

Teresa – I am a Daughter of the Church

Fr Matt 15/12/15

Poem No.2: *I am yours and born for you*
What is your plan for me?

The reality of Teresa's life and how she functioned in the Church, and her place in the Church today from her death and how we view it, both point to and are derived from Teresa's living of her Christianity, her vows, her prayer and her mysticism. They all point to her expression of what it means to be "Church".

Before we look at this, however, there are two critical differences between Teresa's time and our time which we must understand.

- 1) In Teresa's time, church and state were inseparable. The King was the leader of the Church in Spain. The pope was head of State and a political figure. Therefore Lutherism was a threat to the world order, a global threat because religion was not a separate issue. Church was connected to every aspect of society.
- 2) There was no separation of prayer and religious practices from Church; there was no individual piety. Each person was *being* Church.

Teresa grew up in a very Catholic family, which was in the throes of a law suit (when she was aged five) to prove they were of "pure" Castilian blood. This was essential to be fully Church.

As a nun, the Church was controlling but it was also opening up with regard to printing books and translating these into the vernacular. Teresa always sought approval for her writings from the best spiritual directors and theologians. With the Inquisition (set up to search out Jewish apostates) and the Council of Trent came more restrictions and the index of books, but Teresa always had insight into the reality of the Church and negotiated her way with political acumen.

Obedience was essential: God was always working through the Church, therefore she never did anything without permission (even if it seemed to go against what Jesus had told her to do).

If we had to choose when Teresa should be born, we would not choose 16th century Spain! There were three fundamental difficulties for Teresa in her time: she was a woman, she was a woman of prayer and she was from a *converso* family (which everybody knew).

Woman did not exist in the church's hierarchy, and women of prayer were especially suspect. Teresa is writing for readers who understand where she is coming from, readers who were *very* different to us.

Looking at Teresa's introduction to the Way of Perfection, both editions were written before Teresa had any concept of further foundations. She was writing about St José only. What they were doing in her new, small community was an authentic way of *living Church*, and this had an enormous impact on the Church.

Initially reluctant to leave the comfort of her spacious cell at the Incarnation, the first four years in St José have broadened her vision and deepened her motives. Already she has an insight into the power of what is taking place. "I might remedy such evil" she says, regarding the Lutherans, not I might help, or pray for help, but that she would *remedy* the evil (as she saw it from her limited information about the Lutherans). For Teresa and all Catholics, there was no salvation outside the Church, so "saving souls" was required to save those who were baptised Christians and therefore still part of the Church.

Teresa faces her limits in following through her desires. She says, "I will do the little that I can", which she saw as great, the answer to all the Church's difficulties, to all the problems in the world. For her, Christ's "few friends should be good ones". In her convent, status, purity of blood etc were not relevant: "Here, all must be friends".

The quality of human relationships with the community and with Christ was what was important. Christ and the twelve apostles became Church, so would her community. That's what will change the world!

Jesus is Church (St Paul), so friends of Jesus are friends of the Church. Teresa wanted to "follow the evangelical councils as well as I could" which meant living a vocation where limits no longer exist. The *quality* of living a vocation gives it its effectiveness, requiring total *trust* in God, "He never fails them".

The Church's pain is Teresa's pain; the Church's struggle is her struggle. She has a personal identification with Jesus and with His Church.

The Eucharist is church. (Teresa believes that the Lutherans are attacking the Eucharist) she is addressing her nuns but even more, addressing the people around her in the Church.

For her, the world and the Church are the same, the Church sustains the world. So if the Church is under threat, the whole world is under threat, because Jesus Christ is the salvation of humanity.

Two things blew apart Teresa's view of the Church:

- 1) Northern Europe reformation
- 2) Alonso Maldonado (see *Foundations*) telling her about the "loss of souls" in the Indies (South America).

She must do something! Saving the souls through prayer was more powerful than all the services on site! While Teresa is envious of those who can *do* something in the Indies, she sees the depth and power of prayer.

The calling and desires that God gives her are those of the Church: "You will see great things" (*Foundations*). The foundations lead to a whole new way of living Church.

Teresa expressed what it means to be Church through her writings and her foundations: through friendship, community, living one's vocation *where* one is. But this is in a breadth of vision that embraces the whole world, in a Church that sustains the whole world. This is the vision that Teresa was growing into.

On November 18th 1572, Teresa enters into a spiritual marriage with Jesus. This is comparable to the Church as the bride in the Book of the Apocalypse. Teresa enters into the Church's highest vocation: to be a spouse of the Lamb. This is a Church living under persecution.