

The Life of St. Teresa of Avila

Fr. Philippe, ocd, Toulouse 2014

Three Names

We will get to know

St. Teresa

through her

Life

- **Maiden:** Teresa de Ahumda-Cepeda;
- **Reformer:** Teresa of Jesus;
- **Native village:** Teresa of Avila;
- **The Saint & Madre.**

Vocation of Man

**To Know God
and enter into
Communion
with the
Life of God.**

- Teresa was born on March 28, 1515;
- It was the **golden age** or the height of Spanish history;
- Even as a small child she marveled at the **mystery of eternity**, of our destiny--**forever, forever.**

Teresa of
Washington, DC

**What would we
say about
her times?**

We'd say that she was born into a century of profound upset:

- Two World Wars;
- Communism & Nazis;
- Globalism;
- Internet,
- Tolerance;
- Questioning of all certainties;
- Fundamentalists & Terrorism;
- Collapse of the World Trade Towers.

1492

Important year
in the History of
Europe & the World

Important Year for
two main reasons:

- Discovery of America;
- Taking back of the Iberian Peninsula by the Catholic Kings.

Renaissance

**End of the
Middle Ages**

**Birth of
Modern Times**

- **Expulsion of the Jews** from the Peninsula;
- **Turning point** in the history of Spain, Europe and the world as we know it today.

Protestant Reformation

Division between Catholics & Protestants

- **In 1455**, the Guttenberg Bible was printed. It was revolutionary;
- The **printing press** allowed the culture to be widely shared;
- **In 1517**, Luther posted his 95 thesis.

Teresa's World

16th Century
Spain

- Discovery of America;
- Taking back of the Iberian Peninsula;
- Expulsion of the Jews from Spain;
- Explosion of the culture with the printed book;
- Protestant Reformation.

World on Fire

Teresa will be
called by God
to bring
God's response

- She appears in a world of deep change;
- Man at the center;
- Renaissance;
- Each Era has its crisis and its Saints that answer.

Union with God

Map of the Soul

- The first **map of the world** (Mercato);
- Man the **dwelling place of God**;
- Teresa reminds man that he is a **creature loved and saved by God**, called to become his **spouse**.

Teresa's Spiritual Journey

**Teaches us
by her
Life**

- How was Teresa an answer from God?
- We are going to look at the path she is leading us down;
- Teresa shares her experience **of an intimate friendship with Christ.**

Teresa tells
her Life Story

God's Work in Teresa

At the **heart of Teresa's story** is
an invitation to :

- **Let our Lord enter our lives;**
- **Be seized & transformed by him;**
- **Become capable of union with him.**

Avila

Teresa
was born in
Castile

- 1,000 meters above sea level;
- 8,000 souls;
- Surrounded by deserted countryside;
- The climate in winter is severe;
- The sky devours the earth with the immense horizons.

Spain in 1492

Jewish Businessman
from Toledo,
a Difficult Heritage.

- Teresa was born into a very large family: 2 girls, 8 boys;
- Jews who refused to convert were expelled from Spain.

Pure Blood

A Past
one tried to
Forget

- **False Testimony** was bought to recognize the person as nobility ;
- In 1654, Her father **married** a girl from a good family another way to **erase one's origins**;
- **Dona Beatrice de Ahumada** was 15 years old. She gave him 10 children, 2 girls and 8 boys.

America

All the Men Gone

- Teresa brothers dreamed of one thing;
- Teresa's convent filled up;
- When Teresa went to the convent there were 30 nuns; 20 years later, 180 nuns.

Temperament of a Leader

She wanted Heaven
so she had to
Become a Martyr

- Teresa saw heaven promised to the Saints & martyrs;
- At 7, she persuaded her brother, Rodrigo, to come with her;
- They started out but were stopped by an uncle after a few hundred meters.

Between her Parents

Father was Pious &
Austere

Mother was Pious...
sought escape in
Adventure Books

- Father managed his affairs very poorly;
- Mother devoted to the Virgin Mary, exhausted from pregnancies;
- Teresa influenced by her father, the **Saints & sainthood** yet the **imaginary world in the books** her drew her interest as well.

Teresa lost
her Mother

Able to turn
the most Resistant
in her Favor

- In 1528, at 13, Teresa turned to the Virgin Mary;
- Adolescence arrived Teresa realized her power of seduction;
- She became interested in the outward appearance -hairstyles, dress, make-up etc.

Augustinian Convent

Teresa's Father
wanted to
Protect her.

- A frivolous cousin started to have a bad influence on Teresa;
- The adventure books won out over the books on Saints;
- Done secretly to avoid people talking.

Virtuous Path

Wherever Teresa
went
People Loved Her

- She had a rough start but made the decision she would live there and **formed relationships** with the other students;
- She was a **disciple** at this point in her life;
- She developed an admiration **Marie Briceno**, a nun who would lead her along the **path of prayer** and perhaps even awaken in her the idea of **becoming a nun**.

Decision for God

**Difficult
Spiritual Combat**

- Teresa **left school** because of health issues;
- She entered the Incarnation Convent, '**dead in the soul**' on the day of the dead, November 2, 1520;
- She felt her **bones would come apart** as she was crossing the threshold;
- She was **20 years old**. She **entered** to avoid going to **hell**. She had a **friend** there.

Resistance

**Miraculous Recovery
Intercession of
St. Joseph.**

- What she was really feeling in the depths of her soul?
- **She became ill** quickly and had to leave;
- **4 days in a state of catalexis**, her funeral was arranged;
- Teresa that **launched devotion to St. Joseph** in the **Catholic Church.**

Precarious State

God
shines through her
Illness & Weakness.

- She would remain sick throughout her life.
- All the good she did, God did it through her.

Poor Monastery

Take Care of
their Health &
Get Enough to Eat

- Monastery wasn't what we would expect today in religious life;
- Council of Trent reformed religious life;
- Nuns were occasionally obliged to leave.

Cloister
was Porous

Religious Life
was a
Reflection
of the
Castile's society

- People from the outside were able to come in;
- Families entrusted their daughters to their religious aunts;
- Source of Revenue for the monastery;
- Nuns, children, servants, other members of the family.

Great Cloister

Like
a
Village

- A wing with 4 sides, church; superior's offices, library, accounting office;
- A wing for the Sisters of nobility;
- Teresa had a two-story apartment with view of the ramparts;
- She lived with her sister, Juana & friends.

Inequality in Society

Reproduced
in
Religious Life

- Another wing for nuns from modest backgrounds --a large dormitory;
- St. Teresa monasteries, all the nuns were to be **friends**, social origins of families forgotten.

Parlors

Thick Barrier

Paradoxical

- Play an important role in the life of St. Teresa;
- Separate room with two sections; between them a barrier;
- Porous convent; parlors with thick barriers.

Stormy Years

Pulled in Two Directions

- Teresa suffered many years from lack of coherence in her religious life;
- Intimacy with the Lord vs. taste for relationships to please, seduce & beautiful things;
- Her **life's combat** would take place in and around her **life of prayer**; she talked about it in her writings;
- Silent prayer is the path of salvation; the path of peace and joy.

Third Spiritual Alphabet

Written by a
Franciscan
Osuna

in 1527

Spiritual Bestseller

- Teresa learned silent prayer when she left the monastery for medical attention;
- Recollection: detach from the world; turn within seeking God's presence;
- Teresa's soul (will and intellect) would be progressively touched, transformed & invaded by the Beloved.

Soul was a Garden

Different Ways
of
Watering the Garden
or
Different Ways
of Praying

- Little by little, the Lord takes over the soul to spread the living water of grace & dilate the heart;
- Teresa remained divided; she even abandoned prayer;
- She was really **tortured** between a magnificent **God** and **human affection**.

Spiritual Combat

Teresa's
Divided Heart
speaks to those who
wrestle with a
Divided Heart

Around 1555, 3 major events:

- The **first** was the reading of St. Augustin's Confessions;
- The **second** was when she was totally overcome seeing a statue of the wounded and flagellated Christ;

The Last Event

‘I don’t want you
talking with
Man
but with
Angels.’

- When she began to pray to the Holy Spirit she heard what would **set her free** from **worldly conversations** :
- Teresa was now speaking the **language of angels**;
- Her only worry now was the **spiritual well-being of the person** or to **receive a message from God** from that person;
- She had a **liberated heart**; no longer seeking man but **messengers from God**.

All comes to an End

20 years
to be able to
Receive the Power
to fully respond to
Her Vocation

- In 1566, Teresa is 41 years old;
- Her story could stop here!
- Another path would now open;
- It would make Teresa a **reformer** & a **founder**.

A Calling within
a Calling

Summer's End
1560

- Teresa received a **'vision of hell'**;
- Experience of hell; experience of **God's mercy**;
- If she hadn't accepted the **grace of conversion**;
- She experienced hell as about a soul who **willingly cuts itself off from God**.

Loyal to God

Everything that was
in her Power

Live her
Religious Life Perfectly

- Teresa saw the suffering that results from a rupture with God;
- Return to the **purity** of the **primitive rule** of Carmel;
- A decision of personal conversion. She wanted to go deeper;
- Can we really understand mercy and salvation, if we haven't been lost?

Always, Always

Destiny
of the
Person
cut off from
God

- Teresa decided to **dedicate her life to prayer and intercession** for all who risked being lost;
- A woman in Spain in the 16th century didn't have the power to speak;
- For the last 500 years Teresa has spoken through her **writings**;
- Teresa developed a military-style strategy to **conquer souls**.

St. Joseph's
Monastery

First Disciples of Christ
who would work
around him to
Evangelize
1562

- A life of austerity, radical poverty, peace, humility and simplicity of heart;
- Simple fraternal relationships; all the nuns must be friends;
- Two hours of silent prayer daily; two hours of recreation daily;
- A **path of sainthood.**

Program of Spiritual Life

Founded on the
Virtues
of
Faith, Hope, Charity,
Detachment & Humility

Rooted in
Contemplative Prayer.

- The **virtues** St. Teresa proposed was an evangelic way of life;
- Make her nuns contemplatives, **servants of love**, available for the work God would do in them;
- The work of the Carmelite is **intercession**;

St. Joseph's
August 22, 1562

Cradle
of the
New Reformed
Carmel

- Strife in the village with competing monasteries;
- Discalced Carmelites; a sign of penance sandals replaced thick stockings;
- A life of prayer & work reproduced life in the house of Nazareth;
- Teresa lived 5 years in this dovecot for the Blessed Virgin.

Apostolic Zeal

Continued to
Receive Graces

Teresa
wanted to

Share & Spread them

- In 1566, Teresa met a Franciscan returning from America in the parlor;
- Situation in America dire, many souls didn't know God & risked damnation;
- The conquistadors were in America for one reason... Gold;
- What does that serve to gain the whole world if we lose our soul?

Confined in her
Monastery

Destiny
responded
with the visit of the
Carmelite General
Fr. Rubeo

- Fr. Rubeo visited Teresa in her convent;
- St. Joseph was the ideal of how he wanted to reform the order;
- He welcomed and encouraged Teresa's project;
- He gave her permission to found as many monasteries as she had hair on her head.

Helped by Friars

Permission
to found
Two Convents
of
Friars

- She was to become known as the wandering lady;
- She founded 16 convents; the 17th was founded by Ann of Jesus;
- Nuns travelled in covered wagons; they strove to maintain the monastery rhythm;
- Today there are 890 Carmelite convents with a total of 11,500 nuns;
- The **Foundations** is a summary of her travels through Spain. It reads like a novel.

A New Oasis
to her Lord

A New Crown
Of
Carmelites

- Each time the Holy Eucharist was put in the chapel's tabernacle, Teresa was ecstatic;
- Teresa encountered a young Carmelite friar, Jean of St. Matthias;
- Antoine de Jesus & St. John of the Cross opened the first monastery of Carmelite friars on November 28, 1568;
- Today there are 4,000 friars throughout the world.

Foundations

Not
a
Monotonous Account
of
Wonderful Successes

- Crisis within communities; difficulties founding monasteries;
- Widespread persecution of reform;
- St. John of the Cross was confined in Toledo; then taken at night & put in prison 9 months;
- Today, there are the O'Carms & the Discalced Carmelites, reformed by St. Teresa of Avila.

Spiritual Marriage

Total & Definitive Union with Our Lord

November 18, 1572

- In 1577, Teresa wrote the **Interior Castle**; soul is a castle where the Trinity resides;
- 7 mansions or stages of spiritual progress;
- Soul journeys from a **superficial life** to a **life of prayer to conversion to mystical transformation, to spiritual marriage**;
- Service to the Church & its mission.

Alba de Tormes

Night Falls
on an
Exhausted Madre

Teresa is 67 years old

1582

- Teresa died on the feast of St. Francis, the 4th of October;
- We celebrate her feast on the 15th of October;
- Daughter of the Church;
- She told the Lord that it was time that they see one another.

Doctor of the Church

September 27, 1970

by

Pope Paul VI

- Her works were edited in 1588 by Louis de Leon;
- She was beatified by Paul V on April 24, 1614;
- She was canonized on March 12, 1622.

Power of Grace

Brilliant
Testimony

- Teresa allowed merciful love to own her and make of her a slave of love;
- She was devoted to the service of the Church, to souls and to God's loving design to save all men & bring them together in the **mystery of the Church.**

Testimony

A Way of Praying,
of Living a Simple &
Joyful Life Together
in
Fraternal Friendship

- Teresa burned with love for the holy humanity of Christ who she contemplated in silent prayer;
- Her writings described God's work in her;
- Her communities that render her manner of proceeding;
- The Carmelite family has enriched the Church by several treasures of holiness.

Mother of God

Mary
waits for the
Consent
of our
Poor Love

- St. Teresa's testimony is a celebration of the Mother of God;
- The Saints invite us say with them—the Magnificat of Mary;
- The Church sings it every evening with Mary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the true Mother and inspiration of Teresa of Jesus.