

LETTER OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA  
TO MOTHER MARY OF ST. JOSEPH,  
PRIORESS OF SEVILLE

*Written from Toledo, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1576, following Teresa's difficult stay in Seville*

Jesus be with your Reverence!

I ASSURE you that I am touched at the loneliness you say you feel at my absence. The enclosed letter was already written when yours arrived. I was so delighted to get it that I felt softened and ready to grant you pardon. If only you will love me as much as I love you, I forgive you all you have done and will do, for my chief complaint against you now is that you cared so little to be with me at Seville. However, as I said to the Mother Prioress of Malagon, I see perfectly well that it was not your fault but that God, Who willed I should suffer so many trials at Seville, seeing that your company would comfort me, ordained that I should be deprived of it. Most certainly, if my troubles brought any relief to you and the sisters, I should have thought them turned to good account had they been far worse. Believe me, I love you dearly, and when I see you have such affection for me, all else is a trifle beneath my notice, although at Seville, when the two kinds of trials came together and I treated you as a daughter I loved deeply, I was keenly hurt at not meeting the same simplicity and love from you. But this letter of yours has driven such thoughts away and my affection remains: it is a pity that nothing survives to make it less strong.

I was unspeakably glad at your having managed matters so well. Be sure to make the contract, although there is little security for the future as a lawsuit is a miserable thing, especially at the beginning of a foundation. We will try to repay my brother soon; I allude to the sum he lent us to pay for the excise duties, for I take as much interest in your house now as when I was there, or even more.

Oh, how delighted my brother was with your letters! He is never tired of praising your prudence. They arrived in good condition, but whenever your Reverence tries to write better, you write worse. As Lorenzo and Teresa are going to write to you, I say nothing about them. I have already written to my Father, the Prior of Las Cuevas, and ought to send a letter to Malagon today about our affairs and another to our Father, so it will be much if I can even manage a line in answer to the sisters as visitors never leave me free.

I am not surprised at what the good Garcia Alvarez is doing, knowing how charitable he is; give him many kind messages from me. I was pleased with the Father Prior's letter. My friends do me a great favour by being friends with you; be sure to retain their liking, and when an opportunity arises of showing any kindness to Father Mariano or Fray Antonio, take advantage of it for I do not wish them to be annoyed with you. God forgive them! They could have avoided all the difficulties with these Calced friars and arranged matters with them by

behaving differently. Our Father is deeply grieved about it. He is in good health and the Nuncio approves of his not returning to Andalusia.

You cannot complain again that I do not write to you often. Treat me in the same way, for your letters give me extreme pleasure. I knew nothing of what was happening at Seville as our Father writes very briefly: doubtless he can do no more: May God be with you and make you a great saint!

I had written a great part of this letter before reading Gabriela's. She tells me she is ill and suffers with pains in her stomach: God grant it may be nothing worse! I cannot remember now whom I charged to take care of you: let the Subprioress do so and be sure to obey her. Attend to your health for love of me; I should suffer unspeakably if it failed. God give you strength as I ask of Him! Remember me kindly to Beatriz' mother and to Delgado. The Prioress sends her remembrances to you. We were all glad to hear how well you are getting on: may it always be so. I think I told you that today is the feast of the Visitation.

The cleric came to say his Mass and went away afterwards. I spoke to him and would have paid him some kind attention, had he stayed. However, he said that he had a companion with him and left on that pretext.

The year 1576.

Yours,

Teresa de Jesus.

P.S. Sister Gabriela tells me that you keep the convent in perfect order: how I should like to see it! I have not yet had time to find out from whom all the letters come that you forwarded. I was highly pleased with the one from our good Father, Garcia Alvarez, and gladly write to him: my daughters must forgive me if I only answer him who is so kind to them. I have made further enquiries about the postulant; there is no question of admitting her for the present.

LETTER OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA  
TO MOTHER MARY OF ST. JOSEPH,  
PRIORESS OF SEVILLE

*Written from Toledo, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, 1576, shortly after the previous letter*

Jesus be with your Reverence!

YOU will not say now that I rarely write to you for perhaps this letter will reach you before another I sent about three or four days ago. You must know that I shall stay here for the present. My brother left the day before yesterday; I made Teresa accompany him, for I am not sure whether I may be told to make some roundabout journey, and I do not want to have charge of the child.

I am in good health and it has been a rest to be away from all the bustle. Much as I love my brother, I do not like his being absent from his home. I do not know how long I shall stay here and am still wondering how best to arrange affairs at Malagon.

I am grieved to hear of your illness and it does not seem to me wise of you to dose yourself in such weather. Let me know how you are; may God give good health to you and these daughters of mine as I beg of Him! I entreat you all to pray for me. Your letters gave me great pleasure. I have answered some of them already and intend writing at once to my Gabriela and San Francisco. They both know how to exaggerate: God grant they do not tell untruths! Another time, do not let them both tell me the same thing, for all three of you described how the Octave of Corpus Christi was spent: still, I am not sorry for that and was delighted at your having had such fine ceremonies. God reward our Father, Garcia Alvarez, for having provided the means. Give him my very kind regards; I wrote to him the other day.

My brother and I were very glad that you have settled the excise duties on the house. His attachment to you is wonderful, in which he resembles me. I am also delighted to hear that some books have been given you and that my saintly prior is kind to you. May God reward him for it.

I should like to receive full details about what those poor friars are doing, and whether there is any way of pacifying them. How about the Franciscan fathers? Let all of you pray for our Father who is undergoing great trials. God grant that the severity shown to the Calced fathers may have done good! Remember me to Fray Antonio of Jesus and Father Mariano: in future I shall practise perfection as they do, by not writing. Tell Father Mariano that Fray Baltasar and I are firm friends.

Juan Diaz arrived yesterday from Madrid, but as there is no longer any idea of founding a house here, he returned to Court. The King has commanded our Father to address himself in matters concerning our Order to the President of the Royal Council and to Quiroga. God grant the arrangement may be successful! I assure you that our Father stands in urgent need

of prayers. I also ask you to pray for the Father General who has fallen off his mule and broken his leg, much to my grief for he is an old man now.

Remember me affectionately to all my friends. Let the directions written on the enclosed paper be carried out.

Oh, how well the tunics suit me that you made out of the sheets! People here say that they are like linen.

May God make saints of you for my sake and grant you health. Take good care of yourself, for it is better than being ill.

Today is July 11.

Your servant,

Teresa de Jesus.

LETTER OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS  
TO MOTHER ANNE OF ST. ALBERT  
PRIORESS OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES OF CARAVACA.

*Written from Seville, in June, 1588, whilst John was Provincial of Andalucia*

JESUS Be in your soul.

I wrote to you in haste when I left Granada for the foundation at Cordoba. I have since received your letter there, and those of the gentlemen who went to Madrid, thinking that they should find me at the congregation. You must know, however, that this meeting has never taken place, for I have been waiting to finish these visitations and foundations which our Lord has hastened forward in such wise that there has been no time to spare. The Friars have been received at Cordoba with the greatest joy and solemnity on the part of the whole city. No Order has been better received there.

All the Clergy and Confraternities of Cordoba assembled together on the occasion, and there was a solemn procession of the Most Holy Sacrament from the Cathedral Church – all the houses being hung with tapestry with great concourse of people, as on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

This took place on the Sunday after Ascension Day, and the Bishop preached, praising us much in his sermon. The house is in the best part of the city, and belongs to the Cathedral. I am now busied at Seville with the removal of our Nuns, who have bought one of the principal houses at a cost of about 14,000 ducats, being worth more than 20,000. They are now established there. His Eminence the Cardinal is to place the Blessed Sacrament in their chapel with great solemnity on the Feast of S. Barnabas. Before my departure I intend to establish another house of Friars here, so that there will be two of our Order in Seville. Before the Feast of St. John I shall set forth for Ecija, where, with the Divine blessing, we shall found another; thence to Malaga; and then to the congregation. I wish I had authority to make this foundation, as I had for the others. I do not expect much difficulty; but I hope in God that so it will be, and at the congregation I will do what I can; and you may say so to these gentlemen to whom I am writing.

Be pleased to send me the little book containing the Stanzas of the Spouse, which I think Sister Francisca of the Mother of God will by this time have copied for me. Remember to present my humble respect to Señor Gonzalo Muñoz, to whom I do not write for fear of being troublesome to him, and because your Reverence will make known to him that which I have here related to you.

Dearest Daughter in Christ,

Your Servant,

Brother JOHN OF THE CROSS.

LETTER OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS  
TO MOTHER LEONORA OF ST. GABRIEL  
A DISCALCED CARMELITE NUN.

*Written from Segovia, on the 8th of July, 1589, offering spiritual advice to a nun.*

JESUS Be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

Your letter was very welcome to me, and I thank God that He has been pleased to make use of you in this foundation, which His Majesty has done for your greater profit; for the more He is minded to give us, the more does he enlarge our desires, even leaving us empty that there may be the more space for Him to fill with blessings. You shall be well repaid for those which, for the love of your Sisters, you now leave behind you in Seville; for the immense benefits of God can only be received and contained by empty and solitary hearts; and, therefore, because He has a special love for you, our Lord will have you to be alone for the desire He has to be your only companion. Your Reverence must therefore apply your mind to Him alone, and in Him alone content yourself, that in Him you may find all consolation. And true it is that even were the soul in Heaven, if the will were not bent to love it, the soul would be still unsatisfied. So is it with God – though He be ever with us – if our heart be attached to other things and not fixed on Him alone. I well believe that those in Seville will be very lonely without your Reverence. But, perhaps, you have already done all the good there which you were intended to do, and God wills that you should now work here, for this will be one of our principal foundations.

To this end, I pray your Reverence to afford all the assistance you can to the Mother Prioress, with great love and union of heart in all things; though I know that I have no need to enforce this upon one of such experience in religion, and so well instructed in all that is needful for such foundations. For this reason, we chose your Reverence for this work from among many less well fitted for it. Be pleased to remember me particularly to Sister Mary of the Visitation, and to Sister Joanna of St. Gabriel, to whom I return thanks for her letter.

May God give your Reverence His Holy Spirit.

Brother JOHN OF THE CROSS.

## PERSONAL QUIET TIME SUGGESTIONS

Read all four letters slowly and prayerfully. Then, you may wish to follow one or some of the following suggestions for further reflection:

### 1. Lectio Divina

Choose one of the letters, maybe one that you have found intriguing, amusing, or disturbing. Read it a few times, slowly, allowing it to speak to you, letting particular words or sentences stand out, entering into a conversation with the author, putting yourself in the place of the recipient of the letter – as if it had been addressed to you. Do this reading prayerfully, asking God to speak to you, through these words, to teach you something new about yourself or about the world around you, or even about God.

### 2. Reflective Study

You may wish to choose one or more letters and consider some of the following questions: What does it say about the world in which Teresa and John lived? What does it say about their own life struggles? What/who kept them going through the difficulties they faced? Is there a perennial pearl of wisdom you can take from it to help you in your own life? You may find it helpful to write down your thoughts / reflections / prayers (e.g. journaling), or you may feel prompted to get creative, to write a poem, to draw or paint a picture, etc.

### 3. Write a Letter

If you feel drawn to a particular letter, you may choose to write a letter to Teresa or John, in response to their letter – from the perspective of the original recipient. Feel free to be as honest, candid and open as you wish.