

Teresa was born in Avila, Spain on the 28th of March 1515. At the age of 14 her mother died. Although she found comfort in a devotion to the Virgin Mary, she seemed to show less of an interest in God as a teenager than she had in her younger years. Her father not wanting her to be drawn more and more into worldly interests sent his young teenage daughter to a Convent of Augustinian Nuns for her education. Although illness sent her home during her second year of studies, she continued to grow closer to God through the positive influence of her devout uncle Peter and her own spiritual readings. She was captivated by the monastic life and wanted to forgo marriage for a vow of virginity as a religious sister.

At the age of 20, she entered the convent to become a Carmelite nun. Reading Saint Jerome's spiritual writings about the austere life of a monk had inspired her to the highest ideals. She was disappointed at the lax discipline of religious life that she encountered. Although called to live in life as a community, she found many of the nuns self-centered. Many preferred to think of themselves as individuals rather than as a community "at the service of others."ⁱ

Amid painful health issues, 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."ⁱⁱ At the age of 40, her earlier connection to God brought her back to the practice of deep contemplative prayer.

She understood that Jesus was present in her when she received Holy Communion. In her growing awareness, she recognized that God was always with her. Through her contemplative mental prayer, she encountered Christ mystically and he instructed her in visions for her own spiritual growth as well as much-needed reform in the church. Teresa "proposed a return of the Carmelites to their original rule of life, a simple and austere form of monasticism – founded on silence and solitude."ⁱⁱⁱ

"Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter" (Luke 11:52). Jesus uses very strong language to rebuke the scholars of the law as well as the Pharisees.

It seems a very fitting choice of readings for the Memorial of Saint Teresa of Avila. She observed that many entered religious life not to serve but to be served. In her reform of the Carmelite order, she met with fierce opposition from those who preferred the creature comforts of life. It was an uphill battle to call the nuns to holiness, but returning the order to its foundational roots, Teresa helped to establish 30 monasteries during her life. She was greatly aided by Saint John of the Cross, a priest and fellow reformer for the men's order of Carmelites.

With the Lord as her spiritual guide, Teresa of Avila wrote instructive works on how a person can grow closer to God through prayer. She has helped the faithful in all walks of life to become much more aware of our dependence on God.

Through prayer we come to better understand ourselves. In prayer we are often distracted by selfish thoughts. We worry about unimportant things. The opinions of others pull us away from following God. As we recognize our inadequacies, God gradually helps to purify us from these selfish thoughts. We grow in holiness through sacrificial fasting and almsgiving in addition to prayer. As we become more detached and less concerned about ourselves and the material things of this world, the Lord offers deeper insights to the soul. This can be very confusing but then a peace comes upon us. Our intellect begins to understand truth and knowledge from God's perspective. With our mind more receptive and open, God reveals himself to us step by step. Out of darkness comes a purified

understanding. “The self-knowing soul is able to enter into a state of constant union with God.”^{iv}

The *Way of Perfection* that Saint Teresa writes about is like Saint Paul’s explanation to the Ephesians. “In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (1:8b-10).

At the age of 67, serious illness struck once again. Teresa of Avila died in October of 1582 looking forward to eternal union with God: “O my Lord, and my spouse, the desired hour is now come...wherein I shall pass out of this exile, and my soul shall enjoy in thy company what it hath so earnestly longed for.”^v

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/on-500th-birthday-st-teresa-of-avila-remains-strong-witness-of-consecrated-life-says-pope-91722

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-teresa-of-avila-625

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} Rengers, Christopher. *The 35 Doctors of the Church*, St Teresa of Avila, p 493.

^v catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-teresa-of-avila-625