

Daily Saints - 15 October



Feast of Saint Teresa of Avila

She is the patron saint of sick people; Bodily illnesses; headaches; lacemakers; lace workers; loss of parents; people in need of grace; people in religious orders; the opposition of Church authorities; people ridiculed for their piety; sickness, against heart disease.

Teresa Sanchez Cepeda Davila y Ahumada was born in the Castilian city of Avila on 28 March 1515. She was the third child of Alphonsus and Beatrice. Her family descended from Jewish merchants who had converted to Christianity during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Her father Alphonsus had become an ardent Catholic, with a collection of spiritual books of the type his daughter would later compose herself. As a child, Teresa felt captivated by the thought of eternity and the vision of God granted to the saints in heaven. Inspired by the stories of the saints, at the age of seven, Teresa recruited her younger brother Roderigo as a travel companion and set out for Africa where they intended to become martyrs for the faith. Their plan was foiled when they were captured by an uncle, who returned them to their disgruntled parents. When Teresa was 14, her mother died, causing the girl a profound grief that prompted her to embrace a deeper devotion to the Virgin Mary as her spiritual mother. Along with this good resolution, however, she also developed immoderate interests in reading popular fiction (consisting, at that time, mostly of medieval tales of knighthood) and caring for her appearance. As a teenager, she cared only about boys, clothes, flirting, and rebelling.

Alphonsus decided his teenage daughter needed a change of environment and sent her to be educated in a convent of Augustinian nuns. Teresa found their life dull at first but soon came to some understanding of its spiritual advantages.

Illness forced her to leave the convent during her second year. But the influence of her devout uncle Peter, along with her reading of the letters of the monk and Church Father St. Jerome, convinced Teresa that the surest road to salvation lay in forsaking marriage, property, and worldly pleasures completely. Against the will of her father, who wanted

her to postpone the decision, she joined the Carmelite Order. She also thought that it was the only safe place for someone like her.

Teresa became a professed member of the order at age 20, but soon developed a serious illness that forced her to return home. She experienced severe pain and physical paralysis for two years and was expected to die when she went into a coma for four days. But she insisted on returning to the Carmelite monastery as soon as she was able, even though she remained in a painful and debilitated state. Yet instead of helping her spiritually, her sickness became an excuse to stop her prayer completely. For the next three years, the young nun made remarkable progress in her spiritual life, developing the practice of recalling herself into the presence of God through quiet contemplation. As her health returned, however, Teresa lapsed into a more routine prayer life. While she remained an obedient Carmelite, she would not re-establish this close personal connection to God for almost twenty years. Teresa got more involved in flattery, vanity, and gossip than spiritual guidance. These weren't great sins perhaps but they kept her from God.

When she was nearly 40, however, Teresa found herself dramatically called back to the practice of contemplative mental prayer. She experienced profound changes within her own soul and remarkable visions that seemed to come from God. Under the direction of her confessors, Teresa wrote about some of these experiences in an autobiography that she completed in 1565.

Her biggest fault was her friendships. Though she wasn't sinning, she was very attached to her friends until God told her to stop. Some friends, however, did not like what was happening to her and got together to discuss some "remedy" for her. Concluding that she had been deluded by the devil, they sent a Jesuit to analyze her. The Jesuit reassured her that her experiences were from God.

Jesus once said to her in a vision, "I would create the universe again just to hear you say that you love me". Teresa suffered discouragement when rumors of her visions spread through the convent and she was the subject of gossip and mockery. When complaining to Jesus about this injustice, He simply said, "Teresa, that's how I treat my friends". She responded, "No wonder you have so few!" But since Christ has so few friends, she felt they should be good ones.

Teresa had always been accustomed to contemplate Christ's presence within her after receiving him in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Now, however, she understood that the presence she received did not simply fade: God was, in fact, with her always, and had been all along. It was simply a matter of putting herself in his presence, with love and attention – as one could do at any moment.

This revolution in her spiritual life enabled Teresa to play a significant role in the renewal of the Church that followed the Council of Trent. She proposed a return of the Carmelites to their original rule of life, a simple and austere form of monasticism –

founded on silence and solitude – that had received papal approval in the 12th century and was believed to date back to the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

Together with her close collaborator, the priest and writer later canonized as Saint John of the Cross, she founded what is known today as the Order of Discalced Carmelites – “discalced,” meaning barefoot, symbolizing the simplicity to which they chose to return the order after a period of corruption. The reform met with fierce opposition but resulted in the founding of 30 monasteries during her life.

Teresa's health failed her for the last time while she was traveling through Salamanca in 1582. She accepted her dramatic final illness as God's chosen means of calling her into his presence forever.

"O my Lord, and my spouse, the desired hour is now come," she stated. "The hour is at last come, wherein I shall pass out of this exile, and my soul shall enjoy in thy company what it hath so earnestly longed for." St. Teresa of Avila died on Oct. 15, 1582, at the age of 67.

Quotes of St. Teresa of Avila

- "Love does everything."
- "The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything."
- "I threw myself down in despair before an image of the Mother of God. With many tears, I implored the Holy Virgin to become my mother now. Uttered with the simplicity of a child, this prayer was heard. From that hour on, I never prayed to the Virgin in vain."
- "To get to know God's friends is a very good way of 'having' Him."
- "Much harm may result from bad company and we are inclined by nature to follow what is worse rather than what is better."
- "Mental prayer is, as I see it, simply friendly intercourse and frequent solitary conversation with Him who, as we know, loves us."
- "Prayer and comfortable living are incompatible."
- "[God's] voice reaches us through words spoken by good people, through listening to spiritual talks and reading sacred literature. God calls to us in countless little ways all the time. Through illnesses and suffering and through sorrow he calls to us..."
- "Those who give themselves to prayer should in a special manner have always devotion to St. Joseph; for I know not how any man can think of the Queen of the angels, during the time that she suffered so much with the Infant Jesus, without giving thanks to St. Joseph for the services he rendered them then."
- "For prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God."
- "Truth suffers, but never dies."
- "A prayer is an act of love; words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love."
- "Be gentle to all and stern with yourself."

- "We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can - namely, surrender our will and fulfill God's will in us."
- "Always think of yourself as everyone's servant; look for Christ Our Lord in everyone and you will then have respect and reverence for them all."
- "Never compare one person with another: comparisons are odious."
- "God gave us faculties for our use; each of them will receive its proper reward. Then do not let us try to charm them to sleep, but permit them to do their work until divinely called to something higher."
- "Let nothing perturb you, nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything."
- "The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one be"
- "May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love. It is there for each n every one of us"
- "I bore these sufferings with great composure, in fact with joy, except at first when the pain was too severe. What followed seemed to hurt less. I was completely surrendered to the will of God even if he intended to burden me like this forever...Without Him, I truly could not have borne so much with so much joy."
- "The hour is at last come, wherein I shall pass out of this exile, and my soul shall enjoy in thy company what it hath so earnestly longed for."
- "Be gentle to all and stern with yourself."
- "We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can - namely, surrender our will and fulfill God's will in us."
- "Our body has this defect that, the more it is provided care and comforts, the more needs and desires it finds."
- "The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes."
- "Reflect upon the providence and wisdom of God in all created things and praise Him in them all."
- "We need no wings to go in search of Him, but have only to look upon Him present within us."
- "The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too."
- "Pain is never permanent."
- "Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world."
- "Accustom yourself continually to make many acts of love, for they enkindle and melt the soul."
- "For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so

do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything.”