

Aylesford retreat 25-29 July 2022

The Book of Her Life: A Deeper Understanding

Fr Matt Blake ocd

Monday pm 1st talk

Introduction

The Book of her Life is not the term Teresa used, she did not give the book a title, but it is very appropriate. For Teresa, “Life” was her *soul*. Handing over the book, she told her confessor, Garcia de Toledo, “Nevertheless, do what you think best and remember you are obliged to one who has so entrusted her soul to you.” (Life, Epilogue,2) For Teresa, her soul was the complete person in the fulness of her humanity.

The *Life* is the story of Teresa becoming alive, growing into the fulness of life. Teresa’s life can be considered in two parts, before 1562 (47 years) and after 1562 (20 years). In December 1562, she moved to the new community, San José, and began a new life. Before that, she felt her life was not lived to the full. She sensed that there should be more to life. In chapter 8:12, she wrote, “I wanted to live”. She wanted to live life to the full, for the life she was living was not life-giving. To others, she was living a very good life as a nun; people came to her for spiritual direction (including her father), she was outgoing and had a strong, attractive personality. If she walked into this room now, you would know about it.

In 1559, the Inquisitor General published the Index of prohibited books. This affected Teresa greatly as Teresa was a woman of words – she loved reading and writing. She needed to read and to write to understand herself. The Lord came to her help – the Lord said to her, ‘Do not be sad, for I shall give you a living book.’ In chapter 23, her new life begins, Jesus Christ lives in her. Her relationship with Jesus Christ brings her to life, enables her to live the fulness of life.

The visit of Alonso Maldonado, the Franciscan missionary in Mexico, in 1566, expanded her vision of the Church and the world. Previously her focus was on the King and the authority of the Church, but after meeting Alonso, her perspective changed to the world and the universal Church.

In 1567, Teresa so impressed the Carmelite General, Juan Bautista Rubeo, with her new foundation of San José during his visit to Avila that he gave her permission to found new communities. From 1567 to 1582, her work of foundations grew and grew. She founded another 16 foundations besides San José, and the last one was in Burgos.

She finished writing the second edition of the book of her *Life* in 1565; wrote both editions of the *Way of Perfection* between 1566 and early 1567, and lastly wrote the *Interior Castle* in 1577.

During 1576 to 1578, she met with the greatest opposition and persecution from all sides – the Church, the Inquisition, the Carmelite Order, the Government and influential people.

Despite the obstacles and the challenges Teresa emerged as a foundress, a writer, a teacher, a saint and a Doctor of the Church. She is an example of one who lived the fulness of life in the sense of Christian maturity.

This retreat will give us the tools for entering into a deeper understanding of the book, to profit from the treasure that Teresa is giving us. How will it do this? By setting it in the context of Teresa’s life.