

The Way of Perfection

Section 1: Purpose of the Teresian Carmel

Chapters 1-2-3 (summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 1: The Reason I founded this Monastery with such Strict Observance

When I began to take the first steps toward founding this monastery ... it was not my intention that there be so much external **austerity** or that the house have **no income**; on the contrary, I would have desired the possibility that **nothing be lacking**....In sum, my intention was ... involving **my own comfort**.

2. At that time news reached me of the havoc the Lutherans had caused and how this miserable sect was growing ... as though I could do something or were something, I cried to the Lord and begged Him that I might remedy so much evil. It seemed to me that I would have given a thousand lives to save one soul ... All my longing was and still is that since **He has so many enemies and so few friends that these few friends be good ones**. As a result I **resolved** to do the little that was in my power; that is, to follow the **evangelical counsels -- poverty, chastity, obedience --** as perfectly as I could and strive that these few persons who live here do the same. I did this trusting in the great goodness of God, who never fails to help anyone determined to give up everything for Him ... Since we would all be occupied in prayer for the **defenders of the Church** who protect her from attack, we could help as much as possible this Lord of mine who is so **roughly treated** by those for whom He has done so much good; it seems these traitors would want Him to be crucified again and that He have no place to lay His head.

3. ... What is the matter with Christians nowadays? Must it always be those who owe You the most who afflict You? Those ... You have chosen for Your friends, with whom You walk and commune by means of your **sacraments**? ...

4. ... Since the world appreciates You so little, what do we expect? Do we perhaps deserve to be treated better? ... Indeed the Lutherans have won punishment ... still, my heart breaks to see how many souls are lost ... I would not want to see more of them lost each day.

5. O my Sisters in Christ, help me beg these things of the Lord. This is why He has gathered you together here. This is your **vocation**. These must be the business matters you are engaged in. These must be the things you desire, the things you weep

about; these must be the **object** of your petitions.... The **world is all in flames**; they want to sentence Christ again ... They want to ravage His Church ... This is not the time to be discussing with God matters that have little importance.

6. Indeed, were I not to consider human weakness consoled by receiving help in need ... I'd be happy only if people understood that these are not the things they should be **begging God** for with so much care.

Chapter 2: Treats of how one should not worry about bodily needs and of the blessing there is in poverty.

Don't think, my Sisters that because you do not strive to please those in the world you will lack food. I assure you that such will not be the case ... Your eyes on your Spouse! He will sustain you. Once He is pleased, those least devoted to you will give you food even though they may not want to ... Since you have **given up an income, give up worry about food**. If you don't, everything will be lost. God wants some to have an income ... it is alright for them to worry about their income that goes with their vocation; but for us to worry, Sisters, would be **absurd**.

2. ... Leave worrying to the One who can move all, for He is the **Lord of money and of those who earn money** ... Let us not fail Him; do not fear that He will fail you. If some time He should fail you, it will be for a greater good ... It would be a good exchange to give up all for the enjoyment of everlasting abundance.

3. Sisters, what I am saying is **so important** that I want you to remember it after my death ... that is why I am leaving it for you in writing ... **Great gain** comes from not worrying about such things. The less there is the more **carefree** I become ... For us to worry about money would almost be **deceiving** the world, being poor in an exterior way but not being **poor in spirit** ... Where there are **too many cares** about whether others will give us alms, sooner or later these cares will become **habitual** ... If you start worrying like this, I would prefer that you have an **income**.

4. ... Let your thoughts not be taken up with these cares ... Should these cares be present in this house, let the youngest Sister cry out to His Majesty and bring the matter to the attention of the prioress ... I hope in the Lord that **true poverty** will never be lost in this house and that He will not abandon His servants. May this book ... serve to awaken you in these matters.

5. ... For your good the Lord has given me a little understanding of the blessings that lie in **holy poverty** ... Not only had I failed to be **poor in spirit**, even though I professed it, but I was **foolish in spirit**. Poverty of spirit is a good that includes within itself all the good things of the world. (... for myself, I hold that poverty of spirit embraces many of the virtues.) ... It gives to the one who doesn't care about the world's good things **dominion** over them all. What do kings ... matter to me if I don't want their riches, or don't care to please them if in doing so it would **displease God** in even the smallest thing? Nor do I care about their honors... for the **greatest honor** of a **poor person** lies in his being **truly poor**.

6. In my opinion **honor and money almost always go together** ... It seems to me that the desire for honor always brings with it some interest in money. It would be a wonder if any poor person were honored in the world ... though he may be worthy of honor, he is little esteemed. **True poverty** brings with it **overwhelming honor**. Poverty chosen for God alone has no need of pleasing anyone but Him. Experience has shown me that in having need of no one a person is certain to have many friends.

7. ... Keep in mind that **holy poverty** is our **insignia** and a **virtue** ... When our order was founded it was esteemed and well kept by our holy fathers. For I have been told ... that they did not keep anything for the next day. If we do not carry out this practice so well **exteriorly**, let us strive to do so **interiorly**. Life lasts but a couple of hours ... If we do nothing else but what the Lord counseled us to do, the pay of being able in some way to **imitate Him** would be great.

8. These are the **insignia** that must be on our **coat of arms** for we must desire to **observe poverty** in every way: in houses, clothing, words, and most of all in thought. As long as you do this, have no fear that religious life in this house will fail; God will help. As St. Clare said, **great walls** are those of **poverty** ... and **humility**. It is with these walls that she wanted to enclose her monasteries. If poverty is truly observed **recollection** and all the other **virtues** will be much better **fortified** than sumptuous buildings. Be careful of buildings like these... may such a building fall to the ground the day you construct one.

9. It looks very bad, my daughters, if large houses are built with money from the poor ... The houses must be poor and small in every way. Let us in some way resemble our King, who had no house but the stable in Bethlehem where He was born and the cross where He died ...

If it is necessary because of the extremely secluded life you live to have a stretch of land (and this even helps in prayer and devotion) with some hermitages where you can withdraw to pray, well and good. But no buildings, or large and ornate houses.

10. It would not be right for the house of thirteen poor women to make a loud crash when it falls; the **truly poor** must make **no noise**. They must be noiseless people so that others will take pity on them.

And how they will rejoice when they see someone freed from hell because of the alms he gave them! They are obliged to pray for their benefactors, since their food comes from them. The Lord desires that, ... we show **gratitude** to those through whose means He give this food to us. Do not be negligent about showing gratitude.

11. ... I have wandered off the subject ... May His Majesty always help us so that we never fail in the practice of poverty, amen.

Chapter 3: Continues the subject she began to discuss in the first chapter; she urges her Sisters always to busy themselves begging God to help those who labor for the Church. The chapter ends with an earnest plea.

Now, to return to the **main reason** the Lord brought us together in this house and why I desire that we live to **please His Majesty**. I want to speak of helping to **remedy** the **great evils** I have seen. Human forces are not sufficient to stop the spread of this fire caused by these heretics ... People have tried with the force of arms ... but it seems to me that what is necessary is a **different approach**. It is the **approach of a lord** when in **time of war** his land is **overrun** with enemies and he finds himself **restricted** on all sides. He **withdraws** to a city well fortified and from there sometimes strikes his foe. Those in the city, being chosen people, ... can do more by themselves than many cowardly soldiers. And often victory is won in this way; if not won, the chosen people are not conquered...

2. ... What we must ask God is that in this little **castle** ... not one of us will go over to the enemy and that God will make the **captains** of this castle or city – preachers and theologians—very advanced in the way of the Lord ... For as I have said, it is the ecclesiastical, not the secular, arm that will save us. Since in neither arm can we be of help to our King, let us strive to be the people whose **prayers** can be useful in helping the servants of God who ... have strengthened themselves with much learning and a good life ... so as to now help the Lord.

3. Why must we help those who are better than we ourselves are? Well, it is because I don't think you understand how much you **owe the Lord** for bringing you here ... It is a very great mercy. As for those persons I mentioned ... they must **strengthen** those who are weak ... **live** among men, **deal** with men, **live** in palaces, and even sometimes outwardly **behave** as such men do. Do you think, my daughters, that little is required for them to deal with the world ... while interiorly remaining its strangers, its enemies; in sum, **not being men but angels**? For if they do not live in this way, they do not deserve to be called **captains**; ... This is not the time to see **imperfection** in those who must teach.

4. If they are not **interiorly fortified** by grasping the **importance** ... of **detachment from** things that come to an end, and of **attachment to** eternal things, they will show signs of this **lack** no matter how much they try to conceal it. ... The world will **not** forgive this deficiency; nor is there any imperfection it fails to recognize. It will overlook many good things ...but will not overlook any evil or imperfect thing ... Do not think that **little** help from God is necessary. This is a **great battle** these preachers and theologians are fighting; a very great deal is necessary.

5. I beg you to strive ... that we might merit from God **two things**: **First**, that among the learned men and religious there be many who meet these requirements ... necessary for the battle, and that the Lord prepare those who do not meet them; one who is perfect will do much more than many who are not. **Second**, that after being placed in this **combat** ... they may receive **protection** from the Lord to remain free of the perils of the world, and to ... not hear the siren's song on this dangerous sea. If we can obtain some answers from God to these requests, we shall be fighting for Him though cloistered. And if some of our requests are answered, I would consider worthwhile the trials I have suffered to found this little corner, where ... this rule of our Lady ... be observed with **perfection** as when it was initiated.

6. Do not think it useless to have these petitions continually in your heart ... What better prayer than these petitions? ... If you think your sufferings in purgatory will not be shortened, know that by this prayer they will be ... What would it matter were I to remain in purgatory until judgment day if through my prayer I could save one soul? ... Pay no attention to sufferings that come to an end if they allow us to render greater service to Him who suffered much for us. Always try to be informed about what is more perfect...

7. ... Your servants who live here ... desire and **strive** for nothing else than to **please** You ... Since You are not ungrateful, I think You will not fail to do what they beg of You ... When you walked in this world, You always helped women ... You found in them as much **love** and more **faith** than You did in men ...

Since the world's judges are sons of Adam and all of them men, there is not **virtue** in women that they do not hold **suspect**. The day will come, my King, when everyone will be known for what he is ... When we ask You for ... worldly things, do not hear us. But when we ask You for the honor of Your Son, why wouldn't You hear us ...for the sake ... of the blood of Your Son and His merits.

8. ... Was something still to be done to please you? But He did everything ... Do not look at our sins but behold that Your most blessed Son redeemed us and behold His merits and those of His glorious Mother and of so many saints and martyrs who died for you!

9. ... You are a God of mercy ... Behold, my God, my desires and the tears with which I beg this of you ... have pity on so many **souls** that are being **lost**, and help Your **Church** ... Don't allow any more harm to come to Christianity, Lord. Give light now to all this darkness.

10. ... If the bishop is holy the subjects will be so too ... ask this of the Lord in your prayers. And when your prayers, desires, disciplines, and fasts are not directed toward obtaining these things ... reflect on how you are not accomplishing or fulfilling the **purpose** for which the Lord brought you here together. And may the Lord because of who His Majesty is never allow you to forget this. amen