

## Reflection Saturday Week 28 St Teresa of Ávila 2022

St Teresa was born in Ávila in Spain in 1516 and entered the Carmelite convent there at the age of 20, because it seemed the most sensible thing to do. At this time Carmelite convents were comfortable places. With time, and despite ill-health, she made great progress in contemplative prayer and had several mystical experiences, which she treated with great suspicion believing herself not holy enough for them to be from God.

Teresa's prayer led her to seek a more perfect life. In 1562, despite opposition, she founded a convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Ávila. "Discalced" ("shoeless") signifying their devotion to poverty. She established many more Discalced Carmelite convents in the face of intense opposition from the unreformed Carmelites but she also received important support. In 1566 the General of the Carmelite Order approved Teresa's original foundation and permitted her to make new ones. In 1575 the chapter of the Order dissolved 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, and 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 15<sup>th</sup> October 1582.

St Teresa is an outstanding example of contemplative life welling up and overflowing into action. She wrote much on contemplative prayer and her writings remain 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!"*