

To Madre Ana de Jesús, Lobera - Granada: 30th May 1582. No. 451 [433]

This letter has been traditionally called the “terrible letter”. Teresa is in Burgos, having just made her last foundation: chapter 31 of **Foundations** gives us a flavour of Teresa’s difficulties. A few days before writing this letter her new Carmel was flooded! Teresa has received misleading and incomplete information about the Carmel of Granada which at this time was being founded by Ana de Jesus with the help of John of the Cross. As a result she writes this letter.

Some of the wisdom of this letter:

- “Our worth will not come from having many monasteries but in having nuns in them who are saints.”
- “The more you suffer from this the more you will serve Him.”
- “For any kind of attachment, even to the superior, is very foreign to the spirit of disalced nuns, nor would they ever grow spiritually in this way.”
- “Oh true spirit of obedience, how when seeing someone in the place of God no repugnance is felt towards loving her!”
- “For the sake of God I beg you to take care to inspire souls to be brides of the Crucified, that they crucify themselves by renouncing their own will and the pursuit of childish trifles.”
- “God desires my disalced nuns to be very humble, obedient and submissive, for all these other kinds of courage mark the beginning of many imperfections without these virtues.”
- “I truly believe that you will have many sufferings in the beginning. Do not be surprised, for a work as great as this cannot be done without them since, as they say, the recompense will be great.”
- “May God give us light – for without that, there is little one can be sure of – and watch over your reverence, Amen.”

People:

We meet a number of people in this letter, the most famous one being **John of the Cross**. He is in Granada not just to help the nuns with the foundation but also to take up his new position of prior of the friars Monastery of Los Martires, just outside Granada, where he is destined to live for the next six years. John will hold many positions of government in the Order during these six years and he will also write all his major writings. This letter gives us an opportunity to reflect on three key relationships in John’s life.

Carmelite Nuns: For the next six years John will help, guide and support this Carmel of Granada not just spiritually but also in many practical ways. Among the other Carmels that were particularly close to John we could name Beas, Caravaca, Malaga, Seville and Segovia. These communities play an essential role in refining the wisdom we find in John’s writings.

Ana de Jesus: Ana is without any doubt one of the greatest figures in the whole history of the Carmelite Order. Teresa has just completed her last foundation but Ana’s work is just beginning and will take her to Madrid [a foundation Teresa wanted to make], then on to France and Flanders. She will also play an important part in getting Teresa’s writings published. She and John first meet when

Ana accompanies Teresa on a visit to Mancera in 1570. During the years in Beas and now in Granada their friendship grows and matures and it is at her request that John writes his commentary on the **Spiritual Canticle**.

Dona Ana de Mercado y Penalosa: The nuns are guests in Ana's house and Teresa writes: *"I would like to have words to thank her for the good she has done us. She will not lose anything with the Lord, which is what matters."* Ana is a native of Segovia but moved to Granada when she was widowed to be near her brother who was a judge in that city. It is for her that John writes the **Living Flame**.

For reflection/discussion

1. The importance of **friendship**: human and divine. This is an important theme in Teresa's writings. The experience of John and his two female friends bear strong testimony to this powerful connection.
2. Teresa expresses her **feelings** very strongly in this letter. Sometimes we suppress our feelings when we should express them or think that "holy" people should not express negative or painful feelings.
3. Teresa is coming to the end of her life and work. Is she struggling to "let go" of power and control?