



# Carmelite News

Vol. 21, No.1    www.baltimorecarmel.org    410 823 7415    March-May, 2014

## Let's Celebrate!

Next year, 2015, will mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St. Teresa of Avila and the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of our monastery. It is our hope that in this centenary year (October 2014 – October 2015) your life might be touched in some way by the richness and depth of St. Teresa's life. Perhaps you will consider attending our lecture series, and/or reading one of Teresa's works on prayer?

St. Teresa was born in Avila, Spain on March 28, 1515. She made a total of 16 foundations of Carmelite nuns before dying in October 1582 at the age of 67. She was canonized a saint on March 12, 1622, and was declared a Doctor of the Church on September 27, 1970.

Life in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain was especially challenging for Teresa's family. Her grandfather, a Jewish cloth merchant, converted to Christianity rather than face expulsion from Spain. Teresa's knowledge of her family history is apparent in her writings and seems to have influenced her focus on honor and equality.

Teresa was one of twelve children. At the age of seven, she enjoyed "playing hermit" with her siblings. "My brothers and sisters did not in any way hold me back from the service of God. I had one brother about my age. We used to get together to read the lives of the saints" (*The Book of Her Life* 1.4). Teresa and her mother were very close and they often read "books of chivalry" together. Sadly, her mother died when Teresa was only 14 years old. "When I began to understand what I had lost, I went, afflicted, before an image of our Lady and besought her with many tears to be my mother" (*Life* 1.7).

Teresa's teenage years were filled with affectionate and frivolous friendships and, of course, a heightened awareness of her appearance. She was known to be an extrovert whose cheerful and friendly disposition made her particularly attractive. "For it doesn't seem to me that three months, during which I engaged in these vanities, had gone by when my father brought me to a convent in that place where they educated persons like myself, although not with habits as bad as mine" (*Life* 2.6). The Augustinian nuns of Our Lady of Grace in Avila conducted the convent school to which Teresa refers. It was here that Dona Maria Briceno, a nun who cared for Teresa and spoke with her about prayer and religious life, influenced Teresa. "After a year and a half

in the convent school I was much better. I began to recite many vocal prayers and to seek that all commend me to God so that He might show me the state in which I was to serve Him. But still I had no desire to be a nun, and I asked God not to give me this vocation; although I also feared marriage" (*Life* 3.2).

Eventually Teresa became sick and needed to leave the school. During her recovery she had the occasion to visit her uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda who lived as a hermit. Don Pedro introduced Teresa to many spiritual books; the Letters of St. Jerome and Francisco de Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet* were especially influential in her life. Despite her father's initial disapproval, Teresa entered the Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation on November 2, 1535, at the age of 20. "I remember, clearly and truly, that when I left my father's house I felt that separation so keenly that the feeling will not be greater, I think, when I die. For it seemed that every bone in my body was being sundered" (*Life* 4.1). It did not take long for Teresa's father to accept her choice and give her a substantial dowry, which secured for Teresa a private room of her own in the monastery.

At that time, there were over 180 people living in this monastery, including servants and relatives of the nuns. As you might imagine Teresa did not find these living conditions conducive to the life of contemplative prayer. This led her to make her first foundation, the Convent of San Jose, in Avila in 1562. Teresa's focus was on creating smaller communities who were committed to living an intense life of contemplative prayer. Along with her spiritual companion, St. John of the Cross, Teresa sought to renew the eremitical quality of contemplative life as together they began to reform the ancient Carmelite Order which traced its origins to early 13<sup>th</sup> century Palestine.

Throughout her life Teresa stressed the absolute necessity of prayer and the interior life. In her writings, she creatively used her own personal experiences to teach us about God. She continues to be a consummate friend and guide who encourages us simply to look at Jesus. "Behold, he is not waiting for anything else...than that we look at him. In the measure you desire him. You will find him" (*Way of Perfection* 26.3).

Of her time, Saint Teresa of Avila wrote, "The world is all in flames..."(Way 1.5). As we watch the evening news we are confronted with endless images of the flames of oppression, violence, war, natural disasters, poverty, injustice, illness, and the list goes on. The contemplative life of prayer, the same life that St. Teresa lived and nurtured, is as necessary and important today as it was during her lifetime. Teresa was one of the first to stress the *apostolic* nature of prayer – the belief that prayer indeed reaches out beyond the monastery, enters with strong vibrations onto the currents of human consciousness and transforms the lives of people throughout the world.

The question before us as we enter into this year of celebration is this: What contribution will our contemplative prayer, yours and ours, make to this great mystical stream that stretches across our planet and furthers the coming of the reign of God? It is our hope that you will join us as we explore what Teresa has to say to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We joyfully welcome you to this celebration!

**Centenary Corner**

The response to our first lecture, *Marginality and Mindfulness: Teresa and the Experience of Powerlessness*, has been overwhelming. On April 4, 2014 we will welcome Archbishop Rowan Williams to the monastery with a full house. We deeply appreciate the support our friends are giving to this project and regret there are no more tickets available for this initial event. More information for future lectures and liturgies will be forthcoming.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Palm Sunday</b>   | <b>April 13</b> | <b>Holy Saturday</b> | <b>April 19</b> |
| Lauds                | 8 a.m.          | Tenebrae             | 8 a.m.          |
| Eucharist            | 9 a.m.          | Vespers              | 4:30 p.m.       |
| <b>Holy Thursday</b> | <b>April 17</b> | Easter Vigil         | 9 p.m.          |
| Tenebrae             | 8 a.m.          | <b>Easter Sunday</b> | <b>April 20</b> |
| Eucharist            | 5:30 p.m.       | Eucharist            | 11 a.m.         |
| <b>Good Friday</b>   | <b>April 18</b> | Vespers              | 4:30 p.m.       |
| Tenebrae             | 8 a.m.          |                      |                 |
| Liturgy              | 3 p.m.          |                      |                 |

***Please join us for a special Eucharistic Celebration at 9 a.m. on May 11, 2014 when we will be joined by Father Saverio Cannistrà, General of the Carmelite Order.***