

5th Foundation: Toledo

(Ch.15)

The Book of her Foundations

by Teresa of Avila

Treats of the foundation of the monastery of the glorious St. Joseph made in the city of Toledo in 1569

In the city of Toledo, there was a respected and wealthy merchant and a servant of God. He was suddenly struck with a fatal illness. A Father from the Society of Jesus was eager that one of our monasteries be founded in Toledo and so spoke with the man, assuring him of the great service such a foundation would be for our Lord, and that his intentions for the town would be taken care of by the monastery.

2. The merchant too sick to make these arrangements, and therefore left the whole matter in the hands of his brother, a truthful and charitable man. God then took the merchant.

3. His brother sent me a letter encouraging me to come to Toledo quickly to settle the matter of the monastery.

Upon arriving in Toledo with two nuns from St. Joseph's of Avila, we went to Dona Luisa's home, the foundress of Malagon, where we were housed in a suite of rooms with much recollection.

4. I immediately took up business matters with the merchant's brother. He and his son-in-law began asking for many conditions that I didn't think I could agree to.

In the meantime, I continued to look for a house to rent and sought to obtain the needed license to open the monastery. In the end, we disagreed on everything.

5. I didn't know what to do! But, what really saddened me was not getting the **license**. From experience though, I knew that once in possession of the foundation, the Lord would provide as He had in the past. I decided to go and talk to the **governor**.

He accepted to speak to me and I explained to him the fact that simple women wanted to live in austerity, perfection and withdrawal from the world while those that lived in comfort in this town, sought to hinder their works that served the Lord. I told him many other things too with great determination that were given me by the Lord. The governor's heart was so moved that before I left he,

himself, personally gave me the license I needed.

6. I went away very happy as you can well imagine. It seemed I had everything without having anything really at all.

With the little money I did have, I bought two paintings, two straw mattresses and a woolen blanket. As for the house, we completely forgot about it, as we were not in agreement with Alonso.

Another merchant in the town, a friend of mine, told me that he would find us a house; but then he took sick.

Recently, a holy Franciscan friar spent a few days in Toledo, and before leaving, he sent me a very poor young man. He told him to do whatever I asked him to do....

7. So now, I had the license, but no one to help me find a house to rent. I thought of the young man sent to me by the saintly Franciscan and felt that his offer to help me had a mystery about it. I sent for him and asked him to look for a house for us to rent. Two days later, while I was attending Mass, he came to tell me he had the house and the keys. The house was so nice we ended up staying there a year!

8. When I reflect on this foundation, I am amazed by the designs of God. He arranged for this very poor young man to find us a house. Thus in God's design, the foundation had to be made in poverty and with trials.

9. Since the house pleased us, I gave the order that we take possession of it at once with our two straw mattresses and the blanket.

But, the One who gave the young man, Andrada, the desire to help us, had to advance the work until it was completed. We certainly couldn't have done any better than he did in preparing the house and getting workers.

We borrowed the necessary to say Mass. To actually take possession of the house, we went with a workman at nightfall; and we brought a bell used at the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament. We ended up spending the whole night getting all in order. There was, however, no place for a church except in one to the rooms of another house next to ours that was occupied by two women; the owner had also rented us this little house.

10. Since we had everything ready by dawn, we had said nothing to the women, lest they reveal our plan. So, we began making a door

through the partition wall. The two women, still in bed, were terrified. We did all we could to calm them down; but, it was time for Mass. When these ladies saw our intention, the Lord pacified them.

11. When the owner of the house found out that the house had been made into a church, the trouble began. But, she was appeased when she learned we would possibly buy the house. However, the city council, who refused to give us a license, complained to the canon, as they were astonished that a useless little woman should found a monastery against their will. The canon pacified them but told them that I had opened monasteries in other cities and with due authorization.

12. Within a few days we received a notice of excommunication so that no Mass could be said until I presented the documents giving me the authorization for what was done... The canon presented the documents to the council, which not only appeased them but kept us out of deep trouble.

13. For quite a while, we only had our straw mattresses and the blanket, but not even a stick of wood to cook a sardine. I really don't know who the Lord moved to leave a bundle of wood in the church to help us. The nights were cold, but we kept warm with the blanket and our woolen mantles.

Though we had initially stayed with Dona Luisa, a very rich lady who loved me, it was obvious to us that God wanted us to experience the good that lies in the virtue of poverty.

14. It was a good experience for us. We felt great interior consolation and happiness which leads me to think of what the Lord keeps stored up in the virtues. The lack we felt was the cause of a sweet contemplation. The poverty did not last too long as very soon people provided us with more than we needed.

I have to admit to feeling a bit sad as if discovering that my gold jewelry had been removed leaving me poor. Yes, I was sorry that they were bringing my poverty to an end. My companions felt the same way!

15. From that point on, my desire to be poor continued to increase, leaving me feeling free of esteem for earthly goods. The lack of these goods brings an increase of interior good and brings another kind of fullness and calm.

When initially discussing this foundation, there were many who felt my plans were wrong ...because social status was not considered ... I have always esteemed virtue over lineage. Yet, much was said, but the clergy who gave me the license, only gave it under the condition that I make the foundation as in other places.

16. Once the foundation established, the talk continued. I arranged for the people concerned to be patrons of the large chapel with no connection to the monastery. There was a wealthy person who wanted the chapel, leaving me not knowing what to decide. Our Lord gave me light in this matter. He told me that lineage and social status mattered not at all for Him and severely reprimanded me for listening to the people giving me their opinion.

17. I was very humbled for many reasons. I ended up giving them the chapel which I never regretted and we ended up buying one of the nicest houses in Toledo with the help of the same very poor young man. Many Masses and feast were to be celebrated there according to the contract leaving the nuns and the people greatly consoled.

Had I listened to the world, it would have been impossible for us to have been so well provided for and I would have offended the one, the poor young man, who with so much good will, did this charitable deed for us.

Amen