruits. We need a great power of love to leave everything for God. I prefer this great power of love to years of prayer which produce little. Our few small resolutions are like grains of salt. They are certainly not signs of great mortification. We often think we do great things for God, but it is not true. God is gracious. He values what I have done, but I see them as nothing. Forgive me, Lord, but I am of no real service to you and I set no value on my nothingness. Blessed are those who truly do great deeds. If I accomplished something by imitating them, I would please You. I am of no worth. Only Your love can place worth into my deeds.

Looking Back

In July 1565, I received a Brief from Rome empowering me to found this convent without any revenues. I was glad that the whole business had been accomplished. I thought of all the trials and of how the Lord had used me. I saw that all my actions were filled with faults and imperfections. I was fainthearted and lacked faith. The Lord accomplished all He had promised. However, I neither believed firmly nor doubted fully. The goal seemed impossible but the Lord said He would do this. He had done all the good things. I had done all the bad things. So, I stopped thinking about this period, not wanting to recall my faults in His project.

Not Counting Years

It is dangerous to count all the years we have practiced prayer, because we begin to feel that we have won some merit. Certainly, we will be rewarded, but any spiritual person who believes that these years have earned her consolations will never reach the summit of spirituality. Isn't it enough that God has taken her in His hands and removed her from sin? Does she have to sue God to get her money's worth? This is presumption not humility. I never did this because I have never served Him. If I had, I might be more anxious for a reward.

God will grant progress to a humble soul. We should forget our years of service. Their sum total is worthless compared to a single drop of His blood. Really, the more we serve Him, the more we are in His debt. When we pay a farthing toward our debt, He gives us a thousand ducats. Then, we are deeper in debt. Let God do the judging. If these comparisons on earthly matters are bad, what about heavenly matters that only God knows? Did not the owner pay all the workers the same wage?

Another Vision

During these three days I had little time to write and I forgot to describe the following vision. At prayer, I saw myself in a great field. I was all alone and surrounded by a large crowd who had weapons (lances, swords, and daggers) ready to attack me. I could not flee. No one was at my side

and I did not know what to do. I raised my eyes and I saw Christ. He was not in heaven but in the air above, encouraging me. I no longer feared all these people because they could do me no harm.

This vision was important. Soon afterwards, I was attacked in that exact way. The vision portrayed the whole world taking up arms against a poor soul. Even if the soul overcomes the problems of honors, possessions and pleasure, if she is not careful she will be ensnared by friends, relatives and (what amazes me the most) by very good people. I was opposed by all of these. They thought they were doing right and I did not know how to defend myself.

Trusting Only God

All these trials that I have described are warnings to souls that they must hate everything worldly. Of all the persecutions, this was the worst. Oppressed on every side, I found relief only in Heaven. The vision taught me not to trust anyone. Only God never changes. In these trials, God always sent me someone. The vision taught me to cling only to what pleased the Lord.

The Lord Speaks

Once I was restless and grew afraid. I thought that all these favors were illusions. When my soul was in great darkness, the Lord spoke. He told me not to be troubled because we are never safe while in the flesh. He showed me that our time is well spent in seeking the heavenly prize. The Lord was sorry for those who live in the world. He told me that He would never leave me, but that I must do all in my power. The Lord spoke of other things, always tenderly and graciously.

His Majesty often says, "Now, you are mine and I am thine". I often repeat the words, "What do I care about myself, Lord, or about anything except You?" These signs of God's love cause me confusion. I need more courage to receive God's favors so I can experience sufferings. When the favors come, I forget all the good I have done. My reason doesn't function and I see only my sins. This, also, is supernatural.

Vehement Desires for Holy Communion

I cannot put into words how vehement are my desires for Holy Communion. One morning I thought I could not leave the house because of heavy rain. Yet, once I started for Mass, my desire was so great that I would have gone if the raindrops were spears.

At Church, I fell into deep rapture. Frequently, I would see a door into heaven. Now, I saw the heavens themselves, wide open. I saw a throne (which I saw before). Above this, there was another throne on which I saw the Godhead (I did not see this but learned it in a way I cannot explain). The throne was held up by beasts. I wondered if these represented the four evangelists (Rev.4:6-8). I could not see what the throne was like or Who was on it. I saw a multitude of angels with far greater beauty than in previous visions. I wondered if they were seraphim or cherubim. They were in different glory and all on fire. There is a great difference among the angels.

The Effects

I cannot describe the glory and no one who has not had this experience can even imagine it. I felt that everything I could desire was there. Yet, I saw nothing. I was able to understand that I could not understand anything, I considered all else as nothing in comparison. Afterward, I could never be attached to anything on earth.

After Communion, I spent two hours in rapture. Later, I was amazed that I had experienced this fire which comes only from God's love. I strive to be consumed by this fire, but cannot. By my own efforts, I cannot gain a single spark.

This fire consumes my faults, my lukewarmness and my sinfulness. I am like a Phoenix. I rise like a new creature from the ashes. Fresh desires and great fortitude transform my soul. I am not the same. I walk in a new purity. God said, "Your comparison is a good one. Do not forget it. Always strive to amend and begin anew".

Her Doubts

Once, I doubted if these visions came from God. The Lord appeared and exclaimed sternly, "Children of men, how long will you be hard of heart?" He told me to examine myself whether I had surrendered completely. If I had, then I was to be confident that He would not allow me to be lost. He told me not to be troubled because I never knowingly failed to serve Him. All that I desired would be granted. (In fact, what I asked for was given).

He said that my love was increasing daily and that these visions were not from the devil. He would never allow the devil to give clearness of mind and peace. Many people had told me that the visions came from God. I would be wrong not to believe them.

Other Religious Experiences

Once, while reciting the Psalms, God showed me how there could be one God and three Persons. This comforted me and taught me how to know more of God's greatness. Now, this mystery is a great joy for me.

On the feast of the Assumption, while I was in rapture, the Lord showed me Our Lady's ascent into heaven, how she was received and her place in heaven. My soul was filled with glory and I desired to serve Our Lady.

Another time, I was at the Jesuit college in Avila. When the Jesuits were receiving Communion I twice saw a rich canopy over their heads. I did not see this over the other people.

40 – Favors Benefit the Soul

A Plunge into Truth

Once at prayer, I felt such a great joy that I thought of how unworthy I was and the place that had been prepared for me in hell. (I never forget the vision of being there). My soul was vehemently enkindled and I had an indescribable transport. I was plunged into His Majesty and filled with a consciousness of His greatness. I do not know how I understood. I saw nothing.

Truth Himself then spoke, "What I am doing for you is no small thing. All harm comes to the world because the world does not know the truths of Scripture, of which not a jot shall fail". I thought I always believed this. He said, "How few love me in truth. If they did, I would not hide my secrets from them. To love Me in truth is to realize that whatever does not please Me is a lie. You do not realize this yet, but you will see this clearly in the good that this vision brings to your soul".

The Effects

This has happened. I now see that whatever does not serve God is vanity and lies. I don't know how I realize this, but I pity those who are still in darkness. On this occasion, the Lord's special words

helped me to acquire an extreme fortitude. I became firmly resolved to carry out the very smallest detail contained in the Bible. I believe that no obstacles exist which I could not overcome.

An Encounter with Truth

This divine truth was given without my understanding how. God imprinted on my soul a knowledge of His Majesty and Power. I had a great desire to speak only of true things, and to go far beyond what is spoken about in the world. This vision filled me with great tenderness. I knew the Lord had given me much. I had no fear that this was an illusion. I now value only what brings me nearer to God and I understand the experience of a soul walking in the presence of Truth itself.

All From Locutions

I learned all that I am saying from locutions. Sometimes, I learned things without any words. These latter revelations I grasped better than those explained by words. I learned profound truths better than if learned men had taught me. (They could never have taught me the vanity of this world). I was taught truth in itself, without beginning or end. Upon this truth, other truths depend, just as all loves depend on God's love.

I am giving an obscure description of a clear truth. How powerful is His Majesty who can imprint this so quickly. O God, consider to whom you are giving your sovereign mercies. My soul has been an abyss of lies and an ocean of vanities. You gave me a truthful nature, but I have dealt in lies. How can you give me such favors?

Bright As A Mirror

On one occasion, while reciting the Office, every part of my soul became bright all over, like a mirror. In the center was a picture of Christ. I saw Him in every part of me, as in a mirror. This was totally sculptured in the Lord by a most loving communication (I cannot describe this). Whenever I recall this vision, especially at Communion time, I gain great profit.

The Lord explained that whenever a soul is in mortal sin, a thick mist covers this mirror. It remains so darkened that the Lord cannot be pictured or seen in it. Yet, He remains present and gives us our being. With heretics the mirror is broken, (which is even worse). This has helped me a great deal, even though I had deep regrets for those occasions when my own soul became darkened through my own fault.

God Within

This vision helps recollected people, and teaches them to find the Lord in the innermost part of their soul. This is much more fruitful than picturing the Lord outside us (as some books tell us to do). St. Augustine said that He could find God better within himself than in marketplaces or in pleasure or in the other places that he sought Him. This is the best way. We do not need to go to heaven. We just enter within ourselves. Otherwise, we trouble the spirit and distract the soul without producing fruit.

Deep Rapture

I want to give a warning about a deep rapture. For a short time, the soul is in union with God and the faculties are absorbed. After this, the soul will be unable (even in outward things) to return to herself. The memory and understanding will remain bewildered, as in a state of frenzy. This happens, especially in the early raptures because nature cannot endure such spiritual vehemence. While in this state, souls should force themselves not to pray until later. Attempting to pray while in this state might do them harm. I have wisdom concerning what our health can bear.

Needing a Director

Having reached this stage, the soul will need spiritual direction. If the soul is unsuccessful in finding a director, the Lord will help her, because she will need to discuss many things. Few directors have these experiences and a director without experience brings no relief. He only causes disquiet and distress. The Lord takes this into account, so it is best to discuss everything with the confessor.

This penitent-confessor relationship and choosing the correct confessor are extremely important, especially to a woman. The Lord gives these favors far more to women than to men. I have seen this. Fray Peter says women make much more progress than men and He gave excellent reasons, all in favor of women.

Another Vision

Once at prayer, I saw briefly, (with no distinct form but with perfect clarity) how all things are seen in God and how He contains all things. This vision remained imprinted on my soul and caused me to be ashamed of my past sins. If the Lord had shown me this vision earlier, I would not have presumed to offend God. The vision came in such a subtle and delicate way that my understanding could not grasp it. These are the higher type of visions which take place during raptures. After the rapture is over, my faculties cannot form the picture which the Lord revealed and which caused so much the joy.

A Comparison

Let us say the Godhead is a diamond larger than the whole world and all our actions are seen in this diamond. It contains everything in itself and nothing can exist outside such greatness. I was terrified to see so many things so clearly and immediately in the clear depths of this diamond. In that clearness and purity, I even saw my sins. Whenever I remember this experience, I do not know how to bear it. I was so ashamed and could find no place to hide myself.

God and Sin

Let everyone know that their sins cannot be hidden, because sins are committed in God's presence. He rightly grieves over them while we behave with the greatest irreverence in His presence. I can see how a single mortal sin merits hell. It is impossible to understand how grave an offense it is or how sin is so alien to God's nature. His mercy is clearly seen. Knowing that we sin, He is still patient with us.

This made me wonder. If my one short experience so terrified me, what will Judgment Day be like when God reveals Himself clearly and we see our sins? Oh God, how blind I have been! I am amazed at what I have written, but am even more amazed that I am still alive after seeing these things. Blessed be God Who has been patient with me!

Other Visions

Once in a deeply recollected and sweet prayer, I thought I was surrounded by angels and very close to God. I prayed for the Church. God showed me how a single Order (Probably the Jesuits. Possibly the Dominicans) would confer great benefits upon the Church by its members upholding the faith.

Once while I prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, a holy man appeared to me whose Order was in decline. He held a large book and told me to read a few words in large print, "In the time to come, this Order will flourish and have many martyrs" (probably the Dominicans). On another occasion, I saw six or seven members of this same Order with swords in their hands to defend the Faith.

On another occasion my spirit was carried away. I was in a great field where there was much fighting. Members of this Order did battle with great fervor. Their faces were lit up with zeal and they vanquished many. I thought this was a battle against heretics.

Several times I have seen the glorious saint who founded this Order. He thanked me for my prayers. If the Lord wants to reveal which Order this is, others will not take offense. Every Order and every member should strive to be used by the Lord.

Other Experiences

Someone begged me to ask God if he would become a bishop. After Communion, God responded, "When he realizes that true dominion lies in possessing nothing, he may take it". Therefore, anyone who has a position of authority should never desire it or try to obtain it.

God grants me these favors continually but I need not describe any more. The reader can see the spirituality given to me by the Lord, (who has taken such good care of me).

To console me, the Lord told me not to worry. In this life, I am not always in the same condition. Sometimes I am fervent and at other times not. Sometimes I am restless and at other times tranquil. He told me to hope in Him and not to fear.

Correctly Attached

One day I worried if I was too attached, because I enjoyed speaking with people and had affection for them. I especially found comfort in any great servant of God. The Lord said that if a physician healed a sick man at death's door, the man would certainly love the physician. What would have become of me without these people? The Lord said that conversations with good people did me good and I should continue to mix with them. This comforted me because I saw myself as over-attached.

The Lord always spoke to me, even telling me how to deal with people who are weak. I get distressed by my lack of service to Him and so He always looks after me.

A Special Comforting

Once at bedtime, I was in prayer while suffering painfully from my usual sickness. I was tied to my body, while my spirit craved time for itself. I became depressed and shed floods of tears. This has happened often. On this particular occasion, the Lord appeared and comforted me. He told me to do these things for love of Him and to put up with everything, because it was necessary that I live on.

I have never again found myself distressed. I resolved to serve the Lord with all my might. Desiring trials is easy because He comforts me so much. Suffering seems the only reason to be alive. I say to Him, "To die, Lord, or to suffer! I ask nothing else but this from you".

I love to hear the clock strike. With every passing hour I am nearer to the vision of God. At other times, I am in a state where I do not feel I am alive and yet I do not want to die. I experience lukewarmness and all is dark, due to my suffering.

Public Criticism

When these favors became publicly known (He told me years before that this would happen), I suffered much, even to the present. They became public through no fault of mine. I spoke only with my confessors and to those informed by my confessors.

As a result, some people speak ill of me, others avoid me, and others criticize me to my face. I care little because the Lord has chosen this means to help many souls. (I know how much He would suffer for just one soul). This is why His Majesty has placed me in this enclosure. I am like a dead thing and I cannot be seen. At last, the Lord has brought me to a haven which I hope will be safe. I am out of the world and my companions are saintly. Therefore, I care little what people say or think of me. I care more that a single soul make the smallest degree of progress.

Dead to the World

God has given me a life that is a kind of sleep. I see things as if I were dreaming. I have no propensity to joy or to sorrow. When I experience these feelings, they leave quickly. Later, if I want to feel glad or sad I cannot even experience those feelings. I am like a person thinking about what they dreamed.

Formerly, I was not dead to the world. Now, God has awakened me to Himself and will never let me be blinded again by earthly things.

Summary

I hope that what I have written will be of some profit. Having little opportunity to write has made this a laborious task. I will be happy if, from this book, God receives even one act of praise.

Your Reverence can burn this manuscript if you wish. Before doing so, please show to at least three priests who have been my confessors. If it is bad, they will lose their good opinion of me. If it is good, they will know that God is the source. May His Majesty make you a saint, so your spirituality can enlighten this creature who has dared to write about such sublime topics.

I hope I have not erred since I only wanted to be accurate and obedient. I have always hoped that the Lord would receive some praise through me. I have ventured to write this story of my unruly life, not wasting any time and writing in great simplicity.

May it please the Lord that I do His will in all things. May He, who rescued my soul from hell and drew me to Himself, not allow me to be lost. Amen.

Letter to Father Garcia de Toledo when sending him her autobiography.

May you commend me to the Lord, for I have written about my miserable deeds and called attention to them. Still, I suffered more when recalling God's favors than when I wrote of my sins. I have done what you commanded. I have written at length on the one condition that you tear up anything that seems to be wrong. When you asked me to send this, I had not finished proof-reading the text. So, some things might be badly explained. If you must send this to Father-Master Avila, please have it copied so no one will recognize my handwriting. I would like him to see it, for I will be comforted if he thinks I am on the right road.

Be assiduous in serving God so you can help me. We use our time well if we give ourselves to Him who gives Himself without measure. I trust that we will see each other in heaven where we can see more clearly the great things He has done for us and can praise Him forever and ever. Amen.

This book was completed in 1562. (1562 was the completion of the first draft. This full autobiography describes events which happened after 1562, such as the founding of the convent).