

13th Foundation: Villanueva de la Jara
(Ch.28)

The Book of her Foundations
by Teresa of Avila

The Foundation of Villanueva de la Jara

The foundation in Seville, made more than four years ago, was the last one because of the great persecutions that broke out unexpectedly against the discalced friars and nuns. The whole undertaking was at the point of collapse. The discalced friars suffered much, especially the superiors, from serious false testimony and opposition on the part of almost all the calced (traditional friars).

2. Our Father General was urged to oppose strongly any new foundations among the discalced friars. And so that I might not be helping the friars make foundations, caused him to become displeased with me. This was the greatest trial I suffered in the work of these foundations.

On the one hand, I was being encouraged by my confessors to continue my work; on the other, going against my superior was like death to me. Even though I wanted to obey his order, I could not because I was obliged to obey the apostolic visitators.

3. A holy nuncio who supported the discalced passed away. Another one arrived who was sent to test us in suffering. He favored the calced friars and felt it best to put a stop to our foundations. He did so by imprisoning those he thought could stop him or by sending them into exile.

4. Those who suffered most were; Father Antonio de Jesus, Father Gracian and Father Mariano de San Benito. On the other more outstanding ones he imposed penances and issued censures to prevent them from carrying on any business.

5. It was very obvious that His Majesty permitted it so the virtues of our Fathers would be better known.

The nuncio appointed his own superior to visit our friars and nuns. It was a great hardship for us.

I am only touching on this to allow the nuns to come to know how obliged they are to advance in perfection as some of the nuns still living have suffered very much from false testimony...

6. Our Catholic king, Don Philip, took the initiative to favor us. He gave the nuncio visiting our monasteries four counselors, three of whom were religious, so that our rights would be protected. There were also many noblemen and bishops who made haste to inform the nuncio of the truth. All this, however, would have benefitted little had God not chosen the king to intervene.

7. We are all very much obliged in our prayer to our Lord. You can imagine what little possibility there was for making any foundations. We were all occupied unceasingly in prayer and penances so that our Lord would preserve the houses already founded if doing so would be for His service.

8. I was in Toledo when these trials started. A priest from Villanueva de la Jara brought me letters from the town council there asking that I accept a shrine in that town dedicated to St. Anne where nine women were living. These women were living with such recollection and holiness that the whole town was moved to help them become nuns.

9. It seemed to me that it would be unsuitable to accept this foundation. First, there were so many women. It seemed to me it would be very difficult for them to adapt our way of life being used to their own. Second, they had almost nothing to live on in such a small town. Third, they didn't have a house. Fourth, the town was far from our other monasteries. Fifth, I had not had the chance to evaluate the women to verify they in fact did have the qualities we require for monasteries. Thus, I turned down the proposal.

10. It is always my custom never to do anything on my own, but rather to seek the opinion of persons like my confessor who happened to advise me not to turn the proposal down but to answer in a friendly manner. Yet, my opinion remained that it

would be foolish to accept such a proposal but I was unable to turn down the proposal.

11. It happened that Father Antonio de Jesus, upon completion of his exile, went to preach in Villanueva. He ended up becoming an admirer of the virtue of these women, and along with the townspeople and the doctor wrote letters trying very hard to persuade me. A prior came to speak to me where I was in Malagon about the foundation. The doctor was to finance the project and the permission would be obtained from Rome.

12. I put forth many reasons to convince Father Prior that it would not be suitable to make this foundation. I told him that he should consider the matter seriously with Father Antonio. I left the matter with their conscience thinking that what I had said would convince them of the folly of this foundation.

13. After he had gone, I considered how much in favor he was of the foundation and that he would persuade the superior we now have, Father Angel de Salazar, to accept it. I, therefore, wrote him in haste begging him to not give permission for this foundation and giving him the reasons...

14. A month and a half went by, when a messenger arrived with letters from the town council which had taken on the obligation to provide for the needs of the monastery. I was confused. On the one hand, I was afraid of admitting so many Sisters thinking that, as usually happens, they would band together against those would join them. On the other, I didn't not see a sure means for their support.

The Lord had given me so much courage, but it was as if I wasn't trusting God at all.

15. One day after Communion, I was recommending this matter to God.... When His Majesty reprimanded me sternly... telling me that I should not hesitate to accept this house that it would be for His great service and the spiritual progress of souls.

16. Since these locutions from God are so powerful ... that the will is disposed to the desire to carry them out. It seemed to me that

I had been at fault in delaying so long, tied to human reason when the works I had seen Him do for this sacred religious order were clearly beyond reason.

17. It seemed to me now necessary that I go with the nuns who were to live there...

My superior sent the license for the foundation and the command that I go personally and bring the nuns of my choice. As we had prayed much, things turned out very well.

18. Given the assurance of help from the Villanueva, we set out from Malagon. God was pleased to make the weather so good that it seemed to me that I had never been sick.

When we understand that something serves the Lord, God is able to make the weak strong and the sick healthy. When He does not do this, suffering will be the best thing for our souls; and fixing our eyes on His honor and glory, we should forget ourselves. What is the purpose of life and health, save that they be lost for so great a King and Lord? Believe me, Sisters, you will never go wrong following this path.

19. I must confess that I have often fallen prey to fear and doubt. But, I don't remember that solely out of His mercy He ever failed to grant me the favor needed to conquer temptation and throw myself into what would be for His greater service however difficult it was. God wants no more than our determination so that He may do everything Himself.

20. We stopped at the monastery of our Lady of Succor, very near Villanueva, and stayed there in order to inform the town that we were coming.

As we approached, the friars came out in procession to meet their prior who was travelling with us. Since they were disclaced, they were wearing their coarse woolen mantles, inspiring tender feelings in me as it seemed that I was present in that flourishing time of our holy Fathers of old.

In that field, they appeared like white fragrant flowers... They entered the church

singing the *Te Deum*. the entrance was underground, as though through a cave, which represented that of our Father Elijah. I was filled with interior joy... I regretted very much that the saintly woman through whom our Lord had founded this house was now dead...

21. It seems to me that it would not be an idle thing to tell something about her life and why our Lord desired that this monastery be founded there.

On seeing the penance that had been done by this holy woman you may realize how far behind we are, Sisters, and may you try harder to serve our Lord.

She lived a comfortable life in keeping with her status in society. After she had written to me a few times, she signed her letter, “the sinner.”

22. ... Let me tell here what some trustworthy persons who knew her told me.

23. While this saintly woman was living among the nobility, she was always very concerned about her soul and did penance. The desire for penance greatly increased in her as did the longing to be alone to enjoy God and dedicated herself to doing penance without hindrance.

She discussed this with her confessors, but they didn't give their consent as it seemed like madness to them. But, since His Majesty favors authentic desires, enabling one to carry them out, He ordained for her to go to confession to a Franciscan Father... who told her not to give up, but to follow the calling His Majesty granted her which she did at once.

24. She disclosed her plans to a hermit who was living in Alcala and asked him to accompany her. They arrived at the place where the monastery now stands, a tiny cave hardly large enough for her; it is here, he left her.

She wasn't worried about what to eat or about the dangerous things that could happen to her or about the bad reputation she would have when it was discovered she had disappeared. She let no one prevent her from

enjoying her Spouse. She was determined not to love the world and fled from all its satisfactions.

25. With one blow, she conquered all. Let us then consider, Sisters, that what you do by entering this holy religious order, offering your will to God, and professing continual enclosure may not be less. I wonder if in some cases, the initial fervor does not pass away and out of self-love we make ourselves subject again to some things. May we imitate this holy woman in desiring to flee from the world, we may interiorly stay far away from it in all things.

26. She lived in harsh austerity and must have treated her body terribly. For many years, she continued in that solitude with great desires to do penance and had no one to restrain her.

She visited the nuns at St. Joseph's in Toldeo. She was far removed from vainglory and enjoyed telling about the favors God had granted her that His name be glorified. Doing this would be dangerous for those who have not reached this state, for it could seem that they are praising themselves. But her holy simplicity must have freed her from this fault.

27. She said she had been living in that cave for eight years. Often she ate only herbs and roots from the field. She met a little shepherd who was passing by and who provided her with bread and flour with which she made into small cakes over the fire. This is all she ate, and only every three days.

The chains she wore were extremely sharp and were full of blood. But, what she underwent with the devils was even greater, for they appeared to her as huge dogs and jumped on her shoulders, and at other times as snakes. She had no fear of them.

28. Even after the monastery was built, she still used to sleep in her cave and remain there except when she attended the Divine Office. Before it was built, she would attend Mass not too far from her cave and would sometimes get there on her knees.

Her garb was made of coarse cloth, and her inner tunic of rough wool, made in such a way that she looked like a man.

After she had lived in solitude for many years, people began to venerate and pursue her. She spoke to them with great charity. Those able to speak with her, considered themselves lucky. Sometimes there were so many people that the field would be filled with wagons. She felt this pursuit of her was killing her.

Once the friars arrived, they had no choice but to lift her up high so she could bless the people. She was thus freed of the crowd. After eight years of living in the cave, she became so sick, she thought she was going to die.

29. She began to desire a monastery of friars be founded there. From a vision of a white mantle, she understood they would be discalced Carmelites friars.

To find out how to found a monastery, she went to the Carmelite monastery in Pastrana, where at one time she had been a close friend of the Princess of Eboli, whose husband owned the monastery there.

30. In Pastrana, in the presence of the friars, she received the habit of our Lady of Mount Carmel. She had no desire to be a nun as she preferred to live in harsh austerity and solitude.

31. During the ceremony, Father Mariano, present among the friars, experienced a rapture that carried him out of himself. He saw many dead nuns and friars, that seemed to have been martyred. Pray Sisters, that this vision will come to pass, that we will see this great blessing and be ourselves among these martyrs.

32. From Pastrana, the **holy woman of Cardona**, began to seek the means to found her monastery. Wherever she went she had trouble protecting herself from the crowd who would cut pieces from her habit and her mantle. At one point, she stayed with our nuns in Toledo who affirmed a great odor of sanctity emanating from her leaving them with a great devotion.

33. From the court and elsewhere, she acquired what was needed for the monastery. Once the license obtained, the monastery was founded.

The church was built where her cave was. Another cave was made for her further away in which she had a tomb carved out. She stayed there most of the time.

However, she only lived this way about five and a half years after the monastery was built. That she even survived this long seemed supernatural because of her harsh, austere life.

When she died, I think in 1577, her funeral services were held with great solemnity. She is temporarily buried in a chapel of our Lady to whom she was extremely devoted until a larger church is built.

34. Great is the devotion they have to her in this monastery. The friars told us that before she had decided to found the monastery, she had become very wearied from all the visitors. She sought another place but our Lord did not allow her to leave as He is much served there.

The friars have all they need for their way of life. They like to be isolated from people especially the prior. God drew him away from a life of luxury and repaid him with spiritual consolation.

35. The prior was very charitable toward us. The friars contributed to our foundation from what they had in the church, well provided with sacred furnishings.

I was very consoled while there. I saw that the one who had done such harsh penance was a woman just like me but more delicate because of her background.... There is no comparison between the two of us. I have received much greater favors of many kinds from our Lord, and that I am not in hell because of my sins is among the greatest of favors....

36. One day when I had just received Communion in that holy church, very great recollection came over me with a suspension that drew me out of myself. In this suspension, through an intellectual vision,

this holy woman appeared in a glorified body and some angels with her. She told me not to grow weary but to continue with these foundations. I understood that she was helping me before God. I was left very consoled and filled with a desire to work hard... Her trials have now come to an end but the glory she now enjoys will have no end... It goes by so quickly and all comes to an end.

37. We arrived in Villaneuva de la Jara on the first Sunday of Lent ... On this same day at the time of the high Mass, the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the church of the glorious St. Anne.

The joy of the whole town was so great. It gave me much consolation to see the happiness with which they receive the order of the Blessed Virgin, our Lady.

Once inside the church, they began the *Te Deum*. When it was finished, they carried the Blessed Sacrament on one portable platform and a statue of our Lady on another.

The procession proceeded with much pomp. We were in the middle, with our white mantles and our veils covering our faces.

There were many discalced friars and Franciscans and even a Dominican.

Since the distance was great, many altars had been set up along the way. We were moved to devotion at the sight of all of them praising the great God present in our midst.

38. It seems I am happier when there are many trials and persecutions. The truth is that these Sisters in this town suffered persecution and trial for almost six years, in addition to great poverty and hardship they had in earning their food. Furthermore, they did great penance, by fasting and eating little. Their beds were uncomfortable and their house very small, causing a hardship because of the strict enclosure.

39. They felt their greatest trial was their desire to be clothed with the habit. They deprived themselves of food in order to pay from their earnings the messengers sent to me and also for the gifts of gratitude, in their poor way. After having spoken with them

and seen their holiness, I understand that it was through their prayer and tears that they obtained the favor to be admitted into the order. I considered it a treasure to have souls like these in the order rather than a good deal of income.

40. When we entered the house, each one was dressed in her individual way. It appeared from their indifferent manner of dress, that they took little care of themselves. Almost all were so thin that their life of great penance was evident.

41. They received us with great joy. Their fear was that we might go back when we saw their poverty and small house. They slept very little so as to earn their bread and not lose time for prayer in which they spent many hours, on feast days the whole day.

42. They guided themselves with books by Father Luis de Granada and Father Peter of Alcantara. They recited the Divine Office despite their little ability to read. Only one of them read well. God must have accepted their good intention. When father Antonio de Jesus began to guide them, he ordered them to recite only the Office of our Lady. They baked bread and did all with as much harmony as they would have done under a superior.