

Book of the Foundations

Guidelines and questions for chapters 13 to 19

Chapters 13–14

Reading guidelines

The idea to found the Discalced Friars arose in the Spring of 1567, when Teresa already had the permission of the General to found more monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns. Her argument was clear: 'I was thinking about how necessary it would be if monasteries of nuns were to be founded that there be friars observing the same rule' (F.2,5). On 10th August 1567 she received the patent from the Father General to found two houses of 'contemplative friars' in Castile. It took more than a year to put it into effect.

It's worthwhile to reread the encounter between the Saint and the Father General as she tells it in Foundations Ch. 2, above all in numbers 4-6 in which they speak about the founding of a house for friars. She was quickly able to count on persons, but the house only materialised ten months later and it was in a deplorable condition. Humanly speaking, the origin of the Discalced Friars was that insecure. However, the protagonist wasn't Teresa but God.

For reflection

1. Teresa didn't take fright at the few qualities the house had to commend it. She brought these considerations before Father Antonio: 'If he would have courage to stay there for a while, I was certain God would soon provide a remedy, and that the important thing was to begin...I told him he should realize that neither the Provincial at that time nor the previous one would give permission ...if we were seen living in a well-established house...And I pointed out that in that little place and house the foundation would not attract attention. God had given him more courage than He had given me...' (F.13,4)

When the time comes for following the plans of God, what counts more with us – the daring of our confidence in Him or our fear of the snags which could arise?

2. Teresa's style of life is marked by the presence of the Master in the midst of the community and by a series of human values which strengthen fraternity and our sense of belonging to the group: '...there was an opportunity to teach Fr. Fray John of the Cross about our way of life so that he would have a clear understanding of everything, whether it concerned mortification or the style of both our community life and the recreation we have together. The recreation is taken with such moderation...' (F.13,5)

What values characterize our style of fraternity?

The example of the Sisters was John of the Cross' best school. How can we offer such a school, in the heart of the Church and of society?

3. The foundation of Duruelo was accomplished in a poor little place (Teresa no longer remembers its name), in a dilapidated house, without the money to repair it, with only the bare necessities of life, but the two first Discalced friars experienced an interior joy which transformed everything into an opportunity for fidelity and self-giving.

On these lines, consider how Teresa's reflection and exhortation in F.14,4 can be applied to our own times: 'Oh, God help me! What little these buildings and exterior comforts do interiorly. Out of love for Him, I ask you, my Sisters and Fathers, that you never fail to be very moderate in this matter of large and magnificent houses. Let us keep before us our true founders, those holy fathers from whom we descend, for we know that by means of that path of poverty and humility they now enjoy God.'

What is your response to F.14,5 where Teresa again brings up one of the virtues she holds as fundamental: determination?

4. Evangelisation forms part of the Teresian charism: 'They used to go to preach in many of the neighbouring towns where people were left without any instruction in Christian doctrine. On this account also I rejoiced that the house had been founded there.' (F.14,8)

In what way can our apostolate, whether as lay people or as religious, identify with the charism of Teresa?

Chapters 15–16

Reading guidelines

The foundation of Toledo was Teresa's fifth, this word having the double sense of 'fifth' and 'a place of rest' in the meaning of the Spanish: 'quinta'. A wealthy Toledan merchant, Martin Ramirez, through the offices of a Jesuit, Pablo Hernandez, decided to endow the foundation of a new Carmel. The merchant didn't belong to the nobility and they distanced themselves from him: '...that family was not from the nobility' (F. 15,15). This was a great setback in a city where ancestry and lineage played a determinant role. The difficulties increased when the merchant died and his next of kin became so demanding that the foundation seemed an impossibility. Without the one (the nobles) or the other (Martin's relations) but solely with the help of young Andrada, who was 'by no means rich but very poor' (F.15,6), Teresa succeeded in obtaining a house and the permission of the Governor, although not of the Council, and, buying two paintings with the little money she had and with only two straw mattresses and a blanket, she founded the monastery of Toledo.

There were further difficulties: 'I have always esteemed virtue more than lineage. But so much was said to the ecclesiastical administrator that he gave me the licence under the condition that I make the foundation as in other places' (F 15,15). She allowed the 'illustrious and the grandees' to have patronage of the chapel and no more. Dealings were difficult between lineage and virtue!

For reflection

1. 'The designs of God' (F. 15,8) Read the whole paragraph and consider whether, according to Teresa's thinking, the ways of the Lord are our ways.

How able are we to find traces of God's action in our encounter with those who are poor?

Is the presence of God easier for us to sense when means are sufficient and more secure?

2. 'It will seem impossible that, though we had stayed in the house of that lady (Dona Luisa de la Cerda) who loved me so much, we had to enter a new foundation in so much poverty. I don't know the reason, except that God wanted us to experience the good that lies in this virtue. I did not ask for help, because I don't like to be a bother; and she perhaps wasn't aware' (F. 15,13).

What is your reaction to Teresa's judgment of Dona Luisa's 'non-awareness'?

How can we progress in our attitude of 'benevolence' when faced with the thoughtlessness of others?

3. 'The experience was very good for us; the interior consolation and happiness we felt were so great that I often think about what the Lord keeps stored up within the virtues. It seems to me this lack we experienced was the cause of a sweet contemplation' (F. 15,14).

What is our own experience of the contrast between having practically nothing and yet being full of consolation and joy?

4. Teresa has much to say on this subject and she asserts that when they began to be provided with everything she felt sadness and the pain of seeing that they were losing the riches of being poor. Her nuns felt this, too. 'From then on my desire to be very poor increased. And I felt freedom in having so little esteem for temporal goods, for the lack of these goods brings an increase of interior good. Certainly, such a lack carries in its wake another kind of fulness and tranquillity' (F. 15,15).

To what extent can this way of thinking be applied to our social context nowadays?

What does Teresa want to say to us with those last words: 'fulness and tranquillity'?

CHAPTERS 17 – 19

Reading guidelines

1. The Princess and the hermit (F. 17):

Episodes like those concerning Casilda de Padilla, Dona Luisa de la Cerda, the Princess of Eboli (which surpasses all of them), the Duchess of Alba etc. show us the trouble they gave Teresa and they throw great light on those magisterial pages where she speaks of honour and of poverty.

In reading this chapter we shouldn't lose sight of the courage displayed by Teresa and her nuns on closing that foundation, fleeing to Segovia in the middle of the night. It was an act which was costly to Teresa, for the Princess in vengeance denounced the Book of her 'Life' to the Inquisition.

From the providential meeting between Teresa and Fr. Mariano in Madrid the foundation of the friars in Pastrana took its origin. It was nothing like the foundation of Duruelo; it was far from Teresa's kind of humanism, with its extraordinary characters like Baltasar Nieto, its first Superior (F. 17,15), but this foundation, in spite of everything, soon experienced a great surge of vocations (Fr Gracian being one of them).

At this point in her account Teresa overflows with enthusiasm about her 'discovery', appraising Fr Mariano's life and that of his companion (nos. 7-8), although we shouldn't pass over the fine irony she uses in relating how this Father was '*very surprised*' (lit. frightened) at having been convinced so quickly to take the discalced habit '*especially through the instrumentality of a woman...*' (F. 17,9).

2. Gentleness and discretion (F. 18).

When Teresa was beginning to write about the foundation of Salamanca she interrupted the narrative twice; the first and less lengthy of the two allows us to contemplate the backdrop, so to speak, of the foundations: the great difficulties in travelling (F. 18,4), her bad health and the intervention of God giving her the strength she needed. We see, shining before our eyes, the star which guided Teresa of Jesus on her hard and exhausting road, '*...I considered for whose service it (the foundation) was made and reflected that in that house the Lord would be praised and the Blessed Sacrament reserved.*' (F. 18,5) 2

In the second interruption 'some things are coming to my mind now about this matter of mortification...so, lest I forget, I'll mention them now' (F. 18,6) and she begins her series of counsels to prioresses, which we could summarise as follows:

- Discretion (prudence) and gentleness in the government of the community (or, as we would say today, in the co-ordination or animation of the group).
- No extravagance in penances and mortification, and this she wrote in an age so inclined to the 'penances of beasts' in the phrase of St. John of the Cross, such as came to pass in the Friars' novitiate at Pastrana, or those of respected exemplars like Catalina de Cardona, whose portrait Teresa painted sweetly and playfully in F 28.
- It is enough to fulfil the Rule and Constitutions, although we know that 'there are many degrees of observance' (CV 4,1).
- And then a golden rule: 'We must be very careful about this. If for ourselves something would be harsh, we must not order others to do it.' (F. 18,6), which is certainly pure Gospel...

3. 'May it please His Majesty that through His infinite goodness and mercy we will not be in want of the eternal dwelling places' (F. 19).

Thus she concludes this chapter 19, dedicated to the foundation of Salamanca, which was especially laborious due to the difficulties raised by the vendor of the house, Pedro de la Banda, and those difficulties would continue for many years.

To words sufficiently expressive of her weariness in the seemingly endless struggle are linked words in praise of the community, *'for they bear everything happily'* (F. 19,12).

On beginning the new chapter Teresa justifies her long digression in the previous chapter and yet ends with one more counsel to the prioresses. (F. 19,1)

- She continues, or rather, virtually begins, the account of the foundation of Salamanca and introduces Nicolas Gutierrez, the 'guardian angel' of the foundation, to us. (19,2 and 9) Notice again how those who always helped Teresa were her merchant friends, the equivalent of today's middle class, in contrast to the aristocrats and great lords.
- She adds a note of humour in the amusing incident of the students and the frightened nun (F. 19, 3-6).
- The experience taught everyone including Teresa in this foundation, that it isn't necessary in order to take possession to reserve the Blessed Sacrament and for the first time she did not do so. Of course she was far from imagining that the nuns would be three years without It (F. 19,6), but, at last, on 28th September 1573 they moved to a new house and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed with all solemnity, though not without some opposition (F. 19, 9-10).

We shouldn't forget, finally, that it was precisely on this foundation at Salamanca, which was so difficult for her, that she would begin to write the Book of the Foundations (25.8.1573).

For reflection

1. 'My ways are not your ways' (Isaiah 55:8).

In the light of the Word of God re-read F. 17, 1-2: Teresa is satisfied at having finished the foundation of Toledo, thinking *'that I could enjoy some time with the Lord at Pentecost'* (F.17,1), and then the unexpected happened...

How does it affect you when your plans are altered by factors, people, events independently of yourself?

When your 'programmed' life, the relaxation which is your right after work, your personal choices are upset by unexpected events which you can't control, how do you react?

2. Consider carefully F. 18,4-5 and F. 19,6. We see reflected here what her foundations cost Teresa

What is our/your responsibility in continuing her work?

3. Read F. 18,8 where Teresa states that mortification is necessary for obtaining freedom of soul.

How would you fit a healthy mortification, going contrary to your pleasure, into ordinary life?

4. In F. 18,9 Teresa writes: *'The prioress must not then think that she understands a soul at once. Let her leave this to God...Rather, the prioress should strive to guide each nun along the way His Majesty is leading that one.'* (F. 18,9)

Do we act in this way in our communities, parochial groups, in the family?

How can we allow for the mystery of God in the other person?