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## **RICHERS AVAILABLE FOR THE ASKING**

St Teresa of Avila is known as a great mystic of sixteenth century Spain, the first woman to be declared a Doctor of the Church. Her secular education would not equal a high school freshman's of our time. She was able to read and write, an accomplishment eighty percent of the nuns in her monasteries had not attained. She loved spiritual books and discussed her development in prayer with learned priests. Her grasp of theology was deepened through her own experience of God. Teresa's writings are like a letter filled with explanations, good advice, and warm exhortation. She speaks to us in a vernacular Spanish that has been called the speech of the marketplace. The image is an apt one, because she wants to sell us something. What she offers is recognition of a treasure we have within us: the ability to pray. She urges us not to neglect this God-given capacity to contact heavenly reality even on earth. "Behold the Lord invites all. Since He is Truth itself, there is no reason to doubt...Even here below you can begin to enjoy glory!" (Way of Perfection 19:15 & 40:9)

Some mystical writers tell us of the elevated stages of contemplation, describing in detail the wonders encountered there. Teresa is able to do this and her descriptions of such advanced stages shine among the classics of spirituality. But she is so eager to draw people to prayer that she starts not just at the beginning of praying but even before. She wants to arouse your desire to pray, to tell you what a high return every effort of yours will obtain. She says, "God adjusts Himself to our way of giving. In taking account of us, He is not at all petty...Just the raising of our eyes in remembrance of God will have its reward...No matter how small the gain, one will end up being very rich" (Way 23:3,5).

We are invited to begin what is called "an interior life." Let's pause to consider that phrase which is usually applied to someone who is very serious about living on a spiritual plane. Actually everyone has a private world made up of thoughts, longings, hopes, fears. All this constitutes your inner consciousness, concerned with where you are and where you want to go. Each one, then, has some kind of interior life, but oh, how great is the difference from one person to another. What fantasies do I hold on to? What schemes do I devise? What am I aiming at and how does it affect others in my life? As I wake up, what draws me? What makes me enthusiastic or despondent? As I meet a Maine morning and greet the rising light, where do I want my energy to go?

When prayer is brought into my inner world, a change occurs—not a strong change at first but one that gradually takes over. The word "conversion" signifies a shift in direction, moving away from what previously captured my attention. A radical choice of God is called conversion, but all through human existence, ongoing conversion is offered—turning away from what is superficial and turning to what is at the deepest

center of my being. “Turn my eyes from looking at vanities and give me life in Your ways” (Ps 119:37).

The first thoughts of each new day have special value because they are like pointers to guide my mind. Why not make a resolution to bring God into that awareness? The custom of morning prayers is based on setting the mind on the right track early in the day.

Are we too much in a rush these twenty-first century mornings to do this? God doesn't require a special posture like kneeling. All that is asked is a simple remembrance, the remembrance Teresa promised would have its reward. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning” (Lam 3:22,23).

With Jesus we open our eyes to a pristine dawn. We thank Him for the blessing of the rising sun. We ask Him to illuminate our inward vision while the day progresses. Let my eyes find reminders of the Divine Presence in expected and unexpected places. All this brings to my interior world a breeze of peace. Stress may emerge from assigned activities, but such quieting can help my mood adjust to outward pressures.

“The Lord searches all hearts and understands all the mind's thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let Himself be found by you” (1 Chr 28:9,10). Every happening is like a gate swinging wide for me. As I walk through, God helps me see the possibilities before me. I do not walk alone. “The Lord is your shade, beside you at your right hand...The Lord will guard your coming and your going” (Ps 121: 5,8).

Each moment offers a fullness of divine concern whether joy or pain is included in that instant. Nothing is worthless. “In Your plans for us, there is none to equal You” (Ps 40:6). Those who let a breath of brief prayer enter the happenings of the day from time to time, will find what St. Teresa assures us: God “takes care of almost all the expenses...more is given than is asked for, beyond what we could desire” (Way 23:5, 6).

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