

# Devout Life Teachings Part 6

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## **PART ONE – THE PASSIVE UNITIVE STAGE**

### **6.01 YOU CANNOT FOLLOW**

The first disciples asked Jesus, “Where do you stay”. When he answered, “Come and see”, they followed him (Jn.1:38-39). In another scene, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew “Come after me”. Later, he invited James and John to follow him (Mk.1:16-20).

#### *A Different Saying*

After the Last Supper, Jesus said something quite different to his disciples, “Where I go you cannot come” (Jn.13:33). However, he promised, “I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be” (Jn.14:3).

At some point, Jesus said to you, devout soul, “Come, follow me”. In this passive unitive stage, he says, “Where I go you cannot come, but I will come back and take you to myself”. This passive unitive stage is the great divide in the Devout Life. The soul passes from asceticism to mysticism, from active to passive, from ordinary gifts to extraordinary favors. Every soul is invited to the active, unitive stage. The passive unitive state is seemingly found by few.

I say “found by few” because God’s intentions are not clear. St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa debate this speculative question, whether these extraordinary, passive stages are meant for every soul. Both agree that there is a clear division between ordinary and extraordinary.

#### *Sources of Teaching*

These chapters find their foundations in the writings of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Francis deSales and provide their outline of mysticism.

For these chapters, I am deeply grateful to Father Adolphe Tanquerey for his book “The Spiritual Life”, (Numbers 1418 – 1481). St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross are the great teachers of these mystic phenomena and Father Tanquerey provides the clearest outline to understand their teachings.

#### *The Saints Say:*

1. One piece of advice. Do not expect to reach this stage by your own diligence. If you do, your devotion will turn cold. (STA)
2. God is leading the soul by contemplation which is different from meditating and

reasoning. (SJC)

3. This is God's extraordinary road. (SCG)

4. The master is teaching without a word being spoken. (STA)

5. I undertook this writing to explain this night. Many souls pass through it but know nothing about it. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Why should you be interested in the mystical life? Do you even hope to enjoy these favors?

2. Would it be better to hide these favors from you? What is the advantage of explaining what is seemingly far beyond you?

## **6.02 – INFUSED CONTEMPLATION**

Contemplation has two stages, acquired (natural) and infused (supernatural). Teresa explains this infused supernatural gift, "I call supernatural that which cannot be acquired either by industry or by effort, no matter what pains we take for that purpose. We can dispose ourselves and that is a great thing". Later, she writes, "Our Lord makes the soul come higher and higher towards himself. Then He catches his little dove and places it in a nest where she reposes."

John of the Cross writes, "The soul does nothing of itself because God works within. The soul just patiently and freely consents" and "There is a difference between a human and a divine work, between a natural and a supernatural operation. These souls do not act of themselves. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent."

*God at the Soul's Center*

By infused contemplation, God possesses the soul, determining when, how and for how long he will absorb the soul. God acts in the soul's summit, touching the highest parts of the intellect with wisdom and the highest part of the will with a relish for divine things. He acts at the "center of the soul", which is superior even to the soul's faculties of intellect and free will.

*God's Action*

At the soul's center, God produces both an experiential knowledge (in the intellect) and an ineffable love (in the will). Feeling an irresistible attraction to God, the soul goes out of itself and is lost in eternal love. It is transformed like iron in a fire, yet still remaining iron.

*The Soul's Response*

The soul becomes passive, unable to use its faculties in prayer (as it did before). God gradually "binds the faculties". In the beginning stages, the soul can act by gazing at God and loving Him, joyfully consenting to being lifted up to God.

By this experiential knowledge, God becomes a living reality to the soul, causing the soul to feel His presence and to relish his favors. This gift is halfway between ordinary faith (earth) and the beatific vision (heaven).

*The Saints say:*

1. Infused contemplation is a blessing which the soul could never earn. (STA)
2. Unacquainted with this new experience, souls think they are doing nothing. (SJC)
3. God does not allow us to drink the waters of perfect contemplation whenever we want. The choice is his, not ours. (STA)
4. In contemplation God does everything and we do nothing. The work is his alone. (STA)

*Group Discussion:*

1. As you read of God's favors, how are you affected? How are your eyes opened to the reality of God?
2. Does seeing God's ultimate actions throw any light on the early teachings about mental prayer? Can you appreciate the need for all the faculties to participate in prayer?

### **6.03 - VARIOUS ASPECTS OF INFUSED CONTEMPLATION**

*The Effects*

Infused contemplation brings a mixture of unspeakable joy (relishing God's presence) and great sadness (not enjoying complete possession of him). Mystical stages are both painful (stressed John of the Cross) and sweet (stressed by Teresa of Avila).

Souls cannot describe their experiences because they are plunged into a divine darkness. They perceive God obscurely and experience an intense love that defies words. "The soul has no desire to speak of it and can find no example to make such knowledge known." (John of the Cross)

St. Teresa explains this obscurity, "Divine union happens on earth only when the mind knows that God surpasses all creatures". Although in a divine darkness, the soul senses God's presence and his total transcendence.

The soul cannot describe its ardent love. "Only the bride and the bridegroom hear the accents of this song. It is a nuptial song, expressing the sweet emotions of the soul. It cannot be understood by a neophyte in virtue. It belongs to advanced souls who have become worthy of the Spouse." (St. Bernard)

*Advantages of Contemplation*

The advantages are obvious. God receives greater glory because the soul's praises come directly from the Holy Spirit. The soul, made holy through an experimental knowledge and an ardent love of God, practices the highest virtues.

*Freely Given*

God gives this gift to whom he wills, when he wills and how he wills. Usually, these souls are well prepared, but sometimes he gives it to souls to snatch them from the devil's grasp. St. Theresa says, "Sometimes, but rarely, God lifts sinners to contemplation for a short time to see if this grace will induce them to prepare for his favors".

God called some privileged souls (St. Rose of Lima, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus) to contemplation in their infancy. Others attain infused contemplation out of all proportion to their virtue. "I remember a sister whom God enriched in three days. Another reached contemplation in three months. Both of these were still young. Others receive this gift only after a long time. No limits can be placed on God who is so anxious to bestow his favors." (St. Teresa)

### *Needed Preparation*

Usually, the soul must prepare by complete abnegation. "Let the soul be established in pure, spiritual nakedness." (John of the Cross) "God gives this gift to those who are saying "goodbye" to the world." (St. Teresa)

They must practice abandonment to God's will, live according to the gospel maxims, transform all their actions into prayers and joyously accept all trials. (Even those dedicated to study, must renew their love for God during their intellectual pursuits.)

### *Three Signs*

St. John of the Cross gives three signs which show that a soul is disposed for God's infused gift:

1. The soul no longer finds satisfaction from meditation. (This emptiness must not be due to lukewarmness or to physical difficulties.)
2. The soul experiences God's presence without using images and no longer wants to use the imagination in prayer. "He drinks sweetly without effort, having no necessity of images."
3. The soul delights to be alone with God, without any intellectual considerations. "Nothing remains except a general and loving knowledge and attention". This is the most certain of the three signs.

### *Desiring Contemplation*

Can the soul desire infused contemplation? The saints respond affirmatively. However, this desire must be humble (the soul is never worthy) and conditional (according to God's good pleasure). At this stage, the soul can only wait at the door.

### *Waiting at the Door*

This is the picture of souls at the most advanced stage of "active perfection", immersed daily in God's sanctifying presence. By doing this, they sit faithfully at the door, waiting for God to begin the dark night of infused contemplation and mystical union. The soul cannot actively gain this supernatural prayer. All depends on God's free decision. When advanced souls experience infused contemplation, they are total beginners to this passive stage. So, these next steps must begin slowly.

### *The Saints say:*

1. The trials given to contemplatives are terrible, and are overcome only by God's consolations. (STA)
2. God's flame has great wealth. The soul has only great poverty and nothing to

contribute. (SJC)

3. At the fountains of the living waters (contemplation) God fills the soul and removes all tastes for earthly things. (STA)

4. Just one touch of God is enough reward for all the trials of life. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Do you grasp the limitlessness of God's favors? Do you see the greatness of sufferings associated with these favors? Why must the two go together?

2. What is the importance of humility? Why must every soul wait upon God's decision?

#### **6.04 – GOD REMOVES THE IMAGES**

"Images" are a great help in both affective prayer and active contemplation. However, "images of God" or "images of Christ's humanity" are not God himself. Although the soul has made great progress by using these images, it now must be emptied of the images. God, (the reality behind these images) touches the soul directly and infuses contemplation. The images of God are now useless. God Himself welcomes the soul to an extraordinary degree of intimacy. However, the poor soul experiences emptiness, deprived of its spiritual images.

*A Storehouse of Images*

Let's put it this way. For years, the soul has gained a storehouse of spiritual thoughts and images, which brought about great emotions toward Jesus Christ. Later, the soul experienced Jesus' presence with just a few images.

These spiritual experiences (given through images) detached the soul from the external world. Spiritual writers call these "sensual religious experiences". Inside the devout soul are thousands of religious feelings, experiences, images and memories, all resulting from daily mental prayer. As God gives infused contemplation, he brushes aside these "sensual religious experiences". As God draws close to the soul, it senses nothing and feels lost. It is entering into God's darkness.

*The Saints say:*

1. If it does not go backward by desiring images, then it is going forward, even though it perceives nothing. (SJC)

2. It seems like God is surrounded by a cloud which the soul cannot pierce. (SJC)

3. When the soul feels the dryness (with no spiritual images) it should not believe that God is far away. (SJC)

4. This sense of God's absence is so oppressive that souls seeking perfection would die if God did not intervene. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Is your mental prayer filled with images? What images are the strongest? What effects do they bring?

2. Have you moved into acquired contemplation where you sense God's presence with few images?

## 6.05 – A BLINDING LIGHT

Infused contemplation is God's overwhelming light. However, this light is too strong and far beyond the soul's capacities. As a result, the soul experiences God's light as darkness. Later, after being purified, the soul will enjoy the capacity to experience this new light. Infused contemplation changes the soul, leading it from incapacity to capacity, from perceiving darkness to perceiving light. The soul is searching for God (as it always did) but the sensual pleasures of prayer (the consolations, the spiritual thoughts and peace) are totally absent. God enlightens the soul's inner faculties but the soul experiences nothing. God's blessing (at this point) is too spiritual for the soul's faculties to enjoy. The soul must remain faithful to prayer, even though it seemingly "cannot pray".

### *Two Mistakes*

Souls can make two mistakes. Thinking that their prayer is fruitless, they abandon all attempts at mental prayer. They try "to work for God", turning totally to an active spirituality. Or, they try to pray mentally in an active way, using prayer methods that worked in the past. Both approaches will fail. God will do the work. The soul must be both faithful and passive.

God wants a two-fold response. First, souls must keep the commitment they have made to formal and to informal prayer. They must also remain faithful to the duties of their state of life. God is extremely happy when souls pray faithfully, while experiencing no consolation. This "prayer of faith" unites the soul directly to God without using any "forms" or "images".

### *The saints say:*

1. The soul experiences strangeness because it has grown accustomed to sensual consolations. (SJC)
2. Only after the dark night will the soul again experience this spiritual pleasure. At this point it is arid. (SJC)
3. When the divine light assails the soul, its own weaknesses cause the suffering. (SJC)
4. My spiritual dryness increased and I found no comfort in heaven or earth. (STL)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Do you understand a "light that is too strong"? Can you see that the unpurified soul cannot perceive God's light?
2. Can you appreciate the importance of passivity and the suffering involved?

## 6.06 – The Effects of the Darkness

Just as an x-ray is developed in a dark room and reveals what could not be seen in the light, so, in the Dark Night, the soul gains self-knowledge. In this spiritual darkness, God shows the soul her real state, all her hidden sins and imperfections. The Dark Night also purifies them.

Every soul has many selfish attachments which steal some love away from an all-consuming God. This night of the senses is a “short-cut” to perfection, a cleansing which the soul could not accomplish by itself.

#### *The Wet Log and the Fire*

John of the Cross likens the devout soul to a wet log and infused contemplation to a fire. At first, the fire causes loud noises as it dries the wood and turns it black. When the wood is dried and totally enkindled, it takes on the beauty of the fire and then enjoys complete union with the flame. The fire changes the log into its own beauty. The black is gone and the red glow begins. In like manner, God gives the soul his own beauty. All is a gift. “He who is mighty has done great things in me”. God’s fire will continue until the soul is totally one with Him.

#### *The Soul’s Duties During the Night*

Teresa of Avila was always chastising her nuns, telling them not to be like toads, who make slow progress, or like people who take a year to complete a journey of a few days. She wanted them all to “hurry as quickly as possible”. She rejects the “prudence” which always finds reasons to go so slowly because God makes generous, “non-prudent” souls advance quickly.

#### *The saints say:*

1. God brings the soul into this night of sense to bring it into conformity with the spirit. (SJC)
2. By this dark night, the soul goes forth from created things to eternal things. (SJC)
3. God makes the soul ready to serve without the sweetness. It acts for God alone, not for its own profit. (SJC)
4. The soul practices patience and long-suffering by persevering in prayer even when there is no consolation. (SJC)

#### *Group Discussion:*

1. Have you gained self-knowledge by your Devout Life? How has this helped you?
2. Are you aware of some of your selfish attachments? What have you done to purify them?

### **6.07 – THE PHASES OF CONTEMPLATION**

Certainly, God adapts his favors to each person’s temperament. Contemplation comes “individually packed”, perfectly suited to God’s call for each soul. However, a definite unity runs through this multiplicity of religious experiences and St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross (Spanish contemporaries in the 17th century) provide the classic outline.

Teresa talks of four degrees of God possessing the soul:

1. Prayer of Quiet – God acts in the summit of the soul while letting the lower faculties and senses free to function.
2. Prayer of Full Union – God seizes all the interior faculties and leaves only the exterior

senses free to function.

3. Prayer of Ecstatic Union (Spiritual Espousal) – God seizes both the interior faculties and the exterior senses.

4. Prayer of Transforming Union (Spiritual Marriage) – God possesses all internal and external faculties in a stable and permanent way.

John of the Cross speaks of two dark nights – one of the senses and one of the spirit.

Putting the teachings of the two saints together, reveals the stages of infused contemplation.

Stage One – Prayer of Quiet

a. Arid (Dark Night of Senses)

b. Sweet

Stage Two – Prayer of Full Union

Stage Three – Prayer of Ecstatic Union, Spiritual Espousal, (Two Parts)

c. Sweet

d. Bitter – Dark Night of the Spirit

Stage Four – Prayer of Transforming Union (Spiritual Marriage)

We follow this outline in the subsequent chapters.

*The saints say:*

1. Night, pitch black unchanging night was my fate. I slept through the storm. (STL)

2. God dwells in a darkness which is not accessible to man's spirit. When God leads a soul into this darkness, it becomes filled with light. (FJdeC)

3. The soul experiences no movement because God is carrying her. By doing nothing, the soul accomplishes everything. (SJC)

4. God gave me a ray of spiritual light that was so powerful my body and soul seemed to enter eternal life. (SCG)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Can you see God's continuing claim upon the soul? How he absorbs her until he possesses all her faculties?

2. Can you understand the soul's pain? How she does not even understand what God is doing? Can you see the hidden blessings?

## **6.08 – PRAYER OF QUIETUDE**

### THE ARID STAGE – DARK NIGHT OF THE SENSES

At this special moment ("the fullness of time" so to speak) God opens the door and infuses contemplation into the heart of this special little soul. This beginning experience is painful and dark. The soul leaves behind the light of natural prayer and enters the twilight, the midnight and the dawn of the first Dark Night (of the senses).



### *Twilight Experience*

The soul's natural lights are gradually extinguished and God's new light begins to shine. However, God's light is so spiritual that the soul's spiritual sensitivity (even though it is advanced) cannot yet see this light. At the same time, the lower lights of sensual spiritual favors are being extinguished. The soul enters into the partial darkness of a night that is just beginning.

### *Don't Turn Back*

Because the senses experience very little in prayer, the soul needs spiritual knowledge and a competent spiritual director,. The soul is confused and the hours given to prayer seem fruitless.

John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila teach that the devil wants the soul to turn back and give up prayer. This one soul is worth thousands and thousands of other lesser souls. The stakes are very high. Let me spell out three reasons.

### *Reasons*

1. The soul has devoted its whole life to prayer. Having made progress in divine union and in virtues, the soul is entering its most fruitful years. To turn back, would be to abandon a life's work which has involved so many sacrifices and is about to bring a great harvest.
2. God invites the soul to indescribable intimacy, to secret favors and to ministries of intercession for his Church. God's heart is totally open to this beloved little soul. God's plans are infinite and only the soul's capacity limits his favors. God is about to multiply the soul's capacity in millions of ways by leading her into the midnight stage.
3. The Church desperately needs this soul. She will save thousands of souls. She will animate all the missionaries and guide all the bishops. She is the heart of Christ's Body. Without her, all is dead.

### *The saints say:*

1. In the beginning of contemplation the soul experiences grievous afflictions in its spirit which overflow into the senses. (SJC)
2. The flame is bitter at first. At the end, it will be sweet. (SJC)
3. Souls enter this night when God draws them from the state of beginners and places them with the progressives, those already enjoying contemplation. (SJC)
4. The night of sense is common to many souls. These are the beginners. The night of the spirit comes to few.

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Do you understand the image of a light too spiritual to be perceived? Of the lower lights being extinguished, causing a twilight experience?
2. Do you grasp the great importance of this soul? Of its temptations to turn back?

## **6.09 – THE MIDNIGHT STAGE**

As the soul remains faithful, infused contemplation takes greater and greater control of

the faculties. The sensual consolations and lower lights are removed. The soul begins to doubt its friendship for God. It feels like a person who doesn't even believe in God or who has no devotion.

### *Between Earth and Heaven*

The poor soul is caught in darkness, halfway between earth and heaven. For years, it has renounced the pleasures of earth, but has enjoyed the favors of heaven. Now, even heaven's favors are taken away. All is darkness. As the process goes on, it becomes midnight.

The soul must not move. Any action, of any kind, only makes matters worse. Yet her faculties always want to "solve the situation". The poor soul has trouble in quieting its imagination and intellect. They want to "pray as usual", making those acts that previously brought a sense of God's closeness. This is a mistake. Whatever the soul does actively is a hindrance.

The soul must respond in two ways. It must be faithful to prayer (not shortening the time) and it must do nothing in prayer, not using its sensual faculties (imagination and memory). It must seek God with the highest part of its soul in total faith.

### *A Director*

Blessed is the soul which has a director, one who is learned enough to know what is happening (even if he has not personally experienced a dark night). The soul is like a plane flying in total darkness which needs a good control tower to land safely.

### *The saints say:*

1. A director can bring infinite gain to the soul (if he gives good advice) or infinite loss (if he is mistaken) (SJC)
2. Not all directors have sufficient knowledge nor is their spirituality so perfect, so as to direct a soul in every state of the spiritual life. (SJC)
3. When God brings the soul into this solitude (where it can make no acts) it thinks it is doing nothing and strives to do something. (SJC)
4. The soul is like a baby who wants to walk when its mother would carry him. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Since beginning your Devout Life, have you ever doubted your friendship with God? Have you had moments when you lost all faith in God's existence?
2. After years of praying, is it not natural for the faculties to remain active? Why is this now a hindrance?

## **6.10 – THE DAWN EXPERIENCE**

As the soul remains faithful, the dark night purges the faculties. These become capable of seeing God's infused light, the greatest spiritual favor she has ever received.

Having gone through the first night, the soul is purified in its sensual faculties, but not yet

purged in its rational faculties. Still, it is a new dawn, but the soul can make the mistake of thinking that the darkness is over.

### *A Time of Respite*

This dawn is a respite from darkness and from purging, not a total, uninterrupted light. The darkness returns and the soul realizes (much better than the first time) that God is purging it with alternating periods of light and darkness. When in the light, the soul must remember that darkness will surely return. When in the darkness, the soul must believe that light will surely come. The soul grows used to a life of alternating light and darkness, periods of consolation followed by purging. This is tremendously profitable for the soul and extremely beneficial for the Church.

### *The saints say:*

1. Because the sweetness is so great, the soul might think that the trials are over. (SJC)
2. Comparing the purged and the unpurged parts of itself, the soul sees clearly what still needs to be purged. (SJC)
3. The night within my soul had also gone. Jesus had awakened. Joy had returned. The tempest of my ordeal was replaced by a gentle breeze which filled my soul. (STL)
4. When the trials return, the soul suffers more intensely after a period of relief. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Can you see the gentleness and thoughtfulness of God? Does he not see when you need light and when you can stand darkness?
2. Is not this testing beneficial? What are its effects?

## **6.11 – A MYSTIC’S DESCRIPTION**

Wanting this book to be very personal, Eileen George, a mystic who has gone through all these trials, was asked to describe her experiences. The following are her words.

“There is an emptiness beyond description. God withdraws His presence gradually, and, in the beginning, I try to be brave, thinking that I will survive with grace, but there is an inner hurting. In the middle of the night, I grow anxious because I know I am losing my security. In the final stages, I grow defiant and angry. I scream out at God, ‘I love you but you don’t love me. I would never do this to you’”.

I try to find him. I tell him I will search under every rock. I ask “Where are you?” and “What have you done?” It is not despair, but I feel I am at the bottom of a well and I cannot see the light at the top. There is not even the grace to hope. I am stripped of everything. I wouldn’t wish this on my worst enemy. I don’t want to pray (but I still do). I get nothing out of Communion. It is hard even to believe that Jesus is there. During this time of trial, my director would say, “Don’t worry. God will come back” but it certainly looked like a final state to me.

When I come out of each dark experience, Jesus calls me by name and the light returns. Jesus will say, “I longed to have you pursue me. I delighted to see you grow stronger”. After each absence, I easily feel a greater closeness with God. I cling to the Father. My

heart burns with such love that I feel I am going to die. After the purification, the gifts are beyond all expectation. The soul is cleansed in a new way, and I do not want to fail God or to hurt him, even in the smallest way.”

*The saints say:*

1. The wounded soul, in seeking for God, has the vehemence of a lioness whose young have been stolen. (SJC)
2. In these dark waters, the soul is hidden and well protected because it is so close to God. (SJC)
3. The soul is blinded to its own lights so it can see supernaturally. (SJC)
4. Spiritual souls would like to explain their state to their director but they do not know how. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. What struck you about this very personal description? How close was God during this time? How did she perceive him?
2. Were you touched by the results? By the greater gifts? By God’s special love for her?

## **6.12 – Passive Recollection**

When the Night of the Senses ends, the bitter aspects of infused contemplation turn sweet. This new beginning is marked by very definite spiritual favors. Later, these new favors will also fade and become less frequent. At each stage the soul must “let go”. Clinging even to God’s favors is an obstacle to divine union. This is the Fourth Mansion of the Interior Castle. Teresa calls this the prayer of Divine Delights because God’s presence causes great spiritual delights. She uses the image of a cistern, which used to receive water through external pipes but now enjoys the water surging up from within. This prayer is preceded by Passive Recollection.

*Passive Recollection*

In the active unitive stage, the devout soul practiced active recollection, remaining by a deliberate choice, in God’s presence all during the day (even outside of formal prayer). After the first night of the senses, this active recollection becomes passive. Whenever he chooses, God makes his presence felt within and the soul enjoys passive recollection. The soul need not recall God’s presence. God initiates this experience of his inner presence whenever he desires.

*Teresa’s Description*

For Teresa, this passive recollection was her first experience of supernatural prayer. “It is like having another set of senses. The soul wants to close off the exterior senses, and does not want to see or hear anything, so she can withdraw and talk to God alone. The soul still controls the faculties, but they reach out to God.” In another place, she writes, “The great king, at the center of my soul, is like a shepherd calling my faculties together. This shepherd’s call has such power, that my faculties leave behind all exterior things and hurry to him in the castle.” She goes on “Let the soul do nothing, just be absorbed. Don’t

try to understand what is happening. At most, just say a few words of love. The soul will know when God wants the understanding to cease acting". Passive recollection prepares the soul for the Prayer of Quiet.

*The saints say:*

1. A soul recollected in God would not give up her repose for anything in the world. (SFdeS)
2. In this deep repose the soul enjoys a delicate sense of God but is not conscious of her own enjoyment. (SFdeS)
3. Whenever you find yourself on this simple repose of confidence, stay there. Do not move. (SFdeS)
4. The soul cannot count the blessings impressed by this silent contemplation. They are delicate anointings of the Spirit. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Do you practice active recollection trying to be always mindful of God's presence? What blessings have you received from this practice?
2. Can you see how these mystical gifts are greater? How greater favors come at each stage?

### **6.13 – The prayer of quiet (Divine Delights)**

In this first supernatural prayer, God binds only the will, leaving the intellect and memory free to wander. ("Bind" means that the faculty cannot function. As the supernatural prayer progresses, God binds more faculties and even the exterior senses. Their "non-functioning" allows God to act.) St. Teresa calls this the Prayer of Quiet or the Prayer of Divine Delights.

St. Teresa explains, "Having prepared the soul by passive recollection, God sets the soul near to himself. She realizes that in a short time she will be one with him in divine union. Although she sees herself in his kingdom, she is so overwhelmed by reverence that she asks no questions. The will is captive. Nothing troubles the soul, except to realize that she soon must return to the exterior world. Her faculties are inebriated and intoxicated with delight and satisfaction. Desiring nothing else, the soul exclaims with Peter, "Let us build three tents here".

While the will is inebriated, the intellect and imagination might wander. The will should ignore them and continue enjoying God's delights. The ability of the other faculties to wander shows that the soul has not yet reached the Prayer of Full Union.

*Divine Delight*

This is "Divine Delight" because the soul's spiritual joy is different. "Delights flow to the soul's innermost parts with calm and gentleness." These divine delights are far superior to the joys of acquired contemplation. "This heavenly water enlarges our whole interior with inexpressible delights. The soul cannot even understand what God is giving her."

Teresa adds, "These delights are so close to heaven, that the soul loses all cravings for things of earth". "The soul sees that she cannot purchase even one instant of these delights. No earthly delights can give such happiness. These heavenly joys alone satisfy."

*The saints say:*

1. Sometimes the experiences are two-fold. The soul both perceives God's presence and hears him speak. (SFdeS)

2. In the Prayer of Quiet, all the faculties are stilled and the soul realizes she is close to God.

If she were any closer, there would be divine union. (STA)

3. The soul knows she is in the kingdom. She is in a swoon. Her body does not want to move because it experiences the greatest delights. (STA)

4. The Prayer of Quiet is excellent, having no mixture of self-interest. The will seeks God's good pleasure, wanting only to be pleasing in God's sight. (SFdeS)

5. The Prayer of Quiet is supernatural. We can neither acquire it nor prolong it. (STA)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Can you see the need for preparing the soul by the First Dark Night and passive recollection?

2. Can you appreciate how God must purify before giving higher delights? Is this a picture of being prepared for eternal delights?

## **6.14 – THE EFFECTS OF THE PRAYER OF QUIET**

*A Source of Delight*

The soul's delight comes from God himself. Teresa writes, "He sends no messenger because he is so close. The soul need not speak. The King can read her lips". "God wants the soul to realize that He knows her and wants her to feel the power of his presence. He bestows great interior and exterior satisfaction."

*Overcomes Fears*

"Although she now fears God more than ever, she has lost all servile fear and has confidence that she will be in heaven." "She no longer fears bodily sickness. She desires the greatest austerities and has faith that she can accept any future trials. Having seen God's greatness, she now sees her own lowliness. Having tasted God's delights, she easily despises earthly consolations".

*Relishes God's Presence*

The soul relishes God's presence which she experiences in her superior part. This Prayer of Quiet is not totally passive. God seizes only the will, not the imagination or intellect.

*Progress of Gift*

At first, this gift of divine delights comes at intervals, is faint, and sometimes not perceived. The duration is short (the length of a Hail Mary). Later, this favor comes more frequently and lasts longer (half an hour). The divine quiet captures the will. The other

faculties can still fulfill their duties. Sometimes, spiritual inebriation accompanies the prayer and can last for a couple of days (while the person perfectly fulfills exterior duties).

### *Two Forms of Quiet*

St. Teresa describes two contrasting forms of quiet, (silent and vociferous). In the silent form, “the soul is like a child nursing at his mother’s breast. The mother so loves the baby that she forces the milk into his mouth. He need not even move his lips.”

In the vociferous (praying) type, “the soul utters a thousand praises, trying to please the one who holds her in this state”. While in this state, Teresa would compose love verses.

### *The saints say:*

1. By remaining still, the soul does much. (SJC)
2. The soul should now remain in repose. She has found God whom she was looking for. (SFdeS)
3. At times the soul says nothing. At other times, it perceives God and speaks to him without destroying the prayer of quiet. (SFdeS)
4. The soul does not have imaginations or multiple words because these are no longer of any use. (FJdeC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Are you amazed at God’s designs upon the soul? And of his constant, loving concern? Is this a new picture of God for you?
2. Can you see why the delights come slowly at first and then more quickly? What is spiritual inebriation?

## **6.15 – SLEEP OF THE FACULTIES**

(God Seizes Both the Will and the Understanding)

### *A Final Stage of Quiet*

Until now, God’s hold has been primarily upon the will. The other faculties were left to roam. The new sleep of the faculties is a higher form of quiet in which God seizes both the will and the understanding. (For now, the imagination and memory remain outside of God’s command.) Teresa writes, “In this kind of union, God gathers in both my will and my intellect, which no longer reasons. It looks at what is happening. Because it sees so much, it does not know which way to look”.

“The memory remains free. It wars with the will and understanding, trying to put everything into confusion. The memory tires me out and I ask the Lord to deprive me of this power. Memories are like restless gnats which buzz around and trouble people. Consider the memory like a madman and leave it to its madness. Only God can limit its extravagances.” This final stage of quiet prepares for full union.

### *The Soul's Actions*

The soul must be humble and not attempt to initiate what is totally God's favor. If the soul, by its own actions, tries to bring about this experience (suspending the actions of the will and understanding) it is bound to fail. This gift is totally a divine favor.

When the divine favor begins, the soul should stop its own "active prayer" and follow the Holy Spirit. This "following the Spirit" will be either that of silence or praising (described above). "If the memory and imagination wander off. Let them go. Just keep enjoying the gift." (St. Francis deSales)

### *The saints say:*

1. The soul spends many hours in a great forgetfulness, not knowing where it has been or how much time has passed. (SJC)
2. The whole soul and all of its powers seem to be asleep, while the will delights in the Beloved's presence. (SFdeS)
3. The soul does not know what it did or thought. It cannot pay attention to what occupies it even though it tries. (SJC)
4. So that God can work, the faculties must be silenced. (SJC)
5. I suffer no pain in prayer because my faculties are suspended. The pain comes when the prayer is over. (STA)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Does this astound you – the intellect now is gathered in while the memory is free to roam? These saints understood man's psychological make-up.
2. Notice that all is God's initiative. The soul cannot force the gift.

## **6.16 – THE PRAYER OF FULL UNION**

(God seizes all the interior faculties)

The Prayer of Quiet and the Sleep of the Faculties, prepare the soul for the next favor, the Prayer of Full Union (Teresa's Fifth Mansion). In the Prayer of Full Union, God seizes all the interior faculties (will, intellect, imagination and memory) and the soul has total certitude that God lives within her. By seizing the faculties, "God makes the soul quite stupid, so He can imprint true wisdom". (Teresa) While in this state (which is always short) the soul does not perceive, understand or respond to anything. The time seems shorter to the soul than it really is.

Teresa writes, "When the soul comes to, she has total certitude that she was in God and God was in her. This happens because God implants himself in the soul's interior. Even if many years pass before God bestows this favor again, she never doubts or forgets it."

### *Describing Full Union*

In Full Union, the soul has absolutely no distractions and no weariness. "The prayer is like manna from heaven. She abandons herself to the joys. No matter how long the prayer goes, her health is never injured." "The soul enjoys without understanding what is



enjoyed. The soul knows that it possesses the source of all blessings. The senses are taken up in this joy and cannot perceive anything else. One moment of this joy compensates for all earthly suffering." (Teresa)

### *A Contrast*

There is a clear contrast between the Prayer of Quiet and the Prayer of Full Union. In the Prayer of Quiet, God seizes the will (and sometimes the intellect). However, God does not seize the other faculties and the soul can doubt that it experienced union with God. In the Prayer of Full Union, God seizes all the interior faculties and the soul has total certitude that God was united with the soul.

### *The Effects*

The soul undergoes a marvelous transformation which St. Teresa compares to a silkworm becoming a butterfly. The soul receives an ardent zeal to glorify God, a total detachment from creatures, perfect abandonment to God's will and great love for neighbor (especially to save their souls).

### *Preparing for Spiritual Espousal*

This union is the first meeting of lovers. The soul senses that if it is faithful, God will espouse the soul and then lead it to mystical marriage. The soul must continue her efforts to love God and to detach her heart from everything else.

### *The saints say:*

1. The Prayer of Union fastens the soul to God. Only by much force and pain is it removed. (SFdeS)
2. If the soul's imagination is diverted, her intellect will hold on to God. If someone loses her intellect, her will takes hold. (SFdeS)
3. The soul wants freedom from exterior works so she can remain with Jesus. Yet, she accepts these works as necessary for union with him. (SFdeS)
4. The soul sees clearly that it has been carried far from every creature. It has become remote, placed in a profound retreat, in an immense desert with no boundary. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Do you marvel at God's actions? Do you see how he gradually claims all the soul's faculties? Would you want this gift? Will it not be yours in heaven?
2. Will not God transform you, also, according to your surrender? Is there not still more to come?

## **6.17 – ECSTATIC UNION (SPIRITUAL BETROTHAL)**

### *Spiritual Espousal*

Infused contemplation begins as darkness and leads into light. Spiritual espousal is just the opposite. It begins with sweetness and leads into the bitterness of the Dark Night of the Soul.

### *Another Dimension*

By Ecstatic Union, God adds another dimension. In the Prayer of Quiet, God seized the will. In the Prayer of Full Union, he seized the interior faculties. In the Spiritual Betrothal, God seizes all the faculties (both interior and exterior). This is called Ecstatic Union, because God absorbs the soul and all its senses cease to act.

This absorption has two sources. First, the soul's intellect admires God as he reveals the divine mysteries. Second, the soul's will loves God and experiences great sensible enjoyment. By admiring God, the soul loves him even more. By loving God, the soul admires him even more. The two faculties (intellect and will) act upon each other. By absorbing the intellect and will, God gradually seizes the senses and suspends all their activity. Even the person's physical life slows down. Breathing is slower and bodily warmth grows less. "The body gradually cools with a gentleness and unspeakable delight". When seized by this ecstasy, the body becomes immobile and remains fixed in its position. The body is not weakened but feels new energy. Sometimes the senses are completely suspended. At other times, the person can recall the revelations which they received (as happened with St. Catherine of Sienna).

### *Describing Ecstasy*

In Ecstatic Union (even more than in mystical union) God seizes and suspends the actions of the interior senses. The will, however, remains free to accept these gifts and can gain merit. Full ecstasy itself lasts from a few minutes to a half hour. Incomplete ecstasy can precede and follow full ecstasy and might last a few days. A soul comes out of the ecstasy spontaneously and experiences anguish in returning to its normal life. It gradually regains control over its body.

At times, a religious superior might command a soul to come out of ecstasy. The soul always obeys a vocal command but sometimes can ignore a command that is only mental.

### *The saints say:*

1. In raptures and ecstasies the body has no feelings. It can be unconscious even of the most painful afflictions. (SJC)
2. There is a difference between raptures, ecstasies, flights of the spirit and other elevations. I leave all that to St. Teresa. She has written well about them. (SJC)
3. Once, when I fell into ecstasy, those who did not know me thought I was suffering from vertigo. (SCG)
4. Whoever attains to these holy ecstasies of divine love can find nothing on earth to satisfy them after they come back to themselves. (SFdeS)
5. I grew in my love for God. Sometimes I experienced true transports of ecstasy. (STL)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Can you see the great variety of manifestations? Can you also see God seizing control, part by part?
2. Why does the body become immobile? Why does the soul not want to return to normal life?

## 6.18 – THE THREE PHASES OF ECSTATIC UNION

There are three phases of ecstatic union – simple ecstasy, rapture and flight of the spirit.

### *Phase One – Simple Ecstasy*

Simple Ecstasy is like a fainting spell. It produces a painful but delightful “wounding” which results from the felt presence of the Spouse. The soul wants to experience this presence continually (by its own activity) but it cannot do so. The soul suffers when deprived of this favor but the enjoyment is more delightful than the Prayer of Quiet. “The soul feels herself wounded but she does not know how or by whom. She prizes this wound and never wants to be healed. She complains to the Spouse that he is present but will not show himself.” Because of this “wounding”, the delight of Ecstatic Union is greater than in of the Prayer of Quiet. There is also a sense of affliction when God withdraws this favor. At this point, supernatural revelations begin to happen.

### *Phase Two – Rapture*

God seizes the soul with a violence and carries her off, as if on eagle’s wings. She does not know where He is taking her. Her weakness brings a fear, which mingles with her love.

In this rapture, God completes the spiritual espousal. He also shuts down the senses (because the person could die by seeing himself so close to God). After the rapture, the will is inebriated and totally occupied with God. It wants to do penance and complains to God when there is nothing to suffer.

### *Phase Three – Flight of the Spirit*

These Flights of the Spirit are so impetuous that the soul seems to be severed from the body. Resistance to them is almost impossible. “It seems as if the soul has been to another world and has received a light different from all earthly lights. It is totally impossible for her to understand this wonder. In a single instant, she learns many things. If she spent years in thinking she could not remember one-thousandth of them. (Teresa) Ecstasy’s great gift is holiness, even a heroism of life. “If the soul’s conduct does not visibly display the ecstasy of action, then raptures do not make the soul more pleasing to God.” (St. Francis deSales)

### *The Four Effects of Ecstatic Union*

Ecstatic Union has four main effects. First, the soul gains detachment. God brings the soul to the highest point of a fortress so that it sees the nothingness of all creation. In this detachment, the soul would like to give up its free will. Second, the soul gains great sorrow for its own sins, solely because they hurt God. Third, she gains a tender vision of the humanity of Christ and of Mary. By bestowing these visions in her imagination and in her intellect, God buries the soul in humility. Fourth, God bestows patience to undergo passive trials. Because of its longing for God, the soul feels it has been pierced by a fiery dart. This martyrdom of soul and body is relieved only by God’s inebriating delights.

*The saints say:*

1. The rapture of love happens in the will when God touches it with sweetness. (SFdeS)
2. During the flight of the spirit, the soul's spirit is taken, with great violence, into communion with God. The body is abandoned. All bodily acts and senses are suspended, absorbed in God. (SJC)
3. These wounds are secret touches of love which penetrate the soul like an arrow that burns with love. (SJC)
4. Pierced by the Beloved's arrow, the soul seeks relief but finds none. No matter what it does, the pain increases. There is no remedy. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Why would the soul prize a "spiritual wound"? Why does God rapture a soul?
2. Discuss the four main effects? Are they beyond human attainment?

### **6.19 – SPIRITUAL BETROTHAL (St. John of the Cross)**

The two highest stages of divine union are Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage. John of the Cross has written extensively on both. This chapter provides his statements concerning Spiritual Betrothal, which will help those souls who have experienced the Dark Nights.

*Spiritual Betrothal*

1. God brings about Spiritual Betrothal by a vivid vision of the Beloved.
2. The soul does not have perfect tranquility in Spiritual Betrothal because the sensual parts with their imperfect habits are not totally subdued.
3. The soul enjoys the Bridegroom's visits but also suffers from his absences.
4. It also suffers from affliction in its lower faculties and from the devil.
5. Although the soul delights in her union with the Bridegroom, images trouble her memory and desires trouble the sensual faculties.
6. Because her love for the Bridegroom is vehement, the pain of his absence is also vehement. Contact with creatures increases this pain.
7. The soul still experiences terrors and fears (from God or the devil).
8. After this Spiritual Betrothal, the soul receives many divine communications.
9. Spiritual Betrothal cannot compare with the Spiritual Marriage which is a complete transformation into the Beloved.
10. Only after the soul spends some time in Betrothal does God call her to Marriage.
11. This betrothal is a progressive work, done slowly within the soul.
12. Both the will of God and the will of the soul are satisfied. Neither fails the other.
13. During the betrothal the bride must keep all her love, thoughts and actions directed to the Bridegroom.

*The saints say:*

1. The soul and God are the two contracting parties in this spiritual betrothal. (SJC)
2. During this betrothal, God uses the Holy Spirit's choice ointments to make the soul's yearnings extreme and delicate. These ointments are the proximate preparation for

union. (SJC)

3. If these preparatory unctions are so sublime, what will the actual possession of the Beloved in Spiritual Marriage be like? (SJC)

4. By these touches, the soul is purified to receive this union once and for all. This is the Divine Betrothal between the soul and God. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Why is Spiritual Betrothal not perfect? What sufferings are included?

2. What are its blessings? Why is it a progressive work of God? What are the soul's duties?

## **6.20 – THE BITTER STAGE – DARK NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT**

This spiritual espousal culminates in the Dark Night of the Spirit. Because the sensual faculties (imagination, memory and sensual intellect) are already somewhat purged, God's contemplative fire attacks the spiritual intellect and spiritual will. This is the worst of all trials, when the soul believes God has totally abandoned it. The soul even questions its eternal salvation and can become convinced that it is damned forever. Imagine the pain of this devout soul. It loves only God and seeks only to live with him forever. Yet, the soul believes that all of its love will be unrequited. This experienced separation from God is painful because the soul desires only God's presence.

The sufferings of the Dark Night of the Senses (experienced by many) are as nothing compared to the agonies of this second night (experienced by few). However, after this second night all the sufferings are over. The purging is complete. The soul lives at the border of heaven and tastes heavenly glories which John of the Cross describes in detail in *Spiritual Canticle* and *Living Flame of Love*.

*Time Frame*

There are two questions concerning time. First, when do these nights begin? Second, how long do they last? Both depend on the individual. Obviously the Little Flower had experienced both nights by her death at twenty-four. St. Teresa of Avila became a religious at twenty-one, but at twenty-four, was still in the midst of what she calls her "sinful years".

Also, much depends on the person's call. Someone called to the contemplative life would probably experience the dark nights earlier. Someone involved in great activity wouldn't be prepared for these trials until years later.

How long these nights last is also disputed. One writer (Cardinal Bova) says that Francis of Assisi spent two years; St. Teresa, eighteen years; St. Claire of Montefalco, fifteen years; St. Catherine of Bologna, five years; St. Magdalene of Pozi, five years (followed by another sixteen years). However, these figures probably include the two dark nights and the period of respite in between.

*The saints say:*

1. Some few will later enter the second formidable dark night of the Spirit to reach divine union. Only the smallest number enter this because the night of the senses lasts a long

time. (SJC)

2. The pain is deep and causes vehement spiritual groans, which at times receive vocal expression. When the pain is severe, the soul dissolves into tears. (SJC)

3. The spiritual appetite is empty but God's favors have not yet come, so the soul's thirst is worse than death. (SJC)

4. God leaves their understanding dark, their will dry, their memory empty and their feelings bitter. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Why does God bring about such intense suffering? What is the cause of this suffering? Does this teaching reveal anything about your powerful faculties of intellect and will?

2. Do you admire the great Fortitude of the saints to endure these sufferings for years? Do you know anyone who has gone through these dark nights?

## **6.21 - THE EFFECTS OF THE SECOND DARK NIGHT**

*Freedom From Imperfections*

The first night of the senses purified the soul, enabling it to enjoy the Prayer of Quiet, of Full Union and of Ecstatic Union (Spiritual Betrothal).

This second dark night sets the soul free from many imperfections. These include:

1. Habitual imperfections which are deeply imbedded habits.
2. A dullness of mind which subjects the soul to distractions.
3. A certain pride (resulting from spiritual consolations).
4. A false boldness with God that comes from a lack of reverential fear.

All of these are removed in the Second Dark Night.

*The Trials Themselves*

This second night touches all four internal senses. The mind enters into darkness. The will becomes dry. The memory forgets. The affections are painful

*The Mind*

Just as a strong light dazes weak eyes, so God's brilliant divine light paralyzes and tortures the mind. Death itself seems a welcome deliverance. The soul experiences a painful sense of being annihilated, because the infused light reveals the holiness of God and the sinfulness of the soul. It seems that hell is ready to swallow the soul forever.

*The Will*

Deprived of all joy, the soul believes that her sufferings will last forever. To sustain the soul, God sends periods of relief and peace. Then, the devil counter-attacks, causing the soul to believe that God has justly forsaken her.

*The Memory and Affections*

Prayer is impossible. The memory cannot even attend to temporal matters, because all the faculties are tied up. The experiences are like those of hell. The results are the same as purgatory.

“This blessed night darkens the mind to give it light and humbles the soul in order to raise it up. It empties the soul of natural likings so it can divinely possess all things.” (John of the Cross)

### *The Effects*

After the night is over, the effects are clear:

1. During the trial, the soul loved God in its highest part but did not know this. Now, God shows the soul that her love has been ardent.
2. In the trial, the piercing light revealed all the soul's sins and imperfections. Now, this light shows all that the soul will gain as a reward.
3. The soul struggled greatly in the trial. Now, the soul has gained strength and is determined to neglect nothing that serves His glory.
4. The soul is now ready to climb the ten stepping stones of divine love (described by John of the Cross) which lead to the transforming union.

### *The saints say:*

1. This night prepares the soul for an inward peace and tranquility which surpasses all understanding. (SJC)
2. The night draws the spirit away from its ordinary experiences to bring it closer to divine understanding. (SJC)
3. God makes the soul die to all that is not God so the soul can be clothed in the new man. (SJC)
4. Once purged the soul can receive the highest divine light. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Even in these trials, can you see God's special actions?
2. Discuss the zeal of God who has one goal for your lives – that you would be purified so you can enjoy union with him.

## **6.22 – THE TEN STEPS OF MYSTICAL LOVE**

The following short outline comes from the simplified version of the Dark Night of the Soul (Chapters 2.20 and 2.21).

John of the Cross teaches that infused contemplation is a ladder with ten steps. This ladder takes the soul up to God “to steal the treasure of heaven” and allows the soul to descend to great humility. The soul is “always ascending and descending” because “Perfection is a perfect love for God and an emptiness of self”.

He lists these effects (calling them ten steps) and teaches that he does not know the exact nature of each grace. The steps are from the lowest to the highest.

1. The soul languishes, like a sick person. Losing all its desires, it quickly seeks the second step.
2. The soul seeks God ceaselessly, like Magdalene who went to the tomb and waited there. By loving God, the soul is recovering its health.
3. The soul has such a great zeal that it sees all its accomplishments as nothing. She is

like Jacob who willingly worked seven more years to gain Rachel.

4. The soul experiences continual suffering because it so much wants to retain God's love.

5. The soul experiences vehement desires to be united with the Beloved and every delay is oppressive.

6. Full of hope, the soul runs swiftly to God, touching Him, again and again.

7. The soul becomes vehement in its boldness, setting aside its own judgments and refusing to retreat. The soul acts this way only when the King invites her.

8. The soul seizes God and lays hold of Him. The soul climbs to this level but cannot remain long. Otherwise they would possess glory in this life.

9. The soul burns sweetly because of its union with God. Words cannot describe her riches.

10. The soul is totally assimilated to God by a clear and direct vision. This happens only in heaven. These souls do not go to purgatory. Love has totally purged them.

*The saints say:*

1. How can this soul, which feels so unworthy of God, have the strength, boldness and daring to journey towards union? Love gives it strength. (SJC)

2. The bride's heart will be destroyed if she had no hope to attain union, so she does not despair. God makes her thousands of promises. (SFdeS)

3. When St. Stanislas Kotska was fourteen he often fainted from divine love. Only cloths soaked in cold water could assuage the burning he felt in his heart. (SFdeS)

4. When Philip Neri was 80 years old, Divine Love so inflamed his heart, that his heart broke the fourth and fifth ribs so he could breathe. (SFdeS)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Can you see that the Devout Life is a constant ascent toward God? What have been the stages of your own ascent?

2. How have you experienced God acting in you? Are you grasping how active God is on your behalf?

## **6.23 – MOTHER THERESA'S DARK NIGHT**

For years, Mother Theresa of Calcutta enjoyed great divine favors. In the power of her love for Jesus, she willingly obeyed his will to leave her congregation (the Sisters of Loretto) and go into the slums of Calcutta (December 1948). As soon as this work began, she went from light to darkness, a state that perdured for the rest of her life.

She could not even explain this to her confessor. So, he asked her to write a letter to Jesus. Eleven years into this trial, on September 3, 1959, she wrote the following:

*"Dear Jesus:*

*Who am I that you should forsake me? The child of love has become the most hated one, thrown away as unwanted and unloved. I call and I cling, but no one answers. No one. I am alone, unwanted, forsaken.*



*Where is my faith? There is only emptiness and darkness. How painful is this unknown pain, pain without ceasing. I do not dare to utter the thoughts of my heart, for that would cause untold agony. I am afraid to uncover the many unanswered questions within me. These seem like blasphemy, if there be a God.*

*Please forgive me. I trust that all will end in heaven with Jesus. However, when I raise my thoughts to heaven they return like sharp knives and hurt my soul. The word love brings nothing. I am told that God loves me but the reality of emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.*

*Did I make a mistake in blindly surrendering to the Sacred Heart's call? The work is His not mine. I don't feel a single temptation to claim anything in the work. The whole time I am smiling. Sisters and people think faith and love are filling my being and that union with God absorbs my heart. Could they but know that cheerfulness is a cloak covering my emptiness and misery.*

*However, the darkness and emptiness are not as painful as my longing for God. I fear that this contradiction will unbalance me. O God, what are you doing to one so small? Is this the way you imprint your Passion on my heart?*

*If this brings you glory, if you get a drop of joy from this, if souls come to you, if my suffering satiates your thirst, then, here I am Lord. I accept all to the end of my life and I will smile at Your Hidden Face – always.”*

This letter speaks for itself. Nothing more needs to be said!

*The saints say:*

1. God's spiritual light is so immense that it blinds the soul more as it gets nearer. (SJC)
2. In these dark waters the soul is actually hidden and well protected because it is so close to God. (SJC)
3. These severe purgations happen to few souls. Those lifted to the highest degree are the most severely purged. (SJC)
4. Divine things appear dark to the soul. The clearer the light, the more it blinds. This is God's "ray of darkness", a great supernatural light. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Mother Theresa is internationally known as an active person of charity. Does this letter reveal her inner life?
2. What parts of the letter touched you most? Was she not always smiling? How difficult to cover over the inner trials!

## **6.24 – TRANSFORMING UNION (SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE)**

*Nature of Transforming Union*

God's final goal is a transforming union which prepares the soul for the heavenly Beatific Vision.

This intimate union is called spiritual marriage. The two lives (God and the soul) are blended. "It is like rain water falling into a spring. Once mixed, the rain water and the spring water cannot be distinguished." (St. Teresa) The ecstasies and raptures cease (or are few). The soul enjoys a great security. She is certain of God's love for her.

### *Contrast of Unions*

The other unions were transitory. This union is permanent and indissoluble. St. John of the Cross believes that the soul is "confirmed in grace". St. Teresa is not so sure. "The soul is secure as long as God holds her in his hand and she does not offend him. Even if the state continues for years, she does not see herself as secure."

### *Teresa's Two Visions*

Jesus introduced Teresa into this final, seventh mansion by two visions. First, Teresa experienced a vision (in her imagination) of Jesus' humanity "just as he was after his resurrection". Jesus said that "she should take care of his affairs and he would take care of her affairs ... 'not only because I am your Creator, your King and your God but because you are my true spouse'".

She then had a vision in her intellect. "God communicates to the soul in one instant such a great secret that she feels excessive incomparable delight. He manifests to her the glory of heaven, in a way more sublime than any vision. The soul becomes one with God. More cannot be said than this."

After Jesus introduces the soul to this seventh mansion, the Three Persons of the Trinity manifest themselves in an intellectual vision, coming directly upon the soul in a cloud of extraordinary brightness. The Three Persons are distinct, but by a communication of knowledge the soul knows they are one substance and one God.

### *The Trinity*

Teresa wrote, "What others know by faith, this soul understands by sight. All Three Persons speak to her and make her understand Jesus' promise that He, the Father and the Holy Spirit would dwell in the soul that loves him and keeps his word (Jn.14:23). To experience these words is so different from just believing them. The soul is astonished. These words never leave her. She clearly sees that the Three Divine Persons are in her (Teresa's) deepest recesses and she perceives their company in herself."

### *The saints say:*

1. God makes the soul his friend and is happy to have the soul rule him. It is reciprocal. He does what the soul asks and the soul does what he commands. (STA)
2. Having attained all that it can receive, the soul appears to be God. (SJC)
3. The soul is not just united to the fire but becomes one living flame within the fire. (SJC)
4. The soul's acts are absorbed in the Holy Spirit. In this state, the soul performs no acts by itself. All the soul's acts are divine, coming from the Holy Spirit. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. How does Spiritual Marriage compare with heavenly glory? Does it reveal some of the

mystery of heaven?

2. Discuss that in heaven all the souls enjoy Spiritual Marriage? How do the mystics, by their experiences, make heaven more real?

## **6.25 – THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION**

The soul now totally forgets itself and seeks only God and His glory. She abandons herself into God's hands and is indifferent to all that is not God. In ecstatic union, she wanted to die. In this transforming union, whether she lives or dies is unimportant. "All her thoughts are on pleasing the Lord and expressing her love. Good works always come from this." (Teresa)

The soul thirsts for sufferings, but with no anxiety. "If God wants them to suffer, they are content. If he does not want them to suffer, they are content. They experience great joy at being persecuted. They have no hatred, but only affection, toward their persecutors." "They do not seek consolations. If they are alone, they are content. If they are involved in helping others, they are content. They have no aridities or troubles. They want only to praise the Lord, because they remember only his tenderness."

### *No More Raptures/Ecstasies*

"The raptures cease. There are no more. If ecstasies or flights of the spirit come, it is seldom and never in public. In this seventh mansion, God and the soul sweetly enjoy each other in profound silence." (Teresa)

In this enjoyment, the soul still has an ardent but discreet zeal. She is both Mary (intent on the Lord) and Martha (zealous in good works inspired by love). "Our Lord does not regard the greatness of the work but the love that animates it". (Teresa)

If God invited them, Teresa wanted her nuns to enter the seven mansions. They were never to force their way in. "Do not use any violence to enter. God loves humility. So, consider yourselves unworthy to enter even the third mansion. If you do this, you will gain God's good favor to enter the fifth mansion. If you serve him there, He may in time admit you to the seventh mansion reserved for Himself".

### *The saints say:*

1. Neither the soul alone nor God alone bring about the flame's movements. The Holy Spirit and the soul work together. (SJC)
2. Having attained all that it can receive the soul appears to be God. (SJC)
3. The soul loves by the Holy Spirit whose will is now one with the soul's will. (SJC)
4. These glimpses of glory are not as stable, perfect or continuous as they will be in heaven. (SJC)

### *Group Discussion:*

1. What strikes you in this description of the soul's oneness with God? Does not God bring all things to completion?

2. Are there not little gifts? Gifts that fit your present capacity? Reread the chapter, and see what you would like.

## **6.26 – SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE (ST JOHN OF THE CROSS)**

The following are quotes from St. John of the Cross describing Spiritual Marriage, the greatest blessing available to the soul on earth.

1. The soul lives God's life, not its own. Yet, even in spiritual marriage, this is not as perfect and complete as in heaven.
2. The sensual parts lose their imperfect habits and are totally subdued.
3. All afflictions (from the lower faculties and from the devil) cease.
4. Spiritual Marriage is gained only when the soul is cleansed of all imperfect habits.
5. The soul must have courage and exalted love to experience this strong, close embrace of God.
6. The Bridegroom commands all vain distractions to cease. He brings the understanding, memory and will to perfection.
7. By his sweetness and courage, He subdues all the soul's passions and faculties.
8. Every door is open to the soul. She can abandon herself whenever she wants to the sleep of love.
9. The Bridegroom/Shepherd delights to have the perfect soul on his shoulders and hold her in an embrace of union. He leads the soul into the bridal chamber.
10. God and the soul surrender the entire possession of themselves to each other.
11. By a participation that is as great as possible, the soul becomes divine and God.
12. God and the soul are so closely united that what is divine is communicated to the soul. God and the soul seem to be God without any essential change.
13. Both God and the soul want this perfect state. The soul never wearies until it has reached this goal.
14. The marriage enjoys only one love – the love of the Bridegroom.
15. Once the soul is lifted to Spiritual Marriage, she is God's consort.
16. The Bridegroom reveals his secrets and hides nothing from her.
17. Mostly, he reveals the mysteries of His Incarnation and Redemption.
18. Evil spirits fear this soul like they fear God Himself. In this divine union, they do not assail the soul and do not dare to appear.
19. Both the soul and the Beloved rejoice in their mutual beauty.
20. In glory and appearance the soul seems to be God and God the soul. This union baffles all description.
21. God loves the soul and brings it to Himself, so that He can make the soul his equal.
22. In Spiritual Marriage, God communicates Himself directly, not by angels or by natural capacities.
23. The soul enjoys the intimate love of the Bridegroom.
24. After Spiritual Marriage, the soul understands the highest wisdom hidden in God.
25. In heaven, the soul would not be happy unless it loved God as He loves the soul. In Spiritual Marriage, this happens even before death (but it is not the same as heavenly

glory).

26. The soul does by participation what the Father and the Son do by nature. They breathe the Holy Spirit.

*Group Discussion:*

1. Which of the above amazes you the most? What gifts would you want?
2. Do you see that these blessings are totally from God? Do they open your eyes to his plan for you? After reading this, would you ever want to miss out on heaven?

## **6.27 – Mystical Love (St. Catherine of Genoa)**

*Mystical Love Described by St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)*

Catherine of Genoa wanted to enter religious life, but when her father died, her plans were changed. At sixteen, she married a man who was domineering and unfaithful. She was patient with both these traits. She writes that she “led a worldly life for five years”. One day, while going to confession, God immediately gave her the highest mystical graces. She reached perfection without walking the road. For the rest of her life, she experienced an inner purgatory on earth and the highest gifts of divine love. This chapter quotes her beautiful images of a soul in the passive mystical stage. Her whole book (in simplified version) should be read.

*God's Actions*

1. I was raised above my natural condition and could not delight in anything. By this unknown method God drew my spirit and absorbed it.
2. God destroyed the body's animal imperfections and my soul shared in heavenly happiness that I could not comprehend.
3. My soul was seemingly deprived of delight and of the power to love. Yet, my faculties rested in God and were content.
4. True life is found in this hidden love which brings death to human nature.
5. As God's light increased, my anguish deepened. The light revealed my imperfections and I was overwhelmed by my sinfulness.
6. Seeing I was totally abandoned, God revived me and I confessed my sins with extraordinary contrition.
7. Another of God's rays refreshed my body. I felt like I was in paradise.
8. It seemed as if my soul was going to leave my body. In this love, I did not fear martyrdom and could endure everything. O secret love! Whoever tastes you, hungers for nothing else, because you contain everything.

*Effects Upon the Soul*

9. I questioned God, “Why do you love me so greatly?”
10. As I began to delight in spiritual things, God allowed temptations so I would be firm in my ways.
11. God lifted me to a higher state and allowed me to see the work he had accomplished.
12. God infused a hidden love that detached me from other loves.
13. God brought my spirit so close to himself that it no longer communicated with my

soul or my body. They experienced nothing.

14. I was a robber claiming God's spiritual graces as my own.

15. As God afflicted my body, he would refresh my mind. When he assaulted my mind, he would refresh my body. This went on for ten years.

#### *Pure Divine Love*

16. God gave me a penetrating love which had no delight. This was done secretly and I felt abandoned.

17. God revealed a ray of his glory. This remained within me and I could not withdraw from it.

18. God showed me one spark of his love for man and I was overwhelmed.

19. Before, I always wanted to speak with my friends about divine love. Later, I wanted to keep silent.

20. When I saw how pure love works, all other love seemed selfish.

21. With pure love, I find no rest. I am lost, wounded and captured by God, and must wait for his Divine Providence.

22. I did not see the effects of love. Rather, I saw one drop of love itself. This melted all my faculties. My lips are sealed. I cannot speak.

23. Divine love draws all imperfections into a secret hiding place to purge them. The human heart opens at divine love's first touch.

24. God had to remove His vehement love so I could stay in the body. Even after God left, I was still absorbed in him.

25. Imperfections cause great pain because pure love cannot tolerate the slightest fault.

26. In pure love, we cannot distinguish God from man because the heart becomes paradise. These souls have a foretaste of heaven.

#### *The Body*

27. When the task is complete, the soul goes to God and the body goes to the grave.

28. Love destroys the body and absorbs the soul in some hidden satisfaction.

#### *Totally God's*

29. God leaves the soul in nakedness. She abandons everything and rests only in God.

30. The heart has become God's tabernacle. He infuses gifts and the soul feels it is in heaven.

31. How few travel this road of penetrating love which purifies everything.

32. When purified by pure love, the soul realizes that this love is the Holy Spirit.

33. God allures the soul and asks it to accept him. Her own vehement emotions force the soul to speak but her words are not clear.

34. How few experience these actions of God because they are engrossed in earthly projects.

35. A ray of God's love is blinding, removing all desire for earthly things. It enters the heart secretly and softens it like wax in a fire.

36. The action is God's but the blessings belong to man.

37. What more can I say? I want to be silent but I have an urgency to speak.

*The saints say:*

1. The soul enjoys God through God himself (although not as clearly as in heaven). (SJC)
2. The soul is now a heavenly soul, more divine than human. (SJC)
3. Heaven's King shows himself to be a friend, an equal and a brother, so the soul no longer fears. (SJC)
4. Besides allowing the soul to see him, God also reveals what he is doing within the soul. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. What do you find in these teachings that are similar to all the others? What picture of mystical love have you received. Use your own words.
2. Do these descriptions attract you? What happens in your heart?

## **6.28 – OVERVIEW OF THE PASSIVE UNITIVE STAGE**

The picture is clear. The Passive Unitive Stage begins with Infused Contemplation, when God floods the soul with light which causes the Dark Night of the Senses. After enduring this dark night, the soul is prepared for other favors, beginning with passive recollection and leading to the Prayer of Quiet (by which God seizes the will). Then comes the Sleep of Faculties (in which God seizes both the will and the intellect). This prepares for the Prayer of Full Union (in which God seizes all the interior faculties), followed by the Prayer of Ecstatic Union, Spiritual Betrothal, (in which God seizes internal faculties and external senses). This Ecstatic Union leads into the Dark Night of the Spirit. When the soul is totally purified, God takes the soul to himself in the Transforming Union of Spiritual Marriage.

By humility, a love of the cross and total abandonment, the soul consents to God possessing her. Transformed into God, the soul fulfills Christ's desire, "that they also might be one in us" (Jn.17:21).

*Summary*

I will repeat the outline of these phases as described in these chapters:

Stage One – Prayer of Quiet (two parts)

- a. Arid (Night of the Senses)
- b. Sweet

Stage Two – Prayer of Full Union

Stage Three – Prayer of Ecstatic Union Spiritual Espousal (two parts)

- a. Sweet
- b. Crucifying – Night of the Spirit

Stage Four – Prayer of Transforming Union (Spiritual Marriage)

*Extraordinary Phenomena*

The Unitive Way has other experiences which might or might not happen. We call them extraordinary because they are certainly not needed for divine union. These are described in the final chapters.

*The saints say:*

1. By contemplation, the Lord calls us to his side. We arrive at the end of the road without knowing how. (STA)
2. In perfect contemplation we can do nothing by ourselves. No need to work hard or to make plans. (STA)
3. God is not pleased that so few attain this state. He would be pleased if all reached it. However, he finds few vessels in whom he can do his lofty work. (SJC)
4. Infused contemplation is the way of illumination. God himself feeds the soul without its active help. (SJC)

*Group Discussion:*

1. Now we are at the end of the road. Look back. How far have you come? How far must you still go? Are you zealous to make the journey?
2. Do you see the need for God's help? Does this become more evident at the end? Was it not always so?

## **PART TWO**

### **6.29 – PRIVATE REVELATIONS**

By Divine Revelation, God reveals a hidden truth. Divine Revelation is public, when it is for the whole Church (as the Bible). It is private when for a person, a group or a given period of history. Some private revelations have been declared true and valid by the Church (such as Lourdes, Fatima, etc.). This section deals with private revelations not investigated by the Church. In these cases, the discernment is made by the soul and its spiritual director. The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidelines for such discernment.

These private revelations are abundant. The processes for canonization show that God reveals much to his holy ones.

*Sources*

*Revelations have three sources:*

1. Visions
2. Supernatural words
3. Divine touches

*Visions*

Teresa clearly describes three kinds of visions – in the senses, in the imagination and in the intellect.

1. Visions in the senses are called apparitions. The person sees some luminous form, such as of Jesus or Mary. According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Teresa, this is not usually the real heavenly body of Jesus or Mary, but a miraculous impression made upon the sense of sight.



2. Visions in the imagination are given while awake or in sleep (like St. Joseph) .
3. Visions in the intellect frequently accompany visions in the imagination. They reveal spiritual truths without sensible images.

Some visions include all three experiences. For example, Paul's vision on the road to Damascus was sensible (his eyes were blinded by light), imaginative (it revealed the traits of Ananias) and intellectual (he understood God's will).

In some visions, God uses ideas already known by the person. In other visions, God infuses knowledge which the person did not have. Visions can be obscure, manifesting only the presence of the object. Other visions are clear. These last only a short time. Sometimes they are just intuitions which leave deep impressions.

#### *Supernatural Words*

There are three kinds of supernatural words, classified according to which faculty receives them. Auricular (words are actually heard by the ear). Imaginative (words are received in the imagination) and intellectual (words are perceived directly by the intellect).

#### *Divine Touches*

Sometimes God touches the soul directly and produces both emotional sweetness and intellectual light.

Some of these touches are quite ordinary. At other times, God touches the superior part of the will in such a way that the mystic thinks that God's substance has touched the soul's substance.

#### *The saints say:*

1. Locutions are a great favor but perilous. They might come from God, from the devil or from the person's imagination. (STA)
2. True locutions have some signs. First, they have power and authority. Second, they give a great tranquility. Third, some are never forgotten. (STA)
3. Many years might pass but the soul never loses its belief that God will do what he said. (STA)
4. A vision in the imagination is seen with the eyes of the soul. By intellectual visions, the soul sees nothing but grasps indescribable things by a special kind of knowledge. (STA)

#### *Group Discussion:*

1. Since these phenomena are not limited to mystics, we can ask if you have experienced any of the above. Did you discuss this with anyone, especially a spiritual director? What were the effects?
2. What dangers exist in these extraordinary phenomena?

### **6.30 – DISCERNMENT OF PRIVATE REVELATIONS**

### *Attitude Toward Extraordinary Phenomena*

All the saints agree that no one should seek these favors. They are not necessary means to divine union (and sometimes are obstacles). St. John of the Cross says that desires for revelations damage faith, become a source of delusion, and show a lack of humility. He denounces spiritual directors who hold the revelations of their penitents in great esteem.

### *Rules of Discernment*

Discernment begins by examining the person who claims to have received revelation. Certain questions are important.

Concerning their human qualities:

1. Is the person well-balanced or given to hallucinations?
2. Does the person possess common sense or are they excessively emotional?
3. Is the person sincere or do they exaggerate?

Concerning their supernatural qualities:

1. Does the person have proven virtue?
2. Is the person humble or does he desire notoriety?
3. Does the person tell these revelations first to his spiritual director?
4. Has the person practiced heroic virtue or gone through the passive trials?

Some people are deceivers. Other people are good, but deceived.

### *The Revelation Itself*

Any revelation contrary to faith or morals must be absolutely rejected. God cannot contradict himself. Therefore, any revelation against a dogma (e.g. there is no eternal punishment) or against morality (e.g. to break a commandment) must be rejected. All revelations which command the impossible should be rejected. In all revelations, a spiritual guide is essential.

### *The Effects*

Jesus said, "By their fruit you shall know them" (Lk.6:43). A true revelation causes peace, joy and security. A diabolical vision causes sadness and discouragement. True revelations strengthen the soul in humility and obedience. False ones bring pride and disobedience. "The Lord's favors bring humility". (Teresa) True revelation comes with immense gain and interior effects. The devil could never produce such good in the soul or bring about such great desires to serve God. Concerning important revelations, a confessor can ask for a divine sign. This might or might not be given.

### *A True Revelation With Some False Elements*

Because human activity mixes with supernatural revelation, errors can arise. People can mix their own knowledge with the revealed truth. Sometimes, the revelation is misinterpreted. Her voices told St. Joan of Arc that she would be delivered through a great victory, meaning she would suffer heroic martyrdom. Saint Joan thought that she would not be killed.

At other times, the soul retouches the revelation to better explain it. Many who recorded the revelations of saints did this. We should imitate the Church, which first tested the revelations concerning Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart and the Divine Mercy before accepting them as valid.

#### *The Role of the Director*

A spiritual director should not admire the revelations of his penitent but stress the practice of virtue. "At first, it is best to resist these discourses. If they come from God, they will even increase when resisted." (St. Teresa) "The devil rejoices when he sees a soul seeking these revelations. This gives him many opportunities of planting delusions." (St. John of the Cross)

The director should be kind and gain more details, so he can pass judgment. "Confessors should not be severe or show contempt. This would shut the door and cause fear of revealing what has happened." (St. John of the Cross)

Sometimes, a revelation will ask the soul to begin a project. Jesus told St. Teresa to found a convent. She made this known to many other saints and got their advice before proceeding. The visionary must describe everything to a prudent director and follow his instructions.

#### *The saints say:*

1. There are four purely spiritual revelations – visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings. These are visions of the soul (intellectual visions). (SJC)
2. God confirms his revelations when the soul consults his spiritual director. (SJC)
3. In the flights of the spirit, while the soul is outside of herself, great things are revealed. (STA)
4. Without the advice of a confessor, the soul must never act on divine revelations. (SJC)
5. To seek God's favors is to seek self. To seek God is to forsake his favors. (SJC)
6. When the soul rejects visions, God increases his favors to the lowly soul. (SJC)
7. Sublime communications provide no certain proof of his presence, just as aridity does not prove his absence. (SJC)
8. If souls just left everything in God's hands, they would be eminently perfect. (SJdeC)

#### *Group Discussion:*

1. Many private revelations are published these days. Do you read any regularly? What are their effects?
2. Discuss the importance of the spiritual direction.

### **6.31 – OTHER EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENA**

These phenomena vary greatly. Some manifestations exist as signs to others. Others are seemingly rewards that God shows to his special souls. While the saints manifested many of these phenomena, they never emphasized them, always focusing on prayer and charity. However, they should be described.

### *Levitation*

In levitation, the person is raised off the ground, sometimes to great heights. This manifestation seems to be closely connected with the Eucharistic Real Presence. St. Philip Neri had to say Mass privately because after Communion he would levitate for a couple of hours. The altar boy would leave and place a sign on the door that Father Philip was saying Mass. He would then return a few hours later.

The most celebrated saint of levitation was St. Joseph Cupertino, for whom this frequently happened in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. St. Theresa of Avila writes clearly about her levitations, saying that she taught her sisters to hold her body down when they were in choir.

Levitation anticipates the prerogatives of our bodies in heaven. The devil counterfeits levitation and, during an exorcism, the body might be lifted off the ground.

### *Luminous Rays*

This favor also anticipates the luminous qualities of the glorified body. When in ecstasy, there is a halo around the head or a glow enveloping the whole body. A warning must be given. Those involved in Spiritism regularly see "auras" around the head (like halos). People who claim to see these luminous rays, have often been involved in the occult. .

### *Fragrant Odors*

The mystic often gives off a very pleasing fragrance, either during life or at the time of death. This favor was noted about the stigma of St. Francis of Assisi. After death, the body of St. Teresa gave forth a perfume.

### *Prolonged Abstinence and Vigils*

A number of saints went many years without food, except for the regular reception of Holy Communion. Other saints seemed to need very little sleep.

### *The Stigmata*

In September, 1222, while in ecstasy on Mount Alvernia, St. Francis of Assisi received the wounds of Christ (in the hands, feet and side) from a Seraph angel. He carried these wounds until his death in 1226.

These wounds (in some fashion) frequently come to those who experience ecstasies. By these severe sufferings God prepares the mystics to be conformed to the suffering Christ.

The most famous modern-day saint with the stigmata was Padre Pio who suffered this for fifty years (1918 – 1968). The wounds healed right before his death.

### *Group Discussion:*

1. Do you recall any other extraordinary phenomena surrounding the saints? How did the saints themselves view these signs?
2. Which is more important – external signs, external accomplishments, internal fervor?

