

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 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 education. Although she had to return home during her second year of studies due to illness, she increasingly grew closer to God through the positive influence of her devout uncle Peter and her own spiritual readings. She was captivated by religious life and wanted to forgo marriage for a vow of virginity as a religious sister.

At 20, she entered the convent to become a Carmelite nun. Saint Jerome's spiritual writings inspired her to the highest ideals. "Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God" (Lk 12-6). Nor did much escape the notice of Teresa of Avila. She observed that many entered religious life to take it easy. The nuns were self-centered. They 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, Teresa lapsed into a more routine prayer life."ⁱⁱ At 40, she returned to a deeper practice of contemplative prayer.

In her own spiritual journey, she recognized God was always with her. She encountered Christ mystically and he instructed her in visions. Inspired by God, 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

In her reform of the Carmelites, Teresa called sisters to pick up their crosses and follow Jesus to Calvary. She met with fierce opposition. It was an uphill battle but a spiritual one that was necessary to return the order to its core values. Like a new spring, the Carmelites began to blossom again. 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 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."^{iv}

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