

On Making the Visitation

by Teresa of Avila

1. I confess my imperfect obedience. Though I desire the virtue of obedience more than anything else, Beginning this work has been very difficult for me. May it please our Lord that I succeed in saying something, for I trust only in His mercy and in the humility of the one who ordered me to write this, so that, through humility, God, who is powerful, will do the work and not depend on me.

2. It seems an inappropriate thing to begin speaking of worldly matters. Yet I think that these are most important for the promotion of the spiritual good, although it doesn't seem to be so in monasteries founded in poverty. But, in all monasteries, it is necessary to have good order and attend to matters concerning government and the harmonious organization of all.

3. First, the visitorator is to behave toward the nuns on the one hand in an affable and loving manner, but on the other, he makes it known that in essential matters he will be strict and not at all lenient. Nothing harms a visitorator as much as being not feared and allowing subjects to deal with him as with an equal. This is especially true with women. Once they know he is soft, that he will pass over their faults and change his mind to not sadden them, he will have great difficulty in governing them.

4. It must be understood that there is someone in command, who is not tenderhearted when it comes to matters that could weaken religious observance. The judge must be upright in administering justice and will not turn aside from what might be more perfect and for the greater good of God even if the whole world crumbles.

It is necessary that he show compassion and be affable and loving toward them and that he love them as a father, to console and not alienate them.

5. The official visitation should take place once a year so that, with love, faults may be gradually corrected and removed. If nuns do not understand that those who have committed faults will be corrected and punished, year after year goes by and the result is that religious observance becomes lax and it becomes impossible to provide a remedy.

Though the fault lies with the prioress, the nuns grow accustomed to the relaxation in observance. In our human nature, habit is a terrible thing, and gradually, through small things, irremediable harm is done to the order. The visitorator who does not provide a remedy in time will have to give a terrible accounting to God.

6. It seems that by dealing with these matters I am offending the monasteries of the Virgin, our Lady, as they are far removed from any need for this severity. But I say this because with time, through lack of carefulness in the beginning, laxity usually creeps into monasteries. In some communities there may be problems if the visitorator has not done the necessary to remedy the little things and/or removing the prioresses not suited for the job.

7. There must be no pity because though a prioress may be very holy, she might not be suited to the job. It is necessary to remedy the matter quickly. Here, where there is mortification and humility, this will not be taken as an offense. Anyone who has so little perfection that she wants to be prioress should not be governing souls who are so much involved in the pursuit of perfection.

8. The visitorator must keep God in mind and cast out all feelings of pity, the greatest cruelty he could show to the nuns.

9. It's impossible that all those elected prioress will have the talent for the office, they need to be removed within the first year. Not much harm is done in the first year, but allow three to go by and she could destroy the monastery by allowing imperfection to become the norm.

The visitorator must put his feelings aside and remove her from office even if it kills him. If he see the nuns solicit or campaign, he should nullify the election and nominate prioresses from other monasteries for them to choose from. No good can come from an election done in this way.

10. The visitorator must examine carefully and attentively the financial records and not pass over them lightly, especially in houses having an income. It is very important that expenses don't exceed income...

If the community begins to go into debt, it will gradually be ruined. For in the event of great need, it will seem inhuman to major superiors to forbid individuals to keep money earned from their work or that

relatives provide for them, now seen in different monasteries. I would prefer that a monastery be dissolved than reach such a state. This is what I mean then about a lack of care in temporal or worldly matters can cause great harm in spiritual matters. In monasteries founded in poverty, the visitor should examine and advise strongly so that the nuns do not go into debt. They will not be in want --- unless they spend too much.