

Saint Teresa of Ávila

Part 1

1515-1582

PURGATORY

Saint Teresa of Ávila, the great Spanish mystic and reformer of the Carmelites, had numerous visions of the Souls of Purgatory, as she recounted in her *Autobiography*. “In my Monastery of the Visitation in Ávila lived a nun, who was dead for about a day and a half and had been a creature full of the love of God and a true servant of the Lord. While a sister was reading in the choir a lesson of the Office of the Dead that was recited for the deceased nun, I was near her to recite the short verse after the lesson together with her. During the lesson I saw what seemed to me the soul of the deceased as if rising from the deep and flying towards Heaven.

“One day I was in the church of a Jesuit college and there I experienced strong physical and spiritual pains, which still affect me often. I suffered so much that I could not even collect a thought. A brother of this college had died the previous night, and I entrusted him to God as best as I could and later participated in the Holy Mass that a Father of the Society of Jesus celebrated for him. During the Sacred Celebration I was immersed in profound meditation in which I saw the soul of the deceased man accompanied by the Lord ascending towards Heaven, completely surrounded by glory. I considered a truly extraordinary grace the fact that the Lord Himself in His infinite Majesty would lead him to Heaven.

“Another brother of our Order, Father Didaco of Saint Matthias (who had been for quite a long time confessor at the Monastery of the Visitation in

Ávila), a zealous servant of God was very ill in bed. At that time while I was assisting at the Holy Mass I fell again in profound meditation, during which I saw this priest that died and without touching Purgatory he rose directly towards Heaven. Later I learned that he died indeed at the hour when I had the vision.

“I was taken by surprise that he had not had to minimally touch Purgatory. However, it was explained to me later, that he had been a religious very faithful to his vows, for that he benefited from the Sabbatine privilege, thus he had no need of Purgatory. I don't know why I was told this but I think that in this way I was meant to understand that it is not the wearing of the habit that fulfills the religious man and that just being a religious is not enough to obtain the benefit which is promised to him by his religious condition which is a state of higher perfection.”

Saint Teresa of Jesus was born in Ávila (Spain) on March 28, 1515 from a noble and religious family. At the age of 21 she became a Carmelite of the Monastery of the Incarnation in that city. She promoted and brought to completion, through conflicts and suffering, the Reform of the Order giving birth to the Discalced Carmelites. On August 24, 1562 she founded in Ávila her first monastery, dedicated to Saint Joseph. In 1568 the Teresian Reform was extended also to the Fathers, after the encounter of the Saint with Saint John of the Cross. Teresa died in Alba de Tormes on October 15, 1582.

