



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOP OF AVILA ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING
OF THE TERESIAN JUBILEE YEAR**

From the Vatican, 15 October 2014

To Bishop Jesús García Burillo of Ávila

Dear Brother,

On 28 March 1515 in Ávila, a baby was born who in time would become known as St Teresa of Jesus. As the fifth centenary of her birth approaches, I turn my gaze to that city to give thanks to God for the gift of this great woman and to encourage the faithful of the beloved Diocese of Ávila and all the people of Spain to learn the history of this distinguished Foundress, as well as to read her books which, along with her daughters in the numerous Carmelite convents scattered throughout the world, continue to tell us who and how Mother Teresa was and what she can teach us men and women of today.

At the school of the saintly traveller, we learn how to be pilgrims. The image of a path can very well summarize the lesson of her life and her work. Teresa understood life as a way of perfection, along which God leads man, from task to task, up to Him and, at the same time, puts him on a journey toward mankind. Along which paths does the Lord wish to lead us, following in the footsteps of St Teresa who takes us by the hand? I would like to recall four that do me much good: those of joy, of prayer, of fraternity and of time itself.

Teresa of Jesus asks her Sisters to “go cheerfully about whatever services you are ordered to do” (*The Way of Perfection* 18, 5). True holiness is a joy, for “an unhappy saint is a pitiful saint”. Saints, before being courageous heroes, are the fruit of God’s grace to mankind. Every saint shows us a feature of the multifaceted face of God. In St Teresa we contemplate God, who, being the “sovereign Lord, of majesty supreme” (*Poems* 2), reveals himself close and a companion and feels joy conversing with men: God becomes joyful with us. And feeling his love, a contagious and

unconcealable joy was born in the Saint that she radiated around her. This joy is a journey that must be followed throughout life. It is not instantaneous, superficial, tumultuous. It must already be sought by “at the beginning” (*Life* 13, 1). Express the inner joy of the soul, it is humble and “modest” (cf. *The Book of Foundations* 12, 1). It is not reached by an easy shortcut that bypasses sacrifice, suffering or the cross, but is found by enduring labour and pain (cf. *Life* 6, 2; 30, 8), looking to the Crucifix and seeking the Risen One (cf. *The Way of Perfection* 26, 4). For this reason St Teresa’s joy is neither selfish nor self-referential. Like that of heaven, it consists in the “joy in the rejoicings of all” (*The Way of Perfection* 30, 5), placing oneself at the service of others with unselfish love. As she told one of her monasteries in difficulty, the Saint would also tell us today, especially the young: “Do not stop going cheerfully about!” (*Letter* 284, 4). The Gospel is not a bag of lead which one drags arduously, but a font of joy which fills the heart with God and impels it to serve one’s brothers!

The Saint also travelled the path of prayer, which she beautifully defined as “being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who, we know, loves us” (*Life* 8, 5). When times are “difficult”, “the friends of God should be strong” in order to support the weak (*Life* 15, 5). To pray is not a means of escape, nor even to place oneself in a bubble or to isolate oneself, but to go forward in a friendship; and the more this friendship grows, the more one comes into contact with the Lord, the “true Friend” and faithful “companion” on the journey, with whom “everything can be borne”, because, always, “He helps, He strengthens, He never fails” (*Life* 22, 9). In order to pray, “it is not so essential to think much as to love much” (*Interior Castle* IV, 1, 7), in turning one’s eyes in order to look at those who do not fail to look lovingly at us and to patiently support us (cf. *The Way of Perfection* 26, 3-4). God is able to lead souls to himself through many roads, but prayer is “a safe way” (*The Way of Perfection* 21, 5). Leaving it means getting lost (cf. *Life* 19, 6). This counsel of the Saint is of perennial relevance. Thus, go forth along the path of prayer, with determination, without stopping, until the end! This applies particularly to all religious who are committed to consecrated life. In a culture of the provisional, you live the faith of “for ever, ever, ever” (*Life* 1, 4); in a world without hope, you demonstrate the fruitfulness of a “heart with love fast bound” (*Poems* 5); and in a society with so many idols, you witness that “God alone suffices” (*Poems* 9).

We cannot undertake this journey alone, but together. For the reformer Saint, the path of prayer passes by the way of fraternity in the bosom of the Mother Church. Her providential response to this, born of divine inspiration and of her feminine intuition, to the problems of the Church and of the society of her time was to: to establish small communities of women who, by imitating the “Apostolic College”, followed Christ, living the Gospel in a simple way and supporting all the Church with a life made prayer. For this reason “sisters”, were “brought here” (*The Way of Perfection* 8, 1) and this was the promise: “that Christ would be in the midst of us; (*Life* 32, 14). What a beautiful definition of fraternity in the Church: to journey together with Christ as brothers! To this end, Teresa of Jesus does not recommend many things to us, only three: love for each other, detachment from everything, and to have true humility, “which, although I put it last, is the

most important of the three and embraces all the rest” (*The Way of Perfection* 4, 4). In these times, how I should like there to be more fraternal Christian communities where one makes this journey: going forth in the truth of the humility that frees us from ourselves in order to love others more and better, above all the poor! There is nothing more beautiful than to live and die as children of this Mother Church!

Precisely because she is mother with open doors, the Church is always on the way toward men to lead them to the “living water” (cf. Jn 4:10) that irrigates the garden of their thirsty heart. The holy writer and master of prayer was, at the same time, Foundress and missionary on the streets of Spain. Her mystic experience did not separate her from the world nor from the concerns of the people. On the contrary, it gave her new impetus and courage for daily work and duties, because “the Lord goes along with you” even “amidst the pots and pans” (*The Book of the Foundations* 5, 8). She experienced the difficulties of her time — which was so complicated — without giving in to the temptation to bitter complaining, but rather, accepting it in faith as an opportunity to take a step forward on the journey. For “at all times God is ever ready to bestow good favours upon those who serve him in earnest” (*The Book of the Foundations* 4, 5). Today Teresa tells us: pray more in order to truly understand what is happening around you and thus to act better. Prayer conquers pessimism and generates good initiatives (cf. *Interior Castle* VII 4, 6). This is Teresian realism, which requires work instead of emotions, and love instead of dreams; the realism of humble love in the face of anxious asceticism! At times the Saint shortens her pleasant letters saying: “We are on the path” (*Letter* 469, 7.9), to express the urgency of continuing the task begun until the end. When the world is aflame, one cannot waste time on affairs of little importance. If only everyone were infected by this holy haste to go out to journey along the paths of our time, with the Gospel in hand and the Spirit in the heart!

“It is time to walk!” (Anna de san Bartolomeo, *Últimas acciones de la vida de santa Teresa*). These were the words St Teresa of Ávila said shortly before her death, which summarize her life and become for us, especially for the Carmelite Family, for her fellow citizens and for all the people of Spain, a precious legacy to be treasured and enriched.

Dear Brother, with my cordial greeting, I say to all: “It is time to walk”, to set out on the paths of joy, of prayer, of fraternity, of time lived as grace! Let us be taken by the hand of St Teresa as we go through the journey of life. May her footsteps always lead us to Jesus.

I ask you, please, to pray for me, for I need it. May Jesus bless you and may the Virgin Mary protect you!

Fraternally,

Francis

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