



Conference 5 | A Dwelling Place in Our Hearts

Transcript

In this conference we're going to speak about the presence of God in our hearts. Our goal, our goal then is to remain in this context with God in our life. I have already spoken of different aspects in of the presence of God: in nature, in the Eucharist in his word. And now we're going to speak about something really beautiful and really important. Which is this presence of God who dwells within our heart, who inhabits our soul. There is a religious sister from the 17th century in France who said this beautiful thing: happy or blessed is the soul who has found God within itself. She is that soul is more happy than if it had conquered all of the universe. So we're going to together ask for this grace from the Virgin Mary that we might be able to discover the presence of God in our hearts. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now at the hour of our death.*

Here we are in front of a truth of Faith which is important which is beautiful. And there are many passages in text in the Bible especially in the New Testament which tells us that God is living in our heart. I would say that the kingdom of God is within us. It is the phrase Jesus uses that the kingdom of God is within you. St Paul tells us you are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, you are the dwelling of God the living God. There is a very beautiful path passage or text in the gospel of St John in the chapter 14, when Jesus spoke in this following manner: if someone loves Me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and we will make our dwelling place within him. And that's this beautiful idea that God the Father but also the Son and the Holy Spirit comes to make his dwelling place within the heart of man. I believe this is one of the most beautiful truth of our Christian Life. Unfortunately we are not conscientious enough of this and maybe we don't teach this truth enough. It's true as I've said before this presence of God in us is hidden, is mysterious. We cannot discover it in an immediate way and if we scan with a scanner someone's heart or if we do a very deep or in-depth psychological study this is not what's going to permit to us to see God living in that person. So they are not the human normal instruments that will permit us to discover the presence of God. But what can allow us to discover it is faith and also love which makes us to seek God. If we believe truly in this teaching of the church and if we truly have this desire to be United with God , sometimes we can practice the following thing: we can allow a time of silence in our life. We can maybe cut our relationships with exterior and we can close our eyes and in a certain way we can as if meet this presence in our own hearts. I'm not trying to seek to feel something but it's all about an Act of Faith in the beginning. *Lord I believe that You live in my heart, I believe that it is the whole Trinity: the Father the Son the Holy Spirit They have come to dwell within my soul. Lord I thank you truly for this gift. And I will try to be attentive to this presence that will allow me it's as if a little bit as if I'm going down within my own heart in an act of faith, in an act of love to thank the Lord who has come to inhabit my heart.* And to be able to spend a little while with him.

It could be a very brief moment or it could be a longer moment but to try and consider our heart a little bit something like an oratory where God dwells and to enter in that oratory of our heart to adore the presence of God. It is a teaching we find in the life of many Saints. St. Catherine of Sienna speaks very often of this interior room, and many others have enlisted the idea of oratory which we find within



ourselves in which it is always possible to encounter the Divine presence. I believe if we practice this form of prayer, if we try to live this interior attention in faith, if in a regular way we to find God within us, little by little this will become a certain experience. It's not something that we will feel everyday but there will be moments, like a moments of grace that will be given to us. And we will feel in the depths of our hearts there will be certain presence, a certain gentleness, a certain peace. Like a little source that inhabits in the depth of our heart. And little by little we rejoice to discover. And this presence of God in the heart of the believer has different aspects.

The first aspect is God is present in our soul in the sense of a Creator who gives the His creation life. God gives us life every instant by His love which He communicates to us which is given to us. And God never ceases to love us and that is what maintains us in existence. If God stopped one second to love us we will we will disappear in the abyss. The fact that I can breath, the fact that my heart beats - its like a sign of His love that gives me my existence and as Genesis tells us we were created in the image of God so we carry in us as if an image of God, a certain form of His presence.

There is another aspect of presence which is deeper and richer. **It's a presence not simply by nature but by grace that God has decided to come and inhabit our hearts. By the grace of the baptism the whole Trinity has come to inhabit the heart of the believer in a way which is not visible but real.** And This presence of the Trinity within our soul is more and more intense in proportion to our love. The more we love the Lord with all our heart with all our soul the more this presence will be deep and profound and strong in us. As I have said already this is not something that we will understand always in an immediate way. It is only a little by little that we will come to understand this and to experience it, but it's very beautiful to see in the life of so many Saints how they made this discovery. We know very well the example of Saint Augustine who spoke about this in his confessions. There's a beautiful text where he said the following: *Lord I sought you everywhere but I always sought you outside of me until the moment that I end up understanding that you were within me, more intimate to me than my own self.* What is the most deep the deepest in this human existence is this Divine presence.

We're going to read a small text from St. Teresa of Avila which can witness to us how she discover this reality little by little but she tells us herself that it requires a lot of time to get to that point. For a very long part in her life she had not understood at all that the Lord was dwelling within her soul because she lived very often at the exterior aspects of herself. She was a woman with a lot of contacts in a lot of relation she loved to talk which is not necessarily a bad thing. But in her she had a little tendency to forget or to not understand very well that the Lord was also calling her to discover His presence within her heart. So in the beginning it was something for her that she did not understand very well but she ended up never the last receiving this grace and she tells us the story in the a text in her book the way to Perfection where she is speaking to her sisters the Carmelite Sisters after the reform. And she tells them: *you're going to laugh at me because a very long time and many years I did not understand that but now I have understood it.* So let us let St Teresa of Avila tell us, we are going to read her text: *"you will certainly laugh at me and say that it is perfectly clear and you will be right to laugh because for me it was unclear for some time. I understood that I had a soul but what that soul merited and who dwelt in it I did not understand because the vanities of life covered my eyes with a blindfold. If I had understood as I do fully now that in the little Palace of my soul such a great King was living I think I would not have left*



Him alone so often but from time to time I would have remained in company with Him and would have tried to make His Palace less dirty". She speaks to us in a deep way, a very beautiful and deep way. If I had understood earlier that the Lord was dwelling in this little palace of my soul from time to time I would have gone to be with Him and keep Him company; I would not have left Him alone. And I also would have tried my best in a way that the palace would not have been so dirty, I would have done a little bit of cleaning inside my heart. We see that this is a concrete woman who is trying to speak here and then she continues by saying: "but what would be more marvelous than seeing Him who would fill a thousand worlds with His greatness in closing Himself in such a small thing. That is how He chose to dwell in the womb of His most holy Mother. As He is the Lord. He bears freedom within Himself and He loves us. He fits Himself to our and as He loves us He fits Himself to our measure". We see very well that St. Teresa of Avila is awe in front of this God who made Himself so little by His love through His love He made Himself to be in our own measure to come and live in in our heart. And so she makes reference also to what Mary had made experience of; it's true that Mary had experience of something very unique which belongs only to her: the Word was made flesh in her womb so as if Mary was accustomed or learn to be accustomed on how to carry God is good and to be very attentive to this intimate presence. Obviously we don't carry God within us in the same manner that Mary did but there is nevertheless a beautiful analogy here: that God lives in our hearts and it is good for us to understand that and try to live with that reality, **to be attentive to His presence in the moments of prayer** and to little by little also carry this presence of God in us in all the aspects of our life.

Each Christian is like a living Tabernacle, each Christian carries within himself the presence of God which is permanent and anywhere and everywhere I go I carry within me the divine presence of God. It's a secret or mysterious way to evangelize without words. **Through us God can be present anywhere.** It is true for example, after communion when we have received the Eucharist. It's important to be recollected and to be attentive to this presence of God within us in this Eucharist which we just received. But these moments after communion, can also allow us to get accustomed to be attentive to our hearts because there is a certain presence which remains always, the presence of the Trinity which we carry within us always without ceasing. What a beautiful reality because it means that we can always be in contact with God. I'm not always capable to look at nature, I am not always able to find an open church where the Blessed Sacrament is present but I can always meet and encounter the presence of God within my soul. For Saint Teresa of Avila this has completely and totally transformed her life of prayer. She had a little tendency to be dispersed and here after that she had she learned to become more in union with her life and unity and to be more attentive to the work of God in her life.

So this is a form of prayer which is very easy to practice anywhere. When I'm in an airplane for example what does what is that would impede me from being recollected to turn within Myself and find its presence of God which is within me to adore Him, to thank Him and to spend a while with Him. We can do that when we are in our car. If you driving do not close your eyes. When it is possible it's good to close our eyes because obviously this cuts as a little bit away from this external world. And allow us to be more attentive to the One who is within us. This we could do when we are in line at the grocery store for example a few seconds maybe. I would say that we could do that also in our professional life. Let's suppose I am a dentist and I received a client every half an hour, obviously when I am doing my work of dentist, I should be attentive to what I'm doing and not close my eyes. I'm not supposed to enter into



contemplation at that moment but in between two clients when someone has left what stops me from taking three seconds to close my eyes and put my hand on my heart and just say: Lord I give you thanks for the good work that I just finished; I was capable to not hurt the client and I confine to you I entrust to you this coming client whom I shall receive not simply like a client but like a brother in Christ. It takes two seconds because here I was speaking but it's not really necessary to talk. It takes two seconds and I think I believe that little by little this can also change the manner in which we work, we work more and more with the Lord. We will become more and more attentive to the person in whom I am in contact with. And I believe that the grace of the Lord will end up helping us more and more for the rest of our life so let us ask of the Lord that he would give us this grace this gift that all while leave living our life in a normal way in a responsible way we are completely implicated and involved in everything we are doing. **That we learn from time to time to take a few moments a few seconds to become attentive to this presence in our heart which we don't feel often I repeat but which is present.** It's truly a question of faith. Little by little we will realize that it is not just an in imagination but it is a reality.

Also sometimes this form of prayer we can practice it longer times. For example when I am adoring the Eucharist the Sacrament, obviously I can look at the Holy Eucharist and contemplate Christ who is in front of me, but I can also be silent and I can close my eyes and **I can think about Christ who is within me, and I can thank Him for his presence, to adore Him, to entrust myself to Him.** Sometimes we can do this in a little bit longer time and it's a very beautiful form of prayer. To speak now of the same reality but to take another point of view it's good to take with you a sort of an image let's say a parable about all the paths that we could walk to find this presence of God in our hearts because I believe it is a path which is very important to the Christian Life. It's true often times our heart is wounded and hurt and we must obviously accept this reality.

I am going to tell you about a little bit of a story: let's take an image of a man who is in America and he's going to take a trip in Europe in the south of France. And he finds a village which is very beautiful. And there's a beautiful stone house with a large land around; it is a very old house. He falls in love with this place and he buys this house. Obviously he is going to remodel this house so it would be a lot more comfortable and on the land of this house there is a well. As we find often in France these wells with walls it of stone around them. But the problem he faces is that this well is completely clogged because it has not been in use for a very very long time. There's many rocks that have fallen inside, a lot of dead leaves, there are some branches of trees; it probably must have served also like a little garbage can for some people there are things that are not very clean within it. I would say this well of which we are speaking it's a little bit the symbol of our heart: our heart which is deep and this man tells himself surely there's water in the depths of this well. So courageously he puts himself to work: to dig inside the well. So in the beginning in his work was not very pleasurable: there was a lot of mud, a lot of little stones, a lot of leaves, but he persevered. And one day he finds the at the bottom of the well and there effectively there was water, there was a little source of water, water which is very clear and very pure. And he's so happy to be able to drink this water from the well which is by far better than the water of the faucet. So he discovered that source. I believe it's a little bit like this our Christian path: to be able to discover this source which is in the depths of our hearts. This means we need to be faithful to prayer, seek God within us and it's true that this work is not often easy because what are we going to find in our hearts? We don't find God immediately. There are some really heavy stones in our hearts, things that



are very heavy, sometimes hardness, or closeness within us. There are dead things within our hearts that live there; sometimes there are even things that are not very clean. But if we are faithful to seek God in the faith in the prayer little by little we also we will discover that beyond everything which could be negative or wounded we end up discovering that in the depths of our heart there is this little source, this living water which is source of peace and life; it's the Divine presence which inhabits in the depth of the soul of the human soul. And I would say we should really let the source come up , and we should believe in this presence of God within us and little by little this presence will be as if it is growing in our life and it will become the source of our existence. I would say there's something very consoling and what I'm trying to tell you up because it reminds us that what is most deep in the heart of man it is not our wound, it is not the evil we have, it is not our sin ,even if these are things that exist within us and we must recognize it but that which is most profound in the heart of man is the presence of God, it's a presence which is very pure.

Sometimes in the psychological domain there are some people who think, they think that the more that we descend and and come down in the heart of man the more we end up finding complexities, things that are negative and compulsion. I'm not trying to say these things don't exist; our psychological wounds are real but they are not the deepest of our heart. **The deepest is in our heart is the presence of God which is absolutely pure**, that which is most profound in the human being is the love that God has for us. It is love that allow us to live that gives us our existence and that love is absolutely pure and we can find it. We can be in contact with this very pure source. I am not trying to say this would resolve all our problems in one week. But if we are attentive to that presence and if we seek to be united to that source and to let it come up within us, for example by taking some moments of prayer like I said before, it is if we are letting the source come up within us and little by little it can purify us you see. Man is not purified simply by external exercises but also by allowing God to live within his heart. Lord I know that you live with in my heart, I believe that you are here, the source of life, source of peace, teach me to be able to live in communion with you. The source, this intimate source that I carry within my heart, that it may also be the source of all my activity, the source of all my decisions and my words and all of the actions I make. I think this is one of the most fundamental questions of the human existence that I take such and such decision, that I react in this, that manner that I make a choice to do this action, that I say these words but where do they come from? What is the source.

Unfortunately sometimes the source is our hurt and wounded psychology. I might make decisions because of fear or because of a desire within me which I am not in control of and I might say these words because I'm angry or maybe because I'm holding a certain grudge. So I believe that the work of the Holy Spirit in our life; that work is that little by little and it takes a lot of time. That that source of our decisions, the source of our words not be the wounded superficial part of us but our profound and deep part of us, the heart, our heart where God lives. And when our work and our decisions come forth from this deep source from this good which is within us, the presence of God which is within us united with our good will then our words become constructive, our decisions become good because they will be inspired by good, by the Spirit who dwells within us, by the presence of God within us even if this presence is not always felt in a sensitive way it is nevertheless that presence which is orienting and guiding our life more and more. And thats what tells us St. Paul: *it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me*. We don't feel this always you see, but I believe nevertheless but if we are faithful to this



path this way of which I am speaking; if we seek God in prayer and if we seek also this presence of God within us, little by little this would help us and it would help us to better and better to perceive the reality of His presence and to make it in a way it's from where God lives within us we will start to lead our life. Obviously this is a work that will never be ended during all of our life but I believe we could make progress little by little. If we welcome this beautiful mystery of the presence of God within our hearts if we become accustomed to make it habit - that every little bit of time to meet this presence as it is given to us in the possibility of our time not to be forced to do it either by moments of prayer that we will take for this purpose maybe during our day during the work of our day for a few seconds as I've said already. But nevertheless find this presence of God, it will really help us to make a good journey. We will see better and better what lives within our heart, the negative things that more deeply we will see also this positive presence, the presence which loves us. **This source which is gentle and peaceful which lives within my soul who is God who is living within us.**

So during this retreat in all the teachings that I've already given I have presented to you different paths different ways which could put us in the presence of God: His presence in nature, His presence in the humanity of Jesus, His presence in the Eucharist and His presence in our hearts. You see that we have so many means even in a very normal lifestyle. To have that many occasions during one single day to keep this contact with God which *eventually* will become more stable within us and more permanent little by little and it becomes source of joy and our freedom. I remind you more frequently than none it is insane we don't feel much but it is a reality and that reality can change little by little the way we are to make us more free and to walk more and more with the Lord.

There is the last point on which I would like to say a few words because I think it's very important also. I am not going to develop it very much because we do not have a lot of time for it but you see how can we be in contact with God through everything I just explained, but one must not forget there is also another way very important in which we could be in contact with God. **It is through our love for our neighbor.** Jesus said whoever welcomes a small child it is me who who me is welcome. He also tells us every single thing that you would have done to one of my little brothers it is to me that you have done it so every time that I practice charity and I love someone that I give him a certain service that accept as he or she has, that I smile at them, every time I practice forgiveness and mercy, every time I am patient towards someone who is a little bit difficult, **every time I practice the love of neighbor I am in contact with God.** A contact which is not felt but which is absolutely real, we can also find God in the other even if he is poor if he is wounded if he is a sinner, even if he has a thousand imperfections, even if he annoys me from the morning till the evening. If I welcome this person with goodness with a good intention I welcome the Lord Himself. When I care for someone sick when I help a person who is an older person, even in things which is very material very concrete and tangible I am in contact with God. There is no illusion to be made here. Some times we can have illusions in our prayers but in charity there is no illusion possible. We are certain in confidence that we touch God and that we are in contact with Him. I'm not going to develop this much more because we probably must stop before. But one must never separate charity from the other way, to never separate the love of God, the seeking of God from the love of the neighbor or the welcoming of the neighbor. The more I am close from the other my brother my sister, the more I am close to God. And the opposite is also true the more I am close to God the more I



am attentive to the other and the more I will become capable to love him even if sometimes that's not a very easy thing.

So let us truly walk on this journey, this path of prayer and of seeking God, to live in the presence of God and to keep the contact with the Lord in faith. And let us not forget how much charity is an essential means to be in contact with God. Let us give thanks to the Lord and let us ask Him to accompany us and to bless us and to allow us to find a deep joy in all these possibilities which are the means to find the presence of God. Amen.