

Dear Brothers and Sisters



She is one of the greatest, most widely appreciated women the world has ever known. No, I'm not talking about Marilyn Monroe, Sofia Loren, Beyonce, or Jay Lo; but St. Teresa of Avila. Her father, Alonso, was widowed with three children, and then had nine more children with his second wife Beatrice –Teresa's mother. Of this large family St. Teresa says, "All, through the goodness of God, were like our parents in being virtuous, except myself".

Born in Avila in 1515, at an early age she took great pleasure in reading the lives of the saints, in which she spent much time with a brother called Rodrigo, who was near the same age. They were much impressed by the thought of eternity, and they used to repeat often together "Forever, forever, forever". The martyrs seemed to them to have bought Heaven

very cheaply by their torments, and they resolved to go to the country of the Moors, in the hope of dying for their faith. They set out secretly, praying as they went that they might lay down their lives for Christ. Having reached the outskirts of Avila they were met by an uncle, who asked them where they were going. Imagine his surprise! He brought them back to their frightened mother, who reprimanded them; whereupon Rodrigo laid all the blame on his sister.

Teresa had in her room a picture of Jesus discoursing with the Samaritan women, before which she often repeated the words, "Lord, give me of that water, that I may not thirst".

Her mother died when she was fourteen, and she recounts "as soon as I began to understand how great a loss I had sustained I was very much afflicted; and so, I went before an image of our Blessed Lady and besought her with tears that she would be my mother".

After her mother's death Teresa spent hours reading romances, and tried to write them herself. These tales, she says, were the cause of her falling insensibly into other defects. She began to imitate fashions, to take great delight in being well dressed, to take great care of her hands, and use perfume and "to affect all the vain trimmings which my position in the world allowed".

Her father noticed the change and sent his daughter, who was then fifteen, to a convent of Augustinian nuns. After a year she fell sick, and was brought home, where she began to think more seriously about the religious life, in regard to which she was moved by both emotional attraction and repulsion. Her mind was made up when she read a book –the Letters of St. Jerome- and she told her father she wished to become a nun, but he would by no means give his consent. Fearing that she might relapse, she went secretly to the convent of the Incarnation of the Carmelite nuns outside Avila.

She felt a severe interior conflict: "I remember...that whilst I was going out of my father's house, I believe the sharpness of sense will not be greater in the very instance or agony of my death than it was then... There was no such love of God in me at that time that was able to quench that love which I bore to my father and my friends". She was twenty years old, and the step being taken, her father ceased to oppose it.

She lived in the convent, which was more like a social club, for twenty-five years, before being inspired to found a small community bound to a simpler way of life. Against great opposition she undertook to establish a reformed convent, and did so with the convent of St. Joseph, the first of seventeen foundations made in her lifetime. Her nuns lived in poverty, at first without any settled revenues, they wore habits of coarse serge and sandals instead of shoes (hence the name discalced). Together with a young priest, St. John of the Cross, she also undertook the reform of the male Carmelite Order.

Her Feast is this Monday, October 15th, why not come to morning Mass and celebrate the life of one of the greatest, most widely appreciated women the world has ever known, Saint Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church.

Fr. Sean