



Four Waters of Prayer

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A beginner must look on himself or herself as one setting out to make a garden for his Lord's pleasure, on most unfruitful soil, which abounds in weeds. His Majesty roots up the weeds and will put in good plants instead. Let us reckon that this is already done when a soul decides to practice prayer and has begun to do so. We have then, as good gardeners, with God's help, to make these plants grow, and to water them carefully so that they do not die, but produce flowers, which give out a good smell, to delight this Lord of ours. Then He will often come to take His pleasure in this garden and enjoy these virtues.

Now, let us see how this garden is to be watered, so that we may understand what we have to do, and what labor it will cost us, also whether the gain will outweigh the effort, or how long it will take. It seems to me that the garden may be watered in four different ways. Either the water must be drawn from a well, which is very laborious; or by a water wheel and buckets, worked by a windlass. I have sometimes drawn it in this way, which is less laborious than the other, and brings up more water. Or it may flow from a stream or spring, which waters the ground much better, for the soul then retains more moisture and needs watering less often, which entails far less work for the gardener. Or by heavy rain, when the Lord waters it Himself without any labor of ours, and this is an incomparably better method than the rest.

Now to apply these **four methods of watering**, by which this garden is to be maintained and without which it will fail. This is my purpose, and will, I think, enable me to explain something about the four stages of prayer, to which the Lord has, in His kindness, something raised my soul.

On the first water...

We may say that beginners in prayer are those who draw the water up out of the well; which is a great labor, as I have said. For they find it very tiring to keep the senses recollected, when they are used to a life of distraction. Beginners have to accustom themselves to pay no

attention to what they see or hear, and to put this exercise into practice during their hours of prayer, when they just remain in solitude, thinking whilst they are alone of 2 their past life...this is what I mean by beginning to draw water from the well - and God grant there may be water in it!

(Pages 78-79)

On the second water...

Having spoken of the effort and physical labor entailed in watering the garden, and what efforts it costs to raise the water from the well, let us now turn to the **second method of drawing it** which the Owner of the plot has ordained. By means of a device with a windlass, the gardener draws more water with less labor, and so is able take some rest instead of being continuously at work. I apply this description to the prayer of quiet, which I am now going to describe.

Now the soul begins to be recollected, and here it comes into touch with the supernatural, to which it could not possibly attain by its own efforts. True, sometimes it seems to have grown weary through turning the wheel, and toiling with its mind, and filling the buckets. But in this state, the level of the water is higher, and so much less labor is required than for drawing it from a well. I mean that the water is closer because grace reveals itself more clearly to the soul. This entails a gathering of the faculties within oneself so as to derive a greater savor from that pleasure. But they are not lost or asleep. The will alone is occupied in such a way that it is unconsciously taken captive. It simply consents to be God's prisoner, since it well knows how to surrender to One whom it loves. O Jesus, my Lord, how precious your love is to us then! It binds our own love so closely to it as to leave us no liberty to love anything but you!

This water of great blessings and favors which the Lord now gives us makes the virtues grow incomparably more than they did in the previous state of prayer. Our soul is already rising from its wretched state, and receives some little intimation of the joys of heaven. It is this, I believe, that increases the growth of the virtues and brings them closer to God - that true Virtue, from which all virtues spring. For His Majesty begins to communicate Himself to the soul, and would have it feel how He is communicating Himself.

(Pages 98-99)

On the third water...

He now takes on the gardener's work, and desires it to rest. The will has only to consent to these graces that it enjoys, and to submit to all that true Wisdom wishes to do to it...now it is good for the soul to abandon itself entirely to the arms of God. It He will talk it to heaven, let it go; if to hell, no matter since it is going here with its own highest Good. If its life is to end altogether, so let it be; if it is to live a thousand years, it wills that also. Let His Majesty treat it as His own; it no longer belongs to itself; it is entirely given to the Lord, and must cast aside all

care. I mean that in a state of prayer as sublime as this, the soul realizes that the Lord is doing His work without any laboring of the intellect, which is merely amazed, as it seems to me, as seeing God play the part of the good gardener. For when God brings a soul to this state He can do all this and much more, and this is the effect of His action. He will not let it do any work itself, except to delight in the fragrance that the flowers are beginning to give off.

The virtues, then, are now stronger than they were during the preceding prayer of quiet. The soul sees that it has changed, and is unconsciously beginning to do great things with the fragrance given off by the flowers. It is now the Lords will that they shall open, so that the soul may see that it possesses virtues, even though it also knows very well that it cannot and never could acquire them in many years, whereas the celestial Gardener has given them to it in a flash. The soul's humility is now greater and more profound than it was before. It clearly sees that it has done absolutely nothing except consent to the Lords granting it graces, and embraces them with its will.

This state of prayer seems to me a most definite union of the whole soul with God, complete but for the fact that His Majesty appears to allow the faculties to be conscious of and to enjoy the great work that He is doing. Sometimes - indeed very often - the will being in union, the soul is aware of it and sees that it is rejoicing in its captivity. There is the will, alone and abiding in great peace, while the understanding and the memory, on the other hand, are so free that they can attend to business or do works of charity. I tell you this, my Father, so that you may see that it can happen, and may recognize the experience when it comes to you: I myself was driven quite frantic by it; and that is why I speak of it here.

(Pages 117-118)

On the fourth water....

May the Lord teach me words with which to convey some idea of the **fourth water**. I shall indeed need His help more now than ever before. In this state, the soul still feels that it is not altogether dead, as we may say, though it is entirely dead to the world. But, as I have said, it retains the sense to know that it is still here and to feel its solitude; and it makes use of outward manifestations to show its feelings, as least by signs. Throughout, in every stage of the prayer that I have described, the gardener performs some labor, though in these later stages the labor is accompanied by so much less and comfort to the soul that the soul would never willingly abandon it. So the labor is not felt as such, but as bliss.

Here there is no sense of anything but enjoyment, without any knowledge of what is being enjoyed. The soul realizes that it is enjoying some good thing that contains all good things together, but it cannot comprehend this good thing. All the senses are taken up with this joy so that none of them is free to act in any way, either outwardly or inwardly. Previously, as I have said, the senses were permitted to give some indication of the great joy they feel. But now the soul enjoys incomparably more, and yet has still less power to show it. For there is no power left

in the body – and the soul possesses none – by which this joy can be communicated. At such a time anything of the sort would be a great embarrassment, a torment and a disturbance of its repose. If there is really a union of all the faculties, I say, then the soul cannot make it known, even if it wants to – while actually in union I mean. If it can, then it is not in union.

How what is called union takes place and what it is, I cannot tell. It is explained in mystical theology, but I cannot use the proper terms; I cannot understand what mind it, or how it differs from soul and spirit. They all seem one to me, though the soul sometimes leaps out of itself like a burning fire that has become one whole flame and increases with great force. The flame leaps very high above the fire. Nevertheless it is not a different thing, but the same flame which is in the fire.

What I want to explain is the soul's feelings when it is this divine union. It is plain enough what union is; in union two separate things become one. O my Lord, how good You are! May you be blessed forever, O my God, and may all things praise You for so loving us that we can truly speak of Your communication with souls, even here in our exile.

(Pages 122-123)