

Love for Love:

The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Avila

Part 4 (of 4)
Topics 14-16

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

13. Spread the Reform

“I cried to the Savior,
I pleaded with him for the means
of winning souls for him
I asked him to help himself
a little by my prayers, because
that was all I could offer him (F, 1,7).

After many days, the Lord appeared
to her and spoke the comforting
words, “Wait a little while, my
daughter, and you will see
great things” (F, 1, 8).

Six months later came the
fulfillment of this promise.

- Teresa had a burning desire for the salvation of souls that led to new action;
- A Franciscan from the missions visited and told her of the people in heathen lands;
- In Spring 1567, the Carmelite General Rubeo visited Teresa’s reform convent; what he saw moved him to tears;
- He had wanted to return to the old traditions and departed leaving Teresa with permits to found other monasteries directly under him;
- Influenced by Fr. Rubeo, Philip II who became the most powerful friend and protector of the reform.

13. Spread the Reform

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“And only a poor, unshod Carmelite was there to accomplish this, even though furnished with permits and the best wishes, but without any means for initiating the work and without any other support than that of the Lord...” (F, 2, 6).

But this support sufficed.

- Returning to Rome, Fr. Rubeo gave Teresa permission to found two monasteries for men according to the primitive rule;
- While making the foundation in Medina del Campo, Fr. Antonio de Heredia declared himself the first male discalced Carmelite;
- A few days later, John of St. Matthias appeared; , he was practicing the primitive rule and wanted to become a Carthusian;
- On September 20, 1568, Fr. John clothed in the reform habit, went to the donated house in Durelo; he celebrated Mass the next morning.

13. Spread the Reform

“I came there during Lent 1569...
I went into the chapel
and was seized by the spirit of
fervor and poverty
with which God had filled it...
a little wooden cross over a holy
water font to which an image of the
Lord had been glued...
flooded me with more devotion
than if it had been very valuable...
(F, 14, 7)

- Durelo was the cradle of the male branch of the reformed Carmel; it spread rapidly from there;
- Fr. John was entirely a person of prayer and penance;
- Fr. Gracian, the choice instrument of the reform, became Mother’s most faithful support in her last years;
- Teresa journeyed tirelessly as the Lord’s service required; there were battles to endure everywhere;
- When all obstacles had been overcome and all organized so that the true Carmel life could begin, moved on to new tasks.

14. Prioress at the Monastery of the Incarnation

When they entered the chapter room at the sound of the bell, they saw the prioress seated at the feet of our dear Lady, the Queen of Carmel, the keys to the monastery in her hands. Their hearts were conquered... In a short time, under her wise and temperate direction, above all by the influence of her character and conduct, the spirit of the house was renewed.

- The reform was spreading throughout Spain, but the Monastery of the Incarnation was in a sad state;
- In 1570, Fr. Fernandez, the apostolic visitor familiar with the reform, he named Mother Teresa as prioress of the Incarnation;
- The nuns were indignant, they saw Teresa as a mischief-maker; the storm broke as she was led into the house by the Provincial, Fr. Salazar;

14. Prioress at the Monastery of the Incarnation

“He offered me a his right hand and spoke, ‘See this nail. It is the sign of our union. From this day on you are my bride. Up to now you had not earned it. But now you will not only see me as your Creator, your King, you God, but from now on you will care for my honor as my true bride.

My honor is yours;
your glory is mine” (St, 31)

- On November 18, 1572, Teresa experienced ‘spiritual marriage’; a union that lasted the last decade of her life;
- The first result of this union was a forgetfulness of self, it seemed the soul had lost its being; she only cared for God’s honor;
- The second result was an inner desire for suffering;
- Finally she was consumed with a desire to serve him, to glorify his name and to be useful to souls;
- ...the soul becomes the temple of God where only God alone and the soul mutually delight in each other in the greatest quiet. (c, 7, 3, 6-11)

15. Doing Battle for Her Life's Work

The new papal nuncio in Spain called Teresa a 'gadabout'

She was ordered to choose one of the reformed monasteries as her permanent residence and to make no further trips.

- A storm would soon break over the Reform;
- As Prioress her humility, goodness, intelligence, and moderation allowed her to bridge the rift between the "calced" and "discalced";
- Those not of the reform feared the reform would be imposed on them;
- A clash between the two branches of the order ensued; it appeared Teresa's work was threatened;
- With her daughters, she stormed heaven; she was tireless;
- She finally arrived at the solution; a complete separation between the two branches into two provinces.

15. Doing Battle for Her Life's Work

The Congregation has investigated all the complaints of the Carmelites of the mitigated Rule. It comes down to the following:
Those with the mitigated Rule fear that the reform will finally reform them also.

- The Pope decided that the monasteries of the Carmelite friars and nuns of the reform were to form a province of their own under a provincial chosen by them;
- A brief dated June 27, 1580 announced this decision;
- In March of 1581, the chapter of Akala elected Fr. Jeronimo Gracian as its first provincial in accordance with the Holy Mother's wishes.

16. The End

“God alone knew in full
about the bitterness,
and now only he alone knows
of the boundless joy
that fills my soul,
as I see then end of
these many torments...
Now that we are at peace,
calced and discalced,
nothing is stopping us
from serving God...”

(F, 29, 31-31)

- In the time left her, Teresa continued to make foundations;
- Fr. Antonio brought her to Alba to comply with a Duchess, the patroness of the monastery;
- She arrived on September 20, she had predicted she would die here at this time; on September 29, she had to lie down;

16. The End

“At the moment the Blessed Sacrament was brought into her cell, the Holy Mother ... got on her knees...her expression was beautiful and radiated divine love... her wrinkles disappeared... it seemed as if she were hearing a voice that she answered... immersed in prayer... she went out of this world into eternal life.

- Wondrous events occurred at Teresa’s burial; her body remains incorrupt;
- The Spanish people are devoted to Teresa;
- Paul V declared her blessed on April 24, 1614; she was canonized by Gregory XV, March 22, 1622;
- Her feast day is October 15 (not 4) due to Gregorian calendar reform;
- There are few saints as humanly near to us as Teresa; we can know her through her daughters and through her writings, classical masterpieces of Spanish literature;
- Her sons and daughters seek to walk the way of perfection hand in hand with her to its goal.