

Foundations: Chapters 9–12

Introduction

Teresa began the foundation of Malagon during the last days of her stay in Salamanca in 1573. At the beginning of 1574 she moved to Alba and Segovia where she established the new discalced Carmelite way of life on 18th March. Here, at the beginning of April, she incorporated a good number of the Carmelite nuns of Pastrana, after abandoning that foundation because of the interference of the Princess of Eboli. Teresa was going to have almost six months of peace at Segovia before returning to the Incarnation to end her term there as Prioress. So it was in the tranquility of the new Carmel of Segovia where she took up the thread of the *Foundations*, describing her efforts to found the monastery of Valladolid.

It is interesting to note that it was in the monastery of Malagon (probably on the 9th February 1570) where Teresa had the inspiration for the first time to write the book of the *Foundations*:

Our Lord said ‘... that I should write about the foundation of these houses. I thought how in regard to the house at Medina I never understood anything in a way that I could write of its foundation. He told me that that was all the more reason to write of it since He wanted it to be seen that the Medina foundation had been miraculous. He means that He alone founded that house, since it had seemed absolutely impossible to found. And as a result I decided to write about the founding of these houses.’

For reflection

1. In speaking of possessions and legacies, which we hold onto and desire with such eagerness, Teresa centres her attention and ours on what Jesus Christ possessed and what He left to us: works, sufferings and dishonour. ‘Courage, then, my daughters; this must be our badge if we are to inherit His Kingdom. Not with rest, not with favours, not with honours, not with riches will that which He bought with so much blood be gained.’ (F. 10,11)

- *How do we respond to this invitation of Teresa in our personal lives? How far does our life resemble Jesus’ life or are we, rather, looking for our own convenience?*

2. Using elegance finely charged with irony Teresa remonstrates with ‘the knights of Jesus Christ and the princes of the Church’ who were seeking and even justifying a road different from the way of the Cross: ‘O illustrious people! Open your eyes for the love of God; behold that the true knights of Jesus Christ and the princes of the Church, a St. Peter and a St. Paul, did not follow the road you follow. Do you think perhaps there will be a new road for you? Do not believe it.’ (F. 10,11)

- *How might our own actions suggest that there is a better road for us than the one Jesus took?*

3. In the margin of her account of the ups and downs of the vocation of Casilda de Padilla, Teresa leaves us some pearls concerning how religious life (and any form of Christian life) should be: ‘...to serve Him with the greatest happiness, humility and detachment from everything.’ (F. 11,10)

- *To what extent is humility valued, or disparaged, nowadays? In what way can it help us to see things with greater objectivity – exactly as they are?*

4. Teresa writes of other values which should grace the lives of a community in the heart of the Church: ‘a temperament and intelligence so agreeable...’ (F. 11,11) ‘modest happiness that well revealed the inner joy of her soul’ (F. 12,1) ‘Never did she complain about anything, or of any Sister’ (F. 12,1) ‘The smallest thing when done for the love of God is priceless.’ (F. 12,6) ‘It may be that I will say something about them so that those who are a bit lukewarm will be strengthened and that we may all praise the Lord who in this way lets His magnificent riches show forth in us weak, little women.’ (F. 12,10).

- *In what ways do we cultivate these and other values in our daily relationships within the heart of our community, our family and the Church?*