

Episodes in the Life of Teresa

Format of these Sessions

The origin of the Discalced Carmel is to be found in St. Teresa of Jesus. Her writings, *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*, are a vital part of our formation.

Sessions: These sessions will present some **episodes in her life:** not as a complete narrative but in sequence.

About the Images:

Some are authentic representations, others are indicative of the period in which Teresa lived, included for illustration.

Sources include among others:

- The Collected Works of Teresa of Avila;** ICS, particularly: *The Book of Her Life* from Volume 1 and *The Book of Her Foundations* from Volume 3
- A Life of Prayer:** From the Work of St. Teresa of Avila, edited by Dr. James Houston
- Teresa of Avila** by Maria-Milagros Rivera Garretas
- The Life of Saint Teresa** by Father Crisogono de Jesus

Purpose: Our **purpose** in these sessions is to **know** Teresa better as a person, to **walk** with her on her **spiritual journey** through her growing awareness of her Catholic faith, her vocation to Carmel, and her way of perfection.

Our journey with Saint Teresa will **enrich our own spiritual growth;** in her life experiences we will see echoes of our own.

As we know her better, we will better understand our own journey and be strengthened on our path to unity with God.

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Session Four : Teresa establishes her First Foundation, St. Joseph's in Avila

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Teresa is 45 lives at the Incarnation, although concerned about the failure of Carmel to maintain its original ideals, she has no thought of renewing the practices of own monastery, much less a reform of the whole Order.

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how God works, inspiration through other people Teresa is 45. In the fall of 1560 a group of friends and relatives are in her comfortable cell, socializing as they often do. Lightheartedly, they think about "**how to reform the rule observed in the monastery...and found after the manner of hermitages, like the original one...which our holy fathers of old founded.**" Teresa likes the idea because after the terrifying vision of hell, she had promised God that she would make up for the souls lost to Protestantism by being more rigorous.

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I was thinking about what I could do for God, and I thought that the first thing was to follow the call to the religious life by keeping my rule as perfectly as I could. Even though there were many servants of God in the house where I was, the nuns because of great necessity often went out to places where they could stay. Also, the rule was not kept in its prime rigor, but was observed according to the mitigated Carmelite. Also the monastery had a lot of comfort since it was a large and pleasant one. Someone mentioned to me and to the others that it would be possible to found a monastery.

Back at the Incarnation, the other young women in the group also like the idea. Almost all are relatives of Teresa; some are Carmelites, others, lay friends. They include: Beatriz de Cepeda, Leonor de Cepeda, María de Cepeda, Isabel de San Pablo, Ines de Tapia, Ana de Tapia, and Juana Suárez. The one who first mentioned it was María de Ocampo, a daughter of Teresa's cousin. She eventually is to move to the new monastery, St. Joseph's, and take the name María Bautista. María de San José writes: "**One day the Saint together with María de Ocampo and other nuns from the Incarnation began to discuss the saints of the desert. At this time some of them said that since they couldn't go to the**

desert, they should found a little monastery with few nuns."

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How God directs; I am with you;
Nothing was decided at that time but one day in prayer, Teresa received clear direction from the Lord.
One day after Communion, His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and He made great promises that it would be founded and that He would be highly served in it. He said it should be called St. Joseph and that this saint would keep watch over us at one door, and our Lady at the other, that Christ would remain with us, and that it would be a star shining with great splendor. He said that even though religious orders were mitigated one shouldn't think He was little served in them; He asked what would become of the world if it were not for religious and said that I should tell my confessor what He commanded, that He was asking him not to go against this or hinder me from doing it.

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*Since I was having these desires, I began to discuss the matter with my friend, **Dona Guiomar**, who began to draw up plans to provide the new house with income.*
Dona Guiomar de Ulloa was one of Teresa's best friends; born in Toro in 1529, beautiful and flamboyant, she married wealthy Francisco Davila. He died in 1554, leaving her a widow at 25 with a small fortune and three children.

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Experiencing a conversion, she devoted herself to charity. Her **daughter Elvira** entered the monastery of the Incarnation, where **Dona Guiomar** came to know Teresa. Teresa stayed in her home from 1555-1558 as companion to her daughter, who was staying there with the provincial's permission. Dona Guiomar provided a **great part of the income** for Teresa's new foundation in Avila and obtained the brief from Rome for its establishment. She arranged for Teresa to meet **St. Peter of Alcantara**. In 1578 Dona Guiomar entered St. Joseph's but had to leave because of bad health. She took **St. John of the Cross** for her **confessor**. In 1585 she wrote her **memoirs of Teresa** for the **biographer, Padre Ribera**. The house of Doña Guiomar is near **Plaza de los Jeronimos**. Only the front of the building remains. This is most probably the place where Teresa prepared the plans her first foundation.

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Teresa wants to find ways and means to establish her first foundation, **St. Joseph's in Avila**, where the "**Primitive**" Rule will be observed. She is helped by relatives, friends and members of the nobility and clergy such as Bishop Alvaro de Mendoza, Gaspar Daza and **Peter of Alcantara**. Her sister, Juana de Ahumada and her brother-in-law, Juan de Ovalle, acquired the houses and started to turn them into convent buildings. Money came from her brother Lorenzo de Cepeda from the Indies. Dona Guiomar de Ulloa and Dona Aldonza de Guzmán applied for the license from Pope Pius IV to found a Carmelite convent.

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Word gets out. Throughout Avila, they talk of a Carmelite nun in the Incarnation who has **ecstasies, raptures and visions**. She plans to make a foundation of discalced nuns. They chatter about Teresa de Ahumada. Some laugh. She was well known in the city as a socializing young woman; they think she is not the sort of person to found convents. Others see a desire to be famous and be considered a saint. Some think this is the **deluded dream** of a so-called miracle-working nun and want the **Inquisition** to act. A few take it seriously, those who have dealt with her spiritually and know her **virtues, her humility, her spirit of prayer and penance**. But even these think it's a lost cause, impossible to bring about. Even her confessor, a Jesuit, is doubtful.

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One day the people gathered near the entrance of Alcazar seeing a nun and a lady walking across the main square. They are **Teresa and Dona Guiomar**. They are going to St. Thomas' College to present their projects to **Father Domingo Ibanez** a theologian. Dona Guiomar talks about the **finances** to maintain a new convent, and Teresa explains the spirit and the purposes of the foundation. The Dominican Friar listens. Their intentions, he thinks, are good; the idea is holy; the plans are well orientated to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. But he does not give a definitive answer. It is a serious matter, and so he asks for **eight days** to think about it before giving his opinion.

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Eight days later, the foundresses return. They have prayed a lot and decided to go by **Father Ibanez's decision**. If he disapproves, they will give it up. If he approves, they will somehow make it happen

And the opinion of the theologian is enthusiastically in favor. **"If anyone goes against it -he tells them as they leave- let them come to me, and I will convince them"**. The theologian of St. Thomas **approves**.

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From this moment on, Teresa acts decisively. She speaks to the **Bishop**, to **Saint Peter of Alcantara**, to the **Provincial of the Carmelites**. She looks everywhere for **advice** and **help**. But there are still **obstacles**. The Provincial promises to help and backs away; even the Bishop wavers about the character and conditions that the foundation should have. The confessor approves one day and disapproves the next, and at one time prohibits her from involving herself with the project. **She obeys**. Even more, she is sent away to **Toledo** for **six months** to help a noble lady **Dona Luisa de la Cerda** who was having **difficulties**.

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However, Dona Guiomar and Father Ibanez keep working. They write to **Rome** asking for the necessary **permissions**, and thanks to their collaboration, when Teresa comes back to Avila, they present her with a **Brief** from the **Pope Pius IV** **authorizing the foundation**.

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Teresa is 47. It's the 24th of August 1562. in the eastern suburb of Avila, a little bell sounds from a tiny chapel in a small garden with almond trees, next to a humble little house: low stone walls, narrow and grilled windows, shadowy corridors, low ceilings of dark wood. It rings for the **opening** of the **new little convent, St. Joseph's**.

The **inaugural Mass** is led at the chapel altar by **Father Gaspar Daza**, representing the Bishop. Others taking part were: **Father Julian de Avila**, who is to be the chaplain; **Gonzalo de Aranda** and **Francisco de Salcedo**, friends of Mother Teresa; two nuns from the Incarnation, and Teresa's sister Juana with her husband.

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Four young ladies are kneeling behind a **wooden grill**, awaiting the **holy Discalced habit**; they are to be the first to ever wear it. They are dressed in white, their hands together, eyes looking down and faces shining. Antonia de Henao (of the Holy Spirit); Maria de la Paz (of the Cross); Ursula de Revilla (of the Saints); and Maria de Avila (of St. Joseph). Once Mass has finished, the **ceremony of the taking of the habit** takes place. Teresa puts the rough cloth, the wimple, the white

cape, and the veil on each of the novices. Teresa sees before her the four nuns with their discalced feet and white cape; her eyes glow. The magnificent work of the **reform of Carmel** has begun. Ladies first.

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From that moment, life in Avila swirls around the small convent of Saint Joseph. The entire city is **agitated**. There is a coming and going of magistrates, governors, nobles and workers, even friars and clerics as though it is **life or death for Avila**. Everyone has something to say about St. Joseph and Teresa. Those against it when it was only an idea are furious now it is real. Others are amazed by the commotion that it has caused.

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The **four discalced novices** are working on the **spinning wheel** and making **embroidery**. There is a pounding on the door. It is the Chief Magistrate Carvajal, who will break the door down if they don't come out straight away, because the Council has decided to dissolve the foundation. He orders them to **abandon the convent**. But the four little nuns say they won't leave unless Teresa tells them to; she brought them and **only she can instruct them to go**.

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The enraged Magistrate goes back to the Council. They decide to call a **general meeting** with all the important people of Avila, with representatives of the Church, of the Religious Orders, of the clergy, of the nobles and of the different trades of the city. This is the way to settle this.

It is **six days** after the founding of the new convent. The 30th of August. It is Sunday. At **three o'clock** the important men come to **the meeting**, they cross the square in front of the crowd, and go into the Municipal building.

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The Magistrate and the governors, the notaries and the bailiffs; then, the Dean, a canon, the Precentor of the Cathedral and the Provost of the Bishopric. With their white and black habit, the Dominican Father Pedro Serrano, prior of St. Tomas', accompanied by the theologian Father Domingo Banez; the Franciscans are there, the Benedictines with the black habits; the Jesuits; **Father Daza**, nobles and the notables of the town. The townsfolk, who know why these VIPs are here, wait in the square to find out what happens.

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Inside the Chief Magistrate presents the case of the Convent of Saint Joseph, newly founded by Teresa. He wants it **demolished**. The Provost of the Bishop stands up and reads the Pontifical Brief which authorizes the foundation, and then with nothing to add, leaves the meeting. The opinions and discussions start straight away. Almost everyone is against the idea. Clergy, friars, abbots and theologians, graduates and noblemen think that the new foundation is a threat to the rest of the Monasteries. They say not all the **conditions have been met** and so the **Pontifical Brief** need not be executed. It is necessary, therefore, to **cancel the foundation**, to **eliminate the Convent**. And the quicker, the better.

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They all sit down. The Jesuits don't say anything. When there is silence in the chamber, the **young Dominican Friar** with the white and black habit, **Father Domingo Banez**, stands up. Remember he once said: "*If anyone goes against this foundation let them come to me, and I will convince them*". He speaks with courage. *It is necessary to reflect on the matter*, he says. *The suppression of the Convent of Saint Joseph, cannot be decided lightly. There is a Brief from the Pope and an authorization from the Bishop that favor it. It is also done for the glory of God. Let us leave the matter in the hands of the Bishop because this is a matter for the church not for the City Council.* When he sits down, there a **silence of indecision**. His reasons have calmed spirits down,

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When the Chief Magistrate next speaks, it is to propose that the Bishop be informed once again before deciding the fate of the Discalced Convent. **Teresa's defender has triumphed**. This is how the meeting finished on that Sunday afternoon of August. The people, who were waiting outside, stay in the town square, talking about the outcome. The distinguished men leave and go off in different directions

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St. Joseph's monastery has several buildings including a small chapel. It is **simple and austere**. In August 1561, **Teresa's sister**, Juana de Ahumada and her brother-in-law, Juan de Ovalle, bought the houses and started to turn them into convent buildings. It was **financed** by money sent by Teresa's brother Lorenzo de Cepeda sent money from the Americas. **Visitors today** can see what the first convent of the reform was like: kitchens,

refectory, St Teresa's room, cloister, foundational bell and the so-called '**devil's staircase**' down which Teresa fell at **Christmas** time in the year 1577, breaking **her left arm**.

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On the very day when St. Joseph's became the first convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns Teresa was **recalled to the Incarnation** because of the uproar in Avila. While there she writes the first draft of the Life.

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She is there for a **year**, until she and four companions got **permission from Bishop de Mendoza** to live at St. Joseph's, to **initiate the Divine Office**, and to **instruct the novices**.

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Teresa is 48. In August 1563, a year after the **inauguration of the convent**, Teresa climbs the hill on the north of the city, she walks, to the city walls, to the little convent of Saint Joseph. The little bell of the turn rings and when the door opens, the **four novices throw themselves into the arms of their Mother**. The young novices, orphaned for a time now, are comforted with the presence of the holy Mother. She writes the **Constitutions** for St. Joseph's which are **approved** by the Bishop of Avila, Don Alvaro de Mendoza, and by Pius IV in 1565. These are based on the Carmelite "**Primitive Rule**" of Pope Innocent IV. Teresa appointed Ana Davila prioress and Anne Gomez sub-prioress; however, the Bishop made Teresa prioress and Ana returns to the Incarnation. At St. Joseph's, the sisters **dropped their family names**, and Teresa de Ahumada becomes **Teresa of Jesus**.

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In the little convent of St. Joseph, they live a **holy life**, Mother and her nuns.

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At 5 o'clock in the morning, a little bell calls them to prayer. The doors of their cells open softly, and they go along the candle-lit cloister into the choir where they kneel next to the grill that looks out into the chapel. One reads a spiritual passage to help their meditation, and then absolute silence for an hour. In **mental prayer**, they think about God, about the mysteries of Christ, about human misery. And they pray; they pray for the **Church, for priests, for the Lutherans** who are increasing in number and threatening to come to Spain.

Teresa reminds them that these are the objectives of their prayer.

After mental prayer, comes the **Divine Office**. The sweet voices are heard in the streets; they sound like angels singing behind the grilled windows. Afterward, comes the **Mass**, communion, ordering of the cells, and work in their different jobs like a **silent, hardworking beehive**.

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A wooden cross is on the main seat in the refectory, and there is a skull on the table. There are small tables made of rough wood, no carvings no paint; small jars and bowls made of baked clay; wooden cutlery. Here they eat the herbs picked from the garden; cucumbers or some vine leaves, with a few drops of oil. On **feast days**, there is something special: an **egg** for each nun. Many times, Mother Teresa fries them herself. The nuns have even seen her in **ecstasy** while holding the frying pan, and she would tell them: "**Daughters, God dwells among the pots and pans.**"

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When they leave the dining hall - praying psalms and petitions - they go to the small garden or to a small room if it's cold or raining. It is the **hour of recreation**. Teresa gives as much importance to this part of the day as to the other most holy and spiritual of exercises. They talk, they sing, they laugh, they work. The nuns, seated on the floor sew and embroider, they prepare scapulars, repair altar cloths or paint a small curtain for the Tabernacle. Mother Teresa, seated with them, talks, while her hands turn the spindle and the distaff.

On **feast days**, instead of working, they sing alleluias composed by the saint. At **Christmas** they play drums, the castanets, blow whistles, and they even dance around the newborn Child Jesus.

One day, they find themselves their woolen tunics **infested by fleas**. They pray for relief before a statue they have of Jesus Christ. They sing some spiritual **poems** that **Teresa has composed** for the occasion

ALL:

Now, that you give us new clothing, Oh Heavenly King,
Free from the creepy foes, These woolen clothes.

MOTHER:

Daughters, who have embraced the cross, Prepare to fight. And lo Jesus, who is your light, Ask his favor.

MOTHER:

Disturbing is this nasty mob in our petitions, the spirit is not centered in our devotions; Without regard, keep the heart in God most strengthened.

MOTHER:

Since you've come here to die never loose heart,
And of such a bad company never take fright In God
you'll find the remedy to your cry.

ALL:

Now, that you give us new clothing Oh Heavenly King,
Free from the creepy foes these woolen clothes

And the **miracle works!** The nuns are never again to feel troubled by the little animals, and from then on, that statue of Jesus is called "**The Christ of the Fleas**".

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After recreation, the Discalced nuns come back to their practices of **piety and penance**: the penances, the choral exercises, the manual work ... Everything they do is **simple and joyful** and so their smiles remain; their spirituality has a cheerful character that is typical of Teresa, and is nothing like that melancholy, withdrawn, frowning and gloomy kind of holiness that Teresa sees as a terrible spiritual sickness.

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In the afternoon, at three o'clock, after praying **Vespers**, there is **absolute silence** in Saint Joseph's. It's because each nun is in her **cell**, doing her manual work. Modestly seated on the floor, on the bed, or on a square piece of cork, they work on their task. While they sew, embroider or weave hemp for their poor sandals, their thoughts fly as if in the rooms of an **Interior Castle** looking for the **Beloved**.

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At five o'clock, they pray **Compline**; and straight after that a **simple supper**: a glass of water, and some vegetables or some salad in the bowl of baked clay. At eight o'clock, they have another **hour of mental prayer**, and then they pray **Matins**. Afterward comes the **examination of conscience**, the **discipline and petitions**. Then back to their **cells to their devotions**.

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At **eleven o'clock**, one of the nuns while kneeling down at one end of the corridor **smacks little wooden blocks** together nine times. The rhythmic knocks are heard throughout the cloister: Clack, clack, clack; clack, clack, clack; clack, clack, clack. All the nuns open the doors of

their cells and kneel down. Then the nun with the wooden blocks recites a **short prayer**, an aspiration on death, on glory, or on the excellence or one of the virtues:

***You'll die only once and in an uncertain
circumstance
If you choose the wrong door the consequence
will be forever more...***

They stay kneeling, focusing on the little prayer, and Teresa passes by giving a **blessing** to each of them. Now they will slip in to their rough woolen sheets and go to sleep – on a wooden board, on the hard and narrow straw mattress. Until early the next morning when the little bell rings again, calling them to prayer.

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Teresa writes that these are “**the most restful years of my life,**” and she means to live at St. Joseph’s the rest of her life.

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After only **four years** inspired by the Holy Spirit, in response to God's call, in 1566 she is prompted by a **visiting Franciscan missionary, Alonso Maldonado**, and encouraged by the **Carmelite Father-General, John Rossi**, who visited St. Joseph’s in 1567. **Teresa is 52**. She leaves to make **new foundations**.

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That same year she makes a **second foundation** at Medina del Campo, to be followed before her death by **fifteen others**. Amen

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For Reflection and Discussion

Although the Lord can inspire and direct us in many ways, Scripture, tradition and experience seem to show a process that the Lord uses often.

First, He gets our attention;

Then makes His will known;

We respond by objecting or refusing due to our inability to do what the Lord has revealed;

Then He reassures us by saying that He will be with us as we accomplish the task.

We see this pattern often in the Bible: for example, Moses and the burning bush; the Lord giving the Great Commission to His disciples.

Do you see this pattern in the life of St. Teresa of Jesus?

Have you experienced something similar?

Teresa was settled in her life at the Incarnation where she had lived for 25 years.

What happened to turn her life upside down?

What sequence of events drove her to leave her comfort zone?

Have you experienced similar tipping points in your life?

Teresa relied heavily on assistance and resources of others in order to carry out God’s will.

Can you recall times when you did the same?