



SUPERIOR GENERAL OF DISCALCED CARMELITES  
Corso d'Italia, 38  
00198 Roma – Italia

## **IV Centenary of the canonization of Saint Teresa 12<sup>th</sup> March 1622-2022**

Dear brothers and sisters,

This year we are celebrating an anniversary, and it is a very special one: 400 years since the canonization of our Holy Mother Teresa. The entire Teresian Carmel unites in the grateful celebration of that March 12, 1622, and we do so by celebrating with the whole Church the gift of the holiness of Teresa and of the Blesseds who were canonized with her. Before we go into some notes on Teresa's holiness, we greet her four companions in canonization. In each of them, we see a Word of God newly released, also timely for our era. A mirror in which to look at ourselves in order to sound out what God would want today and to venture into the future with the confidence of the saints:

**San Isidore the Farmer:** The simplicity of work that dignifies ordinary life, turning everyday deserts into fertile land, by faith and love that does not draw attention to itself. Teresa was also a godly woman, treading firmly on the land of her time.

**St. Ignatius of Loyola:** A story marked by an injury that changes a life, and that makes a path of encounter and courageous challenge, for the greater glory of God. Discernment that helps to make truth. Everything in Teresa is an open wound of love, and everything in her teaches us to discern God's true love.

**St. Francis Xavier:** When love is alive and burns within, there is no obstacle, no distance, no language that prevents communicating the truth of the smiling Jesus<sup>1</sup> to the ends of the world. A mission without borders. Teresa had a missionary soul of an intrepid conqueror of her own interior dwellings, to the main one, where dwells the Bridegroom, Christ, and that passion leads her to a mission of universal communion, also without borders.

**St. Philip Neri:** We have known the humour of God, who jumps and dances with joy. The smile of God made creativity and play, joy that infects, inviting us to be good people, if we can. Teresa shares this joy, humour, freshness and festivity, of the children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> In his family's chapel at Xavier Castle (Spain), stands a 13th-century walnut Crucifix with a smiling Christ. According to tradition, this Christ sweated blood when Francis Xavier was dying.

I remember the words that the Pope told us in the audience of September 11, on humour, which recall a fundamental characteristic of holiness: «Joy must come from within: that joy that is peace, an expression of friendship. Another thing I put in the Exhortation on holiness: a sense of humour. Please do not lose your sense of humour.»

Now that we have recalled something significant of the four saints who celebrate the Centenary with her, let us come to Teresa our mother, with the affection of children, to thank God for the sanctity of her life:

Since that October 4, 1582, when Mother Teresa closed her eyes to this world in Alba de Tormes, her reputation for holiness has never stopped growing. Her works, first published in 1588, were disseminated and translated into various languages. Nine years after her death, in October 1591, the diocese of Salamanca opened the informative processes about her life, virtues and miracles. In 1595, at the wish of King Philip II, the Nuncio of His Holiness resumed the processes with new witness statements in many other places. The desire to see Teresa of Jesus raised to the altars was becoming clamorous; it quickly caught on in the hearts of many Christians infected by the marvel of God in her.

Faced with the deluge of petitions made to the Holy See by innumerable personalities and institutions, the Congregation of Rites carried out the necessary procedures that culminated, in 1614, with the beatification of Mother Teresa by Paul the V<sup>th</sup>. Almost eight years later, on March 12, 1622, now four hundred years ago, Gregory the XV<sup>th</sup> canonized her, by means of the bull *Omnipotens sermo Dei*. The solemn canonization ceremony was shared with Isidore of Madrid, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier and Philip Neri.

After four centuries, the uncontaminated witness of a woman touched by God deep within her, like fire among the ashes of history, continues to reach us today. Her word, fresh as the first day, continues to cry out to us, overflowing with joy: «See what He did with me» (L 19:15). And, as Pope Francis teaches, «To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world» (GE 33).

All anniversaries remember a living event, a fountain continuing to flow; a celebration and perennial dance in the heart of God. Past memory becomes surprising and effective for today. So is Teresa of Jesus, a living experience of God traversing our lives, activating in us faith in a Burning Presence.

There is something about her that is always provocative, suggestive; that inspires and questions at the same time. Her sympathy, her sense of humour, her daring, her intelligence, her depth of spirit, her incredible ability to translate into words how God is seen by the eyes of the naked soul, expressed with the transparency and simplicity of those who, without defending themselves, accept the challenge, and allow themselves to be invaded, and to be pierced through by the loving Word of God.

What comes to mind when we celebrate the IV Centenary of the canonization of our Teresa? What do we want to revive or, better, what do we want to release? With her we can always have something new, we always begin to know the way once again and we learn to walk as she wanted, «that you know it in the way that it is to be known, imprinted deep within» (WE 10,1).

### **The Origin of Holiness: *The True Lover***

The first thing Teresa brings is the memory of the source of sanctity. All good comes from the only good: God, bent on making us good. Here is the source of the holiness of all, including Teresa, and she is very aware of this: «it (the will) especially keeps in mind how this true Lover never leaves it, accompanying it and giving it life and being» (IC II M 1:4) it is all there. The art of receiving and letting oneself be loved, the surrender to the one who «we know loves us» in her definition of prayer (L 8:5). This is the fabric of holiness.

She never tires of recalling it. She says it in all her writings and we see it in the Book of her Life, «It is the Lord who does everything... their fortitude does not come from themselves» (L 21:11). She says it in a Spiritual Testimony in which she puts in the mouth of God where the root of holiness lies: «People should not think that through their own efforts they can be in light or that they can do anything to prevent the night, because these states depend on my grace ... This is true humility: to know what you can do and what I can do» (ST 24).

Teresa's holiness, the same one to which we are all called, is the adventure that we can live from the moment we realize that we are not hollow within (cf. W 28:10) until we discover the dwelling place of the Trinity and make that Teresian experience our own, where she says that she was given to understand «how the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, which I bear imprinted in my soul, are one» (ST 42). The path of holiness carves in us the light of communion.

Aware of all this, Teresa plays down her reputation for holiness: «I was disheartened at times to hear so much foolishness; for when they say there someone is a saint, it's bound to be nonsense. They laugh because I say they should declare someone else in that place to be one, for it does not cost them any more than words» (Letters: 320 to Gracián from Malagón, end of December 1579). Teresa laughs at herself and also at those who canonize her while alive.

### **The Way to Holiness: *Eyes on Him***

The Teresian adventure of holiness has its own name; the artist, the master sculptor is Christ... *do not want another way*, neither at the summit of contemplation, nor at the height of theology, neither in the mud of the lanes, nor in churches, with their silence and beautiful liturgies. To depart from Christ who became man, to discard his life in order to be spiritual, is to lose one's way. «The Lord Himself says that he is the way; the Lord

also says that he is the light, and that no one can go to the Father except through Him» (IC VI M 7:6). «Never believe anyone who says otherwise to you» (IC VI M 7:5).

Holiness is to make yourself one with Christ, it is «another new life... that one's life is already Christ.» That is the arc that Teresa sketches in the *Book of her Life* – another new life – to the *Mansions* – her life is Christ. Because, as dear Fr. Tomás Álvarez said, we are only saints in the love that passes back and forth between Him and us.

To depart from Jesus and his life is to turn away from holiness. Teresa is radical on this point: «all harm comes to us from not keeping our eyes fixed on you» (W 16:11) because from there, life becomes ambiguous and we walk «like a bird flying about that doesn't know where to alight; and it was losing a lot of time and not making progress in virtue or improving in prayer» (IC VI M 7:15), neglecting the life we truly desire.

### **Concrete Holiness: *Teresian Realism***

One of the most inspiring things about Teresa is her realism, because she makes holiness a possible path of truth. Her holiness is not ethereal, her words touch ground in order to raise one up: «more courage is necessary to follow the path of perfection than to suffer a quick martyrdom. For perfection is not attained quickly» (L 31:17). She has proven the necessity of staying in everyday life.

«Don't think that it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you» (IC VM 3: 12). The road is exciting, it is not *business as usual*. Discovering how and where we will serve, so as not to be limited people, is the passion of Teresian holiness. Hence her radicality: «it is necessary that your foundation consists of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs» (IC VII M 4:9).

Holiness is the reverse of appearance, it is not some or other observance. Teresa's kind holiness, with the *little by little* that defines her, not dodging the *all or nothing* of her bet, with the essential determination, unconditional donation, perseverance that does not give up in defeats and falls, that allows itself to be helped and lifted up, to live in truth and make «our deeds conform with what we say in prayer» (ibid. 7).

### **Bound to God's Mercy: *He reigns and may I be captive***

There is a Teresian desire that defines holiness and that shows us a possible way to grow in it as we celebrate this IV centenary, in this particular time when God has called us to life. Teresa wanted to be bound to God and to live on his mercy: «that although I may want to withdraw from this friendship and union, my will may always, Lord of my life, be subject to your will and not to depart from it» (MSS 3:15). Mercy is the home where Teresa lives, the only place where she feels safe.

With Teresa, we want to live tied to the mercy of God, taking Teresian care of our Christian being. She says it masterfully and beautifully in the last soliloquy, number 17,

which should be known by heart: «May another live in me greater than I and better for me than I, so that I may serve him. May He live and give me life. May He reign, and may I be captive, for my soul doesn't want any other liberty» (Soliloquies 17:3). Free from other constraints for the service of mercy, *to occupy ourselves in prayer*, in order «to be servants of love».

Bind ourselves to mercy by giving our hearts, turning around and welcoming human mediation as knots giving strength to hold evil for ever. In this bond emerges community, as a seal of Christian holiness, as a special Teresian characteristic and as a witness to the world: «strive... to be affable... that everyone you talk to will love your conversation and desire your manner of living and acting, and do not be frightened and intimidated by virtue... the holier they are the more sociable they are» (W 41:7). Holiness is noticeable in education, in treatment, in relationships that welcome and embrace diversity and build in each 'other' the tabernacle in which God seeks to be recognized. Mercy is letting oneself be cared for and caring for the other, love of God and neighbour are authenticated and confirmed in everyone (cf. GE 143-146).

The holiness of our Mother Teresa guides us on the synodal path that the Church proposes to us at this time, making Martha and Mary walk together. It leaves us shining traces of fraternity and courage, and a certain direction, that «we desire and engage in prayer» (IC VII M 4:12), that we walk the path that Jesus has travelled: «Let them turn their eyes to Him, and not fear the setting of this Sun of Justice, nor, if we don't first abandon him, will He allow us to walk at night and go astray» (L 35:14).

On behalf of my brothers and sisters throughout the world, I thank you, Lord of mercies, for Teresa our Mother, thank you for the gift of her holy life to the world, to the Church and to the whole of Carmel, because her presence today continues being a light, strength and grace in the life of each one of the Carmelites. Thank you for continuing to gift us with her magisterium, her experience and her word that encourages us to be holy, to give our lives, to venture along life without surrenders, to trust, and to tell you with her words every day of our life, until the last breath: «yours I am, for you was I born, Lord, what do you command of me to do?»

Br. Miguel Márquez Calle, OCD, *Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites*  
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