

Teresa of avila



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“ But now ask the beasts and they will teach you; And birds of the air, they will tell you; Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea will explain to you” ----- The Book of Job, 12, 7-8. Secrets that all the God’s creations know by inner instincts are what the civilized man forgets as he gets entangled in worldly pleasures as well as greed and selfishness. Saints are special among this human race, because they try to teach the humans of the forgotten lessons of their own existence. One such holy soul was Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). Avila is a province of the Central Western Spain. Teresa Sanchez Cepeda Davila y Ahumada was born as the third child of Don Alonso Sanchez de Cepada by his second wife Dona Beatriz Davila Y Ahumada. She was born on 28th March 1515. Early in her young age Theresa was caught between the strict but honest father and romantic mother. She was caught between detached discipline and over attachment to worldiness. Though she lead an ordinary life , the sense of sin never left her, as she was drawn more and more into the worldly things like flirting and rebelling. At the age of 16, just to discipline her, her father had to send her to the Augustinian nun’s convent for education. Though she hated it first, she found the place less strict than her father; but due to illness she had to leave the place after 18 months. When the time came to choose between marriage and religious life, she chose the later because that was the only safe place for a person tempted by sin. She left for the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation at Avila were she was almost a loner. She started to learn and practice mental prayer to keep Jesus Christ always with her. But there were enough distractions in the convent. Nuns from the rich families were more attentive to their physical appearance than to their inner spiritual life. The prestige of a nun was measured not by piety but by money. The problem

with Teresa was that she was very good looking and attractive. She was conscious of it and in her moments of weakness liked it too. During these weak moments it was easy for her to slip into the worldly thoughts and forget God. It was during this slip down to worldly thoughts again, that she fell ill with Malaria. She recovered but got paralyzed for three years. After that she was never well. These dark experiences forced her to stop prayers all together. For years she did not pray at all, thinking herself to be a wicked sinner who never deserved the love of God. It was at the age of 41 that a priest convinced her to go back to prayers. But she was distracted by what she herself called “ that mad man whom none can tie down”. She was going through the trails of God. And she falls back to her mental prayer where she is alone with God who loves her. She had strange experiences during these lonely prayers where she felt like her body being lifted up from the floor. But these experiences made her a laughing stock and the authorities of the church were convinced that she was in union not with the God but with the devil. There were hostilities and gossips about her. She fought her way up alone to reach God in spite of all these hostilities. She withdrew slowly from all worldly things which included even her friends. Slowly the conviction dawned upon her that the ambience around the Carmelite order that made every one slip into worldly things had to be refined. At the age of 43 she decided to found a new order which insisted on contemplative prayers and rituals. The new order insisted on simple life and voluntary poverty so that there will be no more distractions in the way to attain the love of God. The whole orthodoxy was in arms against her. But her conviction was so strong that she went her own way and founded a convent of her own, the convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Primitive Rule of St. Joseph, at Avila in

August 1562. She preached that spiritual life was an attitude that came through love of God and not one that can be imposed. One can go wrong; but then one shall not punish one self but must try to change oneself. Discarding the opposition to her reformist ideas, she traveled across Spain to found new convents. Orthodoxy could not hold on to their unrelenting attitudes as her following started to grow. The austerities practiced by the members of her order attracted the believers. She was liberating the Carmelite order from the grip of money and worldly temptations. Soon her ideas spread all over Spain and beyond into different parts of Europe. She died in October 1582. She was canonized in 1622 . The founder of Discalced Carmelites, St. Teresa is the patron saint of headache sufferers. Her symbol is a heart, an arrow, and a book. St. Teresa is one who was caught in between love for God and temptations of worldly pleasures. She went through these inner tortures of perilous existence and set on a lonely journey of enquiry. “ I beg every one who shall read this story of my life to keep in mind how wicked it has been and how among the saints who converted to God I have never found one in whom I can have any comfort.” (The life of Saint Teresa of Avila, by herself. PP31) She fought the temptations of the worldly sins and selected the path of poverty. She writes in her book “ The Way of Perfection”, written as a guide to the sisters of her own order: “ When I have least I am most free from anxiety, and God knows that, as far as I can tell, it grieves me far more when I am well cared for than I am in want” (The Way of Perfection, PP10) She was trying to discover her ‘ self’ through her sufferings.” Though that is greater stupidity, our own is incomparably greater, if we make no attempt to discover who we are.” (Interior Castle, PP5). She internalized spirituality and made it contemplative. Her writings on <https://assignbuster.com/teresa-of-avila/>

mystical theology were unique, and she was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970 for her writings, one of the two women to be honored in this way till then. ----- Sources quoted: 1) The Open Bible, The New King James Version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, New York, 1983 2) The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself, Tran. David Lewis, Digireads. com publishing, 2009 3) The Way of Perfection, St. Teresa of Avila, Tran. Benedictines of Stanbrook , Cosimo inc., 2007 4) Interior Castle, St. Teresa of Avilia, Trans. E Allison Peers, wilder publication, 2008