

# Teresa of Avila: Sin & Salvation

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## A Prototype for Christian Life

We will look at Teresa's Life  
from these two angles:

- Teresa's experience with  
Sin;
- Teresa's experience with  
Salvation.

- St. Teresa of Avila's life is a **prototype of Christian life** for **two reasons**;
- The **first** reason is that her life contained a real & significant experience with sin up until the time of her conversion at the age of 40;
- The **second** reason is that Teresa lived a real experience of salvation.

## A. Teresa's Experience with Sin

It is this  
aspect of her life  
that draws her  
near to us and  
makes her a true sister

- We will look at **three main areas** under this heading:
- **First**, Teresa didn't take advantage of the good family environment that God gave her;
- **Secondly**, she was trying to find herself, not without God, in a lot of different areas;
- **Thirdly**, she was very drawn to distractions.

## 1. Take Advantage of her Good Family Situation

Teresa didn't benefit from the virtuous example of her parents (V,1)  
She said that she didn't know how to benefit from their example

- In Teresa's case, one could only think that she deliberately chose bad relationships & not the example of her parents;
- A Religious where she was a student suggested she needed to become more virtuous. Teresa became angry & didn't take this good advice;
- Teresa was influenced by her cousins. They dragged her into superficiality, frivolity & carefree worldliness;
- It would seem she did all she could to move towards evil, to slide towards vice and what would cause her to be lost.

## 1. Take Advantage of her Good Family Situation

The Lord had to take a forceful approach with her & become present to her

Teresa didn't take advantage of the Good Influence around her but gravitated towards bad company

- The religious life filled her with aversion & disgust. Becoming a religious meant leaving the world along with a lot of other things;
- She couldn't imagine herself enclosed in a narrow religious life or even worse in the narrowness of a cloister;
- It takes courage to enter religious life. Teresa lacked courage and so turned away from it;
- In the end it was out of the fear of hell & her concern for her salvation that she decided to enter religious life.

## 2. Teresa was trying to find herself

Teresa had an obsessive need to be appreciated, to draw love to herself and to be admired

At her uncle's home she read to him to please and be loved by him

- She liked to please, seduce & be admired and was successful at it. She had a lot of qualities. People admired her for it;
- Teresa was trying to find herself in her relationships not only to be admired but also to be loved;
- There was self-satisfaction at being able to attract attention. She was caught up in pride, vanity & physical & spiritual primping;
- At one point Teresa was involved in a friendship with a priest. She realized the situation could have taken a bad turn.

2. Teresa was trying to find herself

Teresa acted out of pride & honor

The Image she projected to others mattered to her

Protecting her reputation was paramount for her

- She cut off the relationship with her cousin. She then went into the convent to protect her reputation & avoid hell;
- It was important for St. Teresa that things remain hidden. If she could get away with something in secret, she continued to do it;
- Teresa was seeking to find her way in her apostolic life. She evangelized in the parlor. She used the ministry and our Lord to create a personality 'for all to see'.

### 3/ Teresa was drawn to Distractions & Entertainment

Teresa spent a lot of time  
in worthless, worldly pursuits  
for her own  
selfish satisfaction:  
She devoured chivalry books

If she were alive today she  
would surely spend a lot of  
time on the internet

- Her father had forbidden her to read chivalry books; she continued to read them for her pleasure;
- She preferred personal satisfaction to the glory of God. She wasn't willing to cut off venial sins;
- How often do we tell ourselves that that isn't so bad? We need to try & make this life as pleasurable as possible! We suffer enough as it is!



### 3/ Teresa was drawn to Distractions & Entertainment

If there is never an ascetic effort,  
to take control of our  
addictions & dependencies,  
Our life lacks God or  
delays seeking him.

This was the obstacle  
Teresa faced until her  
Conversion  
at the age of 40 years old.

- When the Lord isn't the center of our lives the created takes up too much room in our lives;
- In our overindulgence of seeking pleasure, distractions and satisfaction we wind up in sin if we aren't determined to cut it off!
- We don't really choose God but rather money & God; pleasure & God; cigarettes & God; alcohol & God.

## B. Teresa's Experience with Salvation

The Lord held  
a place of importance  
in her life though  
her attachment to him  
would be the source of  
a true internal combat

- Despite her sins, St. Teresa had assets that allowed her to keep her hand in the Lord's and to move towards him;
- She was divided between the world, the flesh and the attraction to divine life;
- For almost 20 years she wore herself out in this combat because she was unable to make a choice;
- The ambivalence exhausted her soul.

## B. Teresa's Experience with Salvation

When in the world,  
Teresa felt  
she had abandoned God.

When she chose God,  
she missed the world.

- Teresa was permanently suspended between Heaven and Earth;
- She wasn't completely in the things of the world nor in the things of Heaven;
- Nothing is more exhausting than the inability to make a final choice either for God or the world.

## B. Teresa's Experience with Salvation

In Teresa's experience  
of salvation and  
struggle to reach  
a decision,  
there are  
two fundamental issues

- **General intervention** of God's grace at work in her life;
- **Specific intervention** of God's grace at work in her life. (Addressed in Teresian Prayer by P. M-Laurent)

General Intervention:  
**Introduction**

General Intervention of  
God's Grace in  
Teresa's Life

- God secretly gives all of us a human capital of qualities, gifts and moral virtues that constitute our character;
- Good is a dynamic. The more I practice good, the more I am capable of good things;
- The opposite is also true. The more I allow hateful thoughts to arise within me, the more these hateful urges take over my being;
- It is important to know that heaven and hell exist!

General Intervention:  
**Teresa's natural gifts**

Disappointed she couldn't give her life as a martyr, Teresa decided to give her life to God as a solitary, living the life of a hermit. She began to build her first hermitage at 10 years old.

- Despite her experience with sin, Teresa had a good heart and good intentions;
- An example of Teresa's goodness, was the project to Moor country as a witness for Christ and to die a martyr there;
- Together Teresa & her brother meditated on the always, always, always of eternal life.

General Intervention:  
**Teresa's natural gifts**

One day Teresa saw a very sick nun dealing with her difficult situation with patience; completely submitted God's will & the path to sainthood he had chosen for her. Teresa was deeply moved & desired that same grace

- Early on Teresa realized the Vanity of the things of this World;
- All around us there are brothers and sisters in Christ who serve as models of sanctity for us;
- We can look at their merit and ask God for the grace to be brought up to their same degree of sainthood;

General Intervention:  
**Teresa's natural gifts**

Teresa didn't want to talk about others behind their back because she didn't want them talking about her

She told herself that if she didn't say anything bad about others they would be more inclined not to say anything bad about her

- Teresa didn't gossip. She wanted to preserve the honor of those absent;
- This behavior had to be purified in her; it was an area where she was trying to find herself;
- What's important is to not gossip because we respect someone and see the good in them.



General Intervention:  
Teresa was  
**Courageous & Determined**

Though Teresa resisted God's will for a long time, she gave up the struggle because she loved God.

She decided to enter the Incarnation Monastery, the 'casket' that God had prepared for her, the 'first-class burial' of religious life that God offered her. She remained **ambivalent**.

- Teresa knew how to rein herself in to answer the call God had placed on her life;
- Teresa was bedridden for three years, given last rites, taken for deceased and wax used to seal her eyelids shut;
- Despite three years of illness, Teresa persevered in religious life; she didn't give up even when she had to crawl.

## General Intervention:

Teresa was

### **Courageous & Determined**

It wasn't always easy for Teresa to pray nor is it easy for the Carmelite family today. We don't always feel like praying; it could be said... we rarely do!

A young person who heard a friar say this told him that he was an imposter!

He would be if he didn't pray when he didn't feel like it or was only loyal to prayer because he found it pleasurable

- We all have crosses we want our Lord to take from us but it isn't necessarily a good thing that he take them;
- These crosses we continually live with develop and reinforce our choice for God;
- On this earth, our life only makes sense in the choice for God;
- Little by little Teresa brings us to a choice for God within the reality of our own personal lives-determination, courage, strength of character, behavior in our lives of prayer, the place of sanctification.

General Intervention:

Teresa was

**Courageous & Determined**

It is important to  
differentiate  
our internal zones

- **Sensory:** in this zone we develop appetites, tastes, preferences, desires;
- **Spiritual life:** rational attractions through which we make choices. The choice to love God with determination and courage; pray for his glory; we offer ourselves to his presence when we don't want to pray or even feel disgust for the things of God.

General Intervention:

Teresa was

**Courageous & Determined**

Women are courageous,  
that is why there are more  
women contemplatives  
and more women  
in the secular Carmelites!

- St. Teresa leads us along the path of determination and of the courageous choice for God;
- The choice for God forges a loyalty for him that allows us to go through the desert, without anything except a feeling that we will make it;
- Women are courageous, that is why there are more women contemplatives and more women in the secular Carmelites!

## General Intervention: **Humility**

Teresa's humility is perhaps the most important general help God gave her, the secret of her sainthood.

Teresa felt it was the 'mother' of all virtues.

She had a grasp of her 'miserableness'. She wasn't afraid to confess her unworthiness.

She didn't because she was told not to, she would have gladly done so if she could have.

- Teresa wanted others to see she was a poor sinner;
- She understood her miserableness. and confessed herself to her sisters as much as she was permitted to;
- We understand from the generic imperfections she spoke of that concrete sinful events had occurred in her life;
- This sense of her poverty and miserableness is well-summarized when she told us that God had to put up with her presence in prayer.

## General Intervention: **Humility**

How do you enter a church?  
...as a prideful person who feels  
worthy because you have  
accumulated a  
collection of good actions?  
If we put all these actions on a  
scale, the grade might be 60/100;  
yet we hold our heads up as if  
worthy to appear before  
God's throne.  
What a Spiritual Illusion!

- A king who accepts the visit of his subject who betrayed him. A subject who knows that the king knows he betrayed him and yet the subject dares to come before the king;
- If we could really see the state of our souls, how we are riddled with sin, would we even have trust in God's mercy to dare to enter a chapel?
- This is how St. Teresa lived silent prayer; she lived it like a poor sinner who the Good God full of infinite patience and mercy accepted into his presence.

**General Intervention:  
Teresa made no Demands**

Teresa didn't make demands on God for a special form of supernatural prayer.

She presented herself before him as someone very small who had been largely rewarded, grateful God would even accept that she come before him in this life of prayer.

- This was St. Teresa of Avila! She never sought consolations from God, she invites us to do the same;
- She wants us to remember how blessed we are and all that God has done for us even if we are going through spiritual dryness;
- We can often feel like we are paying attention to God, but that he doesn't pay attention to us; that we have been forgotten;
- We complain! Who do we think we are?

**General Intervention:  
Teresa lacked Trust in God**

Teresa cried & her heart  
broke thinking of her  
resolutions  
with no tomorrow

She stopped praying  
for over a year

She felt it was her  
greatest temptation

- Teresa lacked trust in God; that was the temptation;
- It wasn't about humility;
- It was with the help of general grace in her life, that she came to trust in God's mercy. Humility goes hand in hand with trust in God's mercy;
- In spite of her sin, Teresa always experienced God's loyalty. He always tenderly sought her out overlooking her faults with an infinite patience.



General Intervention:  
**Teresa lacked Trust in God**

Teresa compared herself to St. Augustine. He was sought by God and then turned and sought God. She told us she was called by God not once but a thousand times and she didn't respond to the call. The Lord continued however to tirelessly call her

- We need to discover the God who loves us and never tires of us;
- Yet, we crucify him on a cross and we pierce his heart with the spear of sin;
- In spite of this, he continues to cry out that he is thirsty. The door is always open;
- Our Lord's mercy for us is infinite. He easily forgives us because he is viscerally attached to us. We are his little darlings, the sons and daughters of the Father!

General Intervention:  
**Teresa lacked Trust in God**

Teresa said God punished her by his favors. He pursued her with special graces which allowed her to understand the free gift of God's love. She was able to see God is everything and she was nothing

- St. Teresa came to have a very strong trust in our Lord;
- She would tell her sisters that it was as if he hid her faults;
- He accepted that she was concerned with her honor and hated being discovered in the act of sin;
- Our Lord's mercy went so far as to preserve her from what she dreaded.

## General Intervention: Teresa lacked Trust in God

One day St. Teresa was in the choir where she discovered the little Christ attached at the pillar. It is a well-known statue and can still be seen at the Incarnation monastery in Avila. This little Christ symbolized her sins; the heartbroken looked at her with love and tenderness.

- Teresa understood she had to be tamed and grow to love him;
- To be nothing next to God who is everything, this deployment of goodness for sinners is called mercy or love that leans towards the miserable sinner;
- Susan Stanford had an abortion and wanted to commit suicide. She had a vision of Jesus in the OR with her. His loving look freed her. She was able to resume her therapy practice and help others;
- Mary Magdalene had a similar experience, as did Zacchaeus. It is the story of each one of us; it is St. Teresa's Story.