

# The Foundation of the Carmel of Saint Joseph's of Avila

August 24, 1562

The Feast of Saint Bartholomew



Excerpt from a Conference on  
*The Teresian Community*  
by Fr. Jesús Castellanos, OCD



*This excerpt is from a series of Conferences given to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Mexico, by Fr. Jesus Castellanos, OCD on the theme The Teresian Community. Fr. Jesus points out that prior to the Foundation of St. Joseph's, our Holy Mother received a number of significant graces given to her by the Lord which formed in her heart a desire for a new evangelical and Christ-centered style of Community life in Carmel.*

*Among these graces, which are all detailed in the Book of her **Life**, were first of all, a profound conversion experience which rooted all of her loving in Christ. Second, a desire to teach others about prayer which she had learned from the Lord, as well as from her own experience; she became a leader of this group of friends that frequently met in Teresa's cell at the Incarnation; they learned the powerful effects of prayer in their daily life which brought about a personal spiritual renewal. Third, the vision of hell which gave our Holy Mother a deeply ecclesial meaning to her life resulting in great impulses to help souls; this is followed by her life-changing question: "I was thinking about what I could do for God, and I thought that the first thing was to follow the call to the Religious life that His Majesty had given me, by keeping my Rule as perfectly as I could."*

*These graces formed the basis for the renewed Community that our Holy Mother would found in the little Monastery of St. Joseph's in Avila on St. Bartholomew's day, August 24, 1562. With this as an introduction to situate the Conference, we take up the excerpt of Fr. Jesus.*

We can say that our Holy Mother had already begun a renewal, a renovation, within her own Monastery [of the Incarnation]. We can say that a certain climate, an atmosphere has therefore been created, and it is marked by three qualities. First the revelation of the mystery of the Church and of the salvation of souls; second, the sense of responsibility in the face of this situation on the part of Teresa; and third, the spiritual renewal which is taking place, both personal to her and with the group [of friends]. In this situation, then, comes the great idea which is what our Holy Mother tells us about in number 10 of chapter 32 of the book of her *Life*. And as we go through this number 10, we need to notice everything in it.

*It happened once while I was with someone that she mentioned to me and to the others in the group that if we couldn't be nuns like the discalced, it would still be possible to found a monastery.*

In reality we know that this idea was voiced, not when Holy Mother was alone with someone, but when this group was gathered with her in her cell. It seems it came from a young Sister, Maria de Ocampo, the daughter of Holy Mother's cousin. This Sister did go to St. Joseph's. When she refers to the "discalced", she means a group of Franciscan nuns in Avila who called themselves "Royal Discalced" and who followed the Rule of St. Peter of Alcantara. This Maria de Ocampo was young and excitable, but also one who was most

upset by the situation at the Incarnation. And God used her to voice what our Holy Mother already had in her heart, but had not yet had the courage to express it outright, i.e. to start a new Monastery. So, continuing with number 10, our Holy Mother tells us:

*Since I was having these desires (that is, she already had it in her heart but she didn't say anything because she was waiting for God to work), I began to discuss the matter with that lady companion of mine, the widow I mentioned, who had the same desires.*

This widow was Doña Guiomar de Ulloa. Our Holy Mother did this because she knew that to found a Monastery was not just a simple thing of leaving one place for another. A lot was involved: all sorts of documentation, paper work, preparations, etc., etc. She needed help and support. We continue number 10:

*She (the widow) began to draw up plans to provide the new house with income. (Very practical. The first thing they had to think about was some money.) Now I see that there was little chance these plans would succeed, but our desire made us think they would. Yet since, on the other hand, I was so perfectly content in the house (the Incarnation) in which I was because it was very much to my liking and the cell in which I lived was just what I wanted (we know that it was quite spacious and nice), I was still delaying. Nevertheless, we agreed to pray fervently to God over the matter.*

We can see here that our Holy Mother was quite comfortable. She was not a protestor, yet she had these desires. So, I think that finally God had to push her, and we know that this is what He did. She did not leave on her own—God ordered her to do so. He had been preparing her, maturing this desire and idea in her heart, but now she seems to draw back. We can see how God had been nurturing this whole idea through the spiritual conversations of that group that met in our Holy Mother’s cell. He inspired one of the group to expressly voice the idea of a new Monastery. They discussed it, they thought about plans, etc. All of this is very good and necessary, but it is still a human desire, and for such a great enterprise, this could be dangerous. Because it will be such a great work, it needs, it must also have God’s seal, a supernatural, divine seal. It must also be God’s desire.

And so we come to the next paragraph, number 11 of this chapter 32. As we go through it, note all the details for they are all very important. Here, in this number 11 we can say that we have, so to speak, the “birth certificate” of our life in the Teresian Carmel. It is a charism, and as a charism it is, therefore, born from God. It is a supernatural inspiration. It is a desire of God. Every time that I read this number 11 I have the feeling that we have been born of the explicit Will, the explicit desire of God. It has not been just a human project, it has not been just that one day it occurred to our Holy Mother: “I’m going to be a foundress because

I want to do something great for God.” No. We have been born because God wanted us to be born. It has been an explicit will of God because He has wanted this miracle of the Teresian Carmel as a new form of living Community with, in, and for His Church. And now let us read, in number 11 this “act of our birth”:

*One day after Communion, His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers.*

Now she can get going with this because it is the will of God. We have been born of God. With St. John we can say that the Teresian Carmel has not been born “of the flesh, nor of blood, but of the will of God.” So this is the act of our foundation. Let’s continue number 11:

*He made great promises... (Yes, the Lord not only told her that she had to do it, He also promised great things) that it would be founded and that He would be highly served in it. He said it should be called St. Joseph and that this saint would keep watch over us at one door, and our Lady at the other, that Christ would remain with us, and that it would be a star shining with great splendor. He said that even though religious orders were mitigated one shouldn’t think He was little served in them; He asked what would become of the world if it were not for religious and said that I should tell my confessor what He commanded, that He was asking him not to go against this or hinder me from doing it.*

It is very interesting that in recording this grace for us, this grace which is surely one of the great revelations which up to this time she had received, our Holy Mother gives us all these little details. One gets the impression that this new Carmel which is being born, though it is a desire of our Holy Mother, it is, above all, a desire of God. And we have the impression that He has everything very well thought out. He gives it the name: St. Joseph. He says that St. Joseph and the Virgin will be there at the doors, and He obligates Himself—He, Himself, Christ will be among you (another translation has it: “Christ will walk among you”). That is to say, God is going to form a new Community, a Community which is going to be “Church”, because it will be presided over by Jesus Christ—that He “will walk among you”.

*End of the excerpt of Fr. Jesus*





If our Lord hadn't granted me the favors He did, it doesn't seem to me I would have had the courage for the works that were done or the strength to support the trials suffered and the statements and judgments made against me. So after the foundations were begun, the fears I previously had in thinking I was deceived left me. I grew certain the work was God's and so I threw myself into difficult tasks, although always with advice and under obedience. As a result I understand that since our Lord desired to revive the original spirit of this Order, and in His mercy He took me as a means, His Majesty had to provide me with what I was lacking, which was everything, in order to get results and better manifest His greatness through so wretched a thing.

Our Holy Mother St. Teresa  
*Spiritual Testimonies, n. 30*

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