

The Book of Her Life  
**The Foundation of St. Joseph's**  
Chps. 34-35-36

by **St. Teresa of Avila**

## Chapter 34

Discusses how at this time it was opportune for her to leave the city. Tells about the reason and how her superior ordered her to go to console a lady of the nobility who was very distressed. Begins to deal with what happened there and the great favor the Lord granted her in making her the means by which He awakened a very eminent person to serve Him whole-heartedly, and how afterward she had this person's support and favor. The chapter is most important.

1-Well, no matter how careful I was that this work be **secret**... I feared a great deal that someone should tell the provincial... and he would order me not to continue... The Lord provided in this way: ... In a large city, a **lady** grieved because of the **death of her husband**. Her distress was extreme and they feared for her health... they spoke highly of me to her... This lady was well-acquainted with the provincial and a member of the nobility. The Lord gave her **an irresistible desire** to see me so that I could **console** her. She sent a message to the provincial who sent me an **order** to go immediately with another companion. I learned of it on Christmas eve.

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- 2-... Praying to God very earnestly about this, I spent a great part of matins in a **deep rapture**. The Lord told me to go...and that even though I would have trials, God would be greatly served; that for the business of the monastery it was fitting I be absent until the **brief** arrived...and that I shouldn't fear...I was very consoled. I told the rector about it. He told me I should by no means fail to go...
- 3-I obeyed the rector...It pleased the Lord that the lady was so comforted she began to improve ...she valued this improvement because the suffering had weighed on her heavily ... She was very God-fearing and so good ... She grew deeply fond of me...but almost everything was a cross for me because the **comforts** caused me great torment...While I was there the Lord granted me wonderful **favors** that gave me such freedom and made me despise all I saw.

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4-I derived a very beneficial insight, and I told her about it...about how little should be our esteem of nobility...as all was done to preserve the composure of their status which doesn't allow them to live... I pitied her and saw how often she had to go against her inclination to fulfill her duties...so it doesn't seem they are anything but slaves to a thousand things.

5-The Lord was pleased that while I stayed at that house...I be provided with some trials...so that I wouldn't be charmed by the comfort... and He was then pleased to draw me out of it all with improvement for my soul.

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6-While I was there it happened that a certain religious came to the city, a person...with whom I had sometimes conversed many years prior...and there came over me a desire to know the condition of his soul... I went to call him and he came to speak to me in the confessional... I began to tell him I had experienced many trials of the soul. He strongly urged me to tell him what those trials were...

7-...despite all the displeasures and shame I usually felt when I spoke about these things...I didn't feel any pain with him or with the rector I mentioned but rather I was very much consoled ... He seemed to me wiser than ever... and as soon as I see a person who greatly pleases me ... I want to see him give himself completely to God...

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8-He asked me to pray earnestly to God for him...I went to the place where I usually pray alone and being deeply recollected, began to talk to the Lord, in a foolish way...It is love that is then speaking, and the soul is so transported that I don't notice the difference there is between it and God. Love that knows it possesses His Majesty forgets the soul and thinks it is in Him and, as one without division, speaks absurdities. I recall that after having begged Him with many tears for that soul... I said ...: "Lord, You must not deny me this favor; see how this individual is fit to be our friend."

9-...You don't look at the words but at the desires and the will with which they are spoken! ...May You be blessed forever and ever.

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10-...That night there came over me a greater affliction wondering if I were at odds with God... there couldn't have been a more grievous death for me than to wonder whether I had offended God...dissolved in tears ... I understood that I could truly be consoled ...because a love of God like this, and those favors...His Majesty gave me...could not coexist... with a soul in mortal sin. I remained confident the Lord would grant me what I asked for this person. He told me some **words** to tell him...I put them in writing and gave them to him.

11-They indeed seemed to be from God on account of the **effect** they had on him. He resolved very sincerely to dedicate himself to prayer ... since the Lord wanted this person for Himself. He sent him some truths by means of me ...

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11-... that amazed him ...and he ended up turning to God so completely that every time he speaks to me, I'm stupefied ... that in so short a time ... he no longer seemed to live for anything else on earth ... If he continues to advance like this ... he will become one of God's most distinguished servants for the benefit of many souls... **Often the contemplation the Lord doesn't give to one in twenty years He gives to another in one...**This is the **mistake we make**: we think that with years we shall come to understand what in no way can be comprehended without **experience...** Provided he is a learned man, someone who hasn't had spiritual experiences can guide someone who has, if he limits himself to seeing that in both **interior and exterior matters** the soul walks in conformity to the **natural** way through the use of **reason** and in **supernatural experiences** with **Sacred Scripture**. As for the rest, he shouldn't think he understands what he doesn't...



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12-Let him not be surprised or think these things are impossible-everything is possible with the Lord-but strive to strengthen his faith and humble himself...for with humility he will do more good for souls and for himself than by becoming a contemplative without it...

13-The Lord gave **humility** in many things to this Dominican friar...and as a result he strove to learn through study all he could ...what he doesn't know through experience he finds out from one who has it...Thus the Lord helps him by giving him **deep faith** ...and so...he has helped other souls; and mine is one of them...The Lord changed him almost completely...and gave him bodily strength for penance...and courage for everything good...May He be blessed forever.

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14-I believe all the good comes to this father from the **favours** the Lord granted him in prayer... The Lord has desired too that he be tried and he has come out of these **trials** as one who has already learned of the **merits** gained in **suffering persecutions**... This is beginning to be known. I have already seen some great **visions**, and the Lord has told me some admirable things about him and the rector of the Society of Jesus...

15-...I was once with him in a parlor and my soul and spirit came to such an understanding of the great **love of God** that burned in his spirit... who in so short a time had raised a soul to such a high state ...He listened to me talk about prayer with such humility... it really benefitted me so much to be with him. It seemed he left my soul fired anew with the desire to serve the Lord... What a soul inflamed with your love accomplishes!

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16-It is a wonderful thing when a sick person **finds another** wounded with that same sickness; how great a **consolation** to find you are not alone. The two become a powerful help to each other in **suffering**... This is their **duty**: to labor. Oh, what a great thing it is when the Lord gives this **light to understand** the **abundance** that is gained in **suffering** for Him! This isn't well understood until one abandons all for Him... He who goes after what is **lost** is himself lost. And what **greater perdition, greater blindness, greater misfortune than to cherish that which is nothing?**

17-... while I was contemplating this soul the Lord wanted me to see the **treasures** He had placed in it... I praised His Majesty ...that he had heard my prayer...and my soul being unable to bear so much joy, went out of itself and was lost...a powerful **rapture** came over me ...

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- 17-... I saw **Christ** ...showing great happiness at what was taking place. He told me ... how much He was pleased when persons delighted in speaking of Him.
- Another time ... I saw this father raised up by angels in great glory... I understood that his soul was making much progress... A **serious testimony** against his honor was given...He underwent this with great happiness, performed other works of much service to God, and suffered other persecutions.
- 18-...What I said about the **prophecies** concerning this house, and other prophecies....were all fulfilled...

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19- My brother-in-law died suddenly without going to **confession**. It was told to me in prayer that my sister would die this way as well and that I was to go to her and try to get her to prepare herself for such an event ...She lived in a small village; I went to her... and got her ...to take care of her soul...Within four to five years she had gained the **habit**... but died without being able to confess; **happily** little more than eight days had passed since she had gone to confession. News of her **death** brought me great joy. She remained only a short while **in purgatory**...the Lord appeared to me after I had received Communion and wanted me to see how He **brought her to glory**... May God be praised forever who takes such care of souls so that they be not lost.

## Chapter 35

Continues on the same subject: the foundation of this house of our glorious father St. Joseph. Tells of the means the Lord provided by which holy poverty would be observed in it, the reason why she left the lady she was staying with and returned, and of some other things that happened to her.

- 1-When I was with this lady...with whom I stayed more than half a year, the Lord ordained that a **beata** of our order ...should find out about me. The Lord inspired her the same year and month ... to found another monastery of this order. As soon as He gave her this desire, she sold all and **walked to Rome barefoot** to get a **patent** for it.
- 2-She is a woman who practices much **penance** and **prayer**; the Lord has granted her many favors, and our Blessed Lady appeared to her and ordered her to make the foundation...She showed me the **patent letters from Rome**...and until I had spoken to her...it hadn't been brought to my notice that our **rule**- before it was mitigated- ordered that we **own nothing**, nor had I thought to found the house without an income. My intention was that we have no worries about our needs;

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2-cont'd...I hadn't considered the many **cares ownership of property** brings with it...As she told me about it, it seemed to me to be right...Had I been alone it wouldn't have held me back...since our Lord had given me **great desires for poverty**... to beg for the love of God and not to have a house or anything. But I **feared** that if the others didn't have this desire their lives would be unhappy... and that poverty would be the source of **distraction** in the monastery and thus a **lack of recollection**. I failed to reflect that this **lack of recollection** was the cause of their being poor and that it was not the **practice of poverty** that caused their **distraction** ...God never fails those who serve Him. In sum, I had **weak faith**.

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- 3- Since I consulted in all things with so many, I found almost no one with this opinion, neither my confessor nor the learned man with whom I dealt ... Since I knew it was in the **rule**, I knew that **observing poverty** would be **most perfect**. I couldn't persuade myself that the monastery had to have an income... and when I returned to prayer and contemplating Christ on the cross, so poor and naked, I couldn't accept the idea of being rich. I begged Him to ordain that I would see myself poor, as He was.
- 4-I found so many disadvantages to having an income and saw it would be so great a cause of disquiet and even distraction...I wrote to the Dominican religious who was helping us. He sent me two pages of objections...I answered him ...that I sought to follow my vocation, my vow of poverty, and the counsels of Christ with total perfection...



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5-...Since the holy lady hadn't seen the holy Friar Peter of Alcantara...he came to her house; because he was a true lover of **poverty** and had **practiced it** so many years, he knew well the riches within ...He ordered that I should by no means **fail to go through with my plan...** based on his wide **experience**; I decided not to seek other opinions.

6- One day while praying... the Lord told me I shouldn't in any way fail to **found the monastery in poverty**, that this was both the will of His Father and His own, that He would help me. This took place during a deep rapture...

Another time He told me an **income** would cause **disturbance of mind**...He assured me that whoever would observe poverty **wouldn't lack the necessities of life** ...The Lord also changed the heart of the Dominican I mentioned...It seemed to me I **possessed all the world's riches in resolving to live by the love of God.**

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7-...There was going to be an election in my community...and many wanted to give me the charge of being the superior...It seemed to me that being superior would be dangerous for my conscience...and so I wrote to my friends not to vote for me.

8-...The Lord told me that by no means should I fail to go, that since I **desired the cross a good one was ready for me**...I did nothing but weep...I gave an account of all to my confessor. He told me I should thus try to go, it would be the more perfect thing to do...I was extremely restless and couldn't practice prayer...I didn't want to **offer myself to the trial**...the Lord took away all satisfaction in prayer. In sum, I was so severely tormented that I asked the lady to let me go...

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9- ...It was a most difficult thing for her to let me go...I told her that my going would render God a great service...she regretfully accepted my leaving...

10-I no longer was sorry to go; once I understood it was more perfect and would render great service to God...I was able to endure the pain of leaving ... But the more I saw I was **losing consolation** for God's sake, the **happier I became at losing it**...I couldn't understand how this was possible...I saw two **contraries**: my being **consoled and happy over what weighed on my soul**... I was about to place myself in a fire...and I would **undergo a great cross**...I was however **disturbed** that I hadn't entered into this **battle immediately**...

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- 11-I wasn't able to understand how two contraries were possible. I thought of this **comparison**: Were I to possess a jewel ...that gave me great happiness, and then to find out that the one whom I loved and wanted to please more than myself desired that object, my happiness in going without it would be greater than possessing it if I made the other person happy!
- 12-It was so important, as regards this holy house, for me not to have delayed a day longer ... Often I am amazed when I consider how particularly His Majesty wanted to help me fund this little dwelling corner for God. I believe...it is an abode in which His Majesty delights...that this house was a **paradise of delight for Him**...It seems His Majesty has selected the souls He has brought to this monastery...

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12-cont'd... And they can't get enough of thanking Him...and to those who are young they understand to be detached from all things of life is to live in the greatest calm; and to the older ones...He gives them the strength to bear the austerity and penance...

13- O my Lord, how obvious it is that You are almighty! ...I don't see nor do I know how the **road that leads to you** is narrow. I see that it is a **royal road**, not a path; a road that is safer for anyone who indeed takes it. Very far off are the occasions of sins, those narrow mountain passes and the rocks that make one fall. What I would call a path, a wretched path and a narrow way, is the kind which has on one side, where a soul can fall, a valley far below, and on the other side a precipice: as soon as one becomes careless one is hurled down and broken into pieces.

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14-He who really loves You, my Good, **walks safely on a broad and royal road** ...One fall is not sufficient for a person to be lost, nor are many, if he loves You and not the things of this world. He journeys in the **valley of humility**. I cannot understand what makes people afraid of setting out on the **road to perfection**...

15-They aren't afraid to walk among lions ( honors, delights and similar worldly pleasures) where each lion would want to tear off a piece of them...May anyone who can, through God's goodness, open their eyes; and may He not permit me to become blind, amen

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Continues the same subject. Tells how this monastery of the glorious St. Joseph was finally founded and of the strong opposition and persecution the nuns had to undergo after taking the habit. Tells also of the great trials and temptations she suffered and how the Lord brought her out of them all victoriously to His own praise and glory.

- 1-Once I left that city I was very **determined** to undergo most willingly everything the Lord desired. The very night I reached the city, our **patent** and our **brief** for the monastery arrived from Rome...I found here the bishop and the holy Friar Peter of Alcantara and another gentleman, a very good servant of God...
- 2-The two of them succeeded in getting the bishop to accept the monastery under his jurisdiction...no small thing as the house was to be poor. But the **bishop**... soon grew fond of showing it his favor. And because this holy old **Friar Peter** approved of it, he urged others to help, it was **he who did everything**. If I hadn't come at this time, I don't know how the monastery could have been founded...This saintly man was only here a little while...and shortly afterwards the Lord brought him to Himself. It seems His Majesty preserved him until this matter was taken care of...

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3-Everything was done in deep **secrecy**...as the people were opposed to the foundation. The Lord ordained that my **brother-in-law become ill**; since his wife was not here...my superiors gave me permission to stay with him...It was amazing that he wasn't any sicker than was necessary for the business to be taken care of. When there was need that he get well so that I could be free and he could leave the house empty, the Lord immediately brought this about...

4-I had a lot of trouble with some persons at times...that **the monastery be accepted**. I had trouble...with the **workmen to get them to convert the house into a monastery** and make it ready quickly...for I feared that they make me return to my own monastery ...there were so many things that I wondered if this were the **cross**...



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5-When everything was ready the Lord was pleased that on St. Bartholomew's day the **habit was received** by some and the **Blessed Sacrament** was reserved and with all due power and authority **our monastery of our most glorious father St. Joseph was founded in 1562**. I, along with two other nuns from our house, was present at this clothing...I was there with permission...and with the advice of learned men didn't go one iota against **obedience**. They saw how this house would be beneficial to the whole order and told me I could go ahead. I did so secretly and was careful my superiors didn't find out...Although I desired to live my **profession and vocation with greater perfection and enclosure**...if I had learned that the Lord would have been better served if I abandoned the project, I would have done so with complete peace and calm.

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6-...It was like being in glory to see the **Blessed Sacrament reserved** and that four orphans and four great servants of God (for this is what I had in mind from the beginning, that persons would enter who by their example of prayer and a very perfect life would be a **foundation** upon which we could **achieve our goal**) would give each other support; and to see a work accomplished that I knew was for the service of the Lord and to the honor of the habit of His glorious Mother...It also consoled me to have done what the Lord had commanded me to do; that there was another church in the city, dedicated to my glorious father St. Joseph, in whose honor **none was yet built**...It was a great delight for me to see that His Majesty had used me as an instrument for such a marvelous work. I was so intensely happy that I was as though outside myself, in deep prayer.

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7-After all was over...the devil stirred up in me a **spiritual battle**. He brought **doubts** to my mind about whether what I had done was wrong; whether I had gone against **obedience** in having made the foundation without my **provincial's orders**...it seemed the provincial would be somewhat displeased...but on the other hand he might not care at all. And there were doubts whether those who lived there would be happy with so much **austerity**. What if they lacked food? Wasn't it all foolishness? Who got me involved in all of this since I already had a monastery to live in? All that the Lord had commanded me...the advice...and the prayers for more than two years...all was **erased from my memory**. All the virtues, and my faith, were **suspended within** me without my having the strength to activate any of them or defend myself against so many blows.

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9-Oh, God help me...there is **no secure happiness** in this life, nor anything that doesn't **change**. A short time ago it seemed I wouldn't change my happiness with anyone and now this happiness tormented me. If we would carefully observe the affairs of our life, we would see through **experience** the little of either happiness or unhappiness we ought to have on our account.

It was one of the most difficult periods of my life. Perhaps my spirit anticipated the many things I still had to go through...But the Lord did not let His servant suffer long...He gave me a little light to see it was the devil...I began to recall my strong resolutions to serve the Lord and my desire to suffer for Him...If I had trials they would be meritorious and if unhappiness, it would serve as purgatory if I accepted it in the service of God;

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- 9- cont'd...that I had nothing to **fear**...the greater the **opposition**, the greater the **gain**.  
Why did I lack courage to serve one to whom I owed so much? ... I promised before the Blessed Sacrament to do all I could to **obtain permission** to live in this house and to make the **promise of enclosure**...
- 10-Once I did this the devil fled instantly and left me calm and happy. All the **enclosure and penance** in this house...are extremely **easy** for me.....the happiness is very great...and I have better **health** than ever...May He be blessed ... in whose power all things can be done.

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11-I was left **exhausted** from such a conflict... and laughed to myself at the devil...The Lord permitted this **conflict** for I had never known what it was to be **unhappy** as a nun... and so that if I should meet someone who was unhappy I wouldn't be surprised but would feel **compassion** and know how to **console** her.

...after dinner, I wanted to rest a little...but what was done became known in my monastery, and there arose a great **outcry** in the city...The prioress sent me a message to **return to the monastery** at once...so I left my nuns and returned immediately. I saw clearly that a lot of **trials** awaited me...I was happy about the opportunity to suffer for Him...I believed they would throw me into a **prison cell**...which I thought would make me happy since I wouldn't have to **speak** with anyone and would be able to **rest** a little in **solitude**...I was worn out from so much dealing with people.

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- 12-When I arrived and gave an account to my prioress, she was somewhat placated. They sent everything to the provincial, and the case was left up to him... I was happy to suffer for the Lord but I didn't feel I had committed any offense...as I was trying to see our order fulfill its **mission perfectly**...After receiving a serious reprimand... I didn't want to excuse myself...I begged to be pardoned and punished...
- 13-I saw that in some matters they condemned me without any fault on my part...but in others they were speaking the truth...but none of what they said caused me any **disturbance or grief**...The provincial ordered me to give an **account to the nuns** and I had to do it.

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14-...I gave my explanation in such a way that no one present found anything to condemn me for ...The **provincial was very satisfied** and promised to give me permission to go there once things in the city quieted down... for the **clamor in the city was vehement**.

15- The **city council** met and determined it couldn't consent ... and that the Blessed Sacrament should be removed and the foundation not be allowed to continue ...Only one member, a **presentado**, of the order of St. Dominic...said it wasn't something that had to be suppressed, that there was time and that the matter had to be considered carefully ...and so it continued in existence for the Lord was pleased with it...but they made me and all in favor of it suffer.



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16- The **uproar** among the people was such that they talked of nothing else; they were all condemning me...I felt no more pain about what they said about me than if they hadn't said it, yet I was **fearful** the house would be suppressed...the persons who helped me were losing their credibility and suffering a great trial...If I had a **little faith**, I wouldn't have experienced any disturbance; but a **lack in one of the virtues is enough to put them all to sleep**. So, I was very afflicted for the two days the meetings among the people took place...The Lord said to me: "Don't you know that I am mighty?" What do you fear?" He assured me the new monastery wouldn't be suppressed...I was left consoled...

17-...A long lawsuit began... I had no money...but the provincial ... didn't want to oppose the foundation...Sometimes it seemed though that everything was failing ...

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17-Cont'd...Sometimes it seemed though that everything was failing ... and a day before the provincial came, the prioress told me to have nothing more to do with the new monastery; this meant abandoning everything. I went to God and told Him: “ Lord, this house is not mine; it was founded for You; now that there is no one to take care of its affairs, You, Your Majesty, must do so.” ... I immediately felt it was in safe hands.

18-...A priest who has always helped me ...went to the royal council; and that saintly gentleman...did a great deal in this matter...The Lord gave so much **fervor** to those who helped that it was as if their life and honor depended on it...for it was something by which the **Lord was served**...But the meeting returned to the question of **suppressing the monastery** as if it were a matter of life and death...In all, the assault lasted almost half a year...

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19-I was startled by what the devil stirred up against a few poor little women...There were only twelve women and the prioress ...living such a **strict life** ... that it would be harmful to the city didn't make sense

...Finally they agreed that if it had an **income** they would ...let the foundation continue...I thought that perhaps the Lord wanted it since we couldn't succeed without it; I was disposed to **accept the compromise**.

20-...That same night the holy **Friar Peter of Alcantara appeared to me**...before he died he rejoiced that the foundation was being so vehemently being opposed, as that was a sign that the Lord would be much served in the monastery...and that **in no way was I to accept an income**...and that if I followed this advice all would come about as I desired...He always appeared in his glorified body, filled with great glory...

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21-...This time He looked **severe** and told me that I should by no means accept income and asked why I didn't take His advice ...The next day I told the **gentleman**...that he should **not agree to an income** but that the lawsuit should go forward...He was very happy.

22-...another person...told me the matter shouldn't be put in the hands of learned men...this **snarl** ... caused by the devil turned out to be the most **complicated tangle of all**...The Lord helped me in all...

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23-...Once the city placated, the Dominican Friar, ***presentado***, managed to be a great help to us, though he wasn't present... The Lord brought him...solely for this purpose; ...he told me he had learned of our need **by accident**. After he departed, he tried to get our Father Provincial to give me **permission** ...to come to this house to **recite the Divine Office and teach it** to those who were here...The day we came was one of great consolation for me.

24-Before entering the new monastery, while in prayer outside in the church, almost in rapture, I saw **Christ**; He seemed to be receiving me with **great love** and placing a **crown on my head** and thanking me for what I had done for His Mother.

Another time after compline, I saw **our Lady** clothed in a **white mantle**; it seemed she was **sheltering us all under it**. I understood the **high degree of glory** the Lord would give to those living in this house

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25-Once the liturgical Offices were initiated the **people** began to grow **very devoted** to this house. More nuns were accepted...and our most vigorous persecutors began to show us great favor and give us alms...little by little they **abandoned the lawsuit**...they said they now knew the house was the **work of God**...they are careful about sending us alms. We get along without any lack of necessities...

26-It is a wonderful consolation for me to live with souls so **detached**. Their **conversation is about how they can make progress in the service of God**. Solitude is their **comfort**, and seeing others...is a burden even if they are relatives.

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27-...All the trials suffered were well worth it. Though there is some **austerity** as meat is never eaten without necessity and there is an eight- month fast...and other things... to **observe the rule with greater perfection**. I hope in the Lord that what was begun will prosper, as His Majesty told me it would.

28-The house the **beata** founded in Alcala was also favored by the Lord...she suffered great trials...but I know that full religious observance is kept there...May it please the Lord that all be to His glory and praise to the glorious Virgin Mary, whose habit we wear, amen.

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29-I believe your Reverence must be annoyed by the long account of this monastery, but it is short compared to the many trials we suffered and the wonders the Lord has worked for it...When I am dead give it to the sisters who live here ...so they can see the many things His Majesty arranged for its establishment...that they might be encouraged to **serve God** and strive that what has been begun may not collapse but **always flourish**.

Since the Lord has desired to show His favor towards this house, it seems that one would be ...**punished by God** were one to begin to **mitigate the way of perfection** that the Lord has initiated here ...



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29-cont'd ...The main **disposition** required for always living in this calm is the desire to **rejoice solely in Christ, one's Spouse**. This is what they must always have as their **aim: to be alone with Him**. And there should be no more than **thirteen** in the house...I've found out through experience. To live the spiritual life as we do, as well as for alms without begging, does not allow for a large number. Let them always have greater trust in the one who through many trials and the prayer of many, strove for what would be better. ...Those who find this **life harsh** should **blame their own lack of spirituality** ...they should go to another monastery where they can be saved in a way conformable to their own spirituality.        Amen