

May 3, Easter 5A, (1 Peter 2:2–10; John 14:1–14)

The soul is not a tiny gem or a needle in a haystack, hidden away or easily crushed.

by [Laurel Mathewson](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue

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If there were a game called Most Common Scripture Associations, the answer to the clue “In my father’s house are many mansions” would be “funeral service.” This observation is not to dismiss the beauty and goodness of this passage in such a context. But outside of memorial gatherings, there are riches to consider in Jesus’ imagery and invitation to a divine habitation—for the everyday earthly life of every Christian. After nearly ten years sitting at the feet of St. Teresa of Ávila’s unearthly wisdom, when I hear “dwelling places” my mind now leaps to a different idea: not to the mysteries of heavenly glory that we only know when we die, but to the various spaces, places, or ways we might encounter Christ in prayer. And in fact, Jesus’ words of comfort for his disciples seem to allow for this multivalent reading, one where we might access “the father’s house” through Jesus’ “preparatory work” even now.

Teresa’s seminal work exploring this metaphor for life in relationship to God is known as *The Interior Castle*, but in Spanish the title is simply *Las moradas*: the dwelling places. The image of a castle appears in the text as one of many metaphors Teresa uses for our souls’ capacities (plural, as in “many dwellings”!) for encounter with God, and she uses it primarily because it points to a valuable, spacious, diverse, and varied concept: a large and elaborate structure. She quotes John 14 directly in developing this idea of “many dwelling places.” The point is the surprising size and dignity of this reality: indeed, each of us has already been entrusted with a soul, which is the place of encounter with the God who made us and loves us. And the soul is not a tiny gem or needle in a haystack, hidden away or easily crushed. It is more like a majestic castle, more enduring than our quickly fading flesh.

But Teresa doesn’t just employ Jesus’ words or image about the structure—she keeps his promise from John’s Gospel about his very function at the center of her teaching. “I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” Through Teresa, we learn to accept with humility that it is Christ who draws us to himself, who draws us to the heart of God, who is our very center, too. We can indeed spend our lives “outside the castle,” wandering the grounds, never exploring our capacity for divine-human companionship. But most people eventually “turn inward.” And those who begin to pray with any regularity, she says, who are intent on following Jesus’ way, will hear the beckoning call of Christ: “This Lord of ours deeply wants us to love Him and seek His companionship. And so He calls us again and again, ceaselessly, to come closer.”

We experience this alluring love in diverse ways: “through words heard from good people, or through sermons, or as we read good books, or through sicknesses and trials, or through truths God teaches us when we are praying.” It might be worth asking, alongside this text: When you look back on your life, what are the pivotal moments when you perceived the grace of an invitation to a different way of being, a way closer to God? How does it change your understanding of such moments if you think of them as the Lord at work, trying to “take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also”—in other words, into deeper fullness of life and truth and communion with the Creator?

Hearing anew this promise of Jesus as a way-maker to abundant life, not just once and for all through his death and resurrection but even and especially through the intimate details of our life, can be electrifying. It led me to reevaluate my entire lived experience through this “dwelling places” lens, write a book about it, and become something of a zealot for Teresa’s gifts to the faithful. Truly, Jesus is no intellectual proposition or onetime confession but rather “the way, the truth, and the life,” alive and present to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit—not just 2,000 years ago, and not just after we take our last breath.

For some, this is a welcome word. For others? Well, as my spiritual director once put it: “Not everyone wants that kind of intimacy or direction.” The idea of building our own lives our own way remains attractive, and the humble submission of “let[ing] yourselves be built into a spiritual house,” as 1 Peter puts it, is still repulsive to many. But if Augustine is right, and our restless hearts will not rest until they rest in God’s very presence, then all weary travelers of this chaotic world would do well to hear Jesus’ assurance: We are invited to follow him, and to dwell with God, as a message of unexpected peace and strengthening comfort for today, and not just funeral days.