

# Episodes from the Life of St. Teresa of Avila



# Session Three

## Life and Experiences in the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation



**Teresa born in 1515, died in 1582  
Her life of 67 years can be considered as  
having three distinct phases**



- **First 21 years: First Phase, childhood and young adult until she entered the Monastery of the Incarnation in 1536**
- **Next 27 years, Second Phase, as a Carmelite nun in the Monastery of the Incarnation until 1563, when she is 48 years old**
- **Next 19 years, Third Phase as Carmelite Mother Teresa and Foundress, until she dies age 67**

# **These Three Phases remind us of the Classic Three Stages of Spiritual Progress**

**The Purgative, the Illuminative and the Unitive.**

**Also known as the stages of Beginners,  
Proficient and Perfect**

**Fundamental characteristics:**

**Beginners: avoiding sin**

**Proficient: doing what God wants**

**Perfect: being with God**

**We can see these stages in her life**

**First 21 years: as a Beginner, learning to avoid sin and the occasion of sin**



**We can see these stages in her life**  
**Next 27 years: as a Proficient, learning what**  
**God wants her to do, and beginning to do it**



**We can see these stages in her life**  
**Next 27 years: as a Perfect, being with God**





**These stages are not fixed,  
do not follow seamlessly  
one after the other**

**We see this in Teresa's life.**

**We see it in our life, in our spiritual growth.**

**Successful spiritual development is a trend  
from our beginnings through proficiency to  
perfection; from avoiding sin, to learning what  
God wants of us, to being with him.**

**A trend with many reverses, many detours,  
many cycles, in our lives as in Teresa's.**

# Life and Experiences in the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation



# November 2 1535

## Teresa leaves secretly and walks to the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation



**November 2, 1536: Receives the Habit**

**“Within an hour, Christ gave me such great happiness at being in the religious state of life that it has never left me up to this day”.**



# The Monastery of the Incarnation



**Blessed John Soreth founded the order of Carmelite nuns in 1452. The first convent, was in Florence; the movement rapidly spread to Belgium, France, and Spain. Founded in Avila in 1478, the Incarnation began only 26 years later.**

**In 1536 it was one of eleven Carmelite monasteries for nuns in Spain. It was moved outside the city onto land that had been a Jewish cemetery and a new monastery was built. It was opened on 4 April 1515, the date on which Teresa was baptized.**

**In 1536, who lived in the Incarnation?  
180 nuns and at least 20 others**



# Beatas and Choir Sisters

## Generally from wealthy or noble families





**They bring dowry, keep their property,  
have nice cells, have visitors, go out freely,  
have no ministries, no rule of enclosure**



# Lay Sisters, also Religious, worked to keep the monastery running



**Teresa thinks about these differences  
Is this what the Lord wants?**



**At the Incarnation, religious life includes  
Mass, fasting and abstinence  
liturgy of hours, hours of silence**



# No instruction about mental prayer



# Teresa begins to have “experiences” She is afraid



# Why is she afraid? Upheaval in Spain



# Spanish Inquisition





# Widespread fear of the Devil



**National infatuation with visions  
and extraordinary phenomena  
Led to fame and adulation**



# While Teresa was at the Incarnation 1543: Magdalena de la Cruz confesses to hypocrisy and possession



**Teresa tells all to her Confessors  
The Lord assures her: “I was given calm  
together with fortitude, courage, security,  
quietude, and light”**



**Teresa is 44: Index of Forbidden Books**  
**The Lord says he will be for her a living book.**  
**Later, she writes her own books on prayer**



**Teresa has difficulty with prayer**  
**“I was more anxious that the hour I had determined to spend in prayer be over than I was to remain there”**



**At 39, Teresa has a Second Conversion**  
**“I saw a statue that represented the much wounded Christ and I threw myself down with the greatest outpouring of tears.”**



**Once, at Mass: “The Lord’s most sacred humanity in its risen form was represented to me completely, as it is in paintings, with such wonderful beauty and majesty”**





## A Vision of Hell

**“The bodily pains were unbearable and they would go on without ever ceasing. This was nothing next to the soul's agonizing”**



## A Vision of Hell

**“This experience was one of the greatest favors  
the Lord granted me”**



**“I saw close to me toward my left side an angel,  
in his hands a large golden dart, he plunged it  
several times into my heart”**



**“When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; he left me all on fire with great love of God.”**



**Teresa's incorrupt heart is displayed in a reliquary in the Church in Alba de Tormes. A puncture wound in it is clearly visible.**



**At the Incarnation, Teresa's learns from her spiritual experiences. She perseveres in prayer, humility, love for her brothers and sisters, for the Carmelite Order and for the Church.**



**She dreams of the Carmelite Rule of St. Albert.  
The Lord kindles in her soul another charism.  
Teresa is to be a cloistered nun, a teacher of  
prayer and even more - a foundress to establish  
monasteries for nuns and friars.**



## **For Reflection and Discussion**

**What were some events and people during this stage of her life that opened Teresa's soul to her vocation, and strengthened her resolve?**

**How did she react to visions and other supernatural events?**

**What events and people in your life have led you to a deeper experience of prayer? How did you react initially to these events?**



**Any questions or comments?**

