CHAPTER – 9

PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL

In the active purification, the soul itself makes efforts with the help of divine grace to purify the senses and spiritual faculties for the purpose of attaining divine union. The full purification of the soul for the mystical union cannot happen without passive purification. St. Teresa of Avila says “O my God, how many troubles both interior and exterior must one suffer before entering the seventh mansion”.¹ The teaching of St. John of the Cross is the best, clear and explicit in this case. He says: “No matter how earnestly the beginner in all his actions and passions practises the mortification of self, he will never be able to do so entirely-far from it-until God accomplishes it in him passively by means of the purgation of this night”.² In the passive purification it is God who places the soul in the dark night. The soul does nothing in an active way but suffers all passively and patiently. It is the Holy Spirit with its gifts acts on the soul, purifies and illumines it. The soul is purified from egoism, sensuality, self-love, intellectual pride, immoderate desire for consolations and whatever that opposes the spirit of faith. The soul is completely and totally purified through the passive purification.

The two principal manifestations of this passive purification are the passive night of the senses and the passive night of the spirit. St. John of the Cross says that the sensory night is common and happens to many; however, the spiritual night is the lot of very few, of those who have been tried and proficient.³

1. Passive Night of the Senses

In the active purification the soul purifies itself from all affective attachment to creatures and starts to seek God, but becomes strongly attached to the sensible consolations and sweet delights in the practice of devotions. The soul needs a profound purification from these consolations but can never achieve it by its own efforts. Here God comes to purify or to liberate it in an unexpected manner. He withdraws from the soul all consolations, whether natural or supernatural, plunging it

¹ St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, 126.
³ St. John of the Cross, ‘The Dark Night ’, 1,8,1.
into deep dryness with regard to all that concerns Him. In the book The Dark Night St. John says: “God now leaves them in such darkness that they do not know which way to turn in their discursive imaginings, they cannot advance a step in meditation, as they used to, now that the interior sensory faculties are engulfed in this night. He leaves them in such dryness that they not only fail to receive satisfaction and pleasure from their spiritual exercises and works but also find these exercises distasteful and bitter.” God may act directly on the soul effecting this dryness or through painful events like sickness, death of someone dear, failures or unpleasant events. In this way the soul is weaned violently and painfully from all attachments to creatures and to self, so that it may be endowed with a new vision and seeks God alone in faith.

During this experience of the passive night of senses the soul should observe 1) complete and loving submission to the will of God 2) perseverance in prayer in spite of all dryness and aridity 3) remain in peace, quiet and contend simply with a loving gaze on God, without any desire for delight and consolations. The following are certain benefits produced in the soul by the passive night of the senses 1) self-knowledge 2) great respect to God than when enjoyed sensible consolation 3) more vivid picture concerning God’s grandeur 4) profound humility 5) love for neighbour 6) submission and obedience 7) purification of avarice, lust and spiritual gluttony 8) recollection in God with a fear of falling back 9) exercise of virtues 10) victory over the enemies of soul: world, flesh and devil and 11) enjoys the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

1.1 Passive Purification of the Senses in Mariam Thresia

According to His plan, God allowed Thresia to be purified in the furnace of His love. Only those, whom God wishes to elevate to the highest degree of union, undergo the strong purgation from God. God prepares each one by the purification in accordance with the degree He wishes to raise him/her also according to the person’s impurity or imperfections. Thresia from her childhood was very cautious never to offend God even by a venial sin. Hence her severe purifications were most probably to elevate her to the highest degree of union with God. Physical pains, illness, sufferings, mental trials and the poor conditions of the family were the loving kisses through which God purified her.
1.1.1 Physical illness

Physical illness is due to various reasons. It can be due to physical infirmity, psychic problem, emotional imbalance etc. Here we speak of physical infirmity caused in sound psychic persons. In illness one may experience powerlessness, weaknesses and limitations. It can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature; provoke a search for God and a return to Him.\(^8\) While St. Teresa of Avila speaks of trials she says: “The Lord is also in the habit of sending the most grievous infirmities. This is a much greater trial, especially, if the pains are severe, in some ways, when they are very acute. I think they are the greatest earthly trial that exists.”\(^9\)

From the very childhood Thresia was purified through various illnesses. In the autobiography she has mentioned four times about her sickness before she was twelve years old.\(^10\) In all the four cases, in one way or other, Thresia’s heroic trust in God or a virtuous act is revealed.

In the first case, when Thresia’s condition of health was getting worse (may be due to rigorous ascetical practices) her mother was worried and took her for an expensive treatment. However, the treatment made her condition worse and then Thresia instructed her mother saying: “Hasn’t God given me good health? Is it not because you opposed His will that I am sick again? Therefore let us place our trust in God.”\(^11\)

In the second case she was having a boil and swelling on her arm. Her brother and friends while playing a stone fell on her arm and because of severe pain she fainted. For their carelessness her father was about to spank them, then she said: “I won’t be relieved of my pain even if you punish them”. She requested him to forgive them.\(^12\)

In the third case Thresia was about to die because of asthma and high fever. The Physician too left her without hope. Suddenly she felt better and got up from the bed and said that she was not going to die and she praised God.\(^13\) In the last case she

\(^8\) CCC, 287.
\(^10\) Thresia’s mother expired when she was twelve. Her mother’s interference is mentioned in the last sickness referred.
was discerning God’s will through the parish priest for treating the ailment which she decided to suffer for the love of God.\textsuperscript{14} Child Thresia’s extraordinary faith in the direct intervention of God and her desire to suffer for the love of God is revealed in her sickness.

There are many references in the letters where Thresia was in great distress and excruciating pain due to the physical illnesses. The following are a few examples: “The boil in my abdomen seems to have three peaks. Pain is really unbearable. I do offer all these to God.”\textsuperscript{15}

“Last night my ailments have become worse than usual. Praise to God for it.”\textsuperscript{16}

“I feel worried that I am more sick than usual. Please pray to God that I suffer it with goodwill.”\textsuperscript{17}

“Father, I am not well. I don’t know what exactly to say if you ask me what my illness is. I feel a kind of burning sensation and uneasiness inside my stomach. Besides, there is pain in my stomach and on both sides. I need not tell you the rest. In spite of all these I do place my trust in God.”\textsuperscript{18}

“You know about my illness. A narrow abscess begins to appear on the boil. I need not tell you how painful it is. The entire waist is onion red. Thighs are badly swollen. I am sorry that I have to tell you this thing, to you brother. But what shall I do? My nature is to be indifferent to pain. But this has become like a spear in my dress. My brother, I want only the strength to suffer. Never had I an illness like this. Please pray for me! Let the will of God be done!”\textsuperscript{19}

There are many more instances where various types of illness are mentioned in the Letters and in the \textit{Diary} of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil. It is understood that her whole life was a mixture of interior and exterior suffering and pain. She was able to accept every bit of pain from God as His will and without a word of complaint. As she has

\textsuperscript{14} M. Thresia, ‘Autobiography’, 34.
\textsuperscript{16} M. Thresia, ‘Letters’, 64.
\textsuperscript{17} M. Thresia, ‘Letters’, 73.
\textsuperscript{18} M. Thresia, ‘Letters’, 79.
\textsuperscript{19} M. Thresia, ‘Letters’, 90.
mentioned in the Letter 48, her nature is to be indifferent to pain. She never desired for attention and sympathy. In the autobiography she wrote, “Whenever I got sick, I used to keep quiet about it and would keep on helping my mother in every possible way.”

Thresia’s spiritual father has recorded in the *Diary* the details of her sickness during the years of 1903 to 1918. This was a crucial period for Thresia. She was thoroughly purified both in senses and spirit. A few times she was at the point of death. She bore the pains with great patience and surrendered herself totally to the will of God. She objected to every type of treatment or medication. Thresia always smiled at the sufferings and never uttered a word of complaint. She had told her spiritual father that her treatment is ‘Akasa chikilsa’ (heavenly treatment). Many occasions she was healed miraculously through the interventions of Jesus, Blessed Virgin Mary, Infant Jesus, the Holy Family and Angels. In severe pain very often Mother Mary used to console her.

Physical illness helped Thresia grow in self-knowledge, perseverance in prayer, deep faith and trust in God and turn to God alone for consolations. Letter 22 provides us with an idea about her attitude in physical illness:

> I find it very hard to move about since the evil in me grows stronger. Hence at least now, please have mercy on me, and point out the faults in me and make me do necessary penances. Since my illness gets worse, I feel like complaining. I try to get rid of that temptation; but to no avail; there will always be pain. Please give permission to wear the coarse jacket and to use the pillow stuffed with gravel.

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21 In the manuscript and in the Malayalam text of the letter 14, we read “nobody was particularly worried about it and for this I am very happy”. In the English translation, *Writings of Mother Mariam Thresia* edited by A.Mathiaas Mundadan, “for this I am very happy” is missing.
22 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 133, 165.
24 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 175.
25 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 165, 166, 163.
26 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 100.
27 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 171.
29 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 163.
30 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 100.
1.1.2 Sufferings from Others

A soul has to be weaned violently and painfully from its attachments to creatures and to the self before it attains the final union with God. God allowed Thresia to be purified in the crucible of humiliations, misunderstandings and rejections from her near and dear ones and from the ecclesiastical authorities. This night of senses was necessary in her journey toward her Beloved.

1.1.2.1 Family Members

Until the age of twelve Thresia was well cared for and loved by her parents. At the age of twelve her devout mother expired. Then onwards she had to fight against the rough aspects of life. She filled the vacuum caused by the death of her mother by dedicating her soul and body to Blessed Virgin Mary. Thresia was greatly distressed because of the lack of peace among the other members of the family, especially due to the disturbance due to the brother who used to come home drunk. She had a hard time with making them live in peace. Her brothers and sisters showed disapproval and hatred towards Thresia and she was ridiculed for the unusual happenings in her life. This pain gets a mention in the letter: "The people, my father and the rest of my relatives find fault with me very much. I suffer these not with joy. How could I be happy over the life of my father and my brother? Oh my father, I have offered all my happiness to God."35

A misunderstanding from an aunt caused great distress and confusion to Thresia. She shared it with her spiritual father: “My aunt has sent me a letter in which she says I am pregnant. I cannot write the whole content”. However, for such a great insult she could praise God and pray for them: “Praise be to God! Lord have mercy on them. May they grow in grace more and more”. In the later years after founding the congregation too Thresia had to suffer insults from her drunken brother Ouseph. He used to halt at the convent gate at Kuzhikkattussery, on the way back home after drinking and shower abuses. Thresia took these humiliations with extraordinary courage and remained calm and serene.38

32 St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, 106. St.Teresa describes the trials that a soul has to endure before entering into union with God, taking the similitude of the silkworm. After being ‘dead to the world’, and ‘hidden in the greatness of God’, the silkworm emerges, ‘a little butterfly’, which is the state of a soul in union with God.
33 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 46.
34 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 46; Diary, 45.
38 Posito, ‘Summarium’, 93.
1.1.2.2 Friends and Neighbours

Thresia started to face ridicule and criticisms from people even from her childhood. Teaching catechism to small children under obedience to the parish priest was a cause for ridicule which she offered for the glory of God.\(^{39}\) The extraordinary happenings and the diabolic assaults became a theme of recurring mockery and mimicry for the people.\(^{40}\) A girl of marriageable age visiting homes and caring the patients even in the nights caused people to shower abuses and sarcastic remarks on her.\(^{41}\) However her attitude towards such criticisms was: “May be it is in God’s will that people must speak ill of me. I do resign myself to it totally.”\(^{42}\) No opposition could stop her from doing the will of God. Thresia had suffering from her companions too, who were with her from her childhood. When the congregation was founded they were accepted as postulants. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil makes a mention of that: “Two of her companions were of slightly disagreeable temperament and became unhappy easily and murmured against her. But Thresia was always careful to give them necessary counsel and humbly ask pardon to them for failures.”\(^{43}\)

1.1.2.3 Ecclesiastical Authorities

Thresia had to bear unbearable criticisms not only from lay people but even from priests, especially one who was once her parish priest, confessor and an admirer.\(^{44}\) Bishop John Menachery, the local ordinary, was also suspicious about her extraordinary experiences. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil, Thresia’s spiritual father, reported to him everything that was happening to Thresia.\(^{45}\) As Thresia found many obstacles to loving God in her own home, she requested her spiritual father to build a small house for her. When he informed the matter to the Bishop, he did not permit and asked him to wait for bigger signs from God.\(^{46}\) The Bishop tested her in the crucible of fire and purified her. Knowing about the continuous diabolic attacks on Thresia, he gave a written order for exorcism and asked to paste it in her room. Thresia accepted

\(^{40}\) Vithayathil, *Diary* 17,18.
\(^{41}\) Positio, ‘Summarium’,28
\(^{43}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 187.
\(^{44}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 130; *Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia*, 85.
\(^{45}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 5, 19.
\(^{46}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 28.
this humiliation with great joy.\(^{47}\) He also kept a ban on receiving Holy Communion daily\(^{48}\) and on having special food.\(^{49}\) Her spiritual father presents the event as follows:

His Excellency Bishop John Menachery knew through them (priests) that she was taking such food as coffee, milk and bread. At once the Bishop issued an order on 24 October 1905 to her spiritual father to forbid her to take any food except the ordinary food in her house. She complied readily and submitted to the ban quite happily. She was not actually taking coffee or milk. According to the order of the spiritual father, she was having only a piece of bread…. Though she tried to take gruel and rice after this ban in obedience to the command of the spiritual father, the stuff did not go down through her throat. However hard she tried to drink rice water it was vomited as soon as it reached her stomach. Thus she lived on simple water for a month. Her spiritual father informed the matter to the Bishop. His command was that the existing order was to be maintained, since he suspected that devils were at work in her.\(^{50}\)

In all these sufferings and humiliations Thresia set aside her own will to conform it even more to the sovereign will of God. It was like gold being refined in the crucible.

2. Passive Night of the Spirit

The passive night of the spirit happens as the soul enters into the prayer of passive contemplation. For any soul to reach the seventh mansion or the transforming union, the night of the spirit is indispensable. During the passive night of the senses, the soul is totally in aridity with regard to its sensible nature but it enjoys in spirit deep peace and is aware of being loved by God. In the night of the spirit, the purification which begins in the night of the senses is completed. God withdraws the awareness that it is loved by God, detaching and purifying the last consolation that it has been enjoying. By means of the terrifying trials of this night, the defects of the soul are uprooted. St. John says “the first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to the senses, but nothing can be compared to the second, for it is horrible and frightful to the spirit.”\(^{51}\) Only the most heroic souls who are to reach the height of sanctity enter

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\(^{47}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 169.
\(^{48}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 169.
\(^{49}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 130.
\(^{50}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 130; Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for All*, 77, 78.
\(^{51}\) St. John of the Cross, ‘The Dark Night’ 1.8.2.
upon this night. In this dark night of contemplation, the soul discovers its own ugliness, impurity and unworthiness. It gives a shock and throws the soul into darkness and despair. The soul feels that God is against it and that it is forsaken and condemned by all creatures. Another pain that inflicts and torments the soul is the inability to pray. At times it fails to do its usual, daily chores. “The soul is purified in this forge like gold in the crucible….God humbles the soul greatly in order to exalt it greatly afterwards.”52 The soul which passes through this night comes forth from all trials resplendent and beautiful, completely transformed in God, free from its weaknesses, imperfections and miseries.

2.1 Mariam Thresia in the Passive Purification of the Spirit

“The cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me, the cords of Sheol entangled me and the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I cried for help” (Ps. 18:4-6). When the soul enters into the passive purgation of spirit, it feels very vividly the shadow of death, the sorrows of hell, which is reflected in the feeling of God’s absence, of being chastised and rejected by Him and also in the feeling of being unworthy of Him.53 Thresia underwent great affliction both in body and in spirit especially during the crucial period from 1902 to 1909. This is expressed vividly in many of her letters. The *Diary* of Fr Vithayathil too provides detailed explanations of Thresia’s experience of great agony.

For the purpose of a better study Thresia’s spiritual purgation can be categorized into two sections; 1) deep affliction in the spirit feeling the absence of God and 2) fierce battle with demons which God allowed to test and confirm her virtues.

2.1.1 Absence of God

The most piteous and heavy affliction for the soul is the experience that God has abandoned it. The soul suffers harsh trials in its intellect, severe dryness and distress in its will and burdensome knowledge of its own miseries in its memory. In its substance the soul suffers abandonment, supreme poverty and dryness. It finds no

relief or consolation or even cannot raise its heart to God.\(^{54}\) God allowed Thresia to undergo these kinds of suffering and she tried her best to articulate her deep affliction to her spiritual father. Following are a few extracts from her letters:

“I feel that I am in great trouble. I am even afraid whether God has forsaken me. I begin to forget your advice too. I feel like being thrown into a deep abyss. I have many other forms of tribulations. No good thoughts come to me. Father, I don’t know. Father what a disaster has befallen me!”\(^{55}\)

“I don’t know to explain to you where exactly and how much I feel the pain. To put in one way, my pain is like a tempestuous sea. God willed it so for me.”\(^{56}\)

“I have the fear to ask with my tongue and pray with my mind because of my unworthiness.”\(^{57}\)

“Dear Father, although God sends me sufferings, I am not worried. The pain is terrible. Yet please don’t spare me the due punishment for my faults, thinking of my worries. I, a sinner, beg you, Father, that these afflictions are necessary for my illness and preparation for my death. My pain is really dreadful.”\(^{58}\)

“I feel always much pain and distress inside. Even though I would like to endure all the sufferings God gives me with goodwill, sometimes despair envelops me and I feel like complaining.”\(^{59}\)

“I find it very hard to move about since the evil in me grows stronger. Hence at least now please have mercy on me and point out the faults in me and make me practise necessary penances.”\(^{60}\)

St. John of the Cross says that some times the afflictions pierce the soul and it suddenly remembers its evils and becomes uncertain of any remedy.\(^{61}\)


In another letter she expresses her confusion and the fear of the fruitlessness of her life. May be in her confusion she was not able to experience the presence of God. She wrote: “Father, don’t feel any dislike because of me! This is a time of confusion. I feel confused. What shall I do, Father? I am swimming fruitlessly without reaching the shore. I don’t have the ability to convey to you adequately the depth of my confusion and conflicts—my predicament. I have much sorrow too. What shall I do then? How terrible! You yourself have to help me.”

In this night of the spirit the soul also feels forsaken and despised by creatures. Thresia expresses her desire to be forsaken by all the creatures. “I don’t care for worldly fame. I desire so much to enjoy the glory of heaven. I do pray earnestly that all the God’s creatures must hate me and forsake me.”

To reach union with God St. John of the Cross says: “The soul must first be set in emptiness and poverty of spirit and purged of every natural support, consolation and apprehension, earthly and heavenly.” In the same letter Thresia continues to speak of her emptiness. She discovers her own ugliness, impurity and unworthiness: “I do not find anything to be proud of in this world. For me, if it is miseries of sin, there is nobody like me among the children of God; of poverty, I am the poorest; of illness, manifold are my ailments. Can such people feel proud? God has given me all these because of the evil in me. I have no complaints whatsoever. Praise be to God!”

In the letter 45 Thresia expresses her inability to pray or do anything because she feels that her presence of mind is lost:

I couldn’t come to the church today owing to the sufferings God has given me. I don’t know, I feel like losing my sense. I feel bad that I won’t be able to answer if you ask some questions to me. Father, will I go mad? Nothing is clear to me. What is my condition now? How I look like? I walk around and do things without much sense. God alone knows what is going on in me.

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Once, Thresia complained to her spiritual father that she was unable to pray after Holy Communion, that even she forgot His presence.\(^{68}\) On another occasion she felt aridity in prayer which she overcame by the grace of God.\(^{69}\) Yet another time she felt God was silent and not speaking at all.\(^{70}\) Very often the evil spirit tormented her saying God had abandoned her.\(^{71}\)

### 2.1.2 Fierce Battles

The next category of the sufferings is caused by the devils. Both St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila have mentioned of the dreadful, terrible and fierce torments of the evil spirit on those who are in contemplative stage. The evil spirits attack the soul in three ways: temptation, obsession and possession. God permits the soul to be incited by evil spirit in order to give it an occasion for acquiring greater merits. Victory of the soul over the devil humiliates him and brings greater glory for God. This experience purifies the soul, fills it with deep humility, repentance and confidence in the grace of God. It helps the soul to be always vigilant and alert and to pray continuously.\(^{72}\)

The synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Forty nights He fasted and then He came face to face with the devil. He defeated the evil spirit with the word of God and came victorious to the public ministry. With great power He cast out evil spirits (Mk. 1:23-27) and said that Satan had no power over Him (Jn.14:30).

The evil spirit remains at the passage of the soul’s way from senses to the spirit, deceiving them and feeding their senses with sensible things. Certain souls thinking that there is not any loss in it remain at the threshold to watch what is happening outside the sensory part and fail to enter into the indwelling of the Lord. Very few souls like Thresia, who reached the high spiritual maturity, enter a sublime recollection in such a way that the devil cannot distract by his alluring. He struggles to make the soul advert to them at least through horrors, fears or bodily pains, or exterior

\(^{68}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 144.
\(^{69}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 161.
\(^{70}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 165.
\(^{71}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 12.
\(^{72}\) Royo and Aumann, *Theology of Christian Perfection*, 239.
sounds and noises and thereby draws the soul out and diverts it from the interior spirit.\textsuperscript{73} St. John of the Cross adds: “If permission is given them they can do this very easily, for since the soul at this time enters into great nakedness of spirit for the sake of these spiritual exercises, the devil can easily show the spirit to the soul, because he is also spirit”.\textsuperscript{74} The devil sees every high thing (Job.41: 25). It is far more worth for the devil to hinder those souls which are in glorious delight than to tempt other less perfect souls to fall into numerous serious sins, for these others have nothing to lose compared to the souls which are growing into perfection. “The loss of a little pure gold is much worse than the lose of many other base metals”.\textsuperscript{75}

In the case of Thresia, she could conquer her sensory area and enter into the inner spiritual level, so that the devil could not disturb her in the sensory level. Hence as in the case of Job (Job.1,2.) the devils got permission from the Lord to torment her in a variety of ways. Devils concentrated their power on Thresia through temptation and obsession than by possession. Obsession usually occurs in the souls that are far advanced in virtue. In the obsession, devils act upon all the exterior and interior senses of the soul in a series of unusually violent and persistent temptations. Upon the sense of sight, by appearing sometimes under repulsive forms to frighten the souls and thus turn them away from the practice of virtues; upon the sense of hearing, by causing blasphemous or obscene words like ‘God has abandoned you’ to be heard; upon the sense of touch by blows and wounds or by embraces to tempt them to sin; upon the sense of smell by causing tempting by pleasant odours or an unbearable stench; upon the sense of taste by arousing feelings of gluttony or by mixing repulsive objects with the food so that it is impossible to swallow or digest. In the diabolic possession devils invade and manipulate the body by residing within the body and operate it and treat it as their own property. Ordinarily possession occurs only in sinners and precisely as a punishment for sin.\textsuperscript{76} Thresia had to face terrible temptations against faith, hope, charity and strong suggestions against purity accompanied by phantasy in the imaginations. Thresia herself has recorded the intensity of the torture in the autobiography:

\textsuperscript{74} St. John of the Cross, ‘Spiritual Canticle’, 16, 6.
\textsuperscript{75} St. John of the Cross, ‘Spiritual Canticle’, 16.2.
\textsuperscript{76} Aumann, Spiritual Theology, 404.408-410; Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life, 718-721.
The devils tortured me very much. They knocked down things from my hands and threw stones at me on the road. They even cut off my hand and put it aside. With the help of Blessed Mother, it was reattached and the wound was healed. They even threw me down from the top of the roof; but Blessed Mother helped me to get up. They would bind my hands and legs tightly with rope, beat me all over my body, smash me with their fists, rub my eyes with chilly powder, and abuse me while saying prayers, snatch away the rosary, throw rubbish into the food and show me things against chastity. This troubled my mind very badly.77

In certain letters Thresia shared with her spiritual father the torture she underwent because of the horrible attack of the demons.

“The devils torment me by using my body. Doesn’t God know when a person is being used like this? I wonder why he allows this! God knows,”78

“The devil is playing every possible trick…I am not at all sorry for it.”79

“I felt as though the devil was ill-treating my whole body. If he were to do like this how could I remain without worries and pain.”80

There are many witnesses who have testified to the diabolic attacks Thresia underwent and the way she resisted them. Sr. Yohanna chf says “I often observed that the food she was going to put into her mouth was tossed away by some invisible power. Very often we heard her groaning and cries due to the great torments she suffered.”81 “Once she was driven to the rafters and was being drawn from the other side, when she fell quite unconscious”.82

Fr. Vithayathil’s Diary provides a detailed description of Thresia’s terrible experiences due to diabolic torments which she narrated to him and he himself witnessed. The devils asked the Lord for permission to try to subdue Thresia by

81 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 115.
82 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 182.
melting her in the furnace of suffering for three years. With the Lord’s permission she was tested against faith, hope and chastity. The devils came in large numbers to attack her. Each time the number was increasing from four hundred to seven hundred, to three thousand, to six thousand and finally the number reached up to ten thousand. It is a logical conclusion that the increase in the number of devils indicates their relative weakness and at the same time increase in Thresia’s spiritual power and energy. Any soul which is attacked in this manner cannot be freed by itself. St. John of the Cross says: “It is not in a person’s power to be freed of these until the Lord sends His angel, as is said in the Psalm, to the persons that fear Him and thus delivers them (Ps.33:8) and until He brings peace and tranquillity, both in the sensory and spiritual part of the soul.” Aumann says that beside the suffering soul, there will be Mother Mary and the guardian angel, whose power is greater than that of the devil, to help the soul. Whenever Thresia was severely tormented, she was freed from them by the assistance of Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Family, and the angels or by the prayer of exorcism done by Fr. Vithayathil. Very often Mother Mary was consoling and strengthening her. A few times St. Teresa of Avila too had come to console Thresia.

Whenever Thresia got a little relief from their torments, she would do severe penance. In the midst of cruel attacks, Thresia says: “You can do these things only to my body, you however, cannot do anything to my soul.” Once when Thresia was frightened of the devil’s harassment, Jesus told her that only if she persevered in the sufferings she would be able to see Him and that if the sufferings were taken away she would never see Him, and that she should suffer all these for the conversion of sinners. Devils tried their utmost to make her desperate by creating in her disgust and unpleasantness towards her normal acts of penance. The daily beating, punching,
stabbing and throwing went on continuously. So the pain in her whole body became intense. All these temptations and torments Thresia suffered with courage and thus she won over the devils.\(^{97}\)

### 2.1.2.1 Thresia to Mariam Thresia.

In the book of Genesis we read about Jacob wrestling with a man: When Jacob was left alone he had an experience of wrestling with a man the whole night and when the man saw that Jacob had prevailed he touched the hollow of his thigh and put it out of its joint. Jacob felt that the man was a divine person and he asked for his blessing. Then he blessed Jacob and told him that he will again be called ‘Israel’ because he fought with God and man and prevailed (Gen. 32:22-29).

Thresia had a similar experience of the change of her name after successful battles with the devils. Fr. Vithayathil has narrated this incident in detail in his *Diary* and in the *Biography of Rev. Mariam Thresia*. There are references to it in her writings too.

God permitted the devils to test Thresia for three years. One day Mother Mary informed Fr. Vithayathil through the voice of Thresia while she was in a trance: “The period allowed to the devils by God to test her will terminate on 23 January 1905. After that I wish her to live in this world only for a short time. In the meantime many things are to take place through her.”\(^{98}\) However, Bishop John Menachery, who was waiting for concrete signs to believe that Thresia’s experiences were of heavenly origin, requested Fr. Vithayathil to get the duration of the diabolic test reduced to 8 December 1904.\(^{99}\) Accepting the request of the Bishop, Mother Mary told Fr. Vithayathil: “As regards your request yesterday, the period has been shortened to 8 December. But during the last three days there will be continuous torments. That time the devils will not leave even if they are ordered to do so. So you must come and comfort her for a long a time. On those days the Holy Eucharist should be exposed for public adoration, and you must ask others to pray. After these days she must be named Mariam Thresia (Thresia of Mary).”\(^{100}\) In one of the letters Thresia has

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\(^{97}\) Vithayathil, *Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia*, 34, 36.

\(^{98}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 45.

\(^{99}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 58.

\(^{100}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 59.
referred to these three days of sufferings: “It is the will of God that the Father be here
most of the time today. If you are not free for it please come and console me at 2
o’clock and 5 o’clock. You can imagine what would be the intensity of my suffering
for these three days.”

In keeping with this prediction Thresia went through severe torments during
those three days. Then the spiritual father had gone to her home to give her necessary
counsel and help to hope in God and gain courage. Amidst the terrible mental and
physical torments she could take only a little cold water and a little gruel. Her interior
sufferings were more intense than the exterior ones. While she suffered she invoked
the name of Jesus and repeated the ejaculation, ‘Sweet Heart of Jesus, help me to love
you more and more. Immaculate Heart of Mary be my refuge’. On 8 December
evening at 8 o’clock, she became motionless like a corpse for an hour. When she was
able to talk she called the spiritual father and told him secretly that the devil had said:
“We are defeated and you have won”. And Thresia replied to this: “It is not I who
won, but Jesus”. When the spiritual father asked the devils how many they were in
number, they said they were ten thousand in all and that all except seven were
returning. Then Mother Mary informed the spiritual father that her sufferings had
ended and that in thanksgiving to God she had to be called ‘Mariam Thresia’ and that
acts of love and gratitude should be offered.

After this experience Thresia addressed a few letters in her new name, Thresia
of Mariam. In the letter 50 which she wrote from Carmel Convent, Ollur, she has
mentioned that the Bishop called her by the new name. During the religious
profession the Bishop gave her the same name Mariam Thresia officially as a sign of
entrusting to her a new mission and becoming a new person like Simon who was
changed into Peter (Jn.1:42) and Saul to Paul (Acts 13:9).

The insistence of the devils on tormenting the souls again and again is one of
the best proofs that the soul has not succumbed to the temptations. Every fight of the

102 Vithayathil, Diary, 72; Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 42,43.
103 Thresia addressed herself in three of her letters nos; 20, 32, 35 as Thresia of Mariam before she
made her religious commitment. Among that one letter was sent for her cousin brothers, in which
she wrote Thresia of Mariam, Daughter of Mankydian Thoma.
devil repulsed is a source of new merit before God and greater strength for the soul. After the period of permission to attack Thresia for three years was over, the devils persistently asked God to let him inflict again bodily torments on her saying that they would win over her. God gave permission for nine days and then for seven more days to oppress her body tempting against chastity; and then for one month to tempt her against the theological virtues of faith, hope, charity and other virtues like humility, all at the same time. Each time they tormented her with all their might. However, Thresia was gloriously victorious by the grace of God.

2.1.2.2 Authority over Evil Spirits

Jesus exercised great power on Satan; “With authority He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him” (Mk.1:27). In St. John’s gospel Jesus says; “He has no power over me” (Jn.14:30). St. John of the Cross explains the strength of a perfect soul: “The devils not only fear to attack her (a soul), but they do not even venture to appear before her. For they become greatly frightened upon seeing her so exalted, courageous, and bold with the perfect virtues in the bed of her beloved. When she is united with him in transformation, they fear her as much as they do Him, and they have not even the courage to look at her. The devil has an extraordinary fear of the perfect soul.” Though the devils with all their might tried to subdue Thresia by repeatedly getting permission from God, there isn’t any record that she ever yielded to their temptations. In fact she got the power to drive them away. Once she saw devils in the church and ordered them to leave the church. Then they asked her back: “Who gave you the authority to drive us away” and came to attack her. But Thresia fearlessly commanded them and sent them out. Thresia has recorded in the autobiography too, how she courageously acted on them: “Whenever I went to help the sick, the devil used to abuse me and threaten me with a club. Without any fear I would remain there and continue to help them. I have seen the fight of the devils at the time of the death (of others): then I would pray to Blessed Mother so that the dying could overcome the despair and die a peaceful death.

104 Aumann, Spiritual Theology, 161.
105 Vithayathil, Diary, 162.
106 Vithayathil, Diary, 172.
107 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev.Mother Mariam Thresia, 44.
109 Vithayathil, Diary, 155,156.
The severe tortures against the virtues of faith, hope, charity, chastity and humility left Thresia’s intellect in darkness, will in aridity, memory in emptiness and affections in affliction and anguish. Her expressions in the letters are a proof for this. Her spiritual father has recorded that with great patience she won all the trials.\textsuperscript{111} By these trials Thresia truly humbled herself in preparation for her coming exaltation.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{111} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 172, 190.
\textsuperscript{112} St. John of the Cross, ‘The Dark Night’, I,14,4.