

# Love for Love: The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Avila

Part 1 (of 4)  
Topics 1-4

By St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

## Forward

Our Holy Mother Teresa,  
the foundress of the  
Reformed Carmel,  
traveled all over Spain  
from north to south &  
from west to east  
to plant new vineyards of the  
Lord.

- One would like to bring the spirit of Teresa who built during a century of battles & disturbances;
- May she bless this picture of her life & works, that it capture the radiance of her spirit & conveys it to the readers;
- People will desire to know her better through her works;
- That they never tire of gaining courage & strength from them again & again.

## 1. Native Land and Family Home

Teresa's impact unfolded in a century marked by religious strife and a great schism in the church.

When she was born in 1515, a mere twenty years had passed since the Moors had been driven out and Spain united in the Catholic faith.

- Avila (Avila of the Saints) was her native town;
- Her parents, Alonso Sanchez de Cepeda, pious and virtuous; Beatrice de Ahumada, mild and humble, were of old nobility;
- Teresa was the sixth child of her father and the third of her mother;
- Six younger siblings were later added to five older ones.

## 2. Childhood and Youth

“We were reading the lives of the saints together. When I saw what torments the martyrs endured for God, I discovered they had earned the joy of seeing God for a low price, and I burned with the desire to die a similar death” (L,1,1)  
We decided to travel to the land of the Moors to get our heads cut off.

- ‘Forever!...We must become martyrs.’
- They did not get far...an uncle took the fugitives back to their parents;
- She built hermitages ... and played monastery life...and continued lengthy devotions;
- The early death of her mother drove Teresa to the Mother of God; and began to devour romances of chivalry;

## 2. Childhood and Youth

There came a time when I understood the natural gifts that heaven had bestowed on me...

Soon I acquired a taste for beautiful clothes... I took many pains with my hands and my hair... (L, 1,8; 2,2)

- Teresa had blossomed into a young beauty... the young beauty did not lack admirers;
- The influence of one young relative was particularly unhealthy;
- This friendship changed me so much that there was nothing left of my good nature (L, 2, 4);
- The transformation alarmed her father and sister...they made a decision;
- Don Alonso sent his darling to an Augustinian monastery to be educated.

### 3. The Monastery Pupil

With grateful love she attached herself to the Boarding School Directress, Maria Bricerio, a devout nun & outstanding educator.

“ She spoke beautifully of God!  
I loved to listen to her. She told how, upon reading the words of the Gospel, “many are called but few are chosen,” she made the decision to leave the world...  
I felt the thought, the longing for eternal things awakening in me...”

- The Monastery of Our Lady of Grace was highly regarded in Avila;
- Teresa remained 1 ½ years in the monastery school;
- Toward the end of her stay she was inclined to religious life;
- She had a dear friend at the Incarnation she wanted to be with;
- She was thinking more of her nature and less of the salvation of her soul.

## 4. Vocational Decision

Her uncle's life was devoted to prayer & spiritual books. He asked Teresa to read to him.

The *Letters* of St. Jerome, St. Gregory's *Morals*, & St. Augustine's writings captivated her spirit & reawakened the pious enthusiasm of her childhood.

- Teresa returned to her Father's house; she became ill;
- Returning from convalescence at her sister's, she stayed a few weeks with her uncle Pedro Sanchez de Cepeda; this visit was decisive for Teresa;
- Eternal salvation became her goal, to not lose sight of it, she conquered her aversion to religious life, her love for freedom, & her family attachment;
- Since she cannot hope for her father's consent, she secretly leaves home;
- Teresa entered the Incarnation monastery on All Souls day 1535.