Reflection on: Teresa of Avila October 14th 2020

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these important seasons of the year. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation.

If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in the physical space of the meditation room at Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Introduction: Tomorrow it the feast day of Teresa of Avila, a 16th century Christian mystic, born in 1515 in Spain where she lived until her death in 1582 at 67 years of age. So to honour her I would like to share with you some of the titbits I have been listening to these past weeks from a podcast of Centre for Action and Contemplation (CAC). Firstly, instead of an opening prayer I would like to begin with a Song using Teresa's own words:

See here is my heart, I place it in your hands
With all my life, my body and soul, with my inmost feelings of love
With Jesus my redeemer since I have given all to you,
Speak to my heart, tell me my Lord, what do you want from me?
I am yours because you created me, yours because you redeemed me
Yours because you called me to you and waited for me.

Your sovereign Majesty, unending wisdom and love
Call my soul's great goodness, my one and only God
You see what's here before you, those things are love to you this day.
Speak to my heart, tell me my Lord, what do you want from me?
If you want me to rejoice, then for you I will rejoice
If you lay a burden upon me O Lord, may I bear it with love.

See here is my heart, I place it in your hands
With all my life, my body, and soul, I am yours with all my love.
Whatever words you want to use

When Teresa was a little girl of 5-6 she and her brother would repeat the word 'forever' over and over and over again bringing her into her first taste of mystical union. We are all called to be mystics in the sense that we are all called to have experiences of being united to the beloved. Julian of Norwich calls it oneing. Jesus prays in John's gospel "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me." Jn 17:21

As a young woman, she entered the cloistered Carmelite Convent just outside the medieval walled city of Ávila and lived there as a cloistered nun. During her life in the convent, she began to experience graces in prayer, like being drawn into these more mystical states or oneness with God in prayer. Eventually the sisters

in the community sensed such a depth in her that they asked her to write what she was experiencing so she could teach them about her prayer.

And then toward the end of her life, she again was asked under obedience to write a third book on union with God in prayer and the book: *The Interior Castle* was born. Teresa by this time was a well-seasoned mystic teacher in the Christian tradition. Also, around the time of the writing of the Castle, she was feeling called to bring about a reform of the Carmelite Order that she belonged to, as a return to a more strict observance of prayer, poverty, and simplicity. And this is when she then asked St. John of the Cross, a good friend of hers to join her so that he could reform the men, the friars, Carmelite priests, and she would reform the sisters. Teresa died in the midst of founding one of the reformed houses.

Writing her book, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa realizes that she's being asked to speak of something that's very hard to talk about, that is, being transformed by divine love into the love of God. How to find a language to convey and to explore such things in a helpful way? "I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal--" So, what dawns on her searching for this language is to begin to speak of the mystery of the nature of our own soul. That is what our faith reveals us to be by God creating us in the image and likeness of God. So, our soul then is **our God-given godly nature**. Our soul is who we are because God says so. So, the real issue here, she's starting to raise right at the very beginning, is that our sense of our self, our identity, is much richer than what we tend to think of today as our identity, because we tend to think of ourselves as psychologically, like, who we are in our personality, who we are in our story, and we are that. But it's through that finite personality that we're awakened in a faith consciousness to the mystery of our ultimate identity in God, which is our own given godly nature, which is our soul.

Since she was living in Spain where there were many castles, she comes up with the metaphor of the castle. And so, she has a soul then created by God in the image and likeness of God, she likens it to a castle and to a castle of a great immensity and elegance that's made of a single diamond or crystal. So, the soul now, this lovely kind of spatial metaphor, is this vast, spacious, crystalline castle. And in this castle, she says, "--there are many rooms just as in Heaven there are many mansions."

One of Teresa's first visions was of Christ's hands pictured in the icon. She writes "One day while I was in prayer, the Lord decided to show me just his hands. I could never describe such beauty! The vision shocked me. A few days after this, he showed me his divine face, and I was completely absorbed. Since the Lord would ultimately grant me the favour of seeing him whole, I wondered why he chose to reveal himself little by little. Later I understood that his Majesty was giving me exactly as much as my delicate nature could handle ... Why, may you ask, does it require such strength to see some hands and a face? Glorified bodies are so exquisite that a mere glimpse of such supernatural beauty leaves a soul dazzled and confused. At first, this vision stirred intense fear in me. But the agitation soon melted into a sense of calm certainty and peace." This was an act of generosity, kindness and mercy on Christ's part.

The creator of the icon was so moved to tears when he read this story that he was moved to write the icon. It reminds me of the Gospel text that says in John 16:12 "There is so much more I want to tell you**,** but you can't bear it now. And John 14:26 "But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative, that is, the Holy Spirit, he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you**.** "

Then there is the story of the partridge. After arriving home following an arduous journey, Teresa was found eating a partridge with such gusto. The sister who found her was quite scandalised. Teresa hearing the judgement in the voice of the sister said "When eating partridge, eat partridge" It shows her earthiness, non-duality, there's no distinction between contemplative prayer and life, it's all sacred. God lives among the pots and pans, blesses our ordinary experiences, the very ground where the Holy reveals itself. It's about showing up and being fully present. It's an opportunity for every moment to be mystical encounter of some kind. Today, we would call that mindfulness.

Teresa was very down to earth with her images to illustrate a point in the spiritual life. She uses the image of two candles: God's candle and mine. In the best conditions the two flames touch and they become one flame. In *The Interior Castle* she writes: "The spiritual marriage, on the other hand, is like rain falling from the sky into a river or pool. There is nothing but water. It's impossible to divide the sky-water from the land-water. When a little stream enters the sea, who could separate its waters back out again? Think of a bright light pouring into a room from two large windows: it enters from different places but becomes one light."

I also like how she says at the very end of this state she's talking about, she says for such a person there's only one question left. "How can I be helpful?" That's a beautiful way to end. She circles back around, she's in this sublime state of union with God, and for such a person to say, "Can I help you with the dishes? You seem troubled. What's going on?" Totally other centred because she sees that the incomprehensible stature of the smallest of things is God's presence. She's supple. She moves with the flow of that. It's action and contemplation.

I'm struck, at the way Teresa used just these beautiful examples--water, light, fire, the silkworm and the butterfly. She was really brilliant at offering insights into things that are so hard to explain through what she could see in the real world. This is a certain kind of feminine wisdom that she was very grounded in the body and in sensory experience. She delights herself with the images that she comes up with, even *The Interior Castle* itself, that vision of the soul as this beautiful, radiant, diamond-like place that is the most beautiful place in all of creation.

Before we start our meditation I would like to read some of the more famous sayings of Teresa:

"It is love alone that gives worth to all things."
"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."
"It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves."
"Love turns work into rest."

"Let nothing disturb you, Let nothing frighten you, All things are passing away:
God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

Beginning Meditation: Let us prepare now for our meditation. Notice any tightness in your shoulders and neck and allow any tension in your muscles to relax. Allow your back to rest upright. Be conscious of where your body is touching the chair. Ground yourself and allow your breathing to settle, allow your body to slow down.

Here is a favourite exercise of St Teresa. It is one of the fundamental exercises that she recommended to everybody.

Imagine you see Jesus standing before you.. he is looking at you… notice him looking at you… That is all Teresa says except for two very important adverbs however "Notice that he is looking at you lovingly and humbly." So look at him looking at you. And notice the love in his look. Allow yourself to be loved.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts (this may be your own watch or meditation timer app)
Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

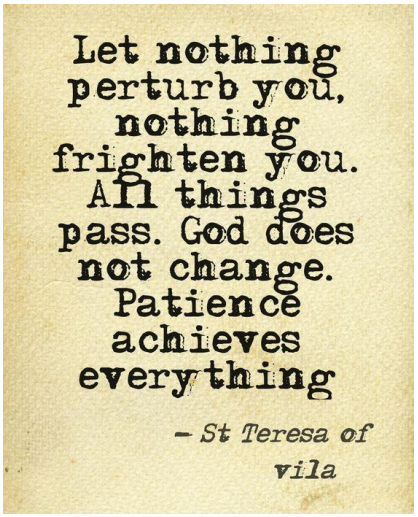
Closing prayer by Teresa of Avila:

"May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us."

Resources: https://cac.org/podcasts/turning-to-teresa-of-avila/
http://frbillmcnichols-sacredimages.com/collections/holy+women-holy+girls?page=1
https://music.apple.com/us/album/womans-song-god-songs-inspired-by-writings-women-mystics/445704742









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