

Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishop of Avila, His Excellency, Mons. Jesús García Gurillo, on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the foundation of St Joseph's Monastery in Avila and the beginning of the reform of Carmel by Saint Teresa of Jesus.

To our venerated Brother, Monsignor Jesús García Burillo, Bishop of Avila.

1. *Resplendens stella*. «the monastery would be a star shining in great splendour» (Book of the Life 32:11). With these words, the Lord encouraged Saint Teresa of Jesus in founding Saint Joseph's monastery in Avila, the beginning of the reform of Carmel, which, on the 24th of August, celebrates its four hundred and fifty years. On the occasion of this felicitous circumstance, I wish to unite myself to the happiness of the beloved diocese of Avila and of the Order of Discalced Carmel, of the People of God who are making pilgrimage to Spain and of all those in the universal Church who have found in the Teresian spirituality a secure light to discover that true renewal of our own life comes to us through Christ. In love with the Lord, this illustrious woman not only longed for but welcomed him in everything. Indeed, saints are not people who carry out great exploits based on the excellence of human qualities, rather they are aware, in humility, that Christ penetrates into their soul, and acts through their person. He is the true protagonist of all their actions and desires, inspiring each initiative and sustaining each silence.

2. To allow oneself, in this way, to be led by Christ alone is possible for those who have an intense life of prayer. This consists, in the words of the Saint from Avila, in "being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him Who, we know, loves us.(Book of the Life 8:5). The reform of Carmel, whose anniversary fills us with interior delight, was born from prayer and tends to prayer. In promoting a radical return to the Primitive Rule, distancing herself from the mitigated Rule, Saint Teresa of Jesus sought to create a favorable atmosphere for a form of life that would assist personal encounter with the Lord, for which it is necessary «to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us. Nor need we feel strange in the presence of so kind a Guest» (Way of Perfection 28:2). Saint Joseph's monastery came into existence precisely for the purpose that her daughters would have the best conditions for finding God and to develop a deep and intimate relationship with Him.

3. Saint Teresa proposed a new way of being a Carmelite in a world that was also new. They were «dangerous times (Book of the Life 33:5). And in them, to quote from this teacher of the spirit, «the friends of God should be strong, in order that they may support the weak» (ibid. 15:5). She also insists with eloquence: «The world is on fire. Men try to condemn Christ once again. . They would raze His Church to the ground. . No, my sisters, this is no time to treat with God for things of little importance» (Way of Perfection 1:5). Does this not seem familiar, at the period of time in which we live, a reflection so brilliant and questioning, made more that four centuries ago by this holy mystic?

The ultimate purpose of the Teresian reform and of the creation of new monasteries in the midst of a world with poor spiritual values, was to support apostolic work through

prayer; to propose a way of evangelical life that would be a model for those who sought a way of perfection, out of the conviction that all authentic personal and ecclesial reform happens each time by reproducing in us, in a better way, the «form» of Christ (cf. Gal 4:19). What the Saint and her daughters undertook was nothing else but this. It was not different for her Carmelite sons, whose only aim was «to progress far ahead in all the virtues» (Book of the Life 31:18). From this point of view, Teresa writes «I think [the Lord] prizes one soul which of His mercy we have gained for Him by our prayer and labour more than all the service we may render Him» (Book of Foundations 1:7). Faced with forgetfulness of God, the Holy Doctor encouraged praying communities, who would infuse with her fervour those who everywhere proclaim the name of Christ, who would intercede for the needs of the Church, who would carry to the heart of the Saviour the cries of all peoples.

4. As in the XVI century, so also today with its rapid change, it becomes necessary for confident prayer to be the soul of the apostolate, so that the redeeming message of Jesus Christ resounds with perfect clarity and vigorous dynamism. It is urgent that the Word of Life should vibrate in souls in a harmonious way, with rich and attractive notes. In this exciting task, the example of Teresa of Avila is a great help to us. We can state that in her time the Saint evangelized without any lack of enthusiasm, with an ardour that never waned, with methods far from inertia, with expressions glowing with light. This preserves all its freshness in the crossroads of the present time, where the urgency is felt for the baptized to renew their heart through personal prayer which, according to the dictates of the Mystic from Avila, is also centered on contemplation of the Most Sacred Humanity of Christ, as the sole way to discover the glory of God (cf. Book of the Life 22:1; The Mansions 6:7). In this way it is possible to form authentic families, who discover in the Gospel the fire for their hearth; Christian communities alive and united, bound together with Christ as their corner stone and which have a thirst for a life of fraternal and generous service. It is also to be desired that this unceasing petition gives priority to a devotion for vocational pastoral work, that particularly underlines the beauty of consecrated life, which must be duly seen as a treasure of the Church, a torrent of grace, as much in its active as in its contemplative dimension. The strength of Christ will lead us at the same time to redouble efforts so that the People of God recover their vigour in the sole possible way: by forming space within themselves for the sentiments of the Lord Jesus (cf. Ph 2:5), searching in every instance to live his Gospel radically. This signifies, above all, to consent that the Holy Spirit makes us friends of the Master and conforms us to Him. It also means to welcome his commands totally and to adopt among our criteria such things as humility in conduct, renouncing what is superfluous, not giving offence to others, instead behaving with simplicity and meekness of heart. Thus, those who surround us, will perceive the happiness that is born from our belonging to the Lord, and that we do not place anything before his love, being always ready to give a reason for our hope (cf. 1 P 3:15) and living, like Teresa of Jesus, in filial obedience to Holy Mother Church.

5. To this radicality and fidelity she invites us today, this most illustrious daughter of the Diocese of Avila. Welcoming her beautiful bequest, in this point of history, the Pope calls on all members of this particular Church, but in a loving manner the youth, to take seriously the common vocation to sanctity. Following in the footsteps of Teresa of Jesus, permit me to say something to those whose future lies ahead: Aspire also to belong totally to Jesus, Jesus only and always to Jesus. Do not be afraid to say to

Jesus as she did: «Lord, Yours am I, because for You was I born! What do you wish to do with me?» (Poetry 2). I also ask the Lord that you know as well how to respond to his calls, inspired by divine grace, with «determined determination», to offer «the little» within you, trusting that God never abandons those who leave everything for his glory (cf. Way of Perfection 21:2; 1:2).

6. Saint Teresa knew how to honour with great devotion the Most Holy Virgin, whom she invoked under the sweet title of Carmel. Under her maternal protection I place the apostolic work of the Church in Avila, so that, rejuvenated by the Holy Spirit, it may find opportune ways to proclaim the Gospel with enthusiasm and courage. May Mary, the Star of evangelization, and her chaste spouse Saint Joseph make intercession so that that «star» which the Lord ignited in the universal Church through the Teresian reform may continue radiating the great splendour of the love and truth of Christ to all people. With this desire, Venerable Brother in the Episcopate, I send you this message, which I ask to be made known to the flock entrusted to your pastoral efforts and particularly to the dear Discalced Carmelite Nuns of St Joseph's monastery in Avila, who perpetuate in time the spirit of their Foundress, and whose fervent prayer for the Successor of Peter pleases me always. To them, to you and to all the faithful in Avila, I impart with affection the Apostolic Blessing, a pledge of copious celestial favours.

Vatican, 16th July 2012

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