



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF DISCALCED CARMELITES
ON THE 500th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF SAINT TERESA OF JESUS**

[Multimedia]

*To the Venerable Brother
Father Saverio Cannistrà
Provost General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites*

Dear Brother,

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the birth of St Teresa of Jesus, I would like, with the entire Church, to join the great family of the Discalced Carmelites — religious and secular men and women — in giving thanks for the charism of this exceptional woman.

I consider this anniversary a timely grace, as it coincides with the Year of Consecrated Life, in which the Saint of Avila shines as a sure guide and attractive model of total donation to God. It is an additional reason to look to the past with gratitude, and to rediscover “the creativity it has sparked” and the high ideals that inspired the founders and foundresses and the first communities (cf. [*Apostolic Letter to Consecrated Men and Women Religious for the Year of Consecrated Life*](#), 21 November 2014).

How much good we continue to derive from the witness of her consecration, born directly from the encounter with Christ, her experience of prayer, as a constant dialogue with God, and her community life, rooted in the motherhood of the Church!

St Teresa is above all a *teacher of prayer*. The discovery of the humanity of Christ was central to her experience. Moved by the desire to share this personal experience with others, she describes

it in a lively and simple manner, within the reach of all, for it consists simply in “being on terms of friendship ... with Him who, we know, loves us” (*Vida*, 8, 5). Often the narrative itself transforms into a prayer, as if she wished to introduce the reader to her inner dialogue with Christ. Teresa’s prayer was not reserved to only one space or one moment of the day; it arose spontaneously on many different occasions: “It would be hard if our prayers could only be made in corners” (*The Book of the Foundations*, v, p. 31). She was certain of the value of constant, albeit not always perfect prayer. The Saint asks us to be persevering, faithful, even in the midst of aridity, of personal difficulties or of the pressing needs that call to us.

In order to renew consecrated life today, Teresa left us a great treasure, full of practical suggestions, ways and methods to pray, which, far from closing us within ourselves or leading us only to achieve interior balance, enable us to always set out again from Jesus and constitute an authentic school to grow in love of God and neighbour.

Starting with her encounter with Jesus, St Teresa lived “another life”; she became a tireless communicator of the Gospel (cf. *Vida*, 23, 1). With the desire to serve the Church, and confronted by the serious problems of her time, she did not limit herself to being a spectator of the reality that surrounded her. As a woman with health problems, she decided — she says — “to do the little which lay in my power, viz. to follow the evangelical counsels with all the perfection I could, and to induce the few nuns who are here to do the same” (*The Way of Perfection*, 1, 2). Thus began the Teresian reform, in which she asked her sisters not to waste time praying to God about “things of little importance” while “the world is on fire” (*ibid.*, 1, 5). This missionary and ecclesial dimension has always distinguished the Discalced Carmelite men and women.

Today, as then, the Saint opens new horizons for us, she convokes us to a great undertaking, in order to look at the world through Christ’s eyes, to seek what He seeks and to love what He loves.

St Teresa knew that neither prayer nor mission could be sustained without an authentic community life. Therefore, she placed fraternity as the foundation of her monasteries: “in this house ... all should mutually love each other, wish well to all, help one another” (*ibid.*, 4, 7). She was very careful to admonish her women religious about the danger of self-referentiality in fraternal life, which, “for the greatest part, consists in throwing off all care of ourselves and of our own pleasure” (*ibid.*, 12, 2) and putting all that we are at the service of others. To avoid such a risk, the Saint of Avila recommends to her sisters, first and foremost, the virtue of humility, which is neither exterior neglect nor interior timidity of soul, so much as each knowing her possibilities and what God is able to do within us (cf. *Relations*, v, 31). The contrary is what she called “mistaken merit” (*Vida*, 31, 23), sources of rumours, jealousy and criticism, which seriously harm relationships with others. Teresian humility is made up of self-acceptance, awareness of one’s own dignity, of missionary boldness, of gratitude and abandonment to God.

With these noble roots, Teresian communities are called to become houses of communion,

capable of witnessing to fraternal love and the motherhood of the Church, by presenting to the Lord the needs of the world, lacerated by division and by war.

Dear Brother, I do not wish to conclude without first thanking the Teresian Carmelite communities who with special tenderness entrust the Pope to the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and accompany with their prayer the great trials and challenges of the Church. I ask the Lord that your testimony of life, like that of St Teresa, may let the joy and beauty of living the Gospel shine through you and attract many young people to follow Christ closely.

To the whole Teresian family I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 28 March 2015

FRANCIS