

# Communicationes N. 286

28/03/2015

## Special Edition 5th Centenary of Saint Teresa of Jesus

### CONTENTS:

- Message from Pope Francis to the Discalced Carmelite Order
- Happy birthday, Teresa!

### **Pope Francis**

#### **Message from Pope Francis to the Discalced Carmelite Order**

*To the Reverend Father Saverio Cannistrà  
Superior General of the Order of Discalced Brothers  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel*

Dear Brother:

On the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus, I wish to unite myself, together with the entire Church, to the great family of the Discalced Carmel –religious women and men and seculars– in their act of thanksgiving for the charism of this exceptional woman.

I consider it a providential grace that this anniversary coincides with the Year of Consecrated Life, in which the Saint from Ávila shines like a sure beacon and role model of total surrender to God. It is yet another reason to look on the past with gratitude and rediscover “the inspiring spark” that has driven founders and their first communities (cf. *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People*, November 21, 2014).

How beneficial to us is, even to this day, the testimony of her consecration, born from a direct encounter with Christ, her experience of prayer as a continual dialog with God, her life in community grounded in the maternity of the Church!

1. Saint Teresa is above all a *teacher of prayer*. The discovery of the humanity of Christ was central to her experience. Moved by the desire to share this personal experience with others, she writes about it in a vital and uncomplicated style, accessible to everyone, because it consists simply in “an intimate sharing between friends....with Him who we know loves us” (*Life* 8, 5). Many times that same phrase becomes a plea, as if wishing to draw the reader into her interior dialog with Christ. Teresa’s prayer was not reserved for any single moment or part of the day; it sprang spontaneously during the most varied circumstances: “It would be a hard thing to bear if we were able to pray only when off in some corner” (*Foundations* 5, 16). She was convinced of the value of continual prayer, even if it were not always perfect. La Santa asks us to faithfully persevere, even in the midst of dryness, personal difficulties, or urgent needs that claim us.

To renew consecrated life today, Teresa has left us a great treasure full of concrete proposals, ways and methods to pray, that, far from closing us off into ourselves or merely providing a path to seek inner balance, makes us begin over again, always from Jesus as a starting point. It is an authentic school in growth of love of God and neighbor.

2. As a result of her encounter with Jesus Christ, Saint Teresa lived “another life” (cf. *Life* 23, 1). Wishing to serve the Church, and in view of the grave problems of her day, she did not limit herself to simply observing the reality that surrounded her. From her circumstances as a woman and with the limitations of her health, she says: “I resolved to do *the little that was in my power*; that is, to follow the evagelic counsels as perfectly as I could and strive that these few persons who live here do the same” (*Way* 1, 2). That is why she began the Teresian reform, in which she asked her sisters not to waste time “discussing with God matters that have little importance” when the “world is all in flames” (*Way* 1, 5). This missionary and ecclesial dimension has always characterized the Discalced Carmel.

As she did then, so also today la Santa opens up new horizons for us, calls us to a great endeavor, to see the world with the eyes of Christ, to seek what He seeks and love what He loves.

3. Saint Teresa knew that neither prayer nor mission could be sustained without authentic community life. For this reason, the foundation of the monasteries she created was fraternity: there, “all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped” (*Way* 4, 7). She placed great importance on warning her religious about the dangers of

self-concern in fraternal life, which properly “lies in losing concern about ourselves and our own satisfaction” (*Way* 12, 2) and placing ourselves entirely at the service of others. To avoid this risk, the Saint from Ávila exhorts her sisters, above all, to practice the virtue of humility, which is neither to belittle oneself exteriorly nor interiorly shrink the soul, but for each to know what one can do and what God can do in her (cf. *Spiritual Testimonies* 30). The opposite is what she calls “accursed honor” (*Life* 31, 23), source of gossip, jealousy, and criticism that seriously harms relationships with others. Teresian humility is made of the stuff of self-acceptance, awareness of one’s own dignity, missionary courage, gratitude, and abandonment in God.

From these noble roots, Teresian communities are called to become houses of communion that witness to fraternal love and the maternity of the Church, presenting to the Lord the needs of our world torn by division and war.

Dear brother, I do not want to end without thanking the Teresian Carmels that entrust the Holy Father with special tenderness to the patronage of the Virgin of Carmel, and who accompany with their prayer the great challenges and threats the Church faces. I ask our Lord that the example of his life, like that of Saint Teresa, translucent in the joy and beauty of living the Gospel, may call many young people to follow Christ closely.

I impart my Apostolic Blessing on all the Teresian family.

From the Vatican, March 28, 2015

## Message from the Father General

### Happy birthday, Teresa!

**Father Saverio Cannistrà.-** Happy birthday, Teresa! That is the heartfelt wish of all who have known you, and therefore love you: your daughters and sons, your large family, that recognizes you as mother and teacher; those Christians who you have caused to discover “what a good friend Jesus is” and how our life is changed by learning to be with him in simplicity and love, limiting ourselves to gazing on him who gazes at us. That is the wish offered to you by so many believers of different religions whom you taught the strength and universal value or prayer humbly offered for a world that suffers. And lastly, that is the wish of so many men and women who have learned from you the unexplored dimensions of their humanity and whose hearts have grown, whose souls have breathed.

You did not keep for yourself the life the Lord gave you. You learned daily how to surrender it completely into His hands, so that He would make it His, His gift to the Church and the world. The less you belonged to yourself, the more you belonged to him; the more you

gave yourself, the more He brought you into participation with His life, His relationship with the Father, and his offering for the world.

Thank you, Teresa, for the gift of that life spent for us! Thank you for continuing to accompany us with your teaching and discernment. You, of all people, know how easy it is to deceive oneself in the spiritual life, create false illusions for oneself. Thank you for “setting us straight,” for freeing us from tortuous paths that always circle around ourselves and close us off from others.

Thank you because you kindle hope within us again and always! Like Nicodemus, we too sometimes say, “How can a person once grown old be born again?” How can the Lord transform us, renew us? You never lost hope and have taught us not to lose it, because God does not leave at a halfway point those who are determined to reach the goal, the fount of living water: “It’s also necessary to begin with the assurance that if we don’t let ourselves be conquered, we will obtain our goal; this without a doubt, for no matter how small the gain, one will end up being very rich. Don’t be afraid that the Lord will leave you to die of thirst, for He calls us to drink from this fount. I have already said this and would like to say it many times, for the devil intimidates persons who don’t yet fully know the goodness of the Lord through experience, even though they know it through faith. But it is a great thing to have experienced the friendship and favor He shows toward those who journey on this road and how He takes care of almost all the expenses” (*Way 23, 5*).

Lastly, thank you for having taught us to laugh at ourselves, to not take ourselves so seriously! Thank you for your good sense of humor that gives us back the true measure of our littleness and misery and the immense greatness of God! With you we will eternally sing the infinite mercies of God.