

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant  
10<sup>th</sup> October 2010  
Evensong for St. Teresa of Avila

Saint Teresa of Ávila, also called Saint Teresa of Jesus, was baptized as Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, on March 28, 1515, at Gotarrendura, in Old Castile, Spain, and was a prominent Spanish mystic, Roman Catholic saint, Carmelite nun, writer of the Counter Reformation, and theologian of contemplative life through deep prayer. She was a reformer of the Carmelite Order and is considered to be, along with John of the Cross, a founder of the Discalced Carmelites.

Forty years after her death, she was canonized, in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, and in 1970 she was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI. Her books, which include her autobiography, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, and her seminal work, *El Castillo Interior* (The Interior Castle), are an integral part of Spanish Renaissance literature as well as Christian mysticism and Christian meditation practices as she entails in her other important work *Camino de Perfección* (The Way of Perfection).

Teresa sought and practiced a life of deep prayer, which has been called mental prayer or interior prayer. This sort of prayer is prayer within oneself – it is a time of silence focused on God, the ground of all being, the source of all love. She wrote, "Mental prayer [oración mental] is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."

A close sharing between friends. Being alone with him who we know loves us.

Teresa's writings display a rare set of images of divine love and how we are to obtain the holiness that flows from that love.

And the answer is prayer.

For Teresa, it is prayer that brings about the Kingdom of God that lies within us – in our own interior castle. Teresa assures us that the abundant blessings, gifts, and favors that God gives, especially in prayer, the Eucharist, in sacraments and works of charity will astonish and astound us. Give it time and God will capture you and make you his own exclusively in accordance to your generosity. Don't expect signs and wonders. Aim only to be kind, compassionate, patient, and gentle as Jesus showed. Enjoy God's presence, God's silence and God's good pleasure. Be alone with him who loves us.

Deep prayer such as the practice of Teresa and countless others means being with someone, a person, the living God. It means accepting the notion that God isn't just "out there," but is "in here," within our selves – the tension between immanence and transcendence. The notion that we encounter the depths of God within the Christ event, and that that encounter leads us ever more deeply into the realm of God.

And as we arise from the realm of God, as we awaken from deep prayer as if from sleep, we can do no less than offer our own generosity to a broken world. For if we encounter the Christ event, if we encounter the depths of God which is love, our own spirits are lifted to *be* the hands and heart of God. Our own spirits are lifted to celebrate that divine love through acts of compassion – not hiding our light under a bushel basket, but as Jesus said, “shining before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

It’s not about our good works being the prize – it is about how deep prayer and the frequent encounters with the living God *inspire* our light to shine – and the light that shines is love. Love in action, love in deed, love in feeding the hungry and caring for the poor.

It is that light that returns us to prayer, returns us to our intimate conversations with the God of all love. We say “thank you” and we listen. We listen. And we listen.

We listen for the whisper that is the breath of God, bestowing upon each of us the grace of his abundant mercy, his infinite compassion, his deep care for all his children.

And our listening becomes our conversation with the divine. And it carries us ever onward, the hands and heart of God in a broken world.

For me, all good works, all just desires, all that feeding and clothing and waging peace flows from prayer. Deep prayer. My heart is more attuned to the great desires of God when I am able to simply be quiet. With practice I can shut out the noise that comes from the outside, and the noise that’s usually in my head. Honestly, it’s a pretty busy place, and it doesn’t have a whole lot of room for God.

When I acknowledge that and simply sit quietly, brushing aside the distractions that happen from time to time, I find that both my mind and heart are more receptive to that still, small voice that is the Spirit of God.

And it is that still, small voice that urges me on. That says, “Go. Be my hands. Be my heart.”

And then I can say,

Amen.