

Doctrinal Guide for *The Way of Perfection*

1. INITIAL MOTIVATION

The Way of Perfection is something like an interior voyage to fullness. The human being has to mature, has to learn to be a person. And we are, in a metaphorical sense, receptacles, that could so much as feel full as empty. “Fullness” comes from “pleno”, which is the same as “full”. Well then, the proper Teresian prayer (*conscious meditation, centering prayer, or contemplative prayer*; it seems structured in this way in St. Teresa’s work) is presented as a path toward the fullness of humanity; a journey to fill ourselves with God, or rather, to allow God to fill us with His love and truth. “Let’s not imagine that we are hollow inside” (W 28,10), Teresa reminds her Carmelite companions in her direct and expressive language. And she reminds us today, too.

One of the great delights and powerful attractions of the *Way of Perfection*, and without doubt one of the unique characteristics of the Teresian style and language, is that amazing capacity to write dialoguing with the entire world. Teresa writes, and at the same time gives the impression that she is speaking with all of us: with her first addressees (her Carmelite sisters), with her confessor, with the censor, with God, with the reader of all times..., with you and with me. That cutting edge of the discourse directing herself to God (uncovering herself spiritually before the reader) also defines another of the more fascinating characteristics of the style of prayer of this passionate woman.

Teresa speaks in order to talk of God, by talking about herself, said C. Kaufmann. And she always does so with a self implicating language, an existential character, that marks a whole way of living. And in that way, by means of the *Way*, and appealing to her first addressees, her nuns, she says to them: “God is your business and language. Whoever wants to speak to you must learn this language; and if he doesn’t, be on your guard...” (W 20,4). It is a new “language” surely, but also a new way of dealing, a new way of understanding human relationships and even the very relationship with God. That God is new at each moment seems to be another Teresian instruction. To dare read the *Way* supposes entering into a permanent dialogue with the Eternal and ever new God. But, who at the same time is so close to us, in our inmost being and in the most familiar.

2. THE WORK AND ITS GENRE

Teresa wrote this work twice. The autograph of the first redaction, more spontaneous and colloquial, more informal and less structured, is conserved in the

Royal Monastery of the El Escorial (Madrid); the second redaction, that lost in freshness, but gained in doctrinal clarity (at least that is what is said), is conserved in the convent of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Valladolid. The 73 chapters of the first redaction were reduced to 42 in the second.

It's been a few years since Fr. Thomas Álvarez proposed 1566 as a more probable date for its composition, supporting himself on internal critical evidence of the same book. She wrote the work when she was prioress of the convent of San José in Ávila; having the Carmelites of that place and of those times as the first addressees; she does so after writing the *Life* and Báñez being her confessor and censor. Moreover, it makes one think of the continuity of the two redactions of the work within the same year of 1566: in January or February – the first redaction; the second redaction towards the summer or the beginning of the fall.

“This book deals with advice and counsel...” seems to be the oldest title. The Saint didn't put a title; she simply spoke of “advice and counsels”. She also referred to it with the name of the *Small Book* and *the Lord's Prayer*. On the reverse side of the first page of the codex in Valladolid, appears the title that makes it famous, with writing of doubtful Teresian authenticity: “*Way of Perfection*”, a title that the Saint recognized and approved in the copies that were revised by her.

Referring to the literary genre of the *Way*, we can clearly affirm the following: in her first redaction (from the El Escorial), the author gives us the impression that she wasn't writing a book on spirituality, but a long letter (along the lines of an epistolary genre) to her sisters and daughters, the Carmelites of San José, syntheses of her talks between humor and truth, in recreation and conventual chapters, like the old collations (works) of the Yermo Fathers (D. de Pablo Maroto). There is verbal communication of Holy Mother with her daughters, between the foundress and her disciples. The second redaction, that to which we now refer, has a more structured profile both doctrinally and didactically even if it has lost some of the Teresian freshness and the colloquial character which were preeminent in the first redaction.

3. KEYS AND GENERAL STRUCTURE

Along the line of what we shall call Teresian evangelical humanism and those called the foundations of the interior life (or prayer), we believe that one of the hermeneutical keys of the *Way of Perfection* is in the following citation:

“I shall mention some things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer...(W 4,3)

The first of these is love for one another;

the second is detachment from all created things;

the third is true humility, which, even though I speak of it last, is the main practice and embraces all the others.” (W 4,4)

The reason is, with the exception made of the central theme of prayer, a reality that imbues all the work of the *Way*, what Teresa aspires to do is draw the outline of a new “community life and recreation” (F 13, 5). It does not prevent that prayer be the principal theme, understood always in its double dimension of ‘presence’ and of ‘relationship’. In this sense, it can be affirmed that humanism and a profound interior life, are the two pivots around which Teresa centers her work. We are before a new style of evangelical life that flows into contemplative prayer, and that contemplative prayer that gives meaning to the evangelical life, all that is true of human life.

With respect to the general structure of the work and the themes set in the *Way*, we can clearly affirm what follows (M. Herraiz): the first chapters deal with the purpose of the Teresian reform, from the 4th chapter the author studies in depth the theme of the ethics of Christian community (charity, liberty, humility), and from chapter sixteen (16) she centers herself on prayer and its versions (with a long digression-commentary on the *Lord’s Prayer* from chapter twenty-seven (27), covered up in any event with the central theme of prayer). The obsessive theme of honor and the lively question on woman¹ will be other themes present and that are not advisable to avoid.

4. THE PARTS AND CONTENTS

A first vision of the collection, structured by chapters, could be the following: the purpose of the Teresian reform (chapters 1-3); the necessity of a community ethic to have a praying community (chapter 4-15); fraternal charity, detachment and humility; active and contemplative prayer (chapters 16-18); vocal and mental prayer, recollection, quiet, union [nature of prayer and its demands] (chapter 19-32). From chapter 27 she comments on the *Lord’s Prayer*. The devotion to the Blessed Sacrament (33-35: Eucharist). The rest of the chapters: honor, prayer, various temptations..., what we could call the effects of contemplation (36-42).

We contemplate the work from the point of view of two great cores that refer clearly to, the peculiar Teresian evangelical humanism on the one hand, and the prayerful dimension and interior life on the other.

¹ On this topic there is no better study than that of T. Egido, “*Ambiente Histórico*”, (Historical Environment) in: *Introducción a la lectura de Santa Teresa*, Madrid: EDE, 2002, pp. 63-155. Do not forget to read the most passionate complaint (and bitter) of Teresa in defense of women in the first redaction, CE 4,1, authentic ‘manifesto’ of early feminism, as the same Egido succeeded in pointing out.

A) The evangelical Teresian humanism

The encounter of Teresa with Christ, her Christological experience, will also determine her experience of humanity, true humanity. Teresa discovers the fullness of humanity, to be oneself, by the hand of the Jesus of the gospels. That is her better school of humanity and of humanism. This same school to which we also need to return to time and again.

The so-called assumptions of prayer, or its foundations, or its pedagogy of prayer (preparatory instruction, needed before), constitutes the nucleus of the evangelical Teresian humanism that could be tracked in chapters 4 to 15 of the *Way*. And here, the three magical words are: *charity, detachment (liberty), and humility*, that, as Teresa says, “it seems to me always go together” (W 10,3). “Before I say anything about interior matters, that is, about prayer, I shall mention some things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer; so necessary that even if these persons are not very contemplative, they can be far advanced in the service of the Lord” (W 4,3).

Next to the triad of *charity, liberty, and humility*, it is important to draw attention to Teresian audacity and determination: “*Prayer and comfortable living are incompatible*” (W 4,2). Comfortable living never brings growth. Hence she underlines the importance of surpassing the culture of the sofa (couch potato), of not seeking to settle down to a quiet life. All that is valuable in life demands an effort accompanied always by personal growth. At least it appears to be indicated by the well-known expression of the Saint: the *determined determination*. As Fr. Thomas Álvarez says, we are in the face of the “slogan of Teresian asceticism”.

The “determined determination” is moreover a *global attitude*, that defines the prayerful person in an existential and vital manner. In a metaphorical sense, she refers to the struggle, to the combat, to the fight: “you are not here for any other reason than to fight” (W 20,2). The Teresian “determination” is not just a mere activity, purely punctual, nor can you reduce it to a moment of prayer in a corner of the chapel and with a candle burning. It is an existential attitude that permeates the entire life.

B) Praying dimension and interior life

In this new section (from chapter 16), our author centers her attention on the nucleus of prayer, contemplated in its different versions and paths, and also its limitations... There appear the first steps to contemplative prayer, followed by the prayer of meditation (conscious meditation), centering prayer (recollection, Teresa would say), contemplative prayer in itself and finally, the relationship between prayer and presence.

“On the road to contemplation”: this could be the title for the topic that Teresa fundamentally develops in chapters 16-19. The relationship between activity and contemplation also appears. We are also going to meet as well with the first outline of contemplation in the Teresian perspective.

In chapters 22-25 of the *Way*, Teresa centers herself on the topic of meditation, giving special attention to vocal and mental prayer. Before those who then rejected the value of vocal prayer, Teresa, untiringly, tries to show the identity between the two types of prayer. The dignity of vocal prayer will be made clear in the commentary that takes place in the *Lord's Prayer*, a condensed synthesis of the degrees of prayer for her (cf. WE 73,3), and a springboard to contemplative prayer, that always remains a gift. And because all authentic vocal prayer ends in mental prayer, that is, in authentic meditation: “If while speaking I thoroughly understand and know that I am speaking with God...mental and vocal prayer are joined” (W 22,1; 22,3).

Teresa revolts against a mere *mechanical recitation* of formulas in prayer, whatever they be; together with the lips, the heart needs to open up as well as the entire life. For her, authentic prayer is a dialogue of friendship, which necessarily implies attention to whom we are speaking with (W 22,1; 24,2). It is not enough with a mere external and empty observance, or with a mere formal recitation. We are before a determined wager for which we call ‘conscious meditation’ (whether vocal or mental).

In chapters 26 to 29 (in chapter 27 she begins the commentary on the *Lord's Prayer*) of the *Way*, Teresa speaks of the prayer of ‘recollection’, which we will translate for ‘centering prayer’, updating a little her old terminology. The attention to Christ, attention which is personal and relational on one hand, and ‘entering into’ oneself, the absorption, on the other hand, define the structure of this section. Let us say that in one hand the psychological dimension of prayer appears (entering into oneself), that implies going further than the scattering of the senses; and the other hand the Christological dimension appears (focusing the attention on Christ). In one case and in another it refers to the depths, where the truth of life is begun to be intuited: ‘the interior of the soul, its depth and interiority, in the most interior of the soul’, etc.

In the following chapters, Teresa enters into the heart of the so-called prayer of quiet, and the prayer of union, that identify themselves, in general terms, with contemplative or mystical prayer (it would not be a good idea to distract oneself with old terms).

Teresa defines prayer experience in the following words:

“In it the soul enters into peace or, better,
the Lord puts it at peace by His presence,
so that all the faculties are calmed.

The soul understands in another way, very foreign to the way it understands
through the exterior senses,
that it is now close to God, and that not much more would be required for it
to become one with Him in union”. (W 31,2)

Contemplation is always a present, a gift. Or as Teresa says, it “is something supernatural, something we cannot procure through our own efforts”. (W 31,2). The ‘supernatural’ does not refer to extraordinary or rare experiences, it refers to grace, to gratuitousness, and it basically refers to being authentically human. Teresa insists (by way of an image) of the gratuitousness of the experience, and it doesn’t depend on our effort: “This is foolish, for just as there’s nothing we can do to make the sun rise, there’s little we can do to keep it from setting. This prayer is no longer our work, for it’s something very supernatural and something very much beyond our power to acquire by ourselves.” (W 31,6).

To finish this section, we wouldn’t want to leave out a key aspect and that is the relationship between prayer and presence. What is always difficult in Teresa (so comprehensive and diverse and as always overflowing) is to find a leading thread to tell and explain her experience of God: that thread could be the experience of the ‘divine’ presence. But what do we speak of when we speak of ‘presence’ in Teresa? We have before us a concept that is born of contact with life: relationship, encounter, interpersonal communication that makes of itself an experience, living dialogue, mutual self-giving... Presence is the awareness that something/Someone is with us.

The method of Teresian prayer is condensed in a few simple words of the *Way*: “Then, daughters, since you are alone, strive to find a companion. Well what better companion than the Master?” (W 26,1). And more of the same: “Represent the Lord Himself as close to you...” (W 26,1). “Let us walk together, Lord...” (W 26,6). That powerful sensation of ‘presence’ is the true stimulus of the Teresian mystical experience.

And we shall not forget the commentary on the *Lord’s Prayer*. The interpretation that Teresa carries out of the central Christian prayer is a free commentary, with continuous digressions of spontaneous prayer. From chapter 27 until the end of the *Way* the commentary is extended; but always with long parentheses and overlaps with the topic of prayer in general and its versions and until the point that one has the sensation that that commentary is an excuse to speak freely and at ease on the theme of prayer or about other topics such as the Eucharist. The

commentary on the petition of the 'bread' is converted as an excuse to speak precisely of the Eucharist (chapter 33-35 of the *Way*).

5. EXISTENTIAL READING AND EFFECTS

And it is that Teresa gives testimony in each page that she writes. The certainty of faith that today some are searching for, is not preserved by means of ideologies, rigid formulations and precise or tight norms, but with the experience of prayer and the sacramental life. Teresa, instead of explaining, discussing, clearing up or understanding everything, gives testimony, announces, transmits, confesses, gives thanks for the gift of the love of God, for the truth. She sings of the mercies of the Lord with her way of being in the world, of confessing it by her conversion of heart. (C. Kaufmann).

“She speaks, not sculpts maxims for posterity, but she does so with a fresh and feminine voice, that imposes itself solely because of the beauty of her concepts and her emotions and it makes one’s heart much bigger, many doors are opened that we didn’t know existed....Her writings have a liberating effect. Suddenly the world is converted into a way, not an end, to grow in love, to be more and to have less, so that the soul would fly burning with love and in joy of living to beautify it. That is why she is a cheerful saint, like her Carmelites are”. (Jesus Cotta).

Precisely, in chapters 36 to 42 of the *Way* (in which run the topics like honor, prayer, different temptations...), we will encounter what we could call the effects of contemplation. And in the midst of all the ‘effects’, forgiveness (cf. especially chapter 36) and the capacity to forgive, is without doubt the most significant and above all the one Teresa returns to untiringly.

The contemplative can have other “faults and imperfections”, but, according to our mystic, never the lack of forgiveness, “I have never seen anyone with this one” (W 36,13). And Teresa continues to insist: The contemplative “who receives greater favors should observe whether these effects are increasing within him. If he doesn’t see any increase he should be afraid and refuse to believe that these gifts are from God” (W 36, 13).

Finally, true prayer or mystical experience is measured and authenticated in its effects. This is the key that the mystics continually appeal to. If the experience has something to do with God, says Teresa, “there is nothing to fear; they bring with them humility”. (W 17,3). And that way, “if the desire were from God, it wouldn’t cause any harm: such a desire bears light, discretion, and measure” (W 19,13). From God, who by his very nature is love and pure positivity, can only come love and positivity. Or in the open list that Teresa has left us: *humility, light, discretion, moderation, affability...* And before all else, *forgiveness*. Above all *forgiveness*. What is most divine of God; what is truly human.

Guide for reading the *Way of Perfection*

“It was opportune that this narration, which all the learned ones who have seen it (who were her confessors), said that it was of great benefit for advise in spiritual things and they ordered her to move and make another little book for her daughters (when she was prioress) where she could give some advice. (R 4,6; CC 53,8). This is how S. Teresa explained it years later as one of the more immediate and important consequences of the book of the *Life*; the *Way of Perfection*. The same censors that recommended not to publish that one (the *Life*), encouraged her to write this one.

And she assumed in conscience this work of writing and spiritual teacher. But above all on this occasion as prioress-foundress she lays the foundations of the work which God has commended to her and she offers us an authentic manual of Teresian life. From there, the saint abounds in establishing the foundation of certain aspects of the prayer life much criticized especially when it had to do with women, and she does it even in an ironical and challenging way at times; she was not only defending prayer, but the fledgling Carmel.

Therefore the following step on the way to the Centenary cannot be more opportune: manual of life and Teresian prayer as well as pedagogical work which is structurally very clear and evocative. There is offered in the following pages some simple keys for reading and celebrating, ordered in the following blocks:

- I) Chapter 1-3: Purpose of Prayer and contemplative life.
- II) Chapter 4-9: Requirements: great virtues I: love and detachment.
- III) Chapter 10-18: Requirements; great virtues II: humility.
- IV) Chapter 19-25: Fundamental attitudes and convictions.
- V) Chapter 26-29: Prayer of recollection
- VI) Chapter 30-35: Prayer of quiet and union.
- VII) Chapter 36-39: The great sign of discernment: forgiveness. And the great temptation: believing in false virtues.
- VIII) Chapter 40-42: Fruits: love and the fear of God and yearning for eternal life.

I) Chapter 1-3

“In this little castle where there are already good Christians...” (3,2)

We choose this text as representative of the universality of the Teresian message. The Church is a castle, a walled city, a fortress. The King is in her, as are the ‘chosen people’, the ‘good Christians of all vocations and of the entire world. Soldiers and captains that fight for God and the Gospel who are disposed “to die, yes; but not to surrender”. (3,1)

A. CONTEXT

1. **Church history:** news from France, problems in Europe, wars of religion (cf 1,2.5): 3,1.8; 35,3)
2. **Textual setting:** apostolic-ecclesial ideal of the Teresian community: praying for the Church. The evangelical counsels and poverty as a radical option of the group.

B. KEYS FOR READING the chosen text:

- 1 Sensibility before the problems of her time and a commitment with the Church and the world: “A thousand lives to save one soul.” (1,2.4; 3,6.9).
2. From the contemplative community to the ecclesial community: The *Way* as a manual for the Christian communities: “chosen people” (3,1), “good Christians” (3,2).
3. Fidelity to the evangelical counsels in the proper chosen vocation: “Let us strive to be the kind of persons whose prayers can be useful.” (3,2).
4. Apostolic and ecclesial value of prayer: “If we can obtain some answers from God to these requests, we shall be fighting for Him even though we are very cloistered.” (3,5).

C. CELEBRATION: **Prayer time** having as a guiding text the prayer of Teresa in CV 3, 8-10 and the poem “*Do not sleep*”. Texts to guide a **Penitential Celebration**: * “I resolved to do the little that was in my power”. (1,2). * “Poverty of spirit is a good that includes within itself all the good things of the world.” (2, 5-6). * “Always try to be informed about what is more perfect.” (3,6). “When we ask you for honor, income, money, or worldly things, do not hear us.” (3,7).

II) Chapter 4-9

“O precious love that imitates the Commander-in-chief of love, Jesus, our Good!”
(6,9).

Contemplating the “good lover Jesus” (7,4), and tending to the ideal of the perfect-spiritual love, we aspire to be “generous souls, majestic souls” (6,4), and to the beatitude of friendship: “Oh blessed souls...loved by such!” (WE 11,4).

A. CONTEXT: The great virtues (chapters 4-18) presented as an ascetic program, evangelical foundation and criteria for verification of the prayer and her community. (4, 3-4)

B. KEYS FOR READING the chosen text

1. Commandment: “love one another very much” (4,5); “all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped.” (4,7).
2. Urgency: “Let us not condescend...to allow our wills to be slaves to anyone, save to the One who bought it with His blood.” (4,8).

3. Discernment: “How is this love for one another...I would like to speak also of the nature of this virtuous love?” (4, 11-13).
4. Horizon: “How impassioned this love is...a love with no self-interest at all. All that it desires or wants is to see the other soul rich with heavenly blessings.” (7,1).

C. CELEBRATION: **Catechesis:** Starting from a list of qualities of good love (4, 10-13; chapter 6-7). Comparison between sensual love and spiritual love; generous love and selfish love. **Round table:** Have a debate basing it on an action, witness, community reality, movie, or actual cultural expression that could contrast with the Teresian experience. The same objections-answers could be used that Teresa offers. (6, 5-7). **Prayer Vigil:** “The soul embraces the good Jesus our Lord with determination, for since in Him everything is found, in Him everything is forgotten.” (9,5). “Give ourselves to the All entirely and without reserve” (8, 1). To display the shade of meaning of these texts embracing the two virtues: detachment as a demand and consequence of love.

III) Chapter 10-18

“Let them consider how true humility consists very much in great readiness to be content with whatever the Lord may want to do with them” (17,6).

Let us surrender everything to God, whose gifts are absolutely free, without condition, and accepting of persons; His love goes before us always.

A. CONTEXT: She is entering the theme of prayer and humility is the principal practice. (17, 1).

B. KEYS FOR READING:

1. Let us not enter into comparisons: “There are times when God will want to grant some great favor to persons who are in a bad state...” (16, 6) and “let each one consider...” (12, 6).
2. And above all, do not separate the eyes from Christ: “O Lord, how true that all harm comes to us from not keeping our eyes fixed on You...” (16, 11), conscious that He is the true Beloved and who makes possible our love: “Behold it is a beautiful exchange to give our love for His...” (16, 10).
3. Teresa knows full well that love is not found without humility: “...for I cannot understand...” (16, 2).

C. CELEBRATION: We begin the **penitential** action recognizing where we are hurting in the terms of humility: “God help me, if I neglect a little rule concerning someone’s honor...” (16, 11) and **Let us pray** confidently and with an open attitude asking: “Don’t abandon me Lord, because I hope in you...” *Soliloquies* XVII, 6.

IV) Chapter 19-25

***“Don’t be afraid that the Lord will leave you to die of thirst,
for He calls us to drink from this fount” (23,5)***

Courageous recommendation to motivate us to follow the call of the Lord to meet Him, “...do not stop on the road but, like the strong fight..., for you are not here for any other reason than to fight...” (20, 2)

A. CONTEXT: Teresa wants us to decide (23, 1) and she knows by experience “the friendship and favor He shows toward those who journey on this road...” (23, 5)

B. KEYS FOR READING:

1. How to begin (21, 2) going without fear (21, 5) and without doubt (19, 14-15).
2. To be aware with who we are with and for what: “whom you are speaking with as well as who you are...” (22, 1), “...knowledge of who this Lord is...” (22,6), “...that we understand whom we are wedded to and what kind of life we must live...” (22, 7)
3. Let us not turn back (22, 2-3-5)
4. Hence it follows how we should treat others: “Daughters, in reference to all the persons who speak with you...” (20, 3-4)

C. CELEBRATION: We can **remember and give thanks** to the one who started us on the road of prayer (24, 3-4-5) and **share** what is most helpful to come to Him.

V) Chapters 26-29: Prayer of Recollection

“All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself” (28, 2).

This text presents us her method of recollection, which consists in representing Christ within, to see Him and talk with Him (nn. 1-8).

A. LITERARY CONTEXT: In the third section, she tackles the theme asked for by the nuns: prayer by nature, development and demands (cc. 26-35). She presents the degrees of prayer with a “consideration” of the Lord’s Prayer (21, 4), in the phases of *recollection* (cc. 26-29) [27: Our Father] [28: who art in heaven] of *quietude* (cc. 30-31) [hallowed be your name...thy kingdom come...] and *prayer of union* (cc. 32-35) [32: thy will be done...]. The Eucharistic communion, an exercise of union (cc. 33-35) [33: give us this day our daily bread].

B. KEYS FOR READING for the chosen text:

The *active recollection* of our interior senses (memory, understanding and will), to center them in the person of Jesus, Master and Spouse (29, 4). Placing our eyes on Jesus within ourselves (26, 8) and recognizing His presence, His gaze over us, His feelings, and the patience with which He suffers us.

The key of the simile of our soul to a building helps to exercise the imagination and with it to recollect ourselves, as an alternative to recollection with the foundation in the exercise of the reasoning of the prayer of meditation. (28, 9-11).

C. CELEBRATION

Catechesis: to reflect on the difficulties to recollect oneself that comes from our contemporary culture. **Prayer time**, exercise *the recollection* with the help of music, images, guided techniques of relaxation. To linger especially in the recognition of the forms of presence of Jesus within ourselves, (26, 6) seeing Jesus and receiving His teaching (28, 4). Time for the **examination of conscience**, with the foundation in the good that comes to us from having a God for Father and in the implications it has for us being his children (27, 2).

VI) Chapter 30-35: Prayer of Quiet and Union. “He feels so happy merely with being close to the fount that he is satisfied even without drinking.” (31, 3)

With these words she begins to describe beautifully what the prayer of quiet is and what it contains in the terms of a supernatural gift of calmness in the will, memory and intellect.

A. LITERARY CONTEXT

She has spoken of the prayer of active recollection as a preparation for the prayer of quiet (cc. 30-31) and of union (cc. 32-35). The Eucharistic communion is the food of the union of our will with God's.

B. KEYS FOR READING the chosen text:

Teresa analyzes the prayer of quiet and union taking, as a key to reading, the degree of immersion of the powers of the will, memory, and the intellect in God. If it is in the prayer of quiet that the will experiences more the action of God (his tenderness, inspirations, and light), on the other hand in the prayer of union it is the three (31, 10). Another key to analysis is the attention to the *effects* that are left in the person praying the two types of prayer.

C. CELEBRATION:

Put into practice the Teresian *advise* to pray with *consideration* (30, 1): with the recognition that God is near (31, 2): with service (31, 5): with humility without the intention of receiving gifts (31, 6): with the affect of the will on God and the intellect remaining in liberty (31, 8-9), basing that surrender on that prior gift of the reign that Jesus has given to us (32, 4), and with determination to suffer for Him (32, 7), put into practice with works (32, 12). The surrender of the will in God with those characteristics is perfect contemplation that they asked her to share (32, 9). To put into practice the Teresian tracks for the *moment of communion*: listen to Him as a master, kiss

Him, negotiate with Him and plead with Him to remain with us (34, 10), so that His love would be imprinted in us (35, 1), and pray to the Father for the Church (35, 5).

**VII) Chapter 36-39: The great sign of discernment: forgiveness.
And the great temptation: believing in false virtues.**

Behind the bond of prayer with the Eucharist and the will of God, now themes ‘less elevated’ are treated, but also fundamental.

A. CONTEXT:

1. **Social and Ecclesial:** “honor” as a custom that feeds and imposes pride of lineage (caste), status, offices (36, 4-6), worth or merit and appearances (38, 5-9), instead of the contrary and evangelical attitudes: forgiveness and humility.
2. **Anthropological intuition:** It is not only a social problem, but a human tendency of which Teresa has much experience and sad reminders. (36, 3.5; 38, 6)

B. KEYS FOR READING:

1. **To See:** “It’s a frightful thing; the world moves in the opposite direction...consider, Sisters, that the devil hasn’t forgotten us; he also invents his own honors in monasteries...” (36, 3-4).
2. **To Judge:** “The fact is that since we are inclined to ascend – even though we will not ascend to heaven by such an inclination – there must be no descending. O Lord, Lord! Are You our Model and Master? Yes, indeed! Well then, what did Your honor consist of, You who honored us? Didn’t you indeed lose it in being humiliated unto death? No, Lord, but You won it for all.” (36, 5).
3. **To act:**
 - a) Disposition to forgive the offenses, even though it is with shame and effort in the case of the beginners (36, 11-12; 37, 3; 38, 8; cf. “the perfect”: 36, 8-10).
 - b) In the face of the temptation to “believe we have virtues when we do not” (38, 5), humility: “prayer and supplication to the Eternal Father not to let us enter into temptation” (38, 5; 37, 5; 39, 6); awareness that the virtues are gifts and they could be taken away (38, 6-7); to take advantage of the occasions to exercise the virtues, and of course, not presume of the ones that we believe we have (38, 8-9); and always pay attention to self-knowledge and the spiritual accompaniment (39, 4-5).
 - c) However, be careful with false humilities and its excesses and cowardliness (39, 1-3).

C. CELEBRATION

Prayer with CV 37, 3-5.

Penitential: cf. *supra* (above) B.3 Act

Round table: This today and in our context?

VIII) Chapter 40-42: Love and the fear of God.

Amen: be freed from all evil forever.

Considering the difficulties recently dealt with, how can we assure ourselves on this road? Thankfully it is to the remedy that He Himself gave us: love which makes us speed up our steps, and fear, that help to avoid the falls.

A. CONTEXT:

But, is it possible to reassure oneself?

1. **Theological:** (cf. 40, 1; 42, 2): “no one is capable of knowing with the certainty of faith, not subject to error, if one has reached the grace of God” (Council of Trent).
2. **Spiritual:** “the illusions the devil brings on contemplatives” (40, 4; 41, 2).
3. **Ecclesial:** besides “the devil will set a thousand false fears before you and strive that others do so” (40, 5; 41, 8).

B. KEY TO THE READING and answers to each doubt of paragraph “A”:

1. **True love cannot be concealed:** it bears obvious signs (40, 3.7). “May it please His Majesty to give us His love before He takes us out of this life, for it will be a great thing at the hour of death to see that we are going to be judged by the One whom we have loved above all things.” (40,8).
2. **Holy Fear, neither:** proceed with humility, strive for the truth (formation) and spiritual accompaniment (40, 4); “they will not advertently commit a venial sin; mortal sins they fear like fire (41,1); determined not to offend the Lord (41,2); turn from every occasion and companion who does not help you come closer to God. We should take great care in everything we do to bend our will...” (41,4) “How our will deviates in its inclination from that which is the will of God!” (42, 4).
3. **But be careful with false and excessive fears!:** “do not be tense, for if you begin to feel constrained, such a feeling will be very harmful to everything good.” (41, 4-8).
4. **Then pray constantly:** “be freed from all evil forever.” (42,2; 40,4).

C. CELEBRATION

Prayer with CV 42, 2-4.

Formal questioning from the outside with 41, 4-8: ask a few people of confidence if they see us in that way.

Round table: Is this my feeling and my will?

Conclusion

“Now see, Sisters, how the Lord by giving me understanding of the great deal we ask for when reciting this evangelical prayer has removed the difficulty involved in my teaching you and myself the path that I began to explain to you. May He be blessed forever! Certainly, it never entered my mind that this prayer contained so many deep secrets; for now you have seen the entire spiritual way contained in it, from the beginning stages until God engulfs the soul and gives it to drink abundantly from the fount of living water, which He said was to be found at the end of the way. It seems the Lord has desired to give us understanding, Sisters, of the great consolation contained in this prayer.” (W 42,5).

For four and half centuries, we have counted on this profound fount of consolation, wisdom and divine intimacy that is the *Way of Perfection*. Actually we count also with the ways to deepen it, like the ones that have been pointed out in paragraphs C and that are drawn from the first guide that was provided in the last course. We enumerate them once again, even though they were explained before: 1) Time of prayer. 2) Sharing, round table. 3) Retreat days. 4) Catechesis. 5) Penitential celebration or personal examination of conscience. 6) Questioning from the outside (e.g. page 9). 7) Challenge, commitment. 8) Cultural expression².

Another fundamental help: T. Álvarez, *Paso a Paso. Leyendo a Teresa con su Camino de Perfección* (*Step by Step. Reading Teresa with her Way of Perfection*); *Comentarios a Vida, Camino y Moradas de S. Teresa*, (*Commentaries on the Life, Way of Perfection and Interior Castle of S. Teresa*), Editorial Monte Carmelo.

² To find in the cultural context, including the secular, in which we find ourselves a fact of life, a song, a film, news... that would be similar, that coincides or that contrasts in some aspect with the Teresian text. On the other hand, the community try to convert the text into culture, in today's word with a language accessible to those searching today: “the holier they are the more sociable...This is what we must strive for earnestly, to be affable, agreeable, and pleasing to persons with whom we deal, especially our Sisters.” (W 41,7).