

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
- Book of Her Foundations** (Collected Work, Volume 3)
- The Divine Adventure**

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 Five: Beyond Avila

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Introduction

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Teresa is **48**. In August 1563 she walks from the monastery of the Incarnation to the little monastery of Saint Joseph in Avila. She takes the religious name '**Teresa of Jesus**' and she intends to live there the rest of her life. In a letter to her brother Lorenzo, December 21, 1561, she described her idea: "**To found a monastery where there will be only fifteen nuns and no possibility for any increase in numbers. They will practice a very strict enclosure and thus never go out or be seen without veils covering their faces. Their lives will be founded on prayer and mortification.**"

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The Lord has other things in mind. In 1567, she is **52** years old, **two** events spur her beyond Avila. A **Franciscan** Alonzo Maldonado, returns from Mexico and tells of the millions who had never heard of Jesus. Teresa is appalled. She complains to her Lord about not being able to do anything. She hears the Lord speak to her: "**Wait a little, daughter, and you will see great things.**"

In the same year, the prior general of the Carmelites, Father Giovanni Battista Rossi, whom Teresa calls Rubeo, makes his visitation of the Carmelite houses in Spain. Teresa is very anxious, but Rossi is delighted with this enthusiastic nun and the manner of living that she has established at St. Joseph's. **Rossi not only approved but asked for more.** He authorizes her to found other monasteries and tells her later to **make as many foundations as she has hairs on her head.**

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Teresa is overwhelmed, but the Lord is with her always, encouraging, prompting, sustaining and showing the Way. With great fortitude she plunges into this new work. She, an inexperienced Carmelite nun, goes beyond the cloister, into the world of negotiations, people, money, property, and conflicts. She finds God in all things, even "**among the pots and pans**" and she knows He is the One who will do what she cannot. She writes: "**A useless woman as helpless as I well understood that she couldn't do anything**"

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Teresa will found **fourteen** in addition to St. Joseph's; two others she directed at a distance. Medina del Campo (1567); Malagon and Valladolid (1568); Toledo and Pastrana (1569); Salamanca (1570); Alba de Tormes

(1571); Segovia (1574); Beas and Seville (1575); Caravaca (1576); Villanueva de la Jara and Palencia (1580); Soria (1581); Granada and Burgos (1582). She also established her way of life among the friars with foundations at Duruelo (1568) and Pastrana (1569). The Lord is with her always throughout her missions as foundress and as mystic, writer and teacher of prayer. Between 1562 and 1565, when she was almost 50, Teresa by order of her Confessors writes the Book of her Life

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It is the 12th of August 1567. Teresa at **52** is on **her first mission beyond Avila**. Along the dry dusty road, it is hot, the air is burning, and plodding donkeys are pulling three covered wagons. Inside, heated by the sun, are **seven nuns**, uncomfortable yet praying psalms and singing hymns. Alongside, some young people are walking and a priest is on a horse. At dusk, they see the castle and the towers of the churches of Arevalo. The next day, they start out again, but not in wagons. Teresa wants to enter **Medina del Campo** silently, because there have been some difficulties. She sends the stable boys back to Avila with the wagons; she leaves four nuns in a close by village, and she, two other nuns and the priest get on mules and set out for Medina. Teresa rides well, she can handle the mule, and **it is midnight when they reach the town, on the eve of the festivity of the Assumption**. They go to the monastery of the Carmelite friars, collect a few things for the small house which is to be their convent. A group of people comes near, there are footsteps and the sounds of cattle, the bulls for tomorrow's bull-running, part of the festivities, still held today. Teresa's group carries luggage: altar cloths, chalice, missal, cruets. When the crowd sees them there are cheeky comments, laughter and whistles. Teresa takes no notice. At daybreak, she makes a chapel in the entrance of the house and she and her nuns hear Mass. The **second foundation** has been inaugurated, St. Joseph's, **Medina del Campo**.

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They need a priest to pray Mass. Where does Teresa get a priest? On her travels, he may be a Carmelite or some other religious from the town, or more often a priest who comes with her. This traveling priest is **Father Julian de Avila**, born in 1527, 12 years younger than Teresa; he is one of the first to help her. Ordained in 1558, he was appointed chaplain for the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Avila and became Teresa's companion for her first eleven foundations. He became involved in the **process for her beatification** when the Pope asked Father Julian to explain some expressions in her writings. His answer, based on his close acquaintance with Teresa, was his

version of her life story, telling of the adventures, hazards, and setbacks surrounding Teresa's foundations. In 1605 he died and is buried in the Carmelite chapel of St. Joseph's in Avila.

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Soon after the foundation in Medina, Teresa talks with a young, small friar; his name **Father John**. He is 25, has recently celebrated his first Mass and is in his last year of studies at Salamanca. Teresa explains her reform among the nuns and tells him she wishes to start the Reform among the friars. The Prior of Medina has already volunteered but she thinks he is old and she wants the **vigor of youth** for the **austerity and recollection** that are the foundation of the Reform. She persuades Father John; **he has one condition**, for he has decided to become a Carthusian. **If the Reform is ready to start when his studies are over, he will agree**. Teresa assures him, and the little Father John promises to be the first Discalced Carmelite friar. Teresa is thrilled. Father John leaves and she tells her nuns: **"Blessed be God, as I now have one and a half friars for the foundation of the Discalced Carmelites"**.

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It is 1568, Teresa is **53**. She has completed her **third foundation** at **Malagon** and saw in Duruelo a small house that is to be the first monastery of friars. Towards the end of June, she returns to **Medina**, to meet Father John, who finished his studies in Salamanca. Teresa shows him the plan of the monastery of **Duruelo**: an entrance, two bedrooms, a small kitchen and an attic. Father John says. **"It is still very big for me"**. They both laughed.

Father John and the nuns are busy. Father John is wearing his **new habit**, sewn by Teresa and her nuns. He has bare feet and a big smile, the humble image of the first Discalced Carmelite. Teresa's dream of a reform among the friars is now a reality. And she thinks that little friar, now called **Father John of the Cross**, will see it is successful. And Teresa of Jesus is right about John of the Cross.

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What about the prior of **Medina**, who Teresa thinks is too old? His name is **Antonio de Jesus**; born in 1510 he is 32 years older than John, and 5 years older than Teresa. He outlives them both; he was **91** when he died in 1601. He received the Carmelite habit when he was ten years a priest and was ordained at twenty-two. He was prior in Avila in 1565, and at Medina in 1567 and assisted Teresa in organizing the foundations there. He then offers to be a discalced Carmelite friar and when the foundation is established in **Duruelo** in 1568, he and

John of the Cross are the **first friars**. In 1573 he leaves to become prior in other communities and other foundations. When in 1581 the disalced friars elected **Father Gracian** as their first **provincial**, Father Antonio lost by just four votes and became an advisor to Father Gracian. As vicar provincial he ordered Teresa at the end of her life to go to Alba de Tormes where she died. His remains are in Velez-Malaga, kept there by the disalced Carmelite nuns.

Teresa is astonished when she visits Antonio and John in their small monastery. She sees a tiny and poor but clean chapel, with lots of crosses and skulls; two small cells where the friars don't fit unless they kneel or lie down; they use straw on the floor as beds, with a stone as a pillow. The roof is broken and snow falls on them while they pray at midnight. And the friars are happy in their austere and humiliating solitude. Teresa's dream is a reality; the cradle of the reform among friars is in place under the sun and the pure clear air of **Duruelo** in Castille.

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It is 1569, Teresa is **54**. In the Jewish suburb of Toledo, among narrow, winding streets close to the Moorish synagogue, in a small, low and narrow house with a small patio, Teresa inaugurates her **fifth foundation**. However, she does not enjoy the small house for very long. A servant of the powerful Princess of Eboli, favorite of the king, comes to take Teresa to **Pastrana** to see the new convent prepared for Disalced nuns.

Teresa's confessor tells her to go.

In the Palace the Princess pampers the nuns. But she has demands and fancies, she wants to interfere in the life of the nuns and Teresa considers this untouchable. She will make no concession. Not the title, not the money, not the social influence, not even the favors received give the wife of Prince Ruy Gomez the right to change the spirit and the way of life of the Disalced nuns.

There are heated arguments. At last the Prince intervenes, and the new **monastery is founded**, the **Monastery of the Conception**. But nobody is happy: the Princess is inconsistent, determined and resentful, because it is not according to her wishes; Teresa senses the Princess is a danger for the peace of her religious nuns.

For the next four years Teresa's nuns live there. Then the princess becomes a widow. She demands to be admitted as a Carmelite. She gives herself the habit and tries to rule the monastery and have her own way. She is **expelled**.

Furious and vengeful, she takes back the gifts she gave to the nuns, she breaks the contract that sustained the monastery and **denounces Teresa's book of her life to**

the Inquisition. Teresa ends this sad state of affairs by removing the nuns to **Segovia**.

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At **Pastrana**, away from the influence of the Princess, she **converts a hermitage** into a monastery for friars. It was founded with three friars on July 13 1569, and existed until 1835, when religious orders were expelled

Salamanca and Alba de Tormes

1570, the night of All Souls, Teresa is **55**. She and Maria of the Sacrament are in Salamanca to begin another foundation in an old house, left in bad condition by the students who had lived there. The house has big rooms, long and dark corridors, large attic. Maria is afraid of the students, who may be hiding in the building; afraid of the dead, who moan from the bell towers. They lie down on some straw they have found, wrap themselves in borrowed blankets and sleep. In the morning, when the shadows and fears have passed by, they make a small altar with planks; and the first Mass is celebrated in **St. Joseph's, Salamanca**.

Teresa goes to **Alba de Tormes**, and there on the 25th of January, 1571 founds the monastery of **Our Lady of the Annunciation**. It is to be here, next to the River Tormes, where the tomb and reliquary of her **incorrupt body** and her **transverberated heart** will come to **rest**.

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Return to the Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila Meanwhile, Teresa's home monastery, the Incarnation in Avila, is close to ruin. When the prior general Rossi visits in 1567, there are 140 nuns in solemn profession and no more than 60 can be supported. The monastery is in debt, and the unfinished church is ready to collapse. To survive, the nuns must get outside help; they must keep their own money. At one time forced by hunger 50 nuns are living in the homes of relatives and benefactors. Parlor visits are encouraged to get **donations**. Spiritually, some want only Carmelite confessors, others want a choice; some don't like the Jesuits preaching, others suggest the Carmelite friars prepare themselves better.

The Pope's ambassador, the Dominican Father Pedro Fernandez decides a **new leader** is needed; someone to bring about reforms and fix the economic troubles. In 1571, he appoints Teresa as prioress of the Incarnation. She is reluctant, but Father Pedro orders Teresa to **interrupt her work as foundress**, go back and do all she can to improve the material and spiritual welfare of that house.

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The Provincial himself takes Teresa there on the 6th of October. He gathers all the nuns together, and they nervously await his announcement. Rossi reads the license by which Father Pedro Fernandez names Teresa the Prioress of the Incarnation.

But the nuns are unhappy; there are dark looks, suspicious comments, and shouting. He hasn't finished reading when a clamor of objections and insults drown his last words.

Teresa has been gone for only four years, but they know what she has been doing: establishing monasteries where the nuns practice a very strict enclosure and never go out and are not seen without veils covering their faces, where the nuns live lives founded on prayer and mortification. They think she will make them follow the discipline of her Reform; that she will make them become Discalced, and they are worried, they oppose this.

Remember, Teresa knows all these women. She lived with them for nearly 30 years. They guided her formation, they nursed her when she was ill, and they are her friends. What does she think as this animosity whirls around her? She stands next to the seat of the Provincial, and stays calm. He silences the nuns and challenges them: "**Don't you want Mother Teresa of Jesus?**" Nobody answers. Finally, one of them, Catherine of Castro, stands up and says: "**We want her, and we love her**". And the question is settled. Teresa is admitted as Prioress of the Incarnation.

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The next day, she calls them to the choir. Some are still afraid; some do not trust her, some do not know what to expect. The first thing they see surprises them. Teresa is not sitting in the big chair reserved for the prioress. In that place of honor, she has placed a **statue of Our Lady, and in her hands she has put the keys of the convent. Teresa sits at the feet of the Blessed Mother, Queen of Carmel.** There is absolute silence.

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The nuns hold their breath waiting for her to speak. She says; "**Ladies, Mothers and Sisters of mine: Our Lord, by means of obedience, has sent me to this house, to carry out this office... I have only come to serve you and to comfort you in everything I can. I am a daughter of this house, and a sister of you all. Do not fear my government, because, even though until now I have lived and governed Discalced nuns, I know well, thanks to the goodness of God, how to govern those who are not Discalced ...**"

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The new, discalced friar Father John of the Cross comes to the Incarnation to assist Teresa and serve as confessor and spiritual director for the nuns. And, under their care, the monastery and community soon become a **model of observance, recollection and spiritual prosperity.**

It stays as an O.Carm monastery for another 400 years. The worry of some nuns that it would join the reform was realized when the nuns of Incarnation willingly became **Discalced in the 1950s.**

John of the Cross stays as confessor at the Incarnation until his capture and imprisonment in 1577.

Father Pedro Fernandez sees success. He writes to the Duchess of Alba in 1573 that though in the monastery of the Incarnation there are one hundred thirty nuns, there is as much tranquility and sanctity there as among the ten or twelve discalced nuns in the monastery of Alba. Teresa writes about the devoted and excellent nuns within the Incarnation community "**who are so good and serve the Lord so authentically that He cannot keep from favoring them.**"

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She later takes as many as thirty-four nuns from there for her new houses. Accused of stripping the Incarnation of all their good nuns, she says there are still more than forty there capable of founding a religious order. She was **sad to leave** and take up again her **mission as foundress.**

Look again at the dates of her **foundations**: 1562, St. Joseph's, then beyond Avila: 1567 Medina del Campo; 1568 Malagon and Valladolid; 1569 Toledo and Pastrana; 1570 Salamanca; 1571 Alba de Tormes; then a gap of three years while she is prioress at the Incarnation; then she picks up again: to Segovia in 1574; and Beas and Seville in 1575. She is the mother foundress again.

She travels across Castile and the Mancha: Avila, Medina del Campo, Malagon, Valladolid, Toledo, Pastrana, Salamanca, Alba de Tormes. No rest and tranquility for her.

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1575. Teresa is **60**. The Lord tells her to go to Madrid, but in Beas, Father Jerome Gracian directs her to **Seville**; she sets out on May 18.

The journey is difficult: at Cordoba guards stop the carriages from entering the city; inside, Teresa and her nuns, clothed with their thick woolen habits, are suffocating with the heat. Father Julian de Avila runs to get permission, but takes a long time because the Chief

Magistrate is still in bed when he got there. The guards open the gate and they head towards the bridge.

A new problem: the carriages are wider than bridge and so Father Julian saws away the axles and the group continues the journey to Seville.

Teresa is exhausted, she is ill, with fatigue and fever.

They reach Seville on the 26th and the monastery St. Joseph of Carmel is founded on May 29.

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Among the first novices at Seville was Maria del Corro, a forty-year-old widowed beata already praised as a saint by the people. However, her age and her spirituality make the Carmelite life hard for her; she seeks exemption from one thing after another.

In Carmel she no longer receives praise for being holy, praise that fed her ego. Finally, unable to stand it anymore she leaves, telling no one. But her public image suffers. Many who once thought her holy now mock her for failing to live in the monastery. She looks for **revenge**.

With the help of her confessor she denounces Teresa and Isabel de San Jeronimo to the **Inquisition** saying they poke fun at it and their beliefs are like the pseudo-mystic Alumbrados or Illuminati.

The news spreads through the city, and Father Gracian is blamed for bringing these Discalced nuns to Seville.

Teresa may be handed over to the Inquisition, and she is advised to document her life.

One day, Gracian sees outside the monastery many horses and mules and knows they belong to the Inquisitors. When he speaks to Teresa, she is happy at the thought of interrogation. But Gracian is in anguish. It was he who ordered her to come to Seville despite her telling him of the locutions she had received from the Lord urging her to make a foundation in Madrid.

Teresa does testify before the Inquisition; she does write accounts of her spiritual life for Rodrigo Alvarez, a Jesuit consultant to the Inquisition.

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Teresa impresses the tribunal with her responses and the spiritual quality of her writings and is **acquitted** of the charges.

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The Vatican ambassador Father Ormaneto worries about Teresa's travels throughout Spain. He is not pleased with her travels away from the monastery.

In 1575, when Teresa is **60**, her provincial **orders her to stay in one monastery and not leave it.**

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The good and holy mother is not saddened. It was precisely what she had been longing for: **to end her days in quiet. amen**

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For Discussion and Reflection

1. How old was Teresa when she began making foundations beyond Avila? What made her leave her home city and her new monastery of St. Joseph and how prepared was she to go to other cities and initiate new foundations?
2. Why was Teresa appointed prioress of the Incarnation? Consider the response of the nuns who lived there. Discuss the reaction to Teresa's return, and how Teresa resolved the issues involved.
3. Why was Teresa denounced to the Inquisition? Discuss the motives of the Princess of Eboli and Maria del Corro. How does Teresa respond to these difficulties?
4. This session covers eight years, beginning when Teresa is 52. What drove her to make these tremendous achievements, enduring hardships, illnesses and accusations?