

Day Seven: The ways of gentleness and love

On the last day of the pilgrimage our pilgrims travel nearly seventy miles north west of Avila to the city of Salamanca, and then a further thirteen miles south to Alba de Tormes. Both are sites of Teresa's original foundations; Salamanca, her seventh foundation was established in November 1570, and Alba de Tormes just a few months later in January 1571.

Salamanca is, of course, famous as a university city and boasts the West's third oldest university after Bologna and Oxford. When Teresa arrived, it was at the height of its fame, renowned for its teaching of both canon and civil law, and promoting economic and spiritual rights. Ignatius of Loyola had studied there in 1527, and St John of the Cross spent four years completing his theological studies from 1564-68. As an intellectual hub for some of the greatest minds in Europe, the rest of the city too was thriving, bustling with students and catering for their needs. In fact, when Teresa arrived to make her foundation she found that the house rented for her was still occupied by students, and wryly observed on their departure that 'they must not have had a gift for cleanliness' (*Foundations*, 19.3)! Salamanca also boasts not one but two cathedrals, dating respectively from the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Our pilgrims begin their visit there, before walking through the university district with its collection of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque buildings. In the late afternoon the pilgrims will travel to the final location of the pilgrimage, Alba de Tormes, where Teresa arrived exhausted and terminally ill on 21st September 1582, and from where she finally departed for heaven just thirteen days later on 4th October 1582.

When Teresa is writing her account of the Salamanca foundation in the *Book of her Foundations* she breaks off the narrative to give some important advice which has occurred to her for prioresses. We tend to think of the typical Teresian virtues as being along the lines of her famous 'determined determination': qualities such as zeal, courage, perseverance and the desire to do great things for the Lord. Here, however, Teresa's counsels are marked by a mother's kindness. She is forming the next generation of leaders for her communities, and new priorities and sensitivities come to the fore; those of gentleness, discretion, and attentiveness to individuals and their particular needs and abilities. Above all, Teresa teaches her prioresses that simple adherence to the *Rule* and the *Constitutions* of the reform is paramount. Teresa is adamant that her vision of a return to the primitive Carmel is not to be obscured by the overlaying of additional and unnecessary practices, devotions and mortifications. '[I] would want them to observe the rule,' she writes, 'for with that there is plenty to do; and the rest should be done with gentleness' (*Foundations*, 18.7). For Teresa, the *Rule* and *Constitutions* are the path by which the sisters should be led (*Foundations*, 18.6). This

simplicity of vision and practice are part of Teresa's endowment to her communities, and it was to be defended at great cost by the prioresses who took the Teresian Carmel out from Spain into the rest of Europe. Much suffering was to be endured by the likes of Anne of Jesus and Anne of St Bartholomew in preserving this clarity and simplicity of the original Teresian charism.

Teresa's gentle and wise advice to her prioresses is, not least, a reminder to us of her own humanity. For all the mystical graces she received, Teresa never lost sight of her all too real frailty and failings. The final days of her sickness in Alba de Tormes were spent expressing sorrow for her sins and praying Psalm 50, the great 'Miserere' psalm of the Church: 'Have mercy on me God in your kindness; In your compassion blot out my offence.' At the same time, witnesses testified afterwards that she also prayed in great longing and confident expectation of the final union with God she was about to experience. For this was Teresa's second great insight into human nature. However sinful we may be, we are, astoundingly, infinitely precious to God and beloved by him. We are, as she tells us at the outset of the *Interior Castle*, 'nothing but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight' (I.1.1). We are the dwelling place in which God chooses to take residence, and as Teresa remarks,

what do you think that abode will be like where a King so powerful, so wise, so pure, so full of all good things takes His delight? I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvellous capacity.

(Interior Castle, I.1.1)

As such, Teresa knew that each soul entrusted to her care in her lifetime, and now under her spiritual guidance, is of immense value. No wonder that she would be willing to 'die a thousand deaths' to save a single one. And no wonder that in her counsels to prioresses she warns them not to presume that they understand a soul all at once, but to honour the Lord's unique and precious work in each sister, supporting and guiding them along the way in which the Lord is leading. Teresa guardian of souls, pray for us!

Pilgrims' Liturgy

Holy Spirit of God

Open our ears to hear your word.

Open our eyes to see your glory.

Open our mouths to proclaim the Good News.

Open our minds to new horizons.

Open our hearts to love.

Amen.

We pray for gentle hearts; that we may ever honour the work of grace being accomplished in each soul we meet, and lend ourselves willingly to all that God would bring to completion in us.

We pray for the dying; that they may know God's love and mercy, that they may journey in confidence into his open arms, that the peace of Christ and the new life of his resurrection may be their eternal gift.

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that they may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance in your kingdom. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.