

June 20, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites,

How well do you know St. Teresa? We call St. Teresa “Our Holy Mother” because we are formed in her spirit, in her charism. Sometimes we refer to ourselves as Teresian Carmelites to distinguish ourselves from the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance and because St. Teresa is truly the founder of the Discalced Carmelite Order. But again I ask, how well do you know our Holy Mother St. Teresa? I am happy to admit that I am always learning more about her and this makes me love her more and more. Just the other day, Fr. Paul Koenig, OCD, showed me something St. Teresa wrote in a letter that I had never noticed. Let me share it with you. It is found in a letter she wrote to Padre Jerónimo Gracían on June 15, 1576.

Oh, my father, what a terrible thing happened to me! While we were sitting on a haystack considering ourselves lucky to have found it, next to an inn that we were unable to enter, a large salamander or lizard got between my tunic and bare arm, and it was the mercy of God that it didn't get somewhere else, for I think I would have died, judging from what I felt. But my brother got hold of it at once and when he threw it away it hit Antonio Ruiz right in the mouth.

This is even more comical when you consider that St. Teresa who *would have died* if that lizard had gone *somewhere else* was already in the state of spiritual marriage and wrote a poem with the refrain, *I die because I do not die*. In another letter she takes a more benign view of lizards when she describes the happiness of the nuns: *They seemed like little lizards that come out into the sun in summer*, cf. letter of December 12 1579. By the way, Teresa was a keen student of the book of nature. In the Interior Castle she writes: *I believe that in each little thing that God created there is more to know than we can understand even though it be an ant.*

The reason for this letter of mine is to encourage you to give special consideration to the upcoming event sponsored by our Province to honor Our Holy Mother St. Teresa. The promotional brochure describes this event as a celebration of: The Creative Spiritual Genius of St. Teresa of Avila Today. Please make every effort to attend and to encourage others to attend. As the website for this event (www.stj500westernus.com) says, this is a party for St. Teresa's 500th birthday. Let us not make excuses for not attending this splendid occasion. As you surely know, it will take place in San Jose from August 21-23. I know there are very good reasons why some won't be able to attend. But you realize that the whole Order has been preparing for St. Teresa's centenary since 2009. This is the moment for our Province to really honor Our Holy Mother. The members of the secular order have a special place in this commemoration. How blessed we are to be the sons and daughters of such a saint as Teresa.

Here is one last quote from her letters: *A book I once read says that if we leave God when he wants to be with us, we will not find him when we want to be with him*, cf. letter to Jerónimo Gracían, December 1577.

Hope to see you in San Jose in August.

Fraternally,
Fr. Steve