

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

FIRST MANSIONS

In which there are Two Chapters.

CHAPTER I

Treats of the beauty and dignity of our souls; makes a comparison by the help of which this may be understood; describes the benefit which comes from understanding it and being aware of the favours which we receive from God; and shows how the door of this castle is prayer.

WHILE I was beseeching Our Lord to-day that He would speak through me, since I could find nothing to say and had no idea how to begin to carry out the obligation laid upon me by obedience, a thought occurred to me which I will now set down, in order to have some foundation on which to build. I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms,[\[17\]](#) just as in Heaven there are many mansions.[\[18\]](#) Now if we think carefully over this, sisters, the soul of the righteous man is nothing but a paradise, in which, as God tells us, He takes His delight.[\[Proverbs 8:31\]](#)[\[19\]](#) For what do you think a room will be like which is the delight of a King so mighty, so wise, so pure and so full of all that is good? I can find nothing with which to compare the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity. In fact, however acute our intellects may be, They will no more be able to attain to a comprehension of this than to an understanding of God; for, as He Himself says, He created us in His

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

21 image and likeness. [Gen 1:26][20] Now if this is so -- and it is -- there is no point
22 in our fatiguing ourselves by attempting to comprehend the beauty of this castle;
23 for, though it is His creature, and there is therefore as much difference between it
24 and God as between creature and Creator, the very fact that His Majesty says it is
25 made in His image means that we can hardly form any conception of the soul's
26 great dignity and beauty.[21]

27 It is no small pity, and should cause us no little shame, that, through our own fault,
28 we do not understand ourselves, or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of
29 great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was, and could not
30 say, and had no idea who his father or his mother was, or from what country he
31 came? Though that is great stupidity, our own is incomparably greater if we make
32 no attempt to discover what we are, and only know that we are living in these
33 bodies, and have a vague idea, because we have heard it and because our Faith tells
34 us so, that we possess souls. As to what good qualities there may be in our souls, or
35 Who dwells within them, or how precious they are -- those are things which we
36 seldom consider and so we trouble little about carefully preserving the soul's
37 beauty. All our interest is centred in the rough setting of the diamond, and in the
38 outer wall of the castle -- that is to say, in these bodies of ours.

39 Let us now imagine that this castle, as I have said, contains many mansions,[22]
40 some above, others below, others at each side; and in the centre and midst of them

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

41 all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the
42 soul. You must think over this comparison very carefully; perhaps God will be
43 pleased to use it to show you something of the favours which He is pleased to grant
44 to souls, and of the differences between them, so far as I have understood this to be
45 possible, for there are so many of them that nobody can possibly understand them
46 all, much less anyone as stupid as I. If the Lord grants you these favours, it will be
47 a great consolation to you to know that such things are possible; and, if you never
48 receive any, you can still praise His great goodness. For, as it does us no harm to
49 think of the things laid up for us in Heaven, and of the joys of the blessed, but
50 rather makes us rejoice and strive to attain those joys ourselves, just so it will do us
51 no harm to find that it is possible in this our exile for so great a God to commune
52 with such malodorous worms, and to love Him for His great goodness and
53 boundless mercy. I am sure that anyone who finds it harmful to realize that it is
54 possible for God to grant such favours during this our exile must be greatly lacking
55 in humility and in love of his neighbour; for otherwise how could we help rejoicing
56 that God should grant these favours to one of our brethren when this in no way
57 hinders Him from granting them to ourselves, and that His Majesty should bestow
58 an understanding of His greatness upon anyone soever? Sometimes He will do this
59 only to manifest His power, as He said of the blind man to whom He gave his
60 sight, when the Apostles asked Him if he were suffering for his own sins or for the

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

61 sins of his parents.[John 9:2][23] He grants these favours, then, not because those
62 who receive them are holier than those who do not, but in order that His greatness
63 may be made known, as we see in the case of Saint Paul and the Magdalen, and in
64 order that we may praise Him in His creatures.

65 It may be said that these things seem impossible and that it is better not to
66 scandalize the weak. But less harm is done by their disbelieving us than by our
67 failing to edify those to whom God grants these favours, and who will rejoice and
68 will awaken others to a fresh love of Him Who grants such mercies, according to
69 the greatness of His power and majesty. In any case I know that none to whom I
70 am speaking will run into this danger, because they all know and believe that God
71 grants still greater proofs of His love. I am sure that, if any one of you does not
72 believe this, she will never learn it by experience. For God's will is that no bounds
73 should be set to His works. Never do such a thing, then, sisters, if the Lord does
74 not lead you by this road.

75 Now let us return to our beautiful and delightful castle and see how we can enter it.
76 I seem rather to be talking nonsense, for, if this castle is the soul, there can clearly
77 be no question of our entering it. For we ourselves are the castle: and it would be
78 absurd to tell someone to enter a room when he was in it already! But you must
79 understand that there are many ways of "being" in a place. Many souls remain in
80 the outer court of the castle, which is the place occupied by the guards; they are not

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

81 interested in entering it, and have no idea what there is in that wonderful place, or
82 who dwells in it, or even how many rooms it has. You will have read certain books
83 on prayer which advise the soul to enter within itself: and that is exactly what this
84 means.

85 A short time ago I was told by a very learned man that souls without prayer are like
86 people whose bodies or limbs are paralysed: they possess feet and hands but they
87 cannot control them. In the same way, there are souls so infirm and so accustomed
88 to busying themselves with outside affairs that nothing can be done for them, and it
89 seems as though they are incapable of entering within themselves at all. So
90 accustomed have they grown to living all the time with the reptiles and other
91 creatures to be found in the outer court of the castle that they have almost become
92 like them; and although by nature they are so richly endowed as to have the power
93 of holding converse with none other than God Himself, there is nothing that can be
94 done for them. Unless they strive to realize their miserable condition and to
95 remedy it, they will be turned into pillars of salt for not looking within themselves,
96 just as Lot's wife was because she looked back.[Gen 29:26][[24](#)]

97 As far as I can understand, the door of entry into this castle is prayer and
98 meditation: I do not say mental prayer rather than vocal, for, if it is prayer at all, it
99 must be accompanied by meditation. If a person does not think Whom he is
100 addressing, and what he is asking for, and who it is that is asking and of Whom he

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

101 is asking it, I do not consider that he is praying at all even though he be constantly
102 moving his lips. True, it is sometimes possible to pray without paying heed to these
103 things, but that is only because they have been thought about previously; if a man
104 is in the habit of speaking to God's Majesty as he would speak to his slave, and
105 never wonders if he is expressing himself properly, but merely utters the words
106 that come to his lips because he has learned them by heart through constant
107 repetition, I do not call that prayer at all -- and God grant no Christian may ever
108 speak to Him so! At any rate, sisters, I hope in God that none of you will, for we
109 are accustomed here to talk about interior matters, and that is a good way of
110 keeping oneself from falling into such animal-like habits.[\[25\]](#)

111 Let us say no more, then, of these paralysed souls, who, unless the Lord Himself
112 comes and commands them to rise, are like the man who had lain beside the pool
113 for thirty years:[\[26\]](#) they are unfortunate creatures and live in great peril. Let us
114 rather think of certain other souls, who do eventually enter the castle. These are
115 very much absorbed in worldly affairs; but their desires are good; sometimes,
116 though infrequently, they commend themselves to Our Lord; and they think about
117 the state of their souls, though not very carefully. Full of a thousand
118 preoccupations as they are, they pray only a few times a month, and as a rule they
119 are thinking all the time of their preoccupations, for they are very much attached to
120 them, and, where their treasure is, there is their heart also.[\[Matt 6:21\]](#)[\[27\]](#) From

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

121 time to time, however, they shake their minds free of them and it is a great thing
122 that they should know themselves well enough to realize that they are not going the
123 right way to reach the castle door. Eventually they enter the first rooms on the
124 lowest floor, but so many reptiles get in with them that they are unable to
125 appreciate the beauty of the castle or to find any peace within it. Still, they have
126 done a good deal by entering at all.

127 You will think this is beside the point, daughters, since by the goodness of the Lord
128 you are not one of these. But you must be patient, for there is no other way in
129 which I can explain to you some ideas I have had about certain interior matters
130 concerning prayer. May it please the Lord to enable me to say something about
131 them; for to explain to you what I should like is very difficult unless you have had
132 personal experience; and anyone with such experience, as you will see, cannot help
133 touching upon subjects which, please God, shall, by His mercy, never concern us.

134 **CHAPTER II**

135 Describe the hideousness of a soul in mortal sin, some part of which God was
136 pleased to manifest to a certain person. Says something also of self-knowledge.

137 This chapter is profitable, since it contains some noteworthy matters. Explains in
138 what sense the Mansions are to be understood.

139 BEFORE passing on, I want you to consider what will be the state of this castle, so
140 beautiful and resplendent this Orient pearl, this tree of life, planted in the living

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

141 waters of life [Psalm 1:3] [\[28\]](#) -- namely, in God -- when the soul falls into a
142 mortal sin. No thicker darkness exists, and there is nothing dark and black which is
143 not much less so than this. You need know only one thing about it -- that, although
144 the Sun Himself, Who has given it all its splendour and beauty, is still there in the
145 centre of the soul, it is as if He were not there for any participation which the soul
146 has in Him, though it is as capable of enjoying Him as is the crystal of reflecting
147 the sun. While in a state like this the soul will find profit in nothing, and hence,
148 being as it is in mortal sin, none of the good works it may do will be of any
149 avail[\[29\]](#) to win it glory; for they will not have their origin in that First Principle,
150 which is God, through Whom alone our virtue is true virtue. And, since this soul
151 has separated itself from Him, it cannot be pleasing in His eyes; for, after all, the
152 intention of a person who commits a mortal sin is not to please Him but to give
153 pleasure to the devil; and, as the devil is darkness itself, the poor soul becomes
154 darkness itself likewise.

155 I know of a person[\[30\]](#) to whom Our Lord wished to show what a soul was like
156 when it committed mortal sin. That person says that, if people could understand
157 this, she thinks they would find it impossible to sin at all, and, rather than meet
158 occasions of sin, would put themselves to the greatest trouble imaginable. So she
159 was very anxious that everyone should realize this. May you be no less anxious,
160 daughters, to pray earnestly to God for those who are in this state and who, with all

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

161 their works, have become sheer darkness. For, just as all the streamlets that flow
162 from a clear spring are as clear as the spring itself, so the works of a soul in grace
163 are pleasing in the eyes both of God and of men, since they proceed from this
164 spring of life, in which the soul is as a tree planted. It would give no shade and
165 yield no fruit if it proceeded not thence, for the spring sustains it and prevents it
166 from drying up and causes it to produce good fruit. When the soul, on the other
167 hand, through its own fault, leaves this spring and becomes rooted in a pool of
168 pitch-black, evil-smelling water, it produces nothing but misery and filth.

169 It should be noted here that it is not the spring, or the brilliant sun which is in the
170 centre of the soul, that loses its splendour and beauty, for they are always within it
171 and nothing can take away their beauty. If a thick black cloth be placed over a
172 crystal in the sunshine, however, it is clear that, although the sun may be shining
173 upon it, its brightness will have no effect upon the crystal.

174 O souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ! Learn to understand yourselves and
175 take pity on yourselves! Surely, if you understand your own natures, it is
176 impossible that you will not strive to remove the pitch which blackens the crystal?
177 Remember, if your life were to end now, you would never enjoy this light again. O
178 Jesus! How sad it is to see a soul deprived of it! What a state the poor rooms of the
179 castle are in! How distracted are the senses which inhabit them! And the faculties,
180 which are their governors and butlers and stewards -- how blind they are and how

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

181 ill-controlled! And yet, after all, what kind of fruit can one expect to be borne by a
182 tree rooted in the devil?

183 I once heard a spiritual man say that he was not so much astonished at the things
184 done by a soul in mortal sin as at the things not done by it. May God, in His mercy,
185 deliver us from such great evil, for there is nothing in the whole of our lives that so
186 thoroughly deserves to be called evil as this, since it brings endless and eternal
187 evils in its train. It is of this, daughters, that we should walk in fear, and this from
188 which in our prayers we must beg God to deliver us; for, if He keep not the city,
189 we shall labour in vain,[Psalm 127:2] [\[31\]](#) since we are vanity itself. That person to
190 whom I referred just now said that the favour which God had granted her had
191 taught her two things: first, she had learned to have the greatest fear of offending
192 Him, for which reason she continually begged Him not to allow her to fall, when
193 she saw what legible consequences a fall could bring; secondly, she had found it a
194 mirror of humility, for it had made her realize that any good thing we do has its
195 source, not in ourselves but rather in that spring where this tree, which is the soul,
196 is planted, and in that sun which sheds its radiance on our works. She says that she
197 saw this so clearly that, whenever she did any good thing, or saw such a thing
198 done, she betook herself straightway to its Source, realizing that without His help
199 we are powerless. She then went on at once to praise God; and, as a rule, when she
200 did any good action, she never gave a thought to herself at all.

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

201 If we can remember these two things, sisters, the time you have spent in reading all
202 this, and the time I have spent in writing it, will not have been lost. Wise and
203 learned men know them quite well, but we women are slow and need instruction in
204 everything. So perhaps it may be the Lord's will that these comparisons shall be
205 brought to our notice. May He be pleased of His goodness to give us grace to
206 understand them.

207 These interior matters are so obscure to the mind that anyone with as little learning
208 as I will be sure to have to say many superfluous and even irrelevant things in
209 order to say a single one that is to the point. The reader must have patience with
210 me, as I have with myself when writing about things of which I know nothing; for
211 really I sometimes take up my paper, like a perfect fool, with no idea of what to
212 say or of how to begin. I fully realize how important it is for you that I should
213 explain certain interior matters to the best of my ability; for we continually hear
214 what a good thing prayer is, and our Constitutions oblige us to engage in it for so
215 many hours daily, yet they tell us nothing beyond what we ourselves have to do
216 and say very little about the work done by the Lord in the soul -- I mean,
217 supernatural work. As I describe the things He does, and give various explanations
218 of them, it will be very helpful for us to think of this celestial building which is
219 within us and is so little understood by mortals, although many of them frequent it.
220 And although the Lord has thrown some light upon many matters of which I have

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

221 written, I do not think I have understood some of them, especially the most
222 difficult, as well as I do now. The trouble, as I have said, is that, before I can get to
223 them, I shall have to explain many things that are well known -- it is bound to be so
224 when a person is as stupid as I.

225 Let us now turn to our castle with its many mansions. You must not imagine these
226 mansions as arranged in a row, one behind another, but fix your attention on the
227 centre, the room or palace occupied by the King. Think of a palmito, [The palmito is a
228 shrub, common in the south and east of Spain, with thick layers of leaves enclosing a succulent edible kernel] [\[32\]](#)
229 which has many outer rinds surrounding the savoury part within, all of which must
230 be taken away before the centre can be eaten. Just so around this central room are
231 many more, as there also are above it. In speaking of the soul we must always
232 think of it as spacious, ample and lofty; and this can be done without the least
233 exaggeration, for the soul's capacity is much greater than we can realize, and this
234 Sun, Which is in the palace, reaches every part of it. It is very important that no
235 soul which practises prayer, whether little or much, should be subjected to undue
236 constraint or limitation. Since God has given it such dignity, it must be allowed to
237 roam through these mansions -- through those above, those below and those on
238 either side. It must not be compelled to remain for a long time in one single room -
239 - not, at least, unless it is in the room of self-knowledge. [\[33\]](#) How necessary that is
240 (and be sure you understand me here) even to those whom the Lord keeps in the

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

241 same mansion in which He Himself is! However high a state the soul may have
242 attained, self-knowledge is incumbent upon it, and this it will never be able to
243 neglect even should it so desire. Humility must always be doing its work like a bee
244 making its honey in the hive: without humility all will be lost. Still, we should
245 remember that the bee is constantly flying about from flower to flower, and in the
246 same way, believe me, the soul must sometimes emerge from self-knowledge and
247 soar aloft in meditation upon the greatness and the majesty of its God. Doing this
248 will help it to realize its own baseness better than thinking of its own nature, and it
249 will be freer from the reptiles which enter the first rooms -- that is, the rooms of
250 self-knowledge. For although, as I say, it is through the abundant mercy of God
251 that the soul studies to know itself, yet one can have too much of a good thing, as
252 the saying goes,[\[34\]](#) and believe me, we shall reach much greater heights of virtue
253 by thinking upon the virtue of God than if we stay in our own little plot of ground
254 and tie ourselves down to it completely.

255 I do not know if I have explained this clearly: self-knowledge is so important that,
256 even if you were raised right up to the heavens, I should like you never to relax
257 your cultivation of it; so long as we are on this earth, nothing matters more to us
258 than humility. And so I repeat that it is a very good thing -- excellent, indeed -- to
259 begin by entering the room where humility is acquired rather than by flying off to
260 the other rooms. For that is the way to make progress, and, if we have a safe, level

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

261 road to walk along, why should we desire wings to fly? Let us rather try to get the
262 greatest possible profit out of walking. As I see it, we shall never succeed in
263 knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God: let us think of His greatness and
264 then come back to our own baseness; by looking at His purity we shall see our
265 foulness; by meditating upon His humility, we shall see how far we are from being
266 humble.

267 There are two advantages in this. First, it is clear that anything white looks very
268 much whiter against something black, just as the black looks blacker against the
269 white. Secondly, if we turn from self towards God, our understanding and our will
270 become nobler and readier to embrace all that is good: if we never rise above the
271 slough of our own miseries we do ourselves a great disservice. We were saying just
272 now how black and noisome are the streams that flow from souls in mortal sin.

273 Similarly, although this is not the same thing -- God forbid! It is only a comparison
274 -- so long as we are buried in the wretchedness of our earthly nature these streams
275 of ours will never disengage themselves from the slough of cowardice,

276 pusillanimity and fear. We shall always be glancing around and saying: "Are
277 people looking at me or not?" "If I take a certain path shall I come to any harm?"

278 "Dare I begin such and such a task?" "Is it pride that is impelling me to do so?"

279 "Can anyone as wretched as I engage in so lofty an exercise as prayer?" "Will

280 people think better of me if I refrain from following the crowd?" "For extremes are

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

281 not good," they say, "even in virtue; and I am such a sinner that if I were to fail I
282 should only have farther to fall; perhaps I shall make no progress and in that case I
283 shall only be doing good people harm; anyway, a person like myself has no need to
284 make herself singular."

285 Oh, God help my daughters, how many souls the devil must have ruined in this
286 way! They think that all these misgivings, and many more that I could describe,
287 arise from humility, whereas they really come from our lack of self-knowledge.
288 We get a distorted idea of our own nature, and, if we never stop thinking about
289 ourselves, I am not surprised if we experience these fears and others which are still
290 worse. It is for this reason, daughters, that I say we must set our eyes upon Christ
291 our Good, from Whom we shall learn true humility, and also upon His saints. Our
292 understanding, as I have said, will then be ennobled, and self-knowledge will not
293 make us timorous^[35] and fearful; for, although this is only the first Mansion, it
294 contains riches of great price, and any who can elude the reptiles which are to be
295 found in it will not fail to go farther. Terrible are the crafts and wiles which the
296 devil uses to prevent souls from learning to know themselves and understanding
297 his ways.

298 With regard to these first Mansions I can give some very useful information out of
299 my own experience. I must tell you, for example, to think of them as comprising
300 not just a few rooms, but a very large number.^[36] There are many ways in which

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

301 souls enter them, always with good intentions; but as the devil's intentions are
302 always very bad, he has many legions of evil spirits in each room to prevent souls
303 from passing from one to another, and as we, poor souls, fail to realize this, we are
304 tricked by all kinds of deceptions. The devil is less successful with those who are
305 nearer the King's dwelling-place; but at this early stage, as the soul is still absorbed
306 in worldly affairs, engulfed in worldly pleasure and puffed up with worldly
307 honours and ambitions, its vassals, which are the senses and the faculties given to
308 it by God as part of its nature, have not the same power, and such a soul is easily
309 vanquished, although it may desire not to offend God and may perform good
310 works. Those who find themselves in this state need to take every opportunity of
311 repairing to His Majesty, and to make His blessed Mother their intercessor, and
312 also His saints, so that these may do battle for them, since their own servants have
313 little strength for defending themselves. In reality it is necessary in every state of
314 life for our help to come from God. May His Majesty grant us this through His
315 mercy. Amen.

316 How miserable is this life which we live! As I have said a great deal elsewhere,
317 daughters, about the harm which comes to us through our not properly
318 understanding this matter of humility and self-knowledge, I am not saying more to
319 you here, though it is a matter of the greatest importance to us. May the Lord grant
320 that something I have said will be of use to you.

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

321 You must note that the light which comes from the palace occupied by the King
322 hardly reaches these first Mansions at all; for, although they are not dark and black,
323 as when the soul is in a state of sin, they are to some extent darkened, so that they
324 cannot be seen (I mean by anyone who is in them); and this not because of
325 anything that is wrong with the room, but rather (I hardly know how to explain
326 myself) because there are so many bad things -- snakes and vipers and poisonous
327 creatures -- which have come in with the soul that they prevent it from seeing the
328 light. It is as if one were to enter a place flooded by sunlight with his eyes so full of
329 dust^[37] that he could hardly open them. The room itself is light enough, but he
330 cannot enjoy the light because he is prevented from doing so by these wild beasts
331 and animals, which force him to close his eyes to everything but themselves. This
332 seems to me to be the condition of a soul which, though not in a bad state, is so
333 completely absorbed in things of the world and so deeply immersed, as I have said,
334 in possessions or honours or business, that, although as a matter of fact it would
335 like to gaze at the castle and enjoy its beauty, it is prevented from doing so, and
336 seems quite unable to free itself from all these impediments. Everyone, however,
337 who wishes to enter the second Mansions, will be well advised, as far as his state
338 of life permits, to try to put aside all unnecessary affairs and business. For those
339 who hope to reach the principal Mansion, this is so important that unless they
340 begin in this way I do not believe they will ever be able to get there. Nor, indeed,

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

341 even though it has entered the castle, is the soul free from great peril in the
342 Mansion which it actually inhabits; for, being among such poisonous things, it
343 cannot, at some time or another, escape being bitten by them.

344 What would happen, then, daughters, if those who, like ourselves, are free from
345 these obstacles, and have already entered much farther into other secret mansions
346 of the castle, should, through their own fault, go out again into this hurly-burly?
347 Our sins must have led many people whom God has granted favours to relapse
348 through their faults into this wretched state. We here, so far as outward things are
349 concerned, are free; may it please the Lord to make us free as regards inward
350 things as well and to deliver us from evil. Beware, my daughters, of cares which
351 have nothing to do with you. Remember that in few of the mansions of this castle
352 are we free from struggles with devils. It is true that in some of them, the wardens,
353 who, as I think I said, are the faculties, have strength for the fight; but it is most
354 important that we should not cease to be watchful against the devil's wiles, lest he
355 deceive us in the guise of an angel of light. For there are a multitude of ways in
356 which he can deceive us, and gradually make his way into the castle, and until he is
357 actually there we do not realize it.

358 As I told you before, he works like a noiseless file, and we must be on the look-out
359 for him from the beginning. In order to explain this better I want to give you
360 several illustrations. He inspires a sister with yearnings to do penance, so that she

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

361 seems to have no peace save when she is torturing herself. This, in itself, is good;
362 but, if the prioress has ordered that no penance is to be done without leave, and yet
363 the sister thinks that she can venture to persist in so beneficial a practice, and
364 secretly orders her life in such a way that in the end she ruins her health and is
365 unable to do what her Rule demands, you see what this apparently good thing has
366 led to. Another sister is inspired with zeal for the greatest possible perfection. This,
367 again, is a very good thing; but the result of it might be that she would think any
368 little fault on the part of the sisters a serious failure, and would always be looking
369 out for such things and running to the prioress about them; sometimes she might
370 even be so zealous about religious observances as to be unable to see her own
371 faults; and this the others, observing only her zeal about their misdeeds and not
372 understanding the excellence of her intentions, might well take none too kindly.
373 The devil's aim here must not be made light of, for he is trying to bring about a
374 cooling of charity and love among the sisters, and if he could do this he would be
375 working a great deal of harm. Let us realize, my daughters, that true perfection
376 consists in the love of God and of our neighbour, and the more nearly perfect is our
377 observance of these two commandments, the nearer to perfection we shall be. Our
378 entire Rule and Constitutions are nothing but means which enable us to do this the
379 more perfectly. Let us refrain from indiscreet zeal, which may do us great harm: let

INTERIOR CASTLE – St. Therese of Avila

380 each one of you look to herself. As I have said a great deal to you about this
381 elsewhere^[38] I will not enlarge on it further.

382 This mutual love is so important for us that I should like you never to forget it; for
383 if the soul goes about looking for trifling faults in others (which sometimes may
384 not be imperfections at all, though perhaps our ignorance may lead us to make the
385 worst of them) it may lose its own peace of mind and perhaps disturb that of
386 others. See, then, how dearly perfection can be bought. The devil might also use
387 this temptation in the case of a prioress, and then it would be more dangerous still.

388 Much discretion is necessary here; for, if it were a question of her contravening the
389 Rule and Constitutions, it would not always do to take a lenient view of the matter
390 -- she would have to be spoken to about it; and, if she did not then amend, the
391 prelate would have to be told: to do this would be a charity. This would also apply
392 to the sisters, where the fault was a grave one: to say nothing through fear that
393 taking the matter up would be yielding to temptation would itself be to yield to
394 temptation. However, to prevent deception by the devil, it should be strongly
395 stressed that no sister must discuss such things with any other, for from this
396 practice the devil can pluck great advantage and start habits of slander; these
397 matters must be discussed, as I have said, only with the person whose concern they
398 are. Here, glory be to God, we keep almost continuous silence, so that the
399 opportunity does not arise; none the less, it is well that we should be on our guard.