

The Inner Room

Deep Calls to Deep · Praying the Scriptures with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila

What We Found

The Bible is the story of God closing the distance: glory on the mountain, glory filling the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38), glory filling the temple, and then the promise carried all the way in: "we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). St. Paul says it of the whole community and of each member's body: "you are God's temple and... God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16; cf. 6:19).

St. Teresa pictured this as a castle of clear crystal with many rooms and the King at the center, and grieved that so many of us live in our own outer courtyard. The door into the castle is prayer and reflection, and Jesus himself commands the practical version: go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret (Matthew 6:6).

Christian interiority is not self-exploration; it is hospitality. The Trinity wills to take up residence in every soul that loves him and keeps his word (John 14:23), and prayer is going home to meet him.

Voices 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.

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.

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.

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."

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."

Before next session: Read Exodus 33:7-11 and Luke 5:15-16. Watch what God and Moses do in the tent, and what Jesus keeps slipping away to do.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 260, 2563, 2691.