



It is time to walk.... Where and how?

Fr Alzinir Francisco Debastiani OCD

Translation from Portuguese by Lucienne Delaquiz OCDS

We are children of the Church, God's pilgrim people in history. Mary, Mother of Jesus, became a pilgrim to the house of Elizabeth, in keeping the traditions of her people and in the footsteps of her son Jesus, the great Pilgrim, who, from the bosom of the Father and with the power of the Holy Spirit, walked down the roads of Palestine preaching the Good News of the Kingdom.

The Order of Carmel was born of pilgrims who went to the Holy Land and established themselves on Mount Carmel, embarking on the paths of the spirit inspired by prophet Elijah and the Holy Virgin Mary.

We of the Discalced Carmelite Order have a Holy Founder, Teresa of Jesus, known as “andariega” (the walker). Just like her, and very often with her, Saint John of the Cross walked the roads of Spain and the paths of the spirit to spread around the message of the Beloved, who “wounds the soul with his love” and stimulates it “to leave itself and all creatures behind”, following the paths course from the “nothing” to the “everything” which is God. Particularly, with our foudress Teresa, “let us also learn to be pilgrims”¹, so wrote Pope Francis.

The Church now invites us to look up to the saints and realize that “a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebr 12:1) impels us to advance constantly towards the goal. (Francisco, *Gaudete et exsultate* =GE, 3).

Under the motto “*It is time to walk*”, the 2018 OCDS Congress invites us to be pilgrims with our saints. This phrase was collected at the end of the life of the Saint by Blessed Anne of Saint Bartholomew and is an incredible ever actual program of life. It reminds us that Teresa walked more than six thousand kilometers of roads in the XVI Century Spain. A geographic walk for sure,

¹ Francisco, Letter to the Bishop of Avila on the occasion of the Vth century of St. Teresa’s birth, October 15, 2014.

but above all a walk with spiritual attitude in which Teresa is Master and Doctor. We, therefore, are eager to learn from her.

And I wonder and now ask to myself and to you: *How are we going to walk guided by Saint Teresa? Where will she lead us?*

We will seek for answers in the Her writings, in the Magisterium of the Church and of the Order, as well as in today's world and we will certainly find secure indications to keep on our journey... Consequently, we want to continue being led by the Holy "Andariego" who encourages us saying: "*Es tiempo de caminar!*" "*It is time to walk!*" I will recall her recommendations before setting out upon this road (1), then, we will see where she wants to lead us (2), how to walk on this road (3), identify and overcome obstacles found along the way, (4) and, finally, keep on walking with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

1. Before setting out upon this road...

Getting off to a good start is a must. Teresa teaches that on this journey to God, we must be very resolute (W 23,1). We must always move forward without becoming weary, only thus can we identify, fight and overcome the obstacles encountered on the road of prayer (L 11, 12-15 W 20,2; 21,2; 23, 4-5; 2 IC,6). It is a resolution which leads to triumph over attachment to the body and fear of losing health (W 11,5).

Another key advice for the whole journey is to *keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus* (W 16,7; 6 7; 7IC 4.8). This will allow us to follow his example of love, for He is the "Captain of Love" (W 6,9). Therefore, whoever wants to be like Him, "servants of love" (L 11,1), must be prepared to follow His example, He who is the Master and perfect model to whom we must conform (L 15,13; 22,7).

Keeping our eyes upon Jesus requires that when facing sufferings and trials we take up our daily cross and follow Him (Luke 9,23), thinking of Him with love, willingness and determination (L 11,12; 4IC 2,9; L 11,15). We can count on His friendship at all times because He is the "faithful friend" (L

22,6), who taking our human condition in compliance with the Father's will experienced weariness, thirst and heat on the dirt roads of Palestine.

The disciple who makes himself available is led to fulfill "the important point which is that we should be absolutely resolved to surrender ourselves to God giving Him full freedom to take out and put in just what He likes, as He would with something of His own" (W 28,12). This means full acceptance of the will of God whatever it is, just as we pray in the Our Father "thy will be done" (W 32; 3IC1,7). This is the purpose of the Way of Perfection: "The aim of all my advice to you in this book is that we should surrender ourselves wholly to the Creator, place our will in His hands and detach ourselves from creatures" (W 32,9). Together with all this we must be constantly vigilant and most careful not to offend the Lord (W 41,3), not to commit imperfections willfully (7IC 4,3) and to strive to please God in all things (4IC 1, 7).

Another warning given by Saint Teresa is that there is the possibility of "losing the way", that is, wander from the goal. This is what happened to her when, after healing from her illness, she entered a period of lukewarmness in her religious life, divided that she was between attending friends at the monastery's parlor (she was then 29 – 39 years old; cf L 7) and her spiritual life. (Cf L7, 11).

Consequently, she abandoned prayer for shame of approaching Jesus, thinking this was a sign of great humility (cf L 19,12; 3IC 3,1). As she says, this was the greatest of all temptations in which she fell (cf L 7,11).

Living in humility/truth draws us closer to God (L 12, 4). When someone is humble, even experiencing great difficulties, he will keep on going, leaving everything in God's hands (3IC 1,7). Humility is the virtue that conquers the heart of our Lord (4IC 2,8). This virtue always goes together with that of fear of God and detachment from self (W 10,3). Human beings are inclined to pick up the best place even when following Jesus, but the humble person will always sit down in the lowest place to lovingly and cheerfully go about serving others (W 17,1; 18, 4-5). In our relationship with others, this implies determination to unconditionally forgive any wrong done to us (W 36). Such disposition and full surrender of oneself will lead to the highest perfection one

can reach: the true union of our will with the will of God, loving Him and having a genuine love for others in spirit and in deeds (5 IC 3,8-9-11).

There is an proverb which says: “If you want to go quickly, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together”. Saint Teresa experienced the truth of this statement since on several occasions she would fall and stay put for not having anyone near to help her out (cf L. 7,22). This is why she encourages us to journey accompanied since “it is a great evil for a soul beset by so many dangers to be alone”, and also “because people trouble so little about things pertaining to the service of God that we must all back each other up if those of us who serve Him are to make progress” (L 7, 20.22). She even proposed a pact of mutual help among “we five, who now love each other in Christ” (L 16,7).

In summary, to set out upon the road according to Holy Mother, it is important to have *lofty ideals*. It is worth recalling the following advice:

“Have great confidence, for it is necessary not to hold back one's desires, but to believe in God that if we try we shall little by little, even though it may not be soon, reach the state the saints did with His help. For if they had never determined to desire and seek this state little by little in practice they would never have mounted so high. His Majesty wants this determination, and He is a friend of courageous souls if they walk in humility and without trusting in self. I have not seen any cowardly soul or any of these who under the pretext of humility remain along the bottom of this path who do not take many years to advance as far as these courageous ones do in a few. I marvel at how important it is to be courageous in striving for great things along this path. For though the soul is not yet strong enough, it nonetheless takes flight and goes very high although like a little fledgling it soon tires and stops” (L 13,2).

2. Where does Saint Teresa want to lead us?

I think that, before all, Saint Teresa intends to guide her readers to live a profound experience of friendship with God. She admits that many are the roads that lead to God (W 17, 1; F 18,6). However, none of them are without consolation, for the Lord offers living water to those willing to fulfill His will (Cf John 7, 37; W 20,1; 32,9).

Discovering that God is a friend who, in his human nature in Jesus, became so close to people was the source of her happiness. “Oh, what a good friend You make, my Lord! How You proceed by

favoring and enduring. You wait for the others to adapt to Your nature, and in the meanwhile You put up with theirs! You take into account, my Lord, the times when they love You, and in one instant of repentance You forget their offenses” (L 8,6; cf. L 22,17). From the moment she encounters Jesus, she starts “another and a new life” (L 23,1). She “cannot understand why it is that people are afraid to set out upon the way of perfection”, which is that of prayer (L35,14). Starting from her own experience, she gives us a true prayer mystagogy so that we can correspond to God’s friendship.

Just like friendship among human beings varies in intensity and evolution, so does prayer understood as friendship with the Lord. Love for each other, detachment from all created things and true humility, give us the essentials to live this friendship. The practice with “determined resoluteness” (W21,2; 2 IC 6) of those three virtues together with the ardent desire to drink the living water promised by Jesus to whoever believed in Him (John 7, 39) and carried his own cross after Him is the exact measure of our love for our Lord (Cf. W 32,7).

Based on her own experience of the mercy of God in her own life, Teresa encourages us to trust Him who “never gets weary of giving and never can His mercies be exhausted” and comes to the coherent conclusion: “let us, then, not grow weary of receiving” (L 19, 15). After her conversion (1554), she was favored with the “consciousness of the presence of God” in her life (L 10,1).

Notwithstanding her “miserable habits” and sins, she discovers God's freely-given and unconditional love for her and this takes her way above the limits of theology and catechism of her time. She can also recognize in her own life “God's great goodness” (L 4,10) and was very “conscious of His very presence” deep inside her (L 18,15; Rel. 18,1; 40) which will lead her to discover Christ as if “wholly sculptured” in her very soul (cf L 40,5).

Based on this, we naturally come to another fundamental feature of Teresian spirituality: her experience with Christ. She goes a long way: at first with prayer affectively contemplating Jesus in some passage of the Gospel, “spending time with Him” (CF L 9). And He reveals Himself to her and becomes “the living Book” which accompanies, speaks to her and instructs her and what’s more He is risen, He lives! (Cf. L 27 – 28). Finally, she realizes that in the innermost of herself she is His image (L 40,5). Her encounter with the risen Christ is a progressive experience, similar to that of the first disciples as related in the Gospel.

From this we can understand the great importance given to the Humanity of Christ in Teresa's message. In practice this becomes a personal relationship with Him by grace, by love and by imitation made possible thanks to the continuation of His presence in the Church through the Eucharist. It is also thanks to this presence that Teresa achieved a living sense of the Church for which she fights and ardently defends.

In short, Teresa reminds us that the goal and aspiration of Christian life is the fullness of life which is Christ. She describes it in the 7th Mansion of the Interior Castle. This is why it is so important to follow this advice: read at least twice a year the seventh Mansion of the Interior Castle of Saint Teresa. In so doing we will maintain alive the ideal of Christian perfection according to the Holy Mother!

3. How to walk on the road proposed by Teresa

We have the advices as how to set out upon the road and we also have the goal to reach. The question now is how should we walk along this road?

Undoubtedly, the attitudes previously seen apply to the whole spiritual path (resoluteness, prayer, following Jesus unconditionally, humility, search for truth, the intention of friendship and conformance to Christ etc.). Now, in this third moment of our reflection, I would like to add a few essential guidelines of Holy Mother on this our journey to holiness, which are also recommended by the Magisterium of the Church in the exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (=GE, March 19, 2018). In this apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis wants to remind us of the call to holiness the Lord made to each one of us at Baptism (cf GE2).

In the third chapter of GE, Jesus is shown to us as the ideal of holiness, especially as the Man of the Beatitudes. Holy Mother encourages us to walk the whole road fixing our eyes on Jesus, having Him always at our side, desiring to live in friendship with Him, learning to love just as He did, our "true Friend". "We must look at His life -- that is our best pattern. What more do we need than to have at our side so good a Friend, Who will not leave us in trials and tribulations, as earthly friends do? Blessed is he who loves Him in truth and has Him always at his side" (L 22,7; Cf L 15,13; 6 IC 7,13).

In this sense, one of Teresa's prayers is quite memorable, and we could well say that it is the prayer of the disciple who follows Jesus unconditionally:

“I desire to suffer, Lord, all the trials that come to me and esteem them as a great good enabling me to imitate You in something. Let us walk together, Lord. Wherever You go, I will go; whatever you suffer, I will suffer” (W 26,6).

Chapter IV of GE presents the “signs of holiness in today’s world”. Let us look at them in the light of Teresian doctrine.

“The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us” (GE 112); is remaining anchored in God’s faithful love. Such an attitude will allow us not to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Romans 12,21). This implies in being vigilant to combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations (GE 114), keep meekness of heart and develop the ability to remain silent in the face of failings and faults of others. The path to holiness also includes humility and patience in the midst of suffering (CF. GE 115-121). All these signs seem to echo the recommendations of Holy Mother, the certainty that “God alone is enough”, that He “does not change”, as well as her unconditional attachment to Jesus.

The second sign of holiness is *“joy and a sense of humor”*. Joy is indeed a fruit of the Holy Spirit, a gift of Jesus who himself is *“full of joy through the Spirit” (Lk 10,21)*. Prophet Isaiah had in earlier times described the time of the Messiah as one where people would *“sing for joy” (Is 12,6; 40,9)*. Jesus did in fact bring this joy by his victory over evil and over death which is manifested by his resurrection (John 16, 2022; 15,11). As for Teresa, joy was a constant in her life. Blessed Anne of Saint Bartholomew, speaking of Teresa’s way of traveling makes the following comment: *“She neither was a friend of sad people, nor was she sad herself and she did not want anybody sad accompanying her. She used to say: “God deliver me from sad saints” (MHCT 5,11).*

The Holy Father had already mentioned joy in his message to the Bishops of Avila for occasion of the V Centenary of Saint Teresa’s birth recalling its importance for us today. According to him, Teresa’s joy springs from the awareness that

“God becomes joyful with us. And feeling his love, a contagious and evident joy was born in the Saint that she radiated around her. This joy is a journey that must be followed throughout life. It is not instantaneous, superficial, tumultuous. It must already be sought by “at the beginning” (Life 13, 1). Express the inner joy of the soul, it is humble and “modest” (cf. The Book of Foundations 12, 1). ... For this reason St Teresa’s joy is neither selfish nor self-referential. Like that of heaven, it consists in the “joy in the rejoicings of all” (The Way of Perfection 30, 5), placing oneself at the service of others with

unselfish love. As she told one of her monasteries in difficulty, the Saint would also tell us today, especially the young: “Do not stop going cheerfully about!” (Letter 284, 4).

As a natural consequence joy brings a sense of humor which naturally flows from a grateful heart, from living in communion with those surrounding us, from sharing and communicating, from rejoicing in the good of others (Rm 12,15; 2 Cor 13,9) (Cf. GE 126-128). Here we recognize Teresa, for she is the saint of good humor². We have an example of this in the good-humored comments she makes to participants of a discussion, or also the nicknames or pet names she uses in a sweet and affectionate way to hide people’s identity during a period of uncertainty due to the threat of abolishment of the Teresian reform³. The following excerpt from the book of her Life gives us a glimpse at her sense of humor in a question of certain rules of etiquette in letter writing in effect at the time.

“ I repeat that indeed I didn't know how to live. Here is a poor tired soul: it sees how they command her to keep her thoughts always on God and they insist it is necessary to do this in order to free oneself from many dangers; on the other hand it sees it mustn't miss any fine points in the world's rules of etiquette lest it become an occasion of temptation to those whose reputations are based on these details. These rules weary me, and I was never done excusing myself, because I couldn't help -- even though I studied the matter -- but to make many mistakes. For, as I say, in the world these mistakes are not taken lightly. And is it true that religious who should be held excused in these matters are in fact excused? No, it is not; it is said that monasteries must be schools of etiquette and that these things should be known. I for one certainly cannot understand this. I have thought that some saint said the monastery should be a school for the instruction of those wanting to be courtiers in heaven -- and this has all been understood backward. It is right for anyone who cares about heaven to have a continual solicitude about pleasing God and despising the world. It is beyond me how anyone can have so much concern about pleasing those who live in the world by means such as these, which are so changeable. If you could learn the rules once and for all, you could let the matter pass. But just for the titles of address on a letter there's need for a university chair, so to speak, to lecture on how it's to be done. For sometimes you have to leave a margin on this side of the page, sometimes on the other; and

² Cf. *Humorismo espiritual*, em in *Dicionário de S. Teresa*.

³ Cf. *Criptônimos*, in *Dicionário de S. Teresa*.

someone who's not usually addressed as *magnifico* must be then addressed as *illustrious*" (L 37, 9-10)⁴.

Boldness and passion stand out as the third sign of holiness today. They are two attitudes which arise from the Risen Jesus in the life of people and of the Church. Jesus stays with us to the end of the world (Mt 28:20; Mc 6,50). His presence infuses courage, boldness, enthusiasm, freedom to speak out, apostolic fervor (*parrhesia*) thus manifesting the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who instills courage and impels us to go beyond our own limits. History is under the light of the risen Jesus who conducts it, just as He conducts the Church and the individual beyond themselves (Cf GE 129-139).

Such boldness and courage are clearly visible in Saint Teresa. They naturally come from her experience with the risen Christ (L 28,3; 29,4; OC 6,9,3; 7,2,1). Listening to the words spoken to the disciples in the Gospels and which now are addressed to her in difficult times of uncertainty, insecurity and fear, infuse her with peace, enthusiasm and strength. Favored by the vision of the risen Jesus present in the Eucharist, she gets new vitality and courage to face the work of the foundations.

"O Wealth of the poor, how admirably You know how to sustain souls! And without their seeing such great wealth, You show it to them little by little. When I behold majesty as extraordinary as this concealed in something as small as the host, it happens afterward that I marvel at wisdom so wonderful, and I fail to know how the Lord gives me the courage or strength to approach Him. If He who has granted, and still does grant me so many favors, did not give this strength, it would be impossible to conceal the fact or resist shouting aloud about marvels so great." (L 38,21).

Another example of *Teresian boldness* is her attempt to comment on the *Canticle of Canticles* at a time when women, and people in general, had no access to the Bible. Or still defending the value of meditation when theologians discouraged the practice to uneducated simple people. (W 22-23). Above all, Teresa instills a holy daring in her nuns in the pursuit of holiness.

⁴ "... porque traer este cuidado quien es razón le traiga continuo en contentar a Dios y aborrecer el mundo, que le pueda traer tan grande en contentar a los que viven en él en estas cosas que tantas veces se mudan, no sé cómo. Aun si se pudiera aprender de una vez, pasara; mas aun para títulos de cartas es ya menester haya cátedra, adonde se lea cómo se ha de hacer, a manera de decir; porque ya se deja papel de una parte, ya de otra, y a quién no se solía poner magnífico, se ha de poner ilustre" (V 37,10).

“God deliver us, Sisters, when we do something imperfect, from saying: "We're not angels, we're not saints." Consider that even though we're not, it is a great good to think that if we try we can become saints with God's help. And have no fear that He will fail if we don't fail. Since we have not come here for any other thing, let us put our hands to the task, as they say. May we presume to use everything we learn about greater service of the Lord in His favor. The presumption I would like to see present in this house, for it always makes humility grow, is to have a holy daring; for God helps the strong and He shows no partiality” (W 16, 12).

Everything comes from the power of God: “O greatness of God, how dost Thou show thy power by giving courage to such an ant!” (F 2,7), exclaims Teresa in view of the foundations she was undertaking.

The fourth sign of holiness in today’s world according to the Holy Father is a *journey in community*. We recalled at the beginning how Teresa suffered for having to walk alone with no one to help her out when she fell. Pope Francis in his message for the V Centenary of Holy Mother’s birth had already mentioned this value in Teresa.

“We cannot undertake this journey alone, but together. For the reformer Saint, the path of prayer passes by the way of fraternity in the bosom of the Mother Church. Her providential response to this, born of divine inspiration and of her feminine intuition, to the problems of the Church and of the society of her time was to: to establish small communities of women who, by imitating the “Apostolic College”, followed Christ, living the Gospel in a simple way and supporting all the Church with a life made prayer.”

In GE, the pope states that the community is the risen Lord’s theological space in which we are sustained by listening and sharing the word of God and celebrating the Eucharist together. A community reflects the beauty of the Trinitarian communion where the little details lived in love develop fraternal communion which in turn fosters our mission and protects us from consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us (Cf. GE 140-146).

What Teresa wanted for her communities was a style of fraternity in friendship “all must be friends with each other, love each other, be fond of each other and help each other” (W 4,7). It is a fraternity which especially aims at helping one another in moving forward on the way of prayer and spiritual life, to advise and to enlighten one another as to the things of this world (L 16,7). The

human aspect goes hand in hand with the spiritual purpose of Teresa's communities. She calls it a recreational and fraternal style which applies to the first friars as well (F 13,5). It is a style which helps counterbalance the rigor of long hours of prayer. It also serves to provide "a bit of relief in complying with the austerity of the Rule" (F 13,5) and shows deep humanity, a happy and festive spirit of a life with God and with brothers and sisters (cf. W 41,7).

Finally, the fifth and last sign of holiness in our days is *the need for prayer and adoration*. In the school of the Carmelite Saints, this characteristic reinforces the need to live prayer, the presence of God in all circumstances, the silence to always remain in the presence of God and listen to his voice. It is a prayer that does not flee from the contact of others or from the problems of current history. Prayer translated into supplication and petition shows trust in God and love for our neighbor and intercession express our fraternal concern for others. The prayerful reading of God's word is another type of prayer which easily becomes a lamp for our steps and a light for our path, transforming our lives. It is in the Eucharist that the word attains its greatest efficacy, since it is the encounter with Christ himself, who is the living Word with whom we renew our covenant and allow him to transform our lives (Cf GE 147 – 157).

Prayer is a constant in all of Teresa's works. In one way or another she encourages us to earnestly dedicate ourselves to prayer. She shows the advantages of such a practice because she wants to convince us that "there is no place here for fear" so that we might "make good use of such a blessing that comes from prayer founded on humility" (L 8,5 and 10,5).

4) Identify and overcome obstacles found along this road...

The signs of holiness we have already mentioned require us to be vigilant and "walk in the love and fear of God" which "will make us quicken our steps" while looking "where we are setting our feet". "These are two strong castles from where we can wage war on the world and on the devils", says Holy Mother (W 40,2).

In turn, Pope Francis reminds us the need of living a spiritual life today bearing in mind that to be genuine it requires spiritual combat, vigilance and discernment (GE Chapter V). It is a battle not only "against the world, a worldly mentality and our human weaknesses, but it is also a constant struggle against the devil" (GE 159). Saint Albert had already mentioned in The Rule urging us to

“put on the armor of God to “be able to extinguish all the darts of the evil” (cf. 19-2017-19). To be alert and trustful means to use “the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach” (GE 162). Only thus shall we be protected against spiritual corruption, which confines us in “a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness” leading us to fall into a state of dull lethargy and lukewarmness (GE 164 – 165).

On the other hand, Teresa recommends the ordinary aids given by the Church: religious books, sermons, sacraments, etc. (Cf. 5 IC 2,3).

She furthermore provides the criterion for spiritual growth which is not to flee from trials and struggles:

“... I am certain that those who reach perfection do not ask the Lord to free them from trials or temptations or persecutions or struggles. This is another very great and certain effect of the contemplation and the favors His Majesty gives, and of the Lord's Spirit rather than an illusion. On the contrary, as I have said a little while ago, these persons desire, ask for, and love trials. They are like soldiers who are happier when there are more wars because they then hope to earn more. If there is no war, they receive their wages but realize they won't get rich” (W 38,1).

She herself experienced all this reality and puts us on guard against the devil's temptations, such as that of false humility which led her to abandon prayer of friendship with our Lord (L 25, 13; 30,9), or fear to begin mental prayer, very diffuse in the Spanish environment of the 16th century (L8,7; W 21 39,7 etc.), or still attachment to honors and social conventions (L2521; 35,15; W 2,6; 36,4). All these are obstacles to the spiritual journey.

Growing in the use of discernment has always been important and continues to be even more so today. Due to the great possibilities of action and distraction the world presents to us, we have an imperative need for the wisdom of this virtue. “It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully”, which exercised daily helps us recognize God's timetable, and the promptings and means of his grace (GE 169). It is also a supernatural gift which is obtained by prolonged prayer, which requires silence to better perceive the signs of God, to calm our

anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in His own light, ready to listen to Him, to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us (GE 171-172).

Thus all aspects of life are lived under the eye of God and the Spirit of the risen Lord liberates us from rigidity. In this way, we grow in freedom, in accepting the cross which makes life a gift, a leaving ourselves behind in order to carry out our personal mission for the good of others (Cf GE 174-175).

Were we to scrutinize the life and writings of Teresa, we would soon see how she sought help to discern the mystical graces and act in conformity with the will of God. She was very concerned “to strive to walk ever in the truth before God and man” (6 IC 10,6). Teresa lived everything in prayer, in compliance with the Word of God and in faithfulness to the Church. Therefore, she conformed to whatever God asked of her carrying out her mission and finally “dying daughter of the Church”.

Pope Francis points out various other obstacles to holiness in today’s world. Standing out are: *individualism* which cause us to be enclosed within ourselves and our own ideas; *hedonistic consumerism*, allowing ourselves to be caught up in superficial information (GE 108); *moral relativism* (GE 102) and being content with a mediocre Christian life; living by appearances even in the religious sphere, with no sincere concern about living in friendship with God.

Modern cultural reality also presents obstacles to holiness, which Francis was able to detect: “a sense of anxiety, sometimes violent, that distracts and debilitates; negativity and sullenness; the self-content bred by consumerism; individualism; and all those forms of ersatz spirituality – having nothing to do with God – that dominate the current religious marketplace” (GE 111). Furthermore, he speaks of two other ideologies which lead to harmful errors: to separate Gospel demands from personal relationship with the Lord, from interior union with him, from openness to his grace and “to suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist” (GE 100-101). Finally, he recalls two subtle enemies of holiness, which in

one way or the other continue to plague the Church to this day. They are *Gnosticism and Pelagianism*⁵ that can lead us astray on the road to holiness (GE 35-62).

Within the Order, an evil observed in many members is that of lack of the sense of belonging to the Order. There also is an inadequate understanding of the purpose of the OCDS, which is a consequence of poor formation. Finally, we are faced with the modern “liquid identity” without commitment to the reality of others, society, the Church and even the Community.

It is time to walk... with our eyes fixed on Jesus, “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14,5).

I would like to end this reflection reminding the relevance and importance of our Holy Mother’s words: “it is time to walk”, the theme of this 2018 OCDS Congress.

A first call to do so had already been made by Saint John Paul II in his homily in Avila on occasion of the IV Centenary of the death of Saint Teresa of Jesus, when he said:

*“Teresa of Jesus, who knew very well the difficulties which are found on the way, invites us to walk with God in our hearts. To guide our route and reinforce our hope, she transmits us a task which was the secret of her life and mission: “Keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, our only good” (1IC 2,11; cf. W 2,1; 7IC 4,8)*⁶.

More recently, Pope Francis, in a message on occasion of the V Centenary of the birth of Saint Teresa, wrote the following:

⁵ *Gnosticism* (GE 36-46) presumes “a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings, » (GE 36); it is a vain superficiality which closes the mind of the gnostics to their way of thinking absolutizing their own theories forcing others to submit to their own way of thinking. They confuse knowledge with holiness and think themselves superior to others who do not know. Of course, they also do not embody the reality of the Gospel in life and, therefore, lose completely the sense of the mystery of God.

Pelagianism (GE 47-62) replaced knowledge or the intellect by the human will, by personal effort, forgetting that salvation depends on God who shows mercy (Rm 9,16) and that “he first loved us” (1 Jo 4,19). With type of mindset, the pelagians “trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style” (GE 49). There are still other aspects highly appreciated by the Contemporary pelagians, namely, “justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result is a self-centered and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. This finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting: an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfilment” (GE 57).

⁶ João Paulo II, *Homilia no IV Centenário da morte de S Teresa*. Ávila, November 1, 1982.

“These were the words St Teresa of Ávila said shortly before her death, which summarize her life and become for us, especially for the Carmelite Family... a precious legacy to be treasured and enriched”.

At the beginning we said that we have a founder known as the “saint walker”. She knew the roads, very often arduous, cold covered with snow, or with unbearable heat. But, above all, her life is important because she went beyond the borders and paths of the spirit then known. That is why she is master in spiritual life and a doctor of the Church! To this date she continues to urge us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the “Captain of Love”.

Finally, I would like to remind you of one more advice given by our Holy Mother. Seeing that God always helped and favored her, she is confident that He will free from danger anyone who wants to live Christian perfection:

“Since, my Lord, we see that You often free us from the dangers in which we place ourselves, even in opposition to You, how can one believe that You will fail to free us when we aim after nothing more than to please You and delight in You? Never can I believe this! It could be that because of other secret judgments God might permit some things that must happen anyway. But good never brought about evil. Thus, may what I have said help us strive to walk better along the road so as to please our Spouse more and find Him sooner, but not make us abandon it; and encourage us to walk with fortitude along a road that has such rugged mountain passes, as does that of this life, but not intimidate us from walking through them. For, in the final analysis, by proceeding with humility, through the mercy of God, we will reach that city of Jerusalem, where all that has been suffered will be little, or nothing, in comparison with what is enjoyed” (F 4,4)⁷.

Fr. Alzinir Francisco Debastiani OCD

Rome, July 24, 2018

⁷ “Así que esto sirva de procurar caminar mejor el camino, para contentar mejor a nuestro Esposo y hallarle más presto; mas no de dejarle de andar. Y para animarnos a andar con fortaleza camino de puertos tan ásperos, como es el de esta vida; mas no para acobardarnos en andarle. Pues, en fin, fin, yendo con humildad, mediante la misericordia de Dios, hemos de llegar a aquella ciudad de Jerusalén, adonde todo se nos hará poco lo que se ha padecido, o nonada, en comparación de lo que se goza” (F 4,4).