

The Inner Room

Exodus 40:34-38 • Matthew 6:5-6 • John 14:18-23 • 1 Corinthians 3:16

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the God who filled the tabernacle now wills to make his dwelling in every baptized soul that loves him and keeps his word, and that St. Teresa's interior castle is a picture of what Jesus promised in John 14:23.

Catholic Touchstone. The indwelling of the Trinity (CCC 260): the ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity, and even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity.

What You Need to Know

Tonight the study turns inward, and it needs its central image: St. Teresa's Interior Castle. Writing under obedience in 1577, Teresa described the soul as a castle of clear crystal containing many dwelling places (she took the plural from John 14:2), with the King himself dwelling in the innermost chamber. Prayer, in her whole account, is simply the journey through the rooms toward the One who is already there. The door of the castle, she says plainly, is prayer and reflection.

The claim underneath the image is not Teresa's invention; it is Jesus's promise: "we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Paul states it of the whole community at Corinth, the plural you gathered into one temple: "you are God's temple and... God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16), and he presses it to each member's body as well (6:19). Teresa's genius is pastoral: she noticed that most Christians live, as she put it in substance, in the outer courtyard of their own castle, unaware of who waits within.

Expect the objection (tonight's steelman) that all this interiority is Platonism smuggled into Christianity. It has a real scholarly pedigree, so take it seriously. The answer is that the indwelling is asserted by Jesus and Paul in the plainest terms, and that Christian interiority is covenantal and personal (Someone dwells in you) rather than a flight from the body or the community. Teresa herself is the counterexample: the most interior woman of her century founded seventeen convents and died on the road.

Keep Matthew 6:6 concrete tonight: Jesus's "room" (*tameion*) was an inner room or storeroom of a Galilean house, a private space with a door to shut. The Lord who commands secret prayer assumes ordinary people in crowded houses can find it. So can a parishioner with a car, a closet, or an early kitchen.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The Old Testament is the story of God progressively closing the distance. At Sinai the glory settles on the mountain, and Israel keeps back. Then Exodus 40:34-38: the glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle, God dwelling in the middle of the camp, in a tent like theirs. Solomon's temple repeats it (1 Kings 8:10-11), and Solomon marvels: "will God indeed dwell on the earth?" (8:27).

The prophets promise something more intimate still: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33); "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26). The trajectory is unmistakable: mountain, tent, temple, heart.

John announces the fulfillment in temple language: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, literally pitched his tent among us (John 1:14), and Jesus calls his own body the temple (John 2:19-21). Tonight's text extends that temple to the disciple: "we will come to him and make our home with him" (14:23). Paul draws the conclusion for the whole community at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:16), and for each member's body (6:19). Teresa's castle is Exodus 40 relocated: the glory now wills to fill you, wherever love keeps his word (John 14:23).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John of the Cross

Commenting on the soul's opening cry ("Where have you hidden?"), St. John answers with the Gospel's own secret: the Word, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden in essence and presence in the innermost being of the soul. His counsel follows, in substance: since your Beloved is the treasure hidden in the field of your own heart, forget everything else, enter into deepest recollection, and seek him there. You do not have to go find God; you have to stop leaving.

The Spiritual Canticle, commentary on stanza 1.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa asks her readers to consider the soul as a castle made of a single diamond or very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places, with the King in the innermost chamber of all. The sorrow of her book is that many souls stay in the outer courtyard among the reptiles, never entering their own castle. And the door by which one enters, she says without ceremony, is prayer and reflection.

The Interior Castle, First Dwelling Places, ch. 1, summarized.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Elizabeth of the Trinity

A young Carmelite of Dijon, St. Elizabeth made Teresa's doctrine a single prayer: "O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity," asking that nothing trouble her peace or make her leave God, "my unchanging God, but may each minute carry me further into the depths of your mystery," and begging: "Give peace to my soul; make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest." The Church liked this prayer well enough to put it in the Catechism.

Prayer "O my God, Trinity whom I adore" (1904), as quoted in CCC 260.

Catechism Connection

CCC 260 states the destination of everything: the ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity, and "even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity," citing John 14:23 and then quoting St. Elizabeth's prayer in full. Our third Voice tonight is the Catechism's own choice.

CCC 2563 locates prayer where Teresa does: the heart is our hidden center, the place of decision, the place of truth, the place of encounter, the place of covenant. And CCC 2560 names what happens there: prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours.

CCC 2691 adds, practically, that for personal prayer a "prayer corner" with the Scriptures can help, and CCC 2710 will remind us later that the choice of time and duration reveals the secrets of the heart. The castle has a door, and doors are entered at particular times.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Thread A ("The Tailor's Apprentice"): one sentence tonight, best placed after Q6: the Krakow tailor turned the back room of a tailor's shop and a small apartment into his inner room; an entire apostolate would eventually fit inside it. Still no names.

Sealed guess: collect nothing, discuss nothing; a light reminder to keep bringing the folded sheet.

Watch for the group treating the castle as a metaphor for self-discovery. Keep correcting toward Teresa's own center of gravity: the point of the castle is the King in it, not the architecture.

Session Goals

1. Trace the temple trajectory (mountain, tent, temple, heart) as a live discovery from Exodus 40 to John 14 and 1 Corinthians 3.
2. Hear Matthew 6:6 as a practical command of Jesus that assumes ordinary people can pray in secret.
3. Meet the Interior Castle accurately: the indwelling King, the many rooms, prayer as the door.
4. Answer the "Platonism" objection without flattening the real interiority of the Gospel.

Time note (75-90 min). Win 10 min; Build 50 min; Send and Live It 15 min. If pressed, cut Q6 and fold its point into the Send questions; keep the full discovery chain and the steelman.

The Inner Room

Exodus 40:34-38 · Matthew 6:5-6 · John 14:18-23 · 1 Corinthians 3:16

Opening Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have offered to make our souls your dwelling, asking only the love that keeps your word. Quiet the noise of this day. Open the door of prayer to us tonight, and teach us the way to the inner room. Amen.

WIN

W1. Where do you actually pray, physically? Does the place help or fight you?

W2. When you picture God during prayer, where is he: far away, across the room, near, within? Where did that picture come from?

BUILD

Q1. Read Matthew 6:5-6. What exactly does Jesus command, and what does he promise? What does the instruction assume about ordinary people?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The command: go into your room (*tameion*, the inner storeroom, the one lockable room of a village house), shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret. The promise: the Father sees in secret and will reward. Jesus assumes that ordinary people, in crowded one-room lives, can find secrecy with God, and that the Father is already there waiting ("your Father who is in secret"). Secret prayer is not an elite practice; it is a command of the Sermon on the Mount, as binding as the ones around it.

DISCOVERY MOMENT · Q2

Read John 14:18-23, and stop on the promise of verse 23: "we will come to him and make our home with him." This language of God coming to dwell has a long Old Testament history. Send the group hunting for the moment God's glory first filled a dwelling place in the middle of Israel's camp (hint: the last chapter of Exodus). Read it, then ask: what has changed between that text and Jesus's promise?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 40:34-38: the cloud covers the tent of meeting and the glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle, so overwhelmingly that even Moses cannot enter. Track the trajectory with the group: glory on the mountain (Ex 19), glory in the tent (Ex 40), glory in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), glory promised within the heart (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26), and now Jesus: the Father and the Son making their home in the one who loves him (John 14:23). What changed is the address. The dwelling of God has moved from architecture to persons. That is not a metaphor Teresa invented; it is the plot of the Bible.

Q3. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19. Paul asks "Do you not know...?" as if this should be basic knowledge. Is it basic knowledge for us? What would change this week if you actually believed you were God's temple?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Paul treats the indwelling as catechism-level fact for a messy, divided, very ordinary congregation: the

plural you of 3:16 is one temple together, and 6:19 carries it to each member's body: "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." Let the group answer the second question honestly and concretely (how we treat our bodies, our attention, our entertainment, our solitude; whether prayer feels like dialing long-distance or turning toward Someone present). This is Teresa's whole pastoral point: the tragedy is not that God is absent but that we live as strangers to our own castle.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS THE INTERIOR CASTLE JUST PLATO IN A HABIT?

At full strength: "This inward turn is not from the Bible; it is from Greek philosophy. Plato taught the soul to turn away from the outer world toward the eternal; Plotinus taught return to the One within; Christian mystics baptized it. But biblical faith is external and covenantal: God speaks from outside, in history, in the preached word, in a crucified body. Faith comes from what is heard (Romans 10:17), not from introspection. All this castle talk turns Christianity into a private inner journey, and worse, it makes the pray-er seek God in the self, which is where sin lives. Give me the Word preached, not mansions of the soul."

Acknowledge openly that serious scholars have pressed versions of this.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Grant what is true: faith does come from what is heard; God has acted outside us, in history, in flesh; and any interiority that replaces Word, sacrament, and Church with self-exploration has left Christianity. But the indwelling itself is not Plato; it is Jesus: "we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23), and Paul: "God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Cor 3:16), and John: "he abides in us" (1 John 3:24). The Christian difference from Plato is decisive: we do not ascend to an impersonal One by escaping the body; the personal God descends to dwell in us, body included ("your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," 1 Cor 6:19), through baptism and faith, which come from outside, through the Church. Teresa's castle presumes all of it: her door is prayer, her center is Christ the King, her test of the highest rooms (we will see in Session 11) is concrete love and obedience. And her own life refutes the privacy charge: the Church's most interior teacher spent her last decades founding communities on dusty roads. Christian interiority is not a flight from the outer covenant; it is where the outer covenant is welcomed and takes up residence.

DIG DEEPER: MONĒ: A DWELLING TO STAY IN

The word for "home" in John 14:23 is the Greek *monē*, an abiding place, the same rare word as the "many rooms" (*monai*) of John 14:2. Jesus uses it exactly twice: dwelling places for us in the Father's house, and a dwelling place for the Father and Son in us. The two promises are mirror images. Ask: which of the two is easier for you to believe, and why?

Q4. Teresa says the door into the castle is prayer, and Jesus in Matthew 6:6 gives door-language too ("shut the door"). What doors, literal and figurative, would you have to shut to enter your inner room daily?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let answers be practical: a literal door and a consistent time; the phone in another room; a decision about the first ten minutes of the day; telling family what the closed door means. Note the two doors in tonight's texts: one door shuts the world out for a few minutes (Matt 6:6), another opens inward to the King (Teresa). In practice they are the same hinge. CCC 2710's later point belongs here: choosing a time and sticking to it is not legalism; it reveals what the heart treasures.

SEND

S1. Jesus promises that the Father "who sees in secret" will reward secret prayer. What would it mean this week to want an audience of One?

S2. If the King really is in residence at the center of you, what is one room of your life you have kept him out of, and what would opening it look like?

Live It This Week

- Extend daily prayer to ten minutes, in the same physical place each day. Begin each time with one slow line: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are here; I am here."
- Set up your inner room: one chair or corner, a Bible, no phone. Make it cost you thirty seconds of preparation, not ten minutes of hunting.
- Once this week, pray St. Elizabeth of the Trinity's line slowly: "Give peace to my soul; make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest."

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, with the Father and the Spirit you have made your home in us. Forgive us for the years we have lived in the courtyard of our own souls. Take us by the hand through the rooms, until we find you at the center. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE · JOHN 14:23

"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

SESSION 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

The Inner Room

Every passage used, in order

Passage	Where it is used
Matt 6:5-6	Q1: the command of secret prayer; the theme
John 14:18-23	Core promise: we will make our home with him; more Dig Deeper (with John 14:2)
Ex 40:34-38	Discovery moment: glory fills the tabernacle
1 Kings 8:10-11, 27	Discovery answer: glory fills the temple; will God dwell on earth?
Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26	Discovery answer: the promise moves to the heart
John 1:14; John 2:19-21	OT Roots: the Word tabernacles; the body as temple
1 Cor 3:16	Q3: you are God's temple
Rom 10:17; 1 John 3:24; 1 Cor 6:19	Steelman and answer: faith by hearing; he abides in us; body a temple