CHAPTER – 10

MYSTICAL UNION - TRANSFORMING UNION
/ SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

The mystical union, the culmination of the mystical journey is the deep habitual union with God. The life of prayer becomes the very breathing of the soul even in the midst of one’s occupations and duties. At this stage the experience of God within the soul is almost continual. The soul gets a deep insight into the matters of God. Here the soul is characterised by deep joy, profound humility, desire to serve God, and apostolic fruitfulness. The soul’s sufferings become a sharing in the redeeming suffering of Christ rather than the suffering of purification.¹

When a soul is thoroughly prepared by frequent mystical experiences, through trials and sufferings accompanied by mystical phenomena, God unites Himself with the soul perpetually in spiritual marriage. Only the souls which remain faithful to the very end of the law of love, to the purifications and sufferings can attain this very high union with God. St. John of the Cross writes in Spiritual Canticle: “It must be known that many souls attain to the first cellars and enter therein, each according to the perfection of love which he possesses, but only few in this life attain to this last and innermost perfection, for in this they come to pass through that perfect union with God which they call the spiritual marriage”.²

Transforming union and spiritual marriage denote the same spiritual state with a slight difference. Transforming union connotes only essential elements where as spiritual marriage includes essential as well as accidental mystical phenomena.³ In the mystical union the soul’s intellect, will, internal senses and external senses are united in a permanent way.⁴ St. Teresa of Avila compares this union with rain falling from heaven into a river where it is impossible to separate the rain water from the river water.⁵ This comparison explains how this union between God and soul remains indissoluble.

¹ Royo & Aumann, Theology of Christian Perfection, 221.
³ Panakal, Intimacy with God, 141.
⁴ Panakal, Intimacy with God, 142.
⁵ St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, 214.
The experience of mystical union with God is so secret and it is ineffable. Only a very few souls like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila are given the grace to write a treatise on this experience. Thresia’s life experiences and her writings show that she had the experience of the mystical union. We shall attempt to prove this by studying the characteristic elements special to this state as seen in Thresia’s life and the effects produced in her as the result of this union.

1. Habitual Consciousness of the Presence of God

At this stage, the soul gets not only an intellectual knowledge of the indwelling presence of God but an experiential knowledge that God is present in the innermost recesses of its being (Jn. 14:23). This is experienced by an intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity. According to St. Teresa of Avila, the Most Holy Trinity reveals itself in all three persons. First of all the spirit becomes enkindled and is illumined, as it were by a cloud of the greatest brightness. It sees these three persons individually and yet, by a wonderful kind of knowledge which is given to it. The soul realises most certainly and truly that all these three persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone. She has great confidence that God will not leave her, and that having granted her this favour, He will not allow her to lose it. The soul is always aware that it is experiencing this companionship. St. John of the Cross says: “The Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul by divinely illumining the intellect with the wisdom of the Son, delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and by absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the divine embrace of the Father’s sweetness.”

1.1 Mariam Thresia - Christ Centred

Jesus has promised that “If any one loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:23). In the letter to the Romans St. Paul says: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5). Hence a soul which experiences the presence of Jesus by His own word and the Father and the Holy Spirit also come and dwell in its heart. “It is the triune God that dwells in us, the Father who loves us as His children, the Son who deals with us as His brother and the

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7 St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 209-211.
Holy Spirit who gives us both gifts and Himself.”9 Thresia’s life was centred on the Son God, the suffering Christ as her devout mother imprinted in her heart the picture of Jesus who suffered and died on the cross for saving all from their sins.

From a very tender age Thresia had deep awareness of the presence of God. At the age of three and a half she was curious to know who are the Father, the Son and the Spirit.10 The Son of God who died on the cross captured her heart and so she started to meditate on His sufferings for long hours in the nights with arms outstretched or kneeling on the floor studded with gravel.11 “In Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts.17:28). Certain remarks made by child Thresia to her pious mother confirm her deep consciousness of the presence of God in her being and of the doctrine of God’s omnipresence and omnipotence. For example, once noticing that Thresia was awake in the night to pray, the mother asked her to sleep by her side and not to stay awake in the night. For this Thresia’s response was: “You ask me to sleep, does our God ever sleep?”12 Without having a deep intellectual knowledge of the indwelling presence of God, a child of three or four years can never get up in the nights to meditate on the sufferings of Christ and the sorrows of Blessed Mother Mary, recite full rosary with arms out-stretched, fast on every Saturday of the year, and four days a week in the Lent season and observe abstinence.13 To imitate Christ carrying the cross, she carried a stone on her back and crawled on all fours meditating on Jesus carrying the cross to Calvary.14 In the later years Jesus gave her a share of His sufferings, His five wounds in her body as a great gift for the intense love she had for Him. She could proclaim with St. Paul “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal.6:17). How she shared in the sufferings of Jesus is explained later. For Thresia the presence of God was not simply a presence of power, but a concrete and spiritual reality, a principle of life destined to expand all the powers and faculties of the soul.15

1.2 Self Surrender – to the God Indwelling

In the spiritual marriage there is a “total transformation in the beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain

9 Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life, 220.
10 Chacko, Mother Mariam Thresia, 9.
14 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev.Mother Mariam Thresia, 16.
15 Ceresi, Quest for Holiness, New York: (Society of St. Paul Staten, 1963),110.
consummation of the union of love.” 16 Child Thresia who dedicated herself to God at three and a half years old, grew deeper in His love day by day, and at the age of nine she took the vow of perpetual virginity and chose Jesus as her spiritual bridegroom. 17 At the age of twelve when Thresia’s beloved mother left this world leaving her in deep sorrow, she dedicated her soul and body to the Blessed Virgin Mary. 18

“Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8) Thresia led a life of self-denial and detachment because of the intense love for the indwelling Lord. She disliked marriage, worldly enjoyments, special clothes, ornaments and all other embellishments. 19 This ardent love for Him impelled her to search for a life of solitude in her teens. However, when she realised that it was not the will of her Beloved, she took a challenging decision to stay at home committed to prayer and service of the people. 20

“Gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable to God, in the furnace of humiliation” (Sir. 2:5). The awareness of the power of the God indwelling, gave Thresia courage and perseverance in the midst of severe trials and humiliations. Her desire for total surrender through the religious vows was fulfilled only at the age of thirty eight, after under going severe torments of active and passive purifications. 21

From the life experience Thresia could exhort her followers about the importance of being in the presence of God. Thresia has repeatedly reminded them to have the awareness of God’s presence. A few extracts are:

“You must do everything with permission except having the awareness of the presence of God.” 22

“Instead of roaming around like pigs, you should try to be in the presence of God.” 23

17 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 16.
18 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 46.
19 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 16.
21 Vithayathil, Diary, 186.
“You must recall the presence of God as you put flour to the steam cake.”24

“Try to live always in the presence of God.”25

Thresia’s last surrender was the most inspiring. The mystical union with the Lord indwelling gave her extraordinary courage and patience in the awesome pain of departure. Before the excruciating pain of death Thresia remained serene and fully resigned to God and even consoled her daughters and people around.26

1.3 Isn’t God God!

Thresia had a unique experience of God’s omnipotence. The soul’s centre is God. When the soul reaches God in its deepest centre, it will enjoy God with all its might.27 The soul which enjoys the union with God will know the grandeur of His attributes such as, omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, mercy, etc.28

Thresia was given the infused knowledge about the attributes of God from her childhood. Little Thresia has expressed her sadness when she was not given a chance to speak about the goodness of God.29 Realising the greatness of and having deep faith in Jesus present in the Holy Communion, she manifested extraordinary eagerness to receive the Sacrament.30 Thresia’s parents very often stood in astonishment seeing the child’s unusual faith and trust in God. They were ready to acknowledge their lack of courage, patience and faith compared to what Thresia had.31 At the age of six Thresia had the intuitive knowledge about sin and she said that God Himself had taught this to her.32 Thresia’s deep faith and knowledge about God’s omnipotence is very beautifully articulated in the letters. Her expressions like ‘Isn’t God God?’, ‘God is God’, ‘God knows’, etc are very unique. While she was undergoing severe tortures, she exclaimed: “Doesn’t God know when a person is being used like this? I wonder why He allows this! God knows!”33

In a heart-piercing sadness due to a misunderstanding, she could experience the powerful intervention of God. She wrote: “When I think of God’s intervention in this, I feel joy too; Isn’t God God?” She was given the intuitive knowledge to know the power of God which made her joyful in the midst of deep sorrow.

Thresia exhibits marvellous courage to advise her spiritual father in a letter, reminding him of the greatness of God: “I trust that God is God.” She also exhorted him to get rid of all the worries saying: “Our God is our hope.”

Thresia’s infinite faith in the reward of God and in His promises is articulated in many letters. For example: “If God is God, He will reward you aptly for your trouble.” “Nobody knows how great is the reward that God gives to those who help the destitute.” “God will grant eternal reward to those who convert a sinner and bring him to the right path.”

2. Confirmation in Grace

St. John of the Cross is of the opinion that a soul when it enters into the final stage of the spiritual journey is filled with the grace that it cannot commit a mortal sin. He writes: “And thus I think that this state never occurs without the soul’s being confirmed in grace, for the faith of both (God and soul) is confirmed when God’s faith in the soul is here confirmed. It is accordingly the highest state attainable in this life.” However, St. Teresa of Avila warns that as long as one is in this world, one must walk with caution, lest one may offend God. This state of the soul is considered as extrinsic impeccability, which means that the soul is given special grace and assistance from God to avoid all mortal sins. This was the privilege of Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles after the experience of the Pentecost and this is the special privilege granted to those who enter into the union with God.
Thresia from her childhood was very cautious never to offend God even by a venial sin. We shall try to see the efforts taken by Thresia to remain always in the state of grace.

2.1 Sense of Sin

A soul in grace is the temple of the Holy Trinity. The grace elevates us to the status of the children of God and heirs to heaven (Rom.8:16, 17). When a soul is united to God, it is filled with grace and continuously in the sphere of the divine. Regarding Thresia, from her childhood she was in company with God. The moment she came to know who the Father Son and Spirit are, she was in communion with the Holy Trinity. Her dedication to God at the tender age of three and a half is a proof for it. The great affliction she experienced in her spirit from her childhood to the cause of loving God as mentioned in the autobiography, manifests her desire to get united to God. Sin is an offence against God and a rupture of communion with Him. Not to rupture her communion with God might be the reason that she was very eager to make confession at an early age of five. In the autobiography she has recorded the efforts she made to make confession before the customary age and finally succeeded at the age of six. Even in that tender age she knew what sin was. Then onwards she was very cautious never to offend God even by a venial sin. In two letters (L.3; L.39) she has shared her temptation against chastity with her spiritual father and asked for his help (most probably for making confession). In the Diary Fr. Vithayathil has recorded that for any venial sin or aridity or lukewarmness in prayer she expressed her desire to confess everyday or as early as possible.

2.2 Holy Communion – Shower of Grace.

“Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit, preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at baptism.” As in the case of confession, Thresia had great desire to receive Holy Communion before the customary age. From the age of nine onwards she started to knock at different doors. Finally a Carmelite priest allowed her to receive Holy Communion.
Communion at the age of ten, when the age of receiving Holy Communion for girls was twelve at that time. More than physical food, Thresia considered Holy Communion as the food for her body and soul. “Although she ardently desired to receive Holy Communion often, she had permission to receive only once a month first, twice a month afterwards, and gradually once a week. Still she received spiritual communion many times a day.” While she was undergoing diabolic assaults, the devils used to play all sorts of tricks on her not to receive Holy Communion. Somehow with great difficulty she managed to go to church and receive Holy Communion whenever allowed. Once, owing to paralysis on the leg, she took more than one hour to reach the church, although there was only a distance of five minutes walk. There were occasions when she was unable to go for Holy Mass; the angels gave her Holy Communion in her room. Jesus with the angels came to her room and gave her Holy Communion. Her spiritual father wrote: “The longing to receive Holy Communion was burning in Thresia’s heart always.”

From the experiences mentioned above we can very easily conclude that Thresia from her childhood was filled with divine grace. She was tested and tempted through trials and diabolic assaults. By the grace of God she could gloriously win over all the temptations. This proves her confirmation in grace.

3. **Substantial touch of God**

In the full union of the soul with God, St John of the Cross speaks of a wound of love caused by the spirit of God in the deepest centre of the soul. According to him this is the highest degree of experience possible in this state of union.

It will happen that while the soul is inflamed with the love of God, it will feel that a seraphim is assailing it by means of an arrow or dart which is all afire with love. And the seraphim pierces and cauterizes this soul which, like a red hot coal or better a flame is already enkindled … And

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50 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 93.
51 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 167.
52 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 35.
53 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 57, 74.
54 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 118.
being wounded by this fiery dart, the soul feels the wound with unsurpassable delight … Seraphim truly inflicts a sore and wounds inwardly in the spirit. Thus, if God sometimes permits an effect to extend to the bodily senses in the fashion in which it existed interiorly, the wound and sore appears outwardly, as happened when the seraphim wounded St. Francis. When the soul is wounded with love by the five wounds, the effect extends to the body and these wounds are impressed on the body and it is wounded, just as the soul is wounded with love. God usually does not bestow a favour upon the body without bestowing it first and principally upon the soul … This so happens because these souls are purified and established in God and that which is a cause of pain and torment to their corruptible flesh is sweet and delectable to their strong and healthy spirit. It is then a wonderful experience to feel the pain augment with the delight.\footnote{St. John of the Cross, ‘The Living Flame of Love’, 2, 8,9,13.}

St. Teresa of Avila explains a similar experience in Life that the angel cherubim with a golden spear with a point of fire at the end, pierced her heart several times so that it penetrated to her entrails and she felt that he was drawing them out. She was completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made her utter several moans. She says that due to the sweetness that caused by this intense pain one can never wish to lose it, nor will one’s soul be content with less than God. For her it was not a bodily pain but spiritual though the body has a great share in it.\footnote{St. Teresa of Avila, The Life of St. Teresa of Avila, 192,193.}

Thresia was given the great gift of this touch of love in various forms in the deepest centre of the soul and in the body. She received the gift of transverberation, the five wounds of Jesus and the experience of crucifixion.

### 3.1 Piercing of Heart

God gave Thresia the experience of His substantial touch as explained by St. John. First she experienced in the spirit. From 1903 onwards Thresia was very often having severe pain in the chest. At times she felt that she was dying because of the pain. Mother Mary informed that it is the sign of God’s love and a preparation for...
receiving the wounds of Jesus.\(^{58}\) On 1905 September 6, Jesus offered Holy Mass in Thresia’s room and an angel gave her Holy Communion. Then Jesus asked the angel to pierce her side with a spear. She felt that much blood oozed out and she experienced intense pain.\(^{59}\) Though it is mentioned that much blood came, there was no mention of her dress being soaked in blood. It would have been an internal wound.

Once more she had the experience of the internal wound. On 10 February 1906 Jesus appeared before Thresia bearing a heavy cross and in great suffering. When she started to cry thinking that it was due to her sins that Jesus was carrying the cross, Jesus revealed to her that it was due to the sins and cruelties of the people of the world. Then Thresia said that she would carry the cross. Jesus told her: “Then you bear this and lessen my burden”. At once she felt that her heart was splitting into two and she experienced much pain and fear.\(^{60}\)

Thresia had the experience of transverberation extended to the body. The body is wounded just as the soul is wounded by love. Fr. Vithayathil has narrated it as follows:

While sitting alone in her room behind closed doors she again saw Jesus bending under the weight of the heavy cross in a more pitiable way. She then cried aloud and said: “Enough O’ Lord enough, I do not want to see this sight, I shall bear the cross. All I need is your help. So saying she wept bitterly… Soon an angel came and thrust a spear into her left side. She felt that the spear had pierced her heart and reached the right side of the chest. Consequently there was profuse bleeding and she became unconscious. Her jacket got wet with blood. Her body was drenched in perspiration.\(^{61}\)

The piercing of the heart of Thresia occurred repeatedly five times in all. The following is another account which is similar to St Teresa of Avila’s experience, highlighting her love of God.

\(^{58}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 16, 20, 29,36.

\(^{59}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 122.

\(^{60}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 141, 142.

\(^{61}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 142.
On Wednesday 14 February 1906 at daybreak an angel came and thrust a spear into her heart. When he drew it out, the point was fiery in colour and it carried a piece of flesh. Thresia felt intense pain and perturbed ... Later the Lord was asked (by her spiritual father) about the meaning of all this. “It is a symbol of the love of God”, answered the Lord (through her). “If she remains constant, she will be pierced twice more.”\textsuperscript{62}

3.2 The Wounds of Jesus

“Let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal.6:17). St. Paul had great compassion for the sufferings of Christ, so he desired to have the wounds of Jesus in his body. If God permits, the wound of love caused in the soul extend to the bodily senses and appear outwardly. “Few persons have reached these heights. Some have, however, especially those whose virtue and spirit were to be diffused among their children. For God accords to founders, with respect to the first fruits of the spirit, wealth and value commensurate with the greater or lesser following they will have in their doctrine and spirituality.”\textsuperscript{63} Thresia was the one among those who was chosen to reach these heights. Truly God was preparing Thresia from her childhood to be the foundress of a new congregation with a challenging charisma of which the church could think only forty years after her death.

Thresia was given the wounds of Jesus in the body in a visible form. In 1905, at the age of 28, Thresia had for the first time the experience of the wounds of Jesus. One Friday, at sunset, a man came to Thresia’s spiritual father and called him to her house saying that she was seriously ill. When he [Fr. Vithayathil] reached her house, he found that she was suffering from severe heart pain. Her hands and legs were frozen. Sometime later she fell into a trance. Blessed Mary spoke to him through her, “Don’t be afraid at this sight. These are the stigmata the Lord is giving her. It will begin in the afternoon every Friday and continue till midnight. This will happen during the time of Lent also.” Thereafter this phenomenon began at 3.00 pm every Friday and ended at night. Sometimes drops of blood could be seen outside the heart and in the palms.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 143; Nedungatt, \textit{Crucified with Christ for all}, 69.
\textsuperscript{63} St. John of the Cross, ‘The Living Flame of Love’, 2,12.
\textsuperscript{64} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary},84,85.; Nedungatt, \textit{Crucified with Christ for all}, 70.
In 1909 all the five wounds of Jesus were given to Thresia in a visible form. Fr. Vithayathil has the following description:

On Wednesday 27 January 1909 at the time of meditation after midnight Jesus gave her his five wounds in a visible way. The wounds appeared on both sides of the hands and legs and in the side of the body. The hands and legs looked as if nailed, and the side as if pierced with a spear. One of the nails from the hands fell down, and she showed it to her spiritual father. The nails on the legs remained firm there. Sometimes blood oozed out from these wounds and at other times only traces of blood were seen.\(^{65}\)

There were many people who witnessed Thresia’s stigmata, though she wanted to hide them from others. Mother Josephine, the third Superior General of the congregation of the Holy Family wrote in her testimony, “I could not see her palms and feet because the tunic she wore was long. She held her fingers closed. Once, however, I saw the wounds on both the palms inside and outside, they were like healed wounds.”\(^{66}\) Most probably to hide her wounds she never allowed anyone to apply medicine on her body taking off her clothes.\(^{67}\) She also told her Sisters not to wash her body after her death.\(^{68}\)

3.3 Identified with the Crucified Jesus

St. Teresa of Avila reminds her Sisters that in the state of union God grant so many favours to the souls not for the pleasure of the souls. She said: “For His mighty hand can do nothing greater for us than grant us a life which is in imitation of that lived by His beloved Son. I feel certain, therefore, that these favours are given us to strengthen our weakness, as I have sometimes said here, so that we may be able to imitate Him in His great suffering.”\(^{69}\) She also added that all those who walked closest to Christ had to bear the greatest trials. For example, Mother Mary and the Apostles. The most important thing to do is to fix ones eyes on the crucified Lord. One really becomes spiritual when he/she becomes the slave of God and is branded

\(^{65}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 174; Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for all*, 70.
\(^{66}\) Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for all*, 72.
\(^{67}\) Vithayathil, *Diary*, 174.
\(^{68}\) Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for all*, 71.
with His sign of the cross and in return that he/she gives Him his/her freedom.\textsuperscript{70} St Paul in his intense desire to be united with Christ, said to Galatians “I have been crucified with Christ; It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal.2:20).

Thresia had many times the vision of Jesus carrying the cross. Then she would tell Jesus “Lord, I shall bear the cross you are carrying, give it to me.” For this Jesus replied to her “You bear this and lessen my burden.”\textsuperscript{71} On another occasion seeing Jesus bend with the weight of the cross, Thresia cried aloud telling: “Enough Lord, enough, I don’t want to see this sight, I shall bear it. Your help will suffice if I have it.”\textsuperscript{72} Lord pleased with her ardent desire to share in His sufferings, gave her the great gift of sharing in His sufferings on the cross.

In 1905, on Good Friday after her great success over the three years of diabolic assaults, for the first time she had the experience of the crucifixion. This was foretold by Blessed Mother to her spiritual father who has narrated it:

One day, in the afternoon of Good Friday, the pain in Thresia’s body and heart increased. Her hands and legs were paralysed and she lay still and appeared as if nearing death. At 3 o’clock her breathing stopped and she became motionless like a dead body. It was found that the nerves of her hands were being drawn inward and the two palms were fixed to the ground and the fingers were drawn inwards. The spiritual father was present there at that time. Though the hands were pulled, they could not even be moved. After being thus for one hour, she could move her hands and legs and talk.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1906 Lent season she underwent the same experience:

From the first day of Lent, Thresia’s sufferings and afflictions increased. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from noon the pain all over the body increased and the nerves tightened. She was being transformed into Jesus’ crucified bride. When it was 3 pm her two hands were fixed to the wall and her two legs were frozen and had a bend-inward shape. When

\textsuperscript{70} St. Teresa of Avila, \textit{Interior Castle}, 229.
\textsuperscript{71} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, , 141.
\textsuperscript{72} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 142; Vithayathil, \textit{Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia}, 66.
\textsuperscript{73} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 98, 99; Vithayathil, \textit{Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia}, 63.
this time comes her companions were sent out and the doors closed. From that time till sunset, she bore all these great pains without any help from others…. On occasions when there was much flurry, an angel used to come and fan her. While she was hanging in this condition the devils used to come to insult and abuse her. They used to ask such things as, ‘Where is your God? If you obey us, we shall give you relief’.74

In the same year on November 23, Friday at 3 o’clock she had the experience of being placed a crown of thorns on her head. “Two angels came with the crown, placed it on her head and hit it down with a stick. Then much blood flowed out of her head. Her eyes were closed and filled with blood. Because of the intensity of the pain she became unconscious for a while. At that time Our Lady came and supported her head.”75

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil, her spiritual father was witness to most of Thresia’s sufferings. He has narrated the intensity of her sufferings:

The sufferings given to this fortunate virgin on Fridays were given after three years not only on Fridays, but also on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. On most of the days from 12 noon to 6 pm and from 10 pm till dawn she was found lying as though her hands and legs were fixed with nails, sometimes pressed to the floor and on two days a week hung on the wall and the beam. The blood which flowed out of her head, body and especially from her heart drenched the floor. The blood flowing down her face and through her ears dried and clotted there and while she was unable to move in this condition ants would come and bite her eyes. Thresia endured these sufferings with great patience.76

In one of her letters Thresia has described the severity of the suffering she was undergoing. It sounds like that she endured the pain while she was going through the crucifixion experience. “Today’s sufferings seem to be very severe. I feel like nails piercing my joints, and the inside of my head being heavily pulled down. No way I can stand up, lie or sit down. Let it be according to the holy will of God.”77

74 Vithayathil, Diary, 150,151; Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 67,68.
75 Vithayathil, Diary, 168; Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 70.
76 Vithayathil, Diary, 173; Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 70,71.
77 M. Thresia, ‘Letters’76.
Thresia was given one by one the sufferings endured by the Lord. “Some times she felt being scourged, a crown of thorns being thrust on the head, being slapped on the face, falling on the ground with the cross, being pulled with a rope tied round the waist, shedding blood and being nailed to the cross and a spearhead being thrust into the side. Her spiritual father has seen these directly.”

Thresia endured all the sufferings with joy meditating on the sufferings of the Lord. She sometimes requested to extend the time of this suffering. When she got little relief from the pain, she used to say “I don’t want any relief, let Jesus be comforted.” Whenever Jesus asked her whether she could carry His cross, she always expressed her readiness to carry it with the help of God. Thresia felt great delight in sharing these sufferings of the Lord. She used to pray that her physical illness may be cured that she can share in the sufferings of the Lord. Even after the foundation of the Congregation of Holy Family, Thresia had the experience of the crucifixion on Fridays and on special occasions. Blood came out of her palms and the side of her body. Her spiritual father has recorded that a time without suffering was very rare in her life. Her life progressed as an offering of continuous sacrificial suffering.

4. Heroic Practice of Virtues

The soul grows in virtues as it enters into deeper prayer experience. In the spiritual marriage the virtues deepen, blossom, and stabilize and one practises them in the daily life in a heroic way. St. Teresa of Avila remarks “You must not build upon foundation of prayer and contemplation alone, for unless you strive after the virtues and practise them, you will never grow to be more than dwarfs.” In the seventh mansions of the Interior Castle the Saint has very strongly explained the purpose of the spiritual marriage:

Oh, my Sisters, how little one should think about resting, and how little one should care about honours, and how far one ought to be from wishing to be esteemed in the very least if the Lord makes His special abode in the soul. For if the soul is much with Him, as it is right it should be, it will

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79 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 177.
80 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 89.
81 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 157.
82 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 141.
83 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 176.
84 Vithayathil, *Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia*, 73.
very seldom think of itself; its whole thought will be concentrated upon finding ways to please Him and upon showing Him how it loves Him. This, my daughters, is the aim of prayer: this is the purpose of the spiritual marriage, of which are born good works and good works alone.\textsuperscript{86}

St. John of the Cross speaks of the perfection of the virtues as a soul journeys towards the union. He is of the opinion that in this life virtues are enjoyed as flower and only in the next life it will be enjoyed as fruit.\textsuperscript{87} In the state of union all the virtues are suddenly and clearly revealed in their perfection. It is the work of both God and the soul. “The beloved Himself helps her, for without His favour and help the soul would not be able to gather these virtues and offer them to Him.”\textsuperscript{88} He also adds that the exercise of virtues is strengthened and fortified through aridity, trials and interior darkness.\textsuperscript{89}

We have already seen that Thresia from her childhood was very fervent in practising all the virtues in a heroic way. As she was purified thoroughly through active and passive purgation, and severe trials and temptations, her virtues were more illumined and confirmed, and grew into more perfection. We shall discuss here how Thresia lived the theological and human virtues in a heroic way.

\textbf{4.1 Theological Virtues}

Theological virtues are faith, hope and charity which are infused into us by God for participation in the divine nature. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. They help the souls to act as the children of God and merit the eternal life.\textsuperscript{90}

From the experiences mentioned before, one can conclude that Thresia had lived the virtues, faith, hope and charity, in a heroic way from her childhood.

In the active night of the senses, the heroic practice of these virtues was already discussed focusing on her writings. At present we shall explore how the practices of theological virtues are illumined through the severe trials and temptations.

\textsuperscript{86} St. Teresa of Avila, \textit{Interior Castle}, 228.
\textsuperscript{87} St. John of the Cross, ‘The Spiritual Canticle’, 16, 7.
\textsuperscript{88} St. John of the Cross, ‘The Spiritual Canticle’, 16,8.
\textsuperscript{89} St. John of the Cross, ‘The Dark Night’, 1,1,1.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{CCC}, 343.
First God permitted the devils to test and torment Thresia for three years against faith, hope and chastity. Since Thresia was not yielding to any of their tricks or abuses, they sought permission from God to torment her more intensely.\textsuperscript{91} For a period of time she was tested in an unseen way against her faith in God by way of giving aridity in prayer. She could succeed with the help of God.\textsuperscript{92} As she was progressing in receiving the gifts of God, the devils were jealous and again asked permission to torment her physically and tempt her against faith, hope and charity simultaneously for a month. Because of the intensity of the torments she started to speak like mad people unconsciously but with the help of God she could win over them.\textsuperscript{93}

On another occasion the devils complained that God didn’t allow them to torment her physically and therefore they couldn’t defeat her in respect of faith and hope in God. However, God obliged their complaint allowed them to tempt her in this regard three hours per day for fifteen days. They persecuted her beating and kicking with big stones. Her whole body was swollen and she had unbearable pain. With extraordinary patience she won over them.\textsuperscript{94} After founding the congregation too she was tested against faith and hope. She successfully fought and won all the temptations and tests.\textsuperscript{95}

Devils put various obstacles against Thresia in her enterprise to help the sinners and the sick.\textsuperscript{96} Ignoring them and fighting against them she continued her service. Thresia wrote in the autobiography too: “Without any fear I would remain there and continue to help them.”\textsuperscript{97} Fr. Vithayathil has recorded that Mother Mary promised that on such occasions she would not be attacked again by the devils.\textsuperscript{98}

To lose her faith and hope in God and in her spiritual father, the devils used to tell her: “God has abandoned you; don’t trust in your spiritual father; God has given you into our hands; if you abandon God we will give you peace and joy and riches etc.”\textsuperscript{99}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[91]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 34,35.}
\footnotetext[92]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 161.}
\footnotetext[93]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 172.}
\footnotetext[94]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 177, 178.}
\footnotetext[95]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 188.}
\footnotetext[96]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 50, 51, 92, 93, 95 etc.}
\footnotetext[97]{M.Thresia, ‘Autobiography’, 36.}
\footnotetext[98]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 60.}
\footnotetext[99]{Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 7, 8, 114.}
\end{footnotes}
Once, when Thresia started feeling hopelessness, Mother Mary asked her spiritual father to accuse and scold her and tell her that all that she endured would be a waste if she became hopeless.\textsuperscript{100} During severe temptations against hope, sometimes the Holy Family,\textsuperscript{101} and twice St. Teresa of Avila,\textsuperscript{102} came to console and strengthen her.

The devils went on getting permission from God to torture and defeat Thresia in one way or other. However, Thresia fought against these malicious spirits continuously along with her physical ailments and sufferings given by God to hold on to Him.\textsuperscript{103} She was incessantly burnt in the furnace of suffering. Yet never did a word of complaint come from her.\textsuperscript{104} Instead, she was asking the Lord for a share in His sufferings so that she could be of a little consolation to the Lord in His pain and desired that no soul should be lost because of her negligence.\textsuperscript{105}

Thresia’s intense love of God exhibited in the practice of the heroic virtues of faith and dauntless hope in God gave her an extraordinary courage and perseverance in her ventures.

4.2 Human Virtues

“Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, and habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct according to reason and faith.”\textsuperscript{106} If theological virtues are infused, these virtues are acquired by human efforts. Thresia practised all the virtues in a heroic way. Here the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance and obedience are discussed. Thresia’s humility and detachment were discussed earlier.

4.2.1 Prudence

It is the virtue that disposes practical reasons to discern true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it.\textsuperscript{107} The autobiographical notes and the letters of Thresia give a clear picture of an exceptionally prudent person. To take right decisions and to seek the will of God she got help from the parish priest

\textsuperscript{100} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 118.
\textsuperscript{101} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 12, 30 etc.
\textsuperscript{102} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 30, 31.
\textsuperscript{103} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 115, 116.
\textsuperscript{104} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 160.
\textsuperscript{105} Vithayathil, \textit{Diary}, 111.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{CCC}, 341.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{CCC}, 341
or from her spiritual father. Child Thresia who desired to suffer the physical pains for the love of God, went to the parish priest to ask for his counsel for taking a massage for a swelling caused by her brother’s hit. Another instance recorded in the autobiography that reveals her prudence was the way she discerned the vocation. Though she wanted to lead a life of solitude or join in a convent, but when found that it was not possible, she accepted happily the will of God made known to her through the parish priest.

We get evidence from the letters for Thresia’s prudent behaviour. In visiting her spiritual father she maintained a prudent reserve about not giving scandal to the people. In letter 29 she wrote: “When you are ill, I shouldn’t come and enquire often as I wish. Even though I want to prepare a concoction and send it to you, I am afraid of the reaction of the people.”

Her penances seem to be excessive; however, she did everything according to the direction of her spiritual father so that no imprudence should come from her decisions. In letter 22 she was asking permission for doing severe penance: “Please give me permission to wear the coarse jacket and to use the pillow stuffed with gravel.” When the Lord prepared food for her in her room and asked her to take it, she was very prudent to ask the consent of the spiritual father to have it so that she might not be deceived by the devils. In visiting the sick and needy she always sought the guidance of the spiritual father. The family apostolate which she initiated needed great act of prudence. A witness wrote about her prudence: “Though the Servant of God was not educated at all, she manifested great prudence in her actions. Against the social background then prevailing, the Servant of God understood that the family apostolate was a great need of the time. This proved to be a prudent decision which brought a change in the tradition. The Servant of God could give people counsels appropriate to their needs though she was not educated.” Fr. Antony Anthikkat has stated that: “The Servant of God was prudent to a high degree.”

114 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 83.
115 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 228. Fr. Antony was a convener of the Trichur Diocesan Historical commission for the cause of Mother Mariam Thresia.
4.2.2 Justice

It is the “moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their
due to God and neighbour.”\textsuperscript{116} Considering Thresia’s justice to God and neighbour,
she seems to be perfect. The first sentence in the autobiography expresses the intense
desire in her to do justice towards God. From the tender age till her death she had only
one desire, namely to fulfil the will of her Bridegroom.\textsuperscript{117} She exhorted the followers:
“My children in order to become good, first offer your heart to the Lord. Then pray
hard that the Lord may give you His heart. See! I have given my Lord my whole heart.
I don’t need anything in the world but the Lord.”\textsuperscript{118} As she prayed “Let all my
pulsations be a prayer of love for you”\textsuperscript{119} she gave herself totally to the Lord. She
suffered every minute for the Lord.\textsuperscript{120} She paid her due to the Lord by offering herself
as a holocaust to Him.

The other side of the justice consists in the overflow of love and service to the
people. Justice is commonly understood with reference to ones dealings with other
people. Thresia had a fine sense of equity in her dealings with others and gratitude to
her benefactors.\textsuperscript{121} Her love for others and service mindedness is visible even from
her childhood. She taught children junior to her who were poor in studies, shared food
with others, helped in the household works.\textsuperscript{122} Her respect towards workers was
highly appreciated. In one of her letters she reminds the spiritual father of giving
wage for the man who carried her letter to him.\textsuperscript{123} Several witnesses have testified to
the special consideration Thresia had for the domestic servants. “I had an opportunity
to observe the dealings of the Servant of God with the workers of the convent. She
was considerate and cordial to them. They had great respect for her and expressed it in
their conversations.”\textsuperscript{124} Another witness says: “She was careful to treat the servants
with consideration. They were given the wages of the time. Besides she tried to please
them by giving them food and showing consideration.”\textsuperscript{125} Besides, Thresia had
special concern towards the outcastes, poor and needy.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{116} CCC, 342.
\textsuperscript{120} Vithayathil., \textit{Diary}, 188.
\textsuperscript{121} Nedungatt, \textit{Crucified with Christ for all}, 183.
\textsuperscript{122} M. Thresia, ‘Autobiography’, 34.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Poitio}, ‘Summarium’, 53.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Poitio}, ‘Summarium’, 70.
\textsuperscript{126} M. Thresia, \textit{Diary}, 94, 152, 180.
4.2.3 Temperance

Temperance in general is understood as the virtue that moderates our inclination to sense pleasure and keeps it within the limits of reason illumined by faith.”127 Thresia from her childhood led an austere life. She never gave way to sensual pleasures or enjoyment. In the autobiography she has written in detail how she controlled all the appetites. From the age of five onwards she used to fast, abstain from meat, add bitter herbs in curry, kneel on pebbles, lay on stone etc.128 Her spiritual father has recorded about her food habits: “Even from the childhood she used to take only rice and gruel, willingly giving up meat, ghee, milk and bread which give strength to the body.”129 After founding the congregation, being the Superior General of the community, she followed the same pattern of food habits. Many Sisters have testified that she never ate tasty food. “She always renounced tasty food. She used to add bitter herbs to her food. She used to observe all the fasts and abstinence of the Church.”130

Concerning the physical enjoyments, she took the vow of chastity at the age of nine.131 From the very childhood she loved chastity more than any other virtue.132 To preserve this virtue she practised strict modesty in her dress and in her general behaviour. On 12 March 1905 she joined the Carmelite Third Order and received the veil. Then onwards she always wore the veil.133 She disliked costly clothes, ornaments and other embellishments.134 She preferred prayer, meditation, and reading good books to playing, sleeping or other entertainments.135 In the severe tests and temptations against chastity she was always on the winning side.136 Several witnesses have praised the simplicity and modesty of Thresia. “Modesty in behaviour was another outstanding feature of Thresia.”137 “She was never showy in her dress or in her dealings.”138

127 Nedungatt, Crucified with Christ for All, 184.
129 Vithayathil, ‘Diary, 130.’
130 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 123.
131 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 16.
132 Vithayathil, Diary, 162.
133 Vithayathil, Diary, 90.
134 Vithayathil, Biography of Rev. Mother Mariam Thresia, 16.
136 Vithayathil, Diary, 131.
137 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 32.
4.2.4 Fortitude

“It is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.” The trials and temptations that Thresia won over, the physical and mental sufferings she endured, various obstacles she overcame to live an austere life etc. testify to her high degree of fortitude.

Child Thresia’s extraordinary patience and forgiving attitude marvelled her father when she requested him not to beat her brothers: “I won’t be relieved of my pain even if you punish them.” Fortitude enables a person to conquer fear and face trials and persecution. When child Thresia objected to the expensive treatment and asked to keep trust in God, her mother appreciated her courage. Extraordinary courage and inner strength to face trials and temptations were heroically manifested all through her life. The continuous battles she fought against the infernal powers and her final victory are evidence of her constancy, fortitude and endurance.

Thresia had to undergo various illnesses one after another. It is very visible from her letters that she could endure those pain and difficulties as the will of God without any complaints. Letter 9 is a good example for it: “God’s holy will. Crosses are manifold. I feel sorry about my weaknesses. Let the cross of our Lord be with me!” She feels joy when she sees the intervention of God in her teething troubles. As a reward for her heroic endurance and fortitude in the sufferings, Lord willed to share the pain of his cross with her.

Thresia manifested extraordinary will-power to execute everything that came from God. The courage she exhibited to correct and also to give advice to her spiritual father is surprising. In a letter she wrote: “The wealth of the priests will not be good for their families.” In the same letter she also expressed her desire that his prayer and doing penance in the nights be increased. In founding the new Congregation and

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139  CCC, 342.
141  CCC, 342.
145  Vithayathil, Diary, 111, 141, 176.
initiating the new apostolate, Thresia exhibited marvellous courage. For the good of the Congregation, she could even stand up to Fr. Vithayathil on certain matters of administration. Sr. Yohanna testifies:

When our original house at Puthenchira was about to be dismantled under the direction of Fr. Vithayathil, the Servant of God went and boldly requested him not to do it, while nobody else would dare say anything to him. The same opinion was boldly expressed by the Servant of God when the school at Puthenchira was to be closed down. In both the cases Fr. Vithayathil yielded to her.\textsuperscript{147}

Patience is included in fortitude. The patience of Thresia under her trials and temptations was heroic and superhuman. Fr. Vithayathil has certified that she suffered everything very patiently.\textsuperscript{148} “All the physical torments she suffered patiently according to the will of God.”\textsuperscript{149}

Thresia had great desire to live a life of solitude from the age of fifteen. She waited patiently in a heroic manner brushing aside all the criticisms and misunderstandings till she was thirty eight when her wish was granted. Her undying hope is expressed in a letter: “Father, please continue to pray for what we have been praying for, without being fed up. God will grant it soon.”\textsuperscript{150} “Perseverance coupled with unruffled hope sustained all through her life with extraordinary fortitude that can be qualified as heroic.”\textsuperscript{151}

4.2.5 Obedience

And Mary said “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; Let it be to me according to your word” (Lk.1:38). With the same spirit of Mother Mary, her true daughter Thresia entered into union with the Lord by surrendering her will totally to the will of the Lord in a super heroic way. Her conformity to the will of God as expressed in the autobiography and letters has been already discussed earlier in the chapter Active Night of the Soul.

\textsuperscript{147} Positio, ‘Summarium’, 123.
\textsuperscript{148} Vithayathil, Diary, 173, 174.
\textsuperscript{149} Vithayathil, Diary, 178.
\textsuperscript{150} M. Thresia, ‘Letters’, 68.
\textsuperscript{151} Nedungatt, Crucified with Christ for All, 188.
True obedience can come from intense love. Jesus for the love of the Father “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil.2:8). The passionate love for God impelled Thresia to dedicate herself to God at the age of three and a half. Since then she had been doing only the will of God. As in the life of Job (Job. 1,2), devils with all their might tried their best to turn her away from God. They tried to tempt her through internal disturbances and distractions, physical torments and frightening, and in various other ways. They tempted her against faith, hope, charity, chastity and humility on various occasions. They could never defeat her. Whenever Jesus asked her if she was ready to carry His cross, she would gladly accept any type of suffering without any reserve.

Fr. Vithayathil has recorded an incident in the Diary where once Thresia’s obedience was tested. Thresia, as penance, tied a chain of thorn on her waist. Due to this tightly tormenting instrument, her waist got infected and pus and worms were oozing out. While she was suffering acute pain due to this, an angel appeared to her and told her to apply powdered salt in the wound. With the permission of the spiritual father, she was about to apply it. Suddenly the angel appeared and prevented her saying that it was a test for her obedience. God tested her obedience and patience giving His sufferings continuously for fifteen days. Without any complaint she bore the difficulties and acute pain in body and soul, meditating on the passion of the Lord and accepting these crosses as a great gift.

Thresia’s obedience to the Bishop was very edifying and heroic. Bishop John Menachery had doubts regarding Thresia’s extraordinary experiences. Because of illness Thresia was taking only bread and sugared water, with the knowledge of her spiritual father. On 24 October 1905 the Bishop sent an order through the spiritual father, forbidding Thresia from taking anything other than the ordinary food stuffs taken by others in the houses. Thresia submitted to the order with great joy. However, she could not eat the ordinary rice and gruel and so for a month she had nothing other than water. When this was informed to the Bishop, he ordered again that she continue to follow the same order. Thresia accepted with great joy the orders that the Bishop had sent for pasting the order of exorcism near her bed and the ban on receiving daily Holy Communion, saying ‘this is my privileged gift.’

152 Vithayathil, Diary, 166, 167.
153 Vithayathil, Diary, 177.
154 Vithayathil, Diary, 130.
155 Vithayathil, Diary, 169.
The Bishop ordered Thresia as a trial to go and stay in a convent at Ollur. Though it caused her great grief,\(^{156}\) she submitted to it very willingly as an obedient child. A witness testifies that her obedience was heroic because “it was an ordeal for her and still she submitted with joy.”\(^{157}\) After founding the Congregation, many raised criticism against Thresia, the Mother superior. Hearing this, the Bishop ordered Thresia not to step to Thrissur.\(^{158}\) Sr Isabella CHF has recorded: “Though she felt great pain at the order, she did not show it externally.”\(^{159}\) Sr Yohanna adds: “In spite of the difficulties she had to endure from the Bishop, she never uttered a word against him.”\(^{160}\) Fr. Antony Anthikkat remarked that the command given by the Bishop was very painful, and her obedience to it heroic.\(^{161}\)

Thresia had unwavering faith and confidence in her spiritual father, Fr Joseph Vithayathil. She accepted him as a God given gift and obeyed him wholeheartedly. It is clear from certain expressions we read in her letters:

“I trust in your word”\(^ {162}\), “I am ready to obey what you tell me”\(^ {163}\), “I pray that you let me know what to do about it”\(^ {164}\), “Tell me what I should do in this regard.”\(^ {165}\)

About obedience Thresia exhorted her Sisters: “You must make the promise that whatever you have to suffer for the sake of obedience you will.”\(^ {166}\) “You should ask permission even for small matters. It is a great virtue to thank and praise God even when you don’t get it and rejoice when it is denied.\(^ {167}\)

St. Benedict says that a perfect soul accepts the will of God ardently.\(^ {168}\) Thresia obeyed and accepted the will of God like a perfect soul with the great joy of being able to imitate the Lord in His sufferings.

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157 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 34.
158 Trissur is the place where the Bishop’s house is situated. In the same town Thresia started a boarding house for the Sister’s higher education. Thresia used to visit them. CHF Charitrathilude 56.
159 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 422.
161 Nedungatt, Crucified with Christ for All, 196.
168 Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life, 240.
5. Effects of Spiritual Marriage

St. Teresa of Avila describes the marvellous effects produced in the soul which enters into the last stage of the spiritual journey, the union with God or the spiritual marriage. She has explained it in detail in the third chapter of the seventh mansions.\(^\text{169}\)

Let us discuss how these effects are present in the life of Mariam Thresia.

### 5.1 Self-forgetfulness

With the experience of the spiritual marriage, the soul gets fully detached from everything created, and even from its own self. It brings about a self-forgetfulness which is so complete, that it really seems as though the soul no longer existed. It has neither knowledge nor remembrance that there is either heaven or life. It is entirely absorbed in seeking the glory of God, and for this it would gladly lay down its life.

Thresia was entirely absorbed in seeking the glory of God. The first sentence in the autobiography is sufficient to prove her self-forgetfulness. Her soul suffered an intense agony with the desire to love God. Her continuous striving to give consolation to the Lord who suffered on the cross for her through her penance and prayers, makes her forget her own self, bodily comforts and worldly enjoyments. In her teens she wished to lead a solitary life, leaving her dear and near ones and to be alone with the Lord in the wood hills. Thresia never cared for her health, name and honour. She said: “I don’t care for worldly fame. I desire so much to enjoy the glory of heaven.”\(^\text{170}\)

While she was burnt in the crucible of suffering through the dark nights, she repeatedly uttered “With your help I am ready to carry the cross. Let you be consoled.”\(^\text{171}\)

After the foundation of the congregation she gave herself totally for the affairs of the convent, religious life of the Sisters and for the service of the poor and needy. Till the end of life, Thresia, forgetting her own self, lived as a continual sacrifice of suffering.\(^\text{172}\)

### 5.2 Great Desire to Suffer

The soul will have a great desire, yet a peaceful desire to suffer for God in perfect conformity with everything that He wills. It rejoices in persecution and

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171 Vithayathil, *Diary*, 141, 142.
experiences a great inner joy and feels a particular love for those who make it suffer. If the persecutors are in any affliction the soul would deeply grieve and would do all in its power to relieve them. On the other hand, the soul has lost all those indiscreet fervours which it formerly felt for corporeal penance. It prefers to wait for sufferings coming from the hand of God rather than to seek for them.

The moment child Thresia came to the knowledge of Jesus, the God who suffered and died on the cross for the salvation of the humanity, her sole desire was to suffer with Him and reduce His pain. Hence she gladly took up the sufferings. Her attitude towards suffering was: “Right now if this be God’s will, I accept it joyfully and with great satisfaction. I do believe that God will not ask us to suffer anything beyond our capacity.” She would say very strongly: “I haven’t made any complaint consciously regarding my pain.” Towards those who gave her sufferings, her attitude was: “May be it is God’s will that people must speak ill of me. I do resign myself to it totally.” Though the Bishop misunderstood her and ill treated her, and ordered her not to step to Thrissur, when he became ill she hurried to get his last blessings. Though there were many who criticised her, she never had any ill feeling towards anybody. She always accepted criticisms with joy, equanimity and patience. Irrespective of caste and creed, she gave all possible spiritual and material help to all, accepting any suffering for their betterment.

5.3 Great Desire to Serve God

Formerly the soul had a desire to die and become one with God. But now it desires to serve Him and to help any soul that it can. It desires to live many more years and to suffer the most severe trials, if in this way it can be a means whereby God is praised even in the smallest thing. The soul desires in some way to help the crucified, especially when it sees how often people offend Him and how few there are who really care for His honour and are detached from everything else.

176 CHF. Charithrathilude, 56; Positio, ‘Summarium’, 506.
177 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 506.
178 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 227; Vithayathil, Diary, 100, 175.
Thresia manifested great eagerness to help others. Neglecting the ridicules she taught catechism to small children, shared her food with poor children, helped in the household works etc. At a time when grown up girls did not step into the homes of other people, she in the company of other friends visited the sick and the poor, prepared the dying for a happy death. In two of her letters to the spiritual father, she requested him to exhort people to turn away from their evil ways. She gave herself totally to the saving of souls for her Beloved. Her heroic charitable works are explained in detail in Part III.

5.4 Detachment from Everything Created

The desire of the soul is no longer for consolations or favours, for, it has with it the Lord Himself indwelling in it. As a result it has a marked detachment from everything and a desire to be alone or busy with something that is to some soul’s advantage.

Thresia remained detached from everything in the world in a superhuman way. She practised detachment with regard to her food, dress, decorations, enjoyments, comforts, even her aspirations for seeking always His will. She considered as madness to worry about worldly affairs. She was fully detached from wealth. She said: “Even if we hoard money, at the end we will have to renounce everything and go.” She even remained detached from spiritual consolations. In letter 33 she wrote: “What I feel is that however great is my suffering I should not send for you.”

5.5 Enjoys Profound Peace and Tranquillity

The soul enjoys almost always deep tranquillity. There is no aridity or interior trials, but only a constant recollection in God and a tender love for Him. It has no fear that this peace may be caused by the devil, because it has unwavering certitude that it comes from God. This experience takes place in the very centre of the soul into which the devil cannot enter. It will have no lack of crosses, but these do not unsettle it or deprive it of its peace. The certainty about the presence of God which it has within makes it forget everything.

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“I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16: 33). From the age of three and a half onwards Thresia experienced the indwelling presence of God. The awareness of this presence grew stronger as she grew up. Various tribulations also affected her adversely in a terrible way. But her faith in the Lord who overcame the world was so deep and heroic that she could win all the trials and sufferings. The severity of the torments and trials did not put her spirit down; instead she praised God or offered them to Him without any complaint or worry. The peaceful state of mind is evident in a few letters: “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.” 184 “Pain is unbearable. I do offer all these to God.” 185 “My illness is really worse. I am not worried about it.” 186 In another letter she expresses her great confidence in God: “God will grant me strength, Father, I have patience.” 187 Though there wasn’t a moment that Thresia had not suffered, she has expressed in a letter that she has no grief at all: “Like any other day, I have joy, joy, great joy. I have no grief at all. Everything is fine. Let it be according to God’s will. I have no sorrow whatever. Everything is just good.” 188 Any amount of trials, crosses or sufferings could never shake her from the deep union she had in the interior of her heart. She manifested profound peace and tranquillity in all her deeds. Fr. Anselm testifies: “Thresia faced all the adverse situations calmly and with resignation.” 189 Another witness opined: “She was never found to be elated or depressed. She was well composed in all situations.” 190

5.6 Absence of Ecstasies

In this state the soul has no ecstasies or raptures accompanied by the suspension of the senses. There are no transports or flights of the spirit. In case they seldom occur, they never happen in public. The fear has been taken away from the soul and it is greatly strengthened by the Lord. In spite of all these endowments, the soul never grows proud; instead it becomes humble and virtuous.

189 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 207.
190 Positio, ‘Summarium’, 165.
The first mention made of Thresia’s ecstasy is found in the Diary of Fr. Vithayathil, kept in 1904. At that time she was twenty eight years old. The period from 1902 to 1909 was a crucial one in Thresia’s life. Most of the trials, temptations, dark nights of the senses and spirit, sharing in the sufferings of Christ etc. happened during this period. After this Fr. Vithayathil has mentioned only a few such phenomena in his Diary. There were experiences of stigmata, sharing in the crucifixion of Jesus and diabolic assaults witnessed by Thresia’s followers even after the foundation of the Congregation. However, most of the experiences that she had after the crucial period did not happen in public. During that period she was more involved in the mission entrusted to her by God. St. Teresa of Avila confesses that she doesn’t know the reasons for having or not having these sorts of phenomena. She says: “Perhaps the reason is that the Lord has so greatly strengthened and dilated and equipped the soul, or it may be that, for reasons which His Majesty alone knows, He was anxious to make a public revelation of His secret dealings with such souls, for His judgements surpass all that we can imagine here on earth.”

191 St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, 224.