

Foundations: Chapter 22

Reading guidelines

1. The difficulties (F. 22, 1-3).

A long and dangerous journey (which included the Pass of Despenaperros, the Sierra Morena and the high crags of Gualdinierno) undertaken in winter by a woman of sixty in fragile health.

A little town, which seemed in no way to have the urban surroundings Teresa preferred, and “*the income (was) small*” (F. 22,19), and it was so far from her native Avila, her reference point for all distances.

The opposition of Father Pedro Fernandez to any new foundations, which was overcome, curiously enough, by another major difficulty: the fact that Beas belonged to the Commandery of the Order of Knights of Santiago and the assumption that the necessary licence would be impossible to obtain from them.

On this occasion one difficulty ironed out another and Philip II himself granted the licence when he learned that the future monastery “*was for the discalced Carmelite nuns*” (F. 22,18). “*Sometimes I think about this*”, Teresa was to write, “*and how that which our Lord wants, even though we may not want it, comes about in such a way that, without our being aware, we are the instruments of it. In this case the instrument was Fr. Maestro Fray Pedro Fernandez.*” (F. 22,3)

2. The Exemplary History of Dona Catalina Godinez

As happened in the account of the foundation of Alba de Tormes, here also the biography of the foundresses, or rather of one of them, Dona Catalina, occupies almost the whole of the chapter (nos. 4-24). The Saint appears to be writing from an outline before her, edited perhaps by another hand, where are found recorded the most outstanding events of so extraordinary a story.

The family life of a young lady from the rural nobility, her conversion and change of life, the religious practices of the young Catalina, now “*dressed in a simple manner*”, the opposition of her parents, her illnesses and her dauntless battle to found a monastery, etc.

In the narrative we come across such picturesque moments as when the din of the demon’s fury drove the good Don Sancho from his bed, bent on investigation, sword in hand and half dressed. Students of Medicine could certainly profit from that little “*treatise*”, which Teresa wrote in this chapter, on the History of Medicine in the XVIth century: There’s a whole catalogue of illnesses making up a strange and heterogeneous clinical picture, along with the remedies applied (cuppings, more than 500 blood-lettings, cauteries etc.) which give credence to the physical strength of the delicate Dona Catalina who was able to survive in spite of everything.

The key to this singular and entertaining history is found in n. 6, with Teresa writing: “*so that all might praise Him*”, God, for sure, the true protagonist of this book. It is for this reason that we find in n. 7 a fine and deeply moving prayer, which rests on the Gospel: “*May You be blessed for ever and ever, my God, for within a moment You undo a soul and remake it...*”

3. The “Actual” History of the foundation (F. 22, 19-20)

Hardly two numbers are dedicated to the account of the actual founding, so brief that they simply refer to the year, 1575, when the nuns led by Teresa arrived “at the beginning of Lent”, allude to the joy of the town, give the name of the new monastery (St. Joseph of the Saviour, founded on the feast of St Matthias) and make a brief mention of the two sisters, the foundresses, receiving the habit, this final detail being embellished with new praises of the matchless Catalina.

And finally! “*What His Majesty desires cannot be set aside*” (F. 22,19).

4. Appendix (F. 22, 21-24)

The account appears to be finished at the final phrase of n. 20, but then Teresa adds a kind of appendix in which we find:

- The “supernatural” way in which Catalina came to know of the existence of the Order of Carmel and of its Rule, as also her meeting the Jesuit who told her he “*knew of these monasteries*” (F. 22, 21-22).
- New details of the miraculous cure (F. 22,23).
- Virtues of Dona Catalina, now become Catalina of Jesus, of whom Teresa powerfully draws a magisterial portrait: “*I don’t know anything about this soul that does not have to do with her trying to be more pleasing to God, and all the nuns feel the same way.*” (F. 22, 24) The proof that none of this, as the Saint said, “*was exaggerated*” exists in the testimony left by Gracian in his *Peregrination of Anastasio*, dialogue 16, for there he wrote that *Mother Catalina is one of the greatest saints of the Order*. Further, St. John of the Cross himself undertook, in his own hand, the transcription of the text of her autobiography.
- And now, really, we have the Amen!

For reflection, revision of life, intercession, thanksgiving, contemplation...

1. Read and meditate on the conversion of Catalina Godinez before the crucifix (F. 22, 5-6), comparing it with “Life” 9, 1-3, where Teresa of Jesus tells us of her own conversion before an image of the gravely lacerated Christ.

2. This could be a good moment for thinking about and sharing with the group your encounter with Jesus and how it changed your life.

3. Pray with Teresa, bless and praise our Lord. (F. 22, 7).

4. “*For I hold that our Lord never grants so great a favour to a person without allowing others to share in it as well*” (F. 22, 9).

This interdependence of the members of the Mystical Body of Christ is noted many times by Teresa of Jesus in various texts (4M 3, 10; 5M 4, 6, among others). None of us goes alone by the chosen way; for good or ill we draw others after us.

- Are we conscious of this truth, which is a very serious responsibility?
- Perhaps the post-modern individualism, from which we all suffer, leads us to forget the power of Christian witness. St. Paul said that we must all carry one another’s burdens.
- Could we also come to be “contaminated”, almost without realising it, with the secularist tendency, which sets out to impose itself, according to which faith has to be lived within private and strictly personal boundaries?
- Is my prayer, more or less, subtly confined to my own intimate interests?

Remember that *“This is the reason for prayer... the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works”* (7M 4,6).

- Pray once again with Teresa using “Accounts of Conscience” (CC) 1 n. 14, i.e. “Spiritual Testimonies” (in Kavanaugh- Rodriguez) 1 no.14; and “Life” 16, 6-7. Share your prayer on these texts with the community, parish or prayer groups etc.

5. Lastly an entreaty:

“May it please His Majesty that the extraordinary generosity He has shown this miserable sinner serve to encourage and rouse those who read this to abandon completely everything for God.” (“Life” 21,12).

Foundations: Chapters 23 – 24

Reading guidelines

1. Teresa had her reasons for devoting a whole chapter to Fr. Jerome Gracian. She considered it necessary to recall the historical circumstances surrounding her first meeting with him because of the situation which the communities of the Discalced were then experiencing. In the Order's need the Providence of God came to their aid by choosing out and sending the right person to carry the Reform forward (F. 23,3, 12-13; 24, 1-2). It is for this reason that Gracian enters fully into the account, and also because it was he, as the new Apostolic Commissary for Andalusia, who ordered Teresa (contrary to her own desires and plans: 24,4) to undertake the foundation in Seville.

2. It must be recorded as historical background that, in addition to the uncertainties and needs proper to every foundation, the Seville foundation experienced the lack of agreement and the discontent of the Calced, who protested at the foundation of houses for the Discalced in Andalusia whether of nuns or of friars (F. 24, 20); there was the misunderstanding and failure of communication between the General, Rubeo, and Mother Teresa, and then the opposition of the Bishop, Fernando de Rojas and Sandoval, to the founding of a new monastery in poverty (F. 24, 15-16). Teresa had to contend with all that in this foundation.

For reflection, revision of life, intercession, thanksgiving, contemplation...

1. Read carefully the description Teresa gives of Gracian, noting his spiritual mettle. Consider his human qualities and of his virtues. She praises highly all that she admires. All is the gift of the Lord, the work which God has done in Gracian for the good of the Order. What would we highlight from all that? What seems to us to be the more important and necessary? What qualities in its members, for the enrichment and communication of the charism we have inherited, does the Order need today in the context of our society and of our pastoral situations.

2. In the account of Gracian's vocation the Providence of God was primary at every moment. He has His plans and brings them to completion by factors and circumstances which seem to be coincidental. They escaped the awareness and intentions first and foremost of Gracian himself: "O wisdom and power of God! How impossible for us to flee from His will!" (F. 23,3). How would we understand this statement of Teresa's today? Do we discover the workings of divine Providence in our vocation, in our following of Jesus, in the discerning of His will in our life? Which intermediaries do we value? Which do we feel we lack?

3. Teresa dedicates various paragraphs to the presence and instrumentality of the Virgin Mary (F. 23, 1, 4-6, 8, 13). In the light of those statements reflect on your own marian experience.

4. The account of Gracian's qualities as superior (F. 23, 7. 10) and the description of the personality and conduct of the Prior of Pastrana (23, 9) allow for the discovery of two forms of government; something of the "ideal" and a disfigurement of the ideal. Compare these with your experience in exercising authority (in those responsibilities which concern you) or in your response to the authority which others exercise as a service in the Church.

5. After writing those long paragraphs, making known Gracian's history and personal matters, Teresa justifies herself (F. 23, 11-13). She has her reasons for recalling it. Reflect on the importance of memory and the importance of recording it. Compare this with our way of understanding, living and transmitting the charism which we have received from God, whatever our state in life. This reflection could bring us to a moment of prayer and praise.

6. In a spirit of faith Teresa gave way to the requirements of the new Apostolic Commissary for Andalusia. She gave up the foundation of Caravaca (contrary to her opinion, personal revelations and desires) and obeyed Gracian (F. 24,4). Reflect on your difficulties in discerning the will of God, in recognising and obeying God through His intermediaries.

7. St. Teresa writes about the foundations telling of the difficulties and adventures of the journeys. She does this with a good deal of freshness and humour (F. 24,5ff). There is no lack of anecdotes drawn from those eight days on the road to Seville. Added to them was the "more than a month" of waiting for the licence to make the foundation, a gruelling delay endured with patience in the most arduous days of the Andalusian summer. However Teresa never loses the opportunity of drawing out some lesson from an experience, of making some application to the spiritual life, or of finding some motivation there for discovering the Providence and Presence of God Himself. Think about what you have discovered in these two chapters. Use for meditation and sharing: "His Majesty always gives trials in a compassionate way" (F. 24,11).

8. Teresa speaks highly of the Sisters she took with her as foundresses. The tried virtue of her nuns inspired her with confidence and strength. Are we receptive to and grateful for the qualities and virtues of others? Do we feel ourselves to be sustained, edified, stimulated by the members of the community? Do we know how to share ideals, tasks and responsibilities, having confidence in the others? What attitudes and virtues should we cultivate more, so as to live our fraternity and mutual confidence in our community or family projects?