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Special issue: Opening of the Fifth Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus

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Superior General

Message from the Father General on the Fifth Centenary

Ávila-Spain, October 15, 2014 (Communicationes).-

+ Ávila, October 15, 2014

La Santa Convent

To all the members of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, friars, nun, and seculars, and to all the great Teresian family, sisters and brothers, from our Mother House, the House of Teresa: May the Peace of Christ, Jesus of Teresa, be with you all!

After five and a half years of conscientious personal and communal preparation, we arrive at this much-longed-for date, October 15, 2014, the solemnity of Saint Teresa, on which we begin the celebrations of the fifth centenary of her birth. Happy 500th birthday, Holy Mother!

For us, this fifth centenary is a magnificent opportunity for Teresa to continue speaking to us with the strength of her testimony and passion. La Santa speaks to us of what she lived; she tells the story of a soul—her soul—that after resisting much yielded to the love of the living God and discovered in it, truth itself, benevolence, and radical beauty. Teresa did not boast about her experience for her own sake, but instead gave it to us so we also can enter into her fulness of life and joy, which we otherwise would not know and would remain prisoners of the world.

We can vouch that day by day, our being tends to be reduced to the scale of a world dominated by the dynamics of economic and technological power. We believe ourselves all-powerful, but in reality we are losing the greatest possession of the human being: the capacity to love as God loves us. Teresa takes us to this summit of our being—to the point of contact between man and God—that has a face and a name: Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

At the center of the Teresian centenary should be what was at the center of Teresa's heart, not what is at the center of our worldly projects and endeavors. There, in the core of the centenary, we should place what for the span of 500 years has not aged, far from it, nor much less lost relevance: a life soaked, wounded in God, to which a mission of crucial importance was entrusted: to remind the Church and human beings of all times that the center of man is God and the center of God is man.

I am wary of calling all this "*mysticism*" because that label might make Teresa *a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed*, open to only a chosen few. Saint Teresa's mission is universal and is nothing but a novel restatement of the Gospel, of the joy of the Gospel, its newness, its liberating and humanizing power.

Teresa shares with everyone, with anyone in any place in the world whose journey is lost on an aimless path, what she found: a dwelling and a way. Those are precisely the titles of her main works: way and dwelling. If we think carefully about that, those are the properly fundamental dimensions needed for life to exist and to be human; the life which we feel is so threatened today by a lifestyle that assaults and distracts us.

The Centenary should lead us to the way and dwelling that Teresa experienced in her life. If we cannot put them at the center, I believe Saint Teresa would be displeased with the celebrations we organize for her, however solemn, attractive, and refined they may be. Let us not forget that Teresa was a poor and simple nun! A nun with a habit and sandals that were usually dusty, with features marked by physical weariness, a spirit frequently wrapped in suffering and concern for her sisters and brothers. Beyond that, though, beneath the superficial tiredness and fragility, there are strength and iron determination; the strength of one who remains home despite having to move constantly; the decision of one who, amid the complexity of circumstances, does not lose sight of the goal that guides her way.

How do we place at the center the way and dwelling of Teresa? To reread her works, as we have done through these last years, is certainly a first step, fundamentally important. But we cannot stay still. We have to move on to deeds. We are called to recognize in ourselves what the words of Saint Teresa describe, to find our home and our way. I caution that this cannot be achieved if we do not make choices. I do not know whether we will have to choose to turn off

our mobile phones more frequently, our computers, tablets, or even –what is much more complicated– learn to use them differently. I am convinced, in other words, that we will not celebrate the Centenary adequately only by doing things to honor the memory of Saint Teresa, but rather by *making ourselves into* Teresa, if you would allow such a daring proposal.

I believe Teresa is telling us what Saint Paul told his Corinthian disciples: you yourselves are my letter of recommendation, “written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh” (2 Cor 3:2-3).

In conclusion: Where does the Centenary of Teresa lead us? It leads us to our hearts, where our truth and the truth of the living God dwell. May those truths be found in the name of and following the footsteps of la Santa: this is the only celebration that will gladden the heart of the Mother and make her feel the fruitfulness of her search, her struggle, her tireless pilgrimage.

Thank you Teresa, because truly, not for yourself were you born, but for us!

Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, ocd

Superior General

Eucharistic celebration

Multitudinous celebration in Ávila for the opening of the Fifth Centenary

Ávila-Spain, October 5, 2014 (Communications).– Ávila hosted a large eucharistic celebration for the opening of the Fifth Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus. In the central plaza, a solemn inaugural Mass was presided over by the president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, Bishop Ricardo Blázquez, concelebrated with over 20 bishops, among whom was Bishop Jesús García Burillo, prelate of Ávila, and the Superior General of the Order, Father Saverio Cannistrà.

Also participating in the celebration were four general definitors, Father Emilio José Martínez, Father Albert Wach, Father Robert Paul, and Father John Grennan; the Secretary General of the Fifth Centenary, Father Antonio González; several Spanish provincials; many Discalced Carmelites; a large number of Secular Carmelites; and an extensive representation from the various branches of the Teresian family.

The open-air Eucharist was celebrated with the participation of more than 7,000 persons. Also present were many members of the Government of Spain, the Board of Castile and León, the city of Ávila, and of other Teresian localities.

Bishop Ricardo Blázquez began his homily with these words: “Her writings are a living book and the reform she began in the convent of Saint Joseph, a few meters from here, enriched religious life within the Church with a new style. The works of Saint Teresa and her daughters and sons are a sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in humanity.” Bishop Blázquez is hopeful of a papal visit to Spain on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary.

The president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference pointed out that Teresa lived historical events in the presence of God, in an act of faith as it were, weaving together exterior occurrences and intimate graces. What happened near or far away was discussed with God in prayer and became an apostolic calling. "In that inner dialogue of history and God, Teresa discovers her charism and listens to her calling to be a foundress. The crossing through different planes: the praying person, the narrative of history, and the statement of her message; is continuous," explained Blázquez.

Bishop Ricardo Blázquez went on to say that in Saint Teresa's school one always learns because she is a bright star in the firmament of the Church and humanity. "It is very profitable to associate with great individuals in our history from our present searching and uncertainty."

As for Teresa as teacher of prayer, the president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference clarified that prayer is not an expansion of the spirit of man to the void or to an intimidating cosmic solitude; nor is it an exercise to overcome superficiality by searching for depth or to prevail over fragmentation in a unifying locus. "Prayer is an engaging in friendship with God who we know loves us (cf. *Life* 8, 5), who comes to meet us, who waits for us, who accompanies us."

Lastly, Bishop Ricardo Blázquez stated that the celebration of the fifth centenary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus is a beautiful opportunity to renew and assimilate the fundamental dimensions of Christian and apostolic life in the Church and the genuineness of our shared human existence. When a person and his or her work sound the depths of life, the resulting luminescence is deeply Christian and truly humanizing; such is Teresa's vision of consummated humanness.

Before concluding the Eucharist, the pilgrims of "Path of Light" received blessings from Bishops Ricardo Blázquez and Jesús García Burillo and from the Order's Father General.

After Mass, the streets of Ávila received Saint Teresa, who was taken in procession from the plaza where the Eucharist was celebrated to the Carmelite Fathers' church amid thousands of people in the streets.

Chapel in Saint Teresa's birthplace

Teresa's room

Ávila-Spain, October 15, 2014 (Communicationes).- The chapel located over the house where Saint Teresa was born has a new space. It is an area that recreates Saint Teresa of Jesus' room. The site will help visitors understand what one of the rooms in the house of Saint Teresa's parents would be like.

Visitors will be able to imagine being in the room of young Teresa there. This project was undertaken by the community of Ávila to offer yet another element to the already much-frequented birthplace chapel.

The room has all the furniture proper to the living quarters of a Spanish family of the 16th century, such as Saint Teresa's.

Teresa's room will have a continuously lit candle which the Superior General of the Order, Father Saverio Cannistrà, lit the evening of October 14.

The prior of La Santa, Father David Jiménez, considers that with this project, the chapel –which has recently been restored– gains another attractive feature for pilgrims that arrive daily at the church of the Carmelite Fathers to learn a little more about the life of Saint Teresa.

Solemn Vespers

Father General presides over solemn vespers at the birthplace of Saint Teresa

Ávila-Spain, October 15, 2014 (Communicationes).- During the evening of October 14, vigil of the Solemnity of Saint Teresa of Jesus, the Superior General of the Order presided over Vespers in the house where Saint Teresa was born. The Chapter of the Cathedral of Ávila and the city's bishop, Jesús García Burillo, also participated.

The celebration began with an entrance procession of several Carmelites with their white mantles and the Chapter of the Cathedral. The relic of Saint Teresa's finger, usually venerated in the convent museum, was placed on the main altar.

The musical parts of the celebration were performed by the Gregorian Choir of La Santa that interpreted several Teresian pieces.

After praying vespers, the Father General uncovered a plaque placed in the atrium that commemorates the Fifth Centenary of the Birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus.

Following this event, the statue of Saint Teresa of Jesus which is in the birthplace chapel was carried in procession to the Cathedral of Ávila along with the Cathedral Chapter and a large group of Carmelites, as is customary every October 14.

Afterward, Father General presided over the solemn Eucharist.

"Since we are celebrating a birthday, it is expected that especially we, her family and friends, bring her who is being honored a gift. But it is even more certain that in giving her the small gifts we are preparing for this centenary year, we should do nothing more than recognize that precisely she, Teresa, is the truest and greatest gift; a gift not only to us –her family– but to all the world," began Father Saverio.

Later he noted that he personally has no doubt when pinpointing what he believes is the true reason for the perennial relevance of Teresa, and that in his opinion, it is also the source of all the other attributes of her multifaceted personality.

"There is no page of Teresa's in which she does not refer, explicitly or implicitly, to Jesus; not

so much to faith in him, but to the experience of him: seeing him, thinking about him, listening to his word, receiving nourishment from his Body, touching his Humanity with our hands. True: Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, as stated in letter to the Hebrews; but there is no doubt that Jesus gave himself to Teresa in a new way, that he has gifted her with a new experience of himself, capable of answering specifically the queries and restlessness of her soul, of her spirit,” noted Father Saverio Cannistrà.

Path of Light

The “Path of Light” begins

Ávila-Spain, October 15, 2014 (Communicationes).- The concept of life as a journey, as a pilgrimage, even as “mission,” is intimately tied to the life and memory of Saint Teresa of Jesus. Her spirit, roving, entrepreneurial, creative, and searching of faith and truth, has spread throughout the world.

In introducing this project, Father Emilio José Martínez, Vicar General of the Discalced Carmelites, pointed out that *Camino de Luz* (“Path of Light”) is an acknowledgement and homage to this trait, so distinctive in the life of Saint Teresa. At the same time it is a way of symbolically beginning this centenary.

Father Emilio explained that this endeavor, in which 29 countries throughout the world will be visited, seeks to unite people of different races and cultures. It is an invitation to all who want to live this experience and thereby highlight the universal spirit of Teresa as well as that of the Fifth Centenary we celebrate.

The Vicar General said that the “Path of Light” pilgrimage will depart from Ávila on October 15, 2014 (feast day of the Saint), and traverse Teresian places throughout the world in the five continents –Europe, Asia, America, Africa, and Oceania– including active missions, until its return to Ávila on March 28, 2015. As of this date, “Path of Light” will be undertaken by the 17 Teresian foundations.

Father Emilio José Martínez announced that throughout the entire journey, Saint Teresa’s cane will be carried as a very symbolic relic-sign. “As its objective, this project invites everyone to walk along with Teresa. For that reason, we have chosen this relic. The Community of Carmelite Friars of Ávila permitted this with immense generosity. It will allow Saint Teresa to be very present on the five continents,” explained the Discalced Carmelite Vicar General.

Father Antonio González, Secretary General of the Fifth Centenary, will head the project until January 7. The project also includes the creation of materials for a “Path of Light” photographic exposition, gathering the best images of the pilgrimage to make a pictorial background of Saint Teresa’s family and friends in the five continents.

A documentary to help us draw near to Saint Teresa and the Discalced Carmelite Order by means of this journey will also be made.

HOMILY FOR THE OPENING OF THE CENTENARY OF ST. TERESA

Avila, October 14, 2014

With this Eucharistic Celebration we officially open the year in which we commemorate the Fifth Centenary of the birth of Holy Mother Teresa. We Carmelites have been preparing for this from as early as 2009, through a course of reading, personal reflection and communal sharing of texts in which Teresa has communicated all about herself. What the reading from the Book of Wisdom says in the first reading we heard can be truly said about her: "I impart without grudging; I do not hide her wealth". The riches that Teresa has bequeathed us are so abundant that, we almost feel spoiled for choice, should someone ask us: why is celebrating this anniversary worth the effort? What has Teresa of Jesus still to say to the world and the Church of our day? What gift can she make us and what help can she give us in these times, where some of the most precious goods of humanity are seriously threatened: peace, freedom (especially inner freedom, the freedom to be themselves), truth?

Of course, as this is a birthday, it is for us, her family and friends, to give a gift to the person we are celebrating. But it is even more true that in the small gifts being prepared for this centenary year, we are doing no more than recognizing that the true, the great gift is Teresa herself, a gift not only to us, her family, but to the entire world. Therefore, it seems fair to ask the question: what is God gifting us, in giving us Teresa once again, five hundred years later, her life, her person, her experience and her doctrine?

As I was saying, we are spoiled for choice, and can seek among the many facets of the figure and work of Teresa: from a woman of faith, who, in the light of the Gospel, fights to assert the dignity of the female condition, to the mystical teacher that opens new ways of the spirit, to the foundress of a religious family with its own specific charism, to the writer who invents literary genres and metaphors capable of containing her incomparable experiences. However, personally I have no doubt in indicating what for me is the real reason for the enduring relevance of Teresa, and which also seems to me to be the source from which all aspects of her multifaceted personality originate.

There is not a page in Teresa that does not make reference, explicitly or implicitly, to Jesus, and not so much to faith in Him, as to an experience of Him: look at Him, think of Him, listen to his word, be nourished by his body, touch his humanity with your hand. Of course, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, as the letter to the Hebrews says, but there is no doubt that Jesus is gifted to Teresa in a new way; he has granted her a new experience of himself, which responds specifically to the questions, to the concerns of her soul and of her spirit.

Teresa is the Samaritan woman who goes looking for water to quench her thirst and finds in Jesus not only the water, but the well itself, which is in no danger of drying up or

becoming contaminated. We know how dear this Gospel story was for Teresa, in which she recognized her own encounter with Jesus: the encounter of a thirsty soul with the source of living water.

In Jesus, Teresa rediscovers the foundation of her humanity, which coincides with becoming a God-centred person. Our humanity is not, in fact, something that relates to God as an extrinsic reality, but – while there is an abyss of difference – we are human only in so far as God is made human. And we Christians do not know any other God but this: the God in whose own centre, in the most intimate mystery of the Trinity, bears engraved the traces of humanity, and neither sin nor death nor hostile power, whether earthly or heavenly, can delete this truth written by God in God.

Teresa discovered at a certain point that she was truly “of Jesus”, i.e. part of Him, a member of Him, inseparable from Him. And in Him she found that she could breathe freely, move in wide open spaces, and travel broad roads, much more so than in the spaces and roads that the world offered her. For this reason she wanted to be united with Him in a closer, eremitical intimacy, in accordance with the tradition of Carmel, because it was only within this intimacy that her humanity could expand and her horizons broaden until they reached the ends of the earth. It is exciting to follow, almost step by step, this progressive transformation of Teresa, which from the confines of a life made up of many futile and petty things is freed and dragged into another dimension, where everything is lived with Christ and in Christ, and therefore everything takes on its proper proportions, “the breadth, the length, the height and the depth” of his love (cf Eph 3:18).

This transformation is important not so much because it gave rise to extraordinary mystical experiences, to which the Church has never attached particular importance, but because it has set in motion a ceaseless activity, has become a love that evangelizes, that cares for the other, both near and far. Along with this, and in all this, Teresa develops a wisdom of life, learning to live in a new way, appreciating and loving what Jesus appreciated and loved: the will of the Father, who calls her to give without reservation for her brothers and sisters.

Everything else flows from this focal point, beginning with her manner of prayer, which is the high point of her sharing with Christ. It is by prayer, that is frequently being with Jesus, that a secret door opens and Teresa enters a space, the existence of which she was unaware, although it is the space of her own self, her own soul. While travelling along this inner space, she will discover how far she has to travel to arrive at the end, at the centre, at the place where peace, truth and freedom dwell and all three meet and intersect in the person of Jesus Christ, son of the Father and the bearer of the Spirit.

An experience like this cannot remain hidden, nor can it be silenced. Teresa will take on the burden of ceaselessly writing so as to communicate what she is living. She does so in obedience, not so much to her Superiors who asked her, but to an inner logic that required it of her. Like every authentic experience of Jesus, her experience has become, moreover, an experience of the Church, it calls the Church together, it prophetically announces a new form

of community. Thus began a series of foundations, which – thank God – through many historical vicissitudes, continues without pause to the present day.

It is this energy, this living water that we continue to draw from Teresa and it is for this reason that we are here to celebrate her. And we want to announce it to everyone, we want to “shout it from the rooftops”, as the Gospel says, that the human person is not made for narrow horizons, that human happiness cannot be reduced to a cycle of production and consumption, that our very being unfolds only when we lose ourselves in relation with the other, through much suffering and effort, through the many failures that it may cost us.

Look, I think Teresa will give us again, the men and women of our times, so often cold and sad, the thing that we are missing and which we are most in need of: the warmth and strength of a renewed hope. This is not, however, a cheap grace. Teresa does not leave us under any illusion on this point. She knows how much effort and commitment it costs to follow this path and therefore she insists on the importance of a “determinada determinación”, on the firm decision not to turn back in the face of trials and difficulties. But at the same time, Teresa helps us travel along the way, indicating what really matters: not spiritual feelings and consolations, but growth in the fundamental virtues, those relating to our relationship with each other, with the world and with ourselves. The experience of God does not consist in experiences that suspended us midway between heaven and earth, but in experiences, guided by the Spirit, by our neighbour, by the times in which we live, and by our own being.

This is why Teresa can rekindle our hope, precisely because she does not offer us an empty dream, like many of the spiritual and political leaders of our day, but makes us look ahead, showing us a way to travel and a home to be reached. And it is with these words addressed to us that her earthly life ended: “Ya es tiempo de caminar!”