

Reflection Friday Week 28 St Teresa of Avila 2021

St Teresa was born in Ávila, Spain, in 1515, and entered the Carmelites there aged 20, mainly because it seemed the most sensible thing to do. Carmelite convents then were comfortable places. One was well looked after, had easy contact with the outside, and could keep one's own possessions. Despite ill-health, Teresa made great progress in contemplative prayer and had a number of mystical experiences which she regarded suspiciously considering herself not holy enough. Teresa's prayer life led her to seek a more perfect life. In 1562, in the face of much opposition, she founded a convent of Discalced ("shoeless") Carmelites devoted to poverty. She founded many more Discalced Carmelite convents despite intense opposition. In 1566 the General of the Carmelites approved Teresa's original foundation and permitted her to make new ones. In 1575 the chapter of the Order decided to dissolve them all, and for the next five years every effort was made to destroy Teresa's reforms. Many of her followers (including St John of the Cross) were imprisoned and cruelly treated.

In 1580, with the support of King Philip II, the Discalced Carmelites were made independent and St Teresa was able to found more new convents. She died, worn out by her efforts, on 15th October 1582.

St Teresa is an outstanding example of how the contemplative life can well up and overflow into action. She wrote a great deal on contemplative prayer and her writings are still standard works today. She was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970.

A favourite story about St Teresa illustrates her intimate relationship with God. On one of her innumerable journeys across Spain, her horse threw her as she was crossing a river. Soaked to the skin she looked up to heaven and said, *"If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!"* (from *Universalis*)

She wrote:

"May there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us."

With winter approaching I want to share a tip someone gave me a while ago.

*If you go out and your mouth is freezing, **Just Grit Your Teeth!!***