



“...SEE WHAT HE DID WITH ME”

(Saint Teresa, *Life*, 19,15)

Dearest Brothers and Sisters in Carmel:

I am thankful for the invitation to be here with you at the 2015 National Congress of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites of the United States. Our Superior General, Fr. Saverio, sends his greetings and prayers to each one of you.

I would also like to personally thank you for your prayers for the General Chapter celebrated last May, as well as the collaboration of the communities and provincial Councils in responding and summarizing the September, 2014, questionnaire which I had sent to you. It was greatly enriching to me to get to know a little more about the realities and the vitality of the 47 OCDS provinces spread throughout the world by reading your summaries.

This 2015 OCDS National Congress gathers at a privileged place in time. Our Congress events join with the entire Carmelite Order in completing the 5th Centenary year on October 15. We began the celebration preparations in 2009, with a theme which is similar to this Congress' theme: *"Yours I am. For You I was born. What do you want of me?"* May these days help us to move forward with the Mission, *"To inspire an authentic friendship with Jesus, based on the life and writings of St. Teresa of Avila."*

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The teachings and life of Saint Teresa offer so many possibilities, that I prayed and reflected about a theme which I could share with you on this very significant occasion.

It was then that I came across the words of the Holy Mother, which are the title of this presentation: **"see what He did with me"** (*Life* 19, 15).

It is Teresa, herself, who invites us to look at what He did with her, to which we should add, in spite of her... These words are so significant, that, if inserted in the context of Chapter 19 of the Book of Life, they allow us see Teresa's conscience in that time in 1565.

In Chapter 19 of the *Book of Life*, Saint Teresa is speaking about the Fourth (4th) degree of prayer (cc 18-21), the prayer of union. The first part of the chapter (paragraphs 1-3) describes the effects of the prayer of union in the life of a person who has received and who already finds himself/herself transfigured by the experience of God. In the second part of chapter 19 (paragraphs 4-15), she speaks of the dangers that can happen with those who have reached this degree of prayer, such as relapsing into sin and abandoning prayer. Teresa recalls her own experience which consisted of infidelities and the abandonment of prayer, dealing with friendship (paragraphs 4-10) which she narrated in chapter 7. She, then, outlines God's characteristics (paragraphs 11-15): of not dwelling on our sins, as shown in the Scriptures (*remember His words*) and in her own life (*see what He did with me*). In God's mode of action experienced by Teresa, she discovers the goodness and generosity of His Divine love, His mercy, regardless of our infidelities, He invites us to fully trust in Him. Let us listen to Teresa:

"It (the soul) should trust in the goodness of God, which is greater than all the evils we are capable of. And He doesn't remember our ingratitude when we, although knowing about it, desire to return to His friendship; nor does He remember the favors He bestowed on us as punishment for these evils. On the contrary, all of this helps us to receive pardon more quickly as members of His household who have eaten, as I say, from His table. Souls should remember His words and see what He did with me; before I grew tired of offending Him, His Majesty began to pardon me. He never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust His mercies. Let us not tire of receiving. May He be blessed forever, amen -- and may all things praise Him" (S. Teresa, *Life*, 19, 15)¹.

¹Quotes take from: St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross; *The collected Works and Letters*. Carmelite Digital Library, Carmel Clarion Communications. Washington, D.C. 2003-2011. *Life* = Book of *Life*; Dw = Interior Castle; Way = Way of perfection; F = Foundations.

What did the Lord do with Teresa? What does she want to tell us today with the invitation "*see what He did with me*"? What can God do with each one of us, if we have disposed ourselves in a docile way towards Him, in the way the Saint counsels us?

Therefore, we will briefly review:

- 1) *A brief spiritual path of Teresa;*
- 2) *A few themes of the Teresian doctrine which are important in order to "to love and to please God";*
- 3) *And finally, Teresa invites us to us to seek "God's glory and the good of the Church".*

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1. The Spiritual path of Saint Teresa

In the lives of saints, with few exceptions, we discover that they were not born saints. They walk in a path, with fidelities and infidelities in response to God's grace. Saint Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582), witnessed the salvific action of God in the human person. She allowed herself to be transformed by His grace, which led her to reach the fullness of her human and spiritual life. This consists in the progressive and free conformity of our own will with God's will, ² which predisposes a person to love with the love she/he receives from Him and to obey His will in everything, as Jesus did. The poem "*Yours I am. For You I was born. What do You want of me?*" (Poetry 2) clearly displays Teresa's openness and total surrender to God's will.

Teresa of Jesus is a privileged witness of the path of human and Christian maturity. With her great ability to narrate the most profound spiritual and mystic experiences, "Teresa is a seeker of truth, who needed to "*walk in truth,*"³ she wrote, in obedience, about the truth which she experienced. Besides understanding what grace she received, she recognized that she also received the grace of how to

² "The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer -- and don't forget this, because it's very very important -- should be that he work and prepare himself with determination and every possible effort to bring his will into conformity with God's will. Be certain that, as I shall say later, the greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity" (Dw 2,1,8; cf 3,2,4). En las moradas quintas hablará de la "unión de voluntades" - de Dios y del hombre-, emparejándola con la unión mística (Dw 5,3,3-4)

³ Tomás Alvarez, *Verdad em Diccionario de Santa Teresa*. Ed. Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2002, p. 643.

communicate it, “to know how to describe and explain it” (*Life* 17,15). As a “narrative theologian”, Teresa shows us the possibility of following her footsteps in each stage of her growth and of the discovery of the mystery of the triune God.

First, we will explore her spiritual journey and its more significant moments⁴. Then, following Teresa’s own guidance, we will present some of her doctrinal elements which help us to move from self-reliance into trust in God. It is important to keep in mind that when Teresa describes the graces received in the Book of Life, she does it many years later and when she has already reached spiritual maturity. Her goal is to make a contrast between “the amazing graces God granted her” and her “many sins and wretched life” (*Life*, Intr. 1), to shine a light on “the great goodness of God” and “His amazing magnificence and mercy” (*Life* 4, 10) towards her.

Childhood, adolescence and early adulthood (1515-1535): In her family, she lived out her family’s devotions and childhood play of a religious nature with her brother Rodrigo. She was in search of that which lasts forever. (*Life* 1, 4). She attempted to flee to the land of the Moors to be killed for Christ. After the death of her mother (1528), in her teens, she lost her childhood piety because of “engaging in worldly vanities” while in the company of some close relatives (*Life* 2,6). She returned to religious fervor in the boarding school of Our Lady of Graces convent (1531-32) and later on in the house of her uncle Don Pedro and with her sister Maria by reading good books (*Life* 3,4). She decided to enter religious life at the Monastery of the Incarnation in 1535 (Nov. 2; cf. *Life*, 4,1).

Early years of Religious Life (1535-1553): She made her profession with great happiness; which for her signified the “espousal” that she entered into with Christ (*Life* 4,3 – Nov. 3, 1537). Soon after that, she went through a period of illness (1539-1542 – *Life* 4-6). Cured by the intercession of Saint Joseph, she recalled neglecting the practice of prayer, the anguish and struggles narrated in chapter 7 of the Book of Her Life. She blamed this on living her religious life without good spiritual companionship. Instead, she was living in a community which did not foster a healthy spirituality. As a result, she spent much of her time on pastimes with friendships in the visiting room. She fell into the temptation of false humility, which led her to give up prayer to the disgrace of God. She abandoned prayer for

⁴ Salvador Ross, *Mística teología, in, Diccionario de Santa Teresa*. Burgos, ed- Monte Carmelo 2002. p. 444ss; T. Alvarez, *Teresa de Jesús*, en, Id... p. 604ss; Ciro García, *Gracia santificante*, en id....p. 313-323.

more than a year (cf.: *Life* 7,10-13; 19, 10 – in 1543); she also fell into mediocrity, living by appearances. The death of her father caused her great turmoil (*Life* 7,13-16 – Dec 26, 1544). She resumed her spiritual life with effort and struggled alone “for many years” (*Life* 7,17) in a “tempestuous sea”, struggling with “a shadow of death” (*Life* 8,2.12), which is “deal to with God and with the world” (1544-1553)⁵. Let us listen to Teresa’s own words recalling this period.

“O Lord of my soul! How can I extol the favors You gave me during these years! And how at the time when I offended You most You quickly prepared me with an extraordinary repentance to taste Your favors and gifts! Indeed, my King, You, as One who well knew what to me would be most distressing, chose as a means the most delicate and painful punishment. With wonderful gifts You punished my sins! (*Life*, 7,19)”.

In the year of 1554: She narrates her “conversion” in the year 1554 in Chapter 9 of the Book of Her Life. Teresa is 39 years old, tired of struggling against her bad habits (*Life* 9, 1). Her encounter with an image of the scourged Christ awakens her devotion, seeing in it the representation of the great suffering she had caused Him due to her offenses. Feeling distressed and with a great outpouring of tears, she beseeches Him to grant her conversion that she might stop offending Him⁶. Teresa realizes that, from then on, all her trust should be placed in God (*Life* 9,3) and not in herself, avoiding occasions to offend Him. In her prayer, she understood that Christ already lived within her for many years (*Life* 9, 4-6); now, in front of the image of the all-wounded Christ, she understands all the suffering she caused Christ with her infidelities. As a consequence, she resolves once and for all to stop offending the Lord; as a consequence of this life changing event, her “soul gained great strength from the Divine Majesty. (*Life* 9, 9)”

From 1555 to 1557: Teresa has her first deep and compelling experience of God without the aid of images or concepts. Teresa feels “totally immersed in Him” and that He is within her and in all things (*Life* 10, 1). The sweetness and glory of His presence surrounded me so completely, that there was no

⁵ Teresa experiences what Saint Paul says about himself: “[I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” (Rm 7, 21-24), which is the drama of so many who live their faith. Notwithstanding all, she recognizes the pedagogy of God towards her: to grant great graces.

⁶ *Life*, 9,1.

place to escape it (*Life* 24, 2). She feels like a sponge saturated with water (*Testimony* 40; 14).⁷ It is here that she moves from the ascetic prayer phase to the mystic phase, as she will describe in the fourth dwellings places. These are years of growing in the mystic graces; in conjunction with the growing fear of being diabolically possessed (Cf. *Life* 23, 1). Saint Francis of Borgia (1554) assures her that these experiences are from “the Spirit of God” (*Life* 24, 3). After this meeting and under the sound spiritual guidance of Father Pradamos, she experiences for the first time the ecstasy (1556) which enables her to understand the meaning of the words: “No longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels.” This grace allows for the detachment from friendships which do not lead her to God (Cf. *Life* 24, 5-7).

In the year of 1559, the Inquisition publishes the list of prohibited books, which forbids the reading of books in the vernacular. Shortly after, Teresa received the grace of the “living book”. Christ is the Book in which the truths are seen and impressed in such a way that one cannot forget them (*Life* 26, 5-6; 27,2). This is the beginning of the Christ centric experience, with locutions and visions of Christ. After two years with the mysterious and constant presence of God at her side (1558-60), she could not doubt that the presence was His⁸ (*Life* 27, 2-3, 5).

Trinitarian Graces – Teresa is 50 years old (1565) and by means of such graces “the soul sees that in an instant it is wise; the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and other sublime things are so explained that there is no theologian with whom it would not dispute in favor of the truth of these grandeurs” (*Life*, 27,9). She experiences the truth of God in Jesus Christ in her soul, which is like a mirror of Him and of the truth in the Holy Scriptures (*Life*, 40, 5; 1Dw, c.1). In the truth of God, Teresa finds her own truth, which is to be the dwelling place of the Trinity (*Life* 40, 5. 9-10). It was also at this time that she decided that “to be humble is to walk in truth, because God is supreme Truth” (6 Dw 10, 7). In the

⁷ “It seemed to me there came the thought of how a sponge absorbs and is saturated with water; so, I thought, was my soul which was overflowing with that divinity and in a certain way rejoicing within itself and possessing the three Persons” (*Testimony* 14) ; In the 5,1,10 Dwellings Places she will speak of the fist of the mystic gifts and in the Way of Perfection she used the image of a castle (C 28,9).

⁸ In the 6 dwelling places this is called “an intellectual vision” (6 Dw 8,2-3).

following 12 years (1565-1577), she experiences a gradual spiritual growth which will culminate in an enduring Trinitarian communion⁹.

On August 28, 1575, Teresa lived the Trinitarian experience, its entry into the deepest center of her being, in the seventh mansion of her Interior Castle (cf. *Testimony* 42; *7 Dw* 1, 6-7). It is the fulfillment of herself as a Christian and as a human being:¹⁰ the communion with the One and Triune God, in the depths of her very self. It is the sanctity of this Trinitarian event that transforms a person's life and which comes from Christ and results in the fullness of a relationship with Him. At the same time there is the complete realization of the "new person" and its new life. The divine grace in Teresa bore fruit and reached fullness, as she described in the seventh dwelling places.

In this way, Teresa's spiritual journey, which in the beginning was rough and filled with surprises, was transformed into many exterior "works". Practically all her works were accomplished in the last 20 years of her life! In view of her experience and teaching, we will explore in the second part of this presentation some of the instructions and counsels which Teresa gives us in order *to love and to please God*. With this goal in mind, we would like to be open to the divine grace in order to grow in love for Christ, for others and in the service of the church.

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2. "...to love and to please God" (Life 7, 21)

Teresa sees in the ones who follow this same vocation, the help and support needed to be "pleasing" or "to please" God in all things; therefore she expressed in the Book of Her Life 16, 7: the need for friends who gather together and search to follow together in the adventure of being "servants of love" (*Life* 16, 7; 21,5; 39,19). In the end of the Book of Her Life, Teresa understands what Jesus told her: "Alas, daughter, how few there are who truthfully love Me! For if they loved Me, I would reveal to them my secrets. Do you know what it is to love Me truthfully? It is to understand that everything that is displeasing to Me is a lie" (*Life*, 40, 1).

⁹ Testimony 10: "One day while I was anxiously desiring to help the order, the Lord told me: "Do what lies in your power; surrender yourself to me, and do not be disturbed about anything; rejoice in the good that has been given you, for it is very great; my Father takes His delight in you, and the Holy Spirit loves you"; Cf.: Testimony 13; 14; 20.

In her experience as a spiritual Mother, Teresa had found out that

“there are many, many souls who reach it but few that pass beyond; and I don't know whose fault it is. Most surely God does not fail, for once His Majesty has granted a soul the favor of reaching this stage, I don't believe He will fail to grant it many more favors unless through its own fault” (*Life* 15,2; cf.: 5 *Dw* 1,1.2).

Like Teresa, to whom God's grace progressively enabled “detachment of herself” (cf *Life* 24,7-8), we are called today to follow the spiritual path with a “determined determination” (*Way* 21,2). Christ is the same “yesterday, today and forever” (Hb 13,8) and “He never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust His mercies. Let us not tire of receiving” (*Life* 19,15). Therefore, like “weak souls,”¹⁰ let us seek in her doctrine and life experience the stimulus to “truly love” Christ.

a) Trust in God's mercy and goodness

It is certain that each one of us has a relationship with God according to the way one perceives God. For Teresa, her relationship with God was transformed from an image of God, in keeping with the theology of her time¹¹, to the novel discovery of a God who is a true friend (*Life* 8,6; 22,6; 25,17; 37,5). Thus, the importance of Teresa's invitation: to trust in God's mercy and goodness in all circumstances of life.

Teresa will always be recognized as an example of the greatness of divine goodness and mercy in view of her faults¹². Throughout her works¹³, she will repeatedly praise God's mercy: “I often marveled to

¹⁰ “I write this for the consolation of weak souls like myself that they might never despair or fail to trust in the greatness of God. Even though they may fall after elevations like the ones to which the Lord here brings them, they ought not to grow discouraged if they don't want to become completely lost. For tears gain all things: one water draws down the other” (*Life* 19,3).

¹¹ When she received mystical graces, even in situations of infidelities, she started changing this vision of God who was not consistent with what she had experienced. Suffice us to remember, for example, that initially mystical graces were considered a diabolic possession (cf. *Life* 23, 11.14). From this, Teresa defends the idea that God can grant spiritual delights to ones who are in sin as a way to stir their desires to Himself (*Way* 16,1).

¹² Cf. *Life* 4,3-4; 8, 3.8; 14,10.

¹³ For example : *Life* 7,22; 8,2.10; 19,5. 15; 38, 7; F 4,4; 10,5; 27,20; 28,35; *Way* 10,16; 36,12; 1*Dw* 1,3; 3*Dw* 1,3; 6*Dw* 4,9; 7*Dw* 1,1; etc. Cf. *Concordancias de S. Teresa*, Vol. II, p. 1654-1657.

think of the great goodness of God, and my soul delighted in seeing His amazing magnificence and mercy..." (*Life* 4,10).

She will give witness in the seventh dwelling places, by describing the graces she received: "my intention is to make known His mercies that His name may be more praised and glorified" (7 *Dw* 1,1).

In *The Way of Perfection*, when commenting on the Our Father, she warns about some temptations which discourage us in our progress along the spiritual path and recommends: "stop thinking about your misery, insofar as possible, and turn your thoughts to the mercy of God, to how He loves us and suffered for us" (*Way*, 39,3). In the trials – the dark night -, she tells that God's mercy "never fails those who hope in Him" (6 *Dw* 1,13). In this way, she assures us: "there is no remedy in this tempest but to wait for the mercy of God. For at an unexpected time, with one word alone or a chance happening, He so quickly calms the storm that it seems there had not been even as much as a cloud in that soul, and it remains filled with sunlight and much more consolation", to hope confidently in Him (6 *Dw* 1,10; 3,17). She also speaks of God's merciful actions in *The Foundations*. In the monastery of Valladolid, she declares that "the Lord grants many favors in that house" (F 10, 7) and that the vocations in Salamanca "are so good by God's mercy" (F 18,3). Her exclamations reveal Teresa's wonder in the presence of the infinite Divine mercy: "... we shall never finish understanding the splendor of our Lord's mercies and what we owe Him" (*Soliloquies* 12,5).

As set forth in the Gospel (*Mark* 10, 47.48; *Luke* 17,13; etc.), Teresa experienced the compassion of God in the person of Jesus, "in whom the divine and the human are joined" (6 *Dw* 7,9) and who is "the face of the Father's mercy". She sees in His Sacred Humanity His suffering for us (*Life* 22,6; *Way* 26,6). In her experiences of the Resurrected One, she feels Him to be a faithful and living presence, which accompanies her (*Life* 28,3; 38,17). That is why, especially when she teaches others how to pray, she states that it is necessary to be aware that Jesus is near us, and that He is looking at us with beautiful and compassionate eyes (*Way* 26, 1, 3-5). In the Eucharist, as the extension of Jesus' presence on earth, He continues to remain with us. When she comments on the petition of the Our Father, "*Thy will be done*" she says that He wanted to be present here with us in the Eucharist to help us to completely fulfill the Father's will as He did (*Way* 33,1; 34,1-2). This is a sign of His compassion for

humanity. In the face of so great a goodness, she was also moved with compassion towards Jesus, which will lead her to experience love for others.

b) Prayer

From her experience of, and trust in, the goodness and mercy of God, there springs up a prayer which is a relationship of friendship. For Teresa, prayer is a friendship with Christ; this is the key to understand her life and teaching. Prayer was the “door” to the graces that God granted her (cf *Life* 8, 9). Above all, this “particular friendship” with Christ sustained her (*Life* 8, 5.6), even in the face of her weaknesses and sins. That is why Teresa urges us to never stop praying because of shame or because of faults; this would be “false humility” and this was her “worst mistake” (*Life* 7, 1; 19, 4.15).

One of her objectives, in writing about her spiritual life, is “to make known His mercy and the great good it did me not to abandon prayer and reading” (*Life* 8, 10) and it “is my intention to attract souls to so high a blessing” (*Life* 18,8). Her works are a testimony to the patience of God, who “waited so long” (*Life* 9,9;19,8) for her to be done “according to her condition” (*Life* 8,6). Teresa invites anyone who has not begun this “particular friendship”, to experience “so much good” (id.).

Her essence is in love (4 *Dw* 1, 7; *F* 5,2). All Teresa’s counsels to the prayerful person, is to have the objective to “do that which best stirs you to love” Christ (4 *Dw* 1, 7). She places greater emphasis on love than on understanding, because love is the center of a Christian life, above all when it has “its root in God’s love” (5 *Dw* 3, 9; 7 *Dw* 4,15). This love may be lived in all places, because “the true lover loves everywhere and is always thinking of the Beloved!” (*F* 5, 16). That is why the authentic prayer life lived with love, is manifested in one’s life by the practice of virtues or “works”. These are the best evidences of friendship with Him and the best expression of its authenticity: “called the vestiges (lit. *dejos*) confirmed by works”.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. 7 *Dw* 4, 6-7; Lit.: *dejos*= taste or flavor what remains in one’s mouth after one eats something: cf. Letter 136,4, a Jeronimo Gracián, 23, Out. 1576.

From the love and friendship with Christ is born the desire for His company. Hence, “the further a soul advances [in the spiritual life], the more it is accompanied by the good Jesus” (6 *Dw* 8,1). Jesus leads the soul to discover its own dignity as the dwelling of the Holy Trinity, which is “sculpted” into the soul (Cf. *Life* 40,5) and which has its delight in being with the children of men (1 *Dw* 1,1; Prov.8,31).

c) *Freedom*

Friendship with Christ progressively leads the prayerful person to freedom. This means experiencing and living that “God alone suffices”, through the virtues of brotherly love, detachment and humility. For Teresa, these are “sovereign virtues, rulers over all creation, emperors of the world, deliverers from all snares and entanglements laid by the devil, virtues so loved by our teacher Christ who never for a moment was seen without them!” (*Way* 10, 3). At the end of the Book of Her Life, she writes: “Since I am among a few holy companions and am not in the world, I observe as though from on high and am really little bothered by what they say or know about me. Moreover, I would like some soul to profit a little by all that can be said about me” (*Life* 40, 22). In the interior castles, (or our ‘dwelling places’) she will say that “they give away their freedom” and “are slaves of God” (7 *Dw* 4,8), this is the ultimate freedom of love! Teresa encourages beginners on the spiritual journey to undertake an adventure of prayer to become “servants of love” (*Life* 11,1) “with joy and freedom” (*Life* 13,1), without harmful faint heartedness (*Way* 28,3; 41,5-6) to live in “holy freedom”.

For Teresa, freedom must exist in three areas: in relationship with *oneself*, with *material things* and with *others*.

Freedom from *one’s self* in the Teresian teaching is centered in the principle that “the worst thief” – the ego – is always with us (*Way* 10,1). One needs to be vigilant, to exercise self-control to deny one’s own will, to avoid excessive concern about one’s body and to resist the fear of losing one’s health (*Way* 10,5). After much struggle, Teresa obtained the grace to be free of herself (*Life* 24,8).

Freedom, in relationship to *material things*, is obtained when considering that “everything comes to an end” and we should place our trust in that which “never ends” (*Way* 10,2). In the same way, teresian

poverty is united with detachment from material things in inner freedom, “to give all to All without reserve” (*Way 8,1*).

The freedom with regard to *others*, including relatives (*Way 9,4*), means not to allow our “wills to be slaves to anyone, save to the One who bought it with His blood” (*Way 4,8*). Only in trust and fear of God, will one arrive at “holy freedom” (*Way 41, 4.5-6*)¹⁵.

The theme of freedom is a theme closely connected with the promises. Chastity, poverty and obedience make sense when a person becomes free of self and of social conditioning in order to follow Christ more closely and to serve our neighbor out of love.

d) Self- Knowledge

This is a fundamental theme in the spiritual life. To Saint Teresa, self knowledge “must never be abandoned”, for it is like “bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread. It must be eaten within bounds, nonetheless” (*Life 13, 15; 6 Dw 10,7*). Unlike the atheist psychology, Teresa understands self knowledge and her own dignity as God’s dwelling. It is an experiential knowledge which forms a part of the virtue of true humility (*1 Dw 2,13*): “Since there is no hidden cobweb in a room where much sun enters, the soul sees clearly that it is most unworthy; it sees its misery” (*Life 19,2*). Through humility, the one who prays understands that none of the spiritual good, which he has is his, but comes from God (*Life 15,14*). That is why she recommends that “however sublime the contemplation, let your prayer always begin and end with self-knowledge” (*Way 39,5*). In the spiritual path, many times it is necessary to look at the greatness of God, of Christ, or of the saints in order to see the contrast between them and oneself as a

¹⁵ It is very important to keep in mind here that Teresa’s views on freedom are taken in reference to women’s marginalization, in the time of the first edition of the Ways of Perfection (*Way 4,1*).

way to help one to grow in holiness (2 *Dw*, 8.11.13). Teresa always exhorts all “to go forward in the service of our Lord and in self-knowledge” (5 *Dw* 3,1)¹⁶.

Closely united with self-knowledge, Teresa gives great importance to prudence. She warns many times to avoid situations or occasions which can lead to falling into offending God. This warning is especially important in the beginning of the spiritual journey, when one does not, yet, have the strength to resist temptations. Remembering her past experience, she said that if she had had someone to guide her, she would not have erred so much (*Life* 4, 9; 7,9; 6,4; 7,1; *Way* 9,5). She exhorts “souls to watch out for these occasions, not relying on themselves” (*Life* 8, 10), escaping dangerous situations and understanding that it is good to avoid them (cf 2 *Dw* 1,2).

It is significant when the Saint realizes, after her conversion, the importance of “self-distrust” and the importance of “placing all trust in God” (*Life* 9, 3) and not exposing oneself to temptations. She sought frequently to be alone in prayer and to shun the occasions of sin (*Life* 9, 9; 23, 2.5), which led to a great progress in her spiritual life. She advises beginners who have already received some special graces, to walk in fear of self and avoid placing themselves in situations of offending God (*Life* 13,1; 19,12-13; *Way* 39,4; 3 *Dw* 2,22). This is especially true of those in the fourth dwelling places: “One strong warning I give to whoever finds himself in this state is that he guard very carefully against placing himself in the occasion of offending God” to avoid relapses (4 *Dw* 3,10; cf 5 *Dw* 4,5-7). In *the Way of Perfection* she advises avoiding such occasions: “you must always proceed carefully and turn from every occasion and companion who does not help you come closer to God” (*Way* 41, 4). Finally, her vehement appeal: “for the love of God we should avoid such occasions; the Lord will help us, as He did me” (*Life* 32,7).

Besides these four themes, we could have explored many other themes of the vast Teresian doctrine. In a pluralist society, it is even more necessary to have a strong faith and a solid understanding of Christian doctrine. This will help us to enter into dialogue with the world without losing our identity. Equally fundamental, like it was for Teresa, is the support of the members of the Community in order

¹⁶ In the mystic experience in the 6 dwelling places, one sees sin and its effects through the lenses of “self-knowledge and humility upon seeing that something so low in comparison with the Creator of so many grandeurs dared to offend Him” (6 *Dw* 5,10).

to grow in friendship with Christ Jesus. Taking into account the importance of her confessors, of Francisco de Salcedo, of D. Guiomar de Ulloa in Teresa's life and mission, we realize, that we can grow in collaboration with each other in the service of building the Kingdom.

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3. Teresa invites us to seek the "glory of God and the good of the church"

In this third and last section, I start with mentioning what God did through Teresa, the external "works". There were 18 monasteries of nuns (she was planning 13 more foundations...); the reform of the friars; her many miracles even while still alive; the countless benefits which her writings give us and have given humanity throughout the past five centuries, within and outside of the Catholic world, etc...

However, I would like to emphasize what today's church is telling us. It is one of the four important themes of Teresian teaching and spirituality for us today, according to Pope Francis¹⁷, along with joy, prayer and fraternity. We, like Teresa, are invited to seek the "glory of God and the good of the church" (*Dw 3,6-7*).

- 1) The preparation and celebration of the 5th Centenary of Holy Mother awoke in many places a collaboration among Friars, Nuns and OCDS. For this it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the lay identity and to discover the uniqueness of its own vocation and its mission within the Order. We continue to grow in the understanding of what it is to be a Secular Carmelite and of its collaboration with the other members of the Order, especially in the mission of promoting the spiritual life and in so many other areas of activity.

¹⁷ *Message of Pope Francis to the Bishop of Avila on the opening of the Teresian Jubilee year.* 15 October 2014: "Today Teresa tells us: pray more in order to truly understand what is happening around you and thus to act better. Prayer conquers pessimism and generates good initiatives (cf. *Interior Castle* VII 4, 6). This is Teresian realism, which requires work instead of emotions, and love instead of dreams; the realism of humble love in the face of anxious asceticism! At times the Saint shortens her pleasant letters saying: "We are on the path" (*Letter 469, 7.9*), to express the urgency of continuing the task begun until the end. When the world is aflame, one cannot waste time on affairs of little importance. If only everyone were infected by this holy haste to go out to journey along the paths of our time, with the Gospel in hand and the Spirit in the heart!"

- 2) The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is a calling to all the baptized to live as and to be a missionary within the world. How am I living my disciple-missionary calling?
- 3) We are in the *Year of Consecrated Life*. The Secular Order, as part of the Order, is called "to live this Year for Consecrated Life as a grace which can make you more aware of the gift you yourselves have received. Celebrate it with your entire "family", so that you can grow and respond together to the promptings of the Spirit in society today" (Francis, *Letter to all Consecrated people*, III, 1).
- 4) The Encyclical *Laudato sii* (May 25, 2015) has invited us to care for our Planet by living with moderation in the use of material things, promoting initiatives to achieve this goal, as well as to live an "ecological spirituality" (Chapter VI). In its reference to the example of St. Therese of Lisieux, it invites us "to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms" (230).
- 5) On the upcoming 8th of December, we will begin a Holy Year, a *Jubilee of Mercy* which will be ending in November 2016. Pope Francis is inviting us to live this "Jubilee Year in light of the Lord's words: *Merciful like the Father*. The Evangelist reminds us of the teaching of Jesus who says, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (*Lk 6:36*)¹⁸. And he proceeds: "In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return" (MV 14).

We have seen how Saint Teresa invites us to "see what He did with me" (*Life 19,15*). In her life, the discovery of the loving generosity and mercy of God were fundamental. This progressively transformed her and led her to the discovery of herself as God's dwelling place and at the same time, this discovery strengthened her determination to work for the Order of the Virgin Mary and the church of her time. "She lived with profound faith in God's mercy" (*Const. OCDS, 7*) and proceeded exhorting

¹⁸ Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* 13 = MV. 11 April 2015.

us to trust in God's Mercy, like she who "never lost confidence in His mercy", because "He never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust His mercies. Let us not tire of receiving" (*Life* 9,7; 19,15).

That is why, as members of the Teresian Carmel which has in prayer one of its pillars "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life" (MV 2). By meditating and contemplating His Mercy, may we be able to see in each member of our family, community, workplace, social interactions, in whatever path we find ourselves, with the same merciful gaze of Christ Jesus, who tells us: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (*Mt* 5,7).

"All this can be believed as coming from the mercy of God" (*F* 12, 9). Teresa tells us *It is time to walk!*¹⁹ as the Chapter fathers reminded us in the last General Chapter. We trust in HIM and together with Holy Mother, let us be open to receive His graces and like her let us say: *What do You want of me?*

Thank you!

Fr. Alzinir Francisco Debastiani, OCD

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¹⁹ Words by Ana de San Bartolomé in *Últimas acciones de la Vida de Santa Teresa*.