

Secular Carmelite Retreat 9th-13th July 2012 Boars Hill Oxford

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Talk 1 (*Foundations is the practical application of what Teresa writes about in the Interior Castle...transcriber's summary note*)

Prayer: Help us to appreciate more deeply what it means to be a Carmelite and to live our vocation with generosity, peace and joy.

Teresa's book of The Foundations has been the focus during the year and will be so in this retreat. We are at a particular stage in our preparation for the Centenary of Teresa's birth, 1515. We have journeyed through the book of her Life and the Way of Perfection. Next year we will read the Interior Castle. These are not just books, but Teresa handing on her spirit; the charism God gave her to us. We listen to Teresa teaching us to be Carmelites, handing on to us the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift she discovered, lived and committed all her life to, while nurturing and establishing it in all sorts of ways.

In the book of Life Teresa includes San Jose in Avila, shortly after she writes the Way of Perfection in two editions. However we tend to speak of it as one book. She writes this for her sisters in San Hosea, at their request because in their experience of her first community they need help with prayer. We wind the clock forward to 1573. Teresa is in Salamanca where she has already made a Foundation. She has also founded two communities of Friars and is asked to write about these Foundations just as she wrote about San Hosea ten years previously. Her book of Life is with the Inquisition. She recounts the events from 1568 and then continues to add to the book till the end of her life.

The Foundations is the last fifteen years of Teresa's life. It is important to know that she is now at a different stage of her life. When she wrote the Way of Perfection and her Life she was in San Jose, Avila. When she found this Community there was no intention of finding any more. Here she focused on community life as an end in itself. Now Teresa is travelling around the country engaged in an enormous work of founding. In the midst of this about two-thirds of the way through the 15 years, 1577, she write the Interior Castle within two months, a very short span. It is a time of crisis as her work of founding has been halted and there is a possibility that it will be brought to an end.

The Interior Castle is an account of the ‘interior castle’, the place where God dwells. It is a journey into the very depths, the place of union with God, the Seventh Dwelling place. We need to think of these two books as coming together. While Teresa is founding; her inner life is the Interior Castle. The work of founding is at the surface of the interior castle. Ultimately that’s what she is most interested in, but for her it is one and the same work. One is not in conflict with the other. The God of the 7th dwelling place is the God of the pots and pans; the one she meets along the roads of Spain, the places she founds, the practical problems she meets, setting up the communities, sorting out finances, dealing with rogues, the God in the Blessed Sacrament. All this work is at the service of this same God. The God who gives Teresa the wisdom, the depth and the peace we find in the Interior Castle.

To get a sense of Teresa’s inner life while founding refer to the book of the Interior Castle. The Fifth Dwelling place: Ch 1: paragraph 2, *“So I say now all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. **This call explains our origin; we are the descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel who in such great solitude and contempt for the world sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation that we are speaking about.*** (read to the end of the paragraph).”

This passage is almost like something she would write about in the book of Foundations. She addresses her sisters, the communities she has founded. The call to prayer and contemplation is for all Carmelites in the true sense of Carmel. This is foremost in her mind while Founding, it’s not about buildings or dotting Spain with Carmels. (Fr Matt reread paragraph 2; the words in bold, see above). So that was the purpose of the original Carmelites on Mt. Carmel. It is our purpose also today. We are descendants of the hermits, Teresa and all her companions and the reform down the centuries. The call to prayer and contemplation explains our **origins**, a term Teresa uses. It implies or explains why Teresa is making these foundations. It is the purpose of these foundations, to fulfil the call of God and particularly the Carmelite call, which for Teresa is to prayer and contemplation. We find in the above paragraph how attentive Teresa is to this, she says *‘Yet few of us dispose ourselves to this.’* The externals proceed well; the structures, setting up the Carmels, programmes, timetables, formation etc., but it is the **virtues** that are necessary for arriving at Prayer and contemplation in the 5th dwelling place. Teresa says **‘The truth is that the treasure lies within’**. This is what she wants to explain to the

occupants of the Foundations. The real work is not in setting up the Foundations, which is enormous but the real work is discovering the treasure within, which is in all of us.

In the Seventh Dwelling place Teresa at the heights/depths of her spiritual life states *'All it's concern (that is the soul) is taken with how to please him more and how and where it will show him the love it bears him. This is the reason for prayer my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage the birth of good works, good works.'* Out of prayer comes good works. Teresa sees what is happening in the Carmels, the fruit of prayer is good works, pleasing the Lord, doing God's will. There is no contradiction between prayer and work. The two are one. They are reality. *'This is what I want us to strive for my sisters. Let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment, but so as to have the strength to serve. Let us refuse to take an unfamiliar path as we will get lost at the most opportune time. It would indeed be novel to think having these favours from God through a path other than the one our Saviour took and the one followed by all his saints. May the thought never enter our mind. Believe me Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have him always present and not host him badly by failing to give him something to eat. How would Mary always at his feet provide him with food if her sister did not help her. His food is that in everything possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise him always.'* So the purpose of prayer is to serve, to live the kind of life that Jesus lived, to save souls.

The Foundations is the practical application of what Teresa writes about in the Interior Castle, particularly the fifth and sixth dwelling places. How in practise does one live these dwelling places, Teresa answers it in the book of Foundations. The latter dwelling places are lived by serving the Lord in whatever way the Lord calls us to serve. In Chapter 5 of Foundations where Teresa speaks of the substance of perfect prayer she said it is to love and to suffer, to do whatever it is the Lord calls one to do at whatever time or whatever circumstance, where ever that maybe. This is the spirit in which Teresa lives. Teresa does the work in a spirit of service. She lives out what she writes about in the last three dwelling places particularly the seventh one. Martha and Mary become one. The life of service and prayer are one. Living in conformity with Jesus Christ and total service of the Church, a holiness that is real, that is lived and practical, that doing good and brings about good works; a holiness that serves God and builds up the kingdom of God in the world. A holiness that is completely free of any kind of self service, or self indulgence or selfish ambition or self preference, a holiness that only wants one thing and that is to the will of God, that the Lord be served. To this end

Teresa writes in the **Prologue** of the Foundations where she sets out what she is going to write about: (Refer to **paragraph 3**) She tells us the importance of what she is going to write about in the Foundations. It requires the same care and attention as writing the Interior Castle where God works in the interior of the soul. When Teresa writes about the great work God is doing in the Foundations, the writing is an act of worship, an act of praise of God recounting the works of God, it requires the same attention the same reverence. It is not writing about her work, or her achievements, but what God is doing and that gives it so much more importance. This is a work of God, a gift of God and those who read it must read it in this spirit. God is revealing himself, showing his greatness through this work. The need of truthfulness, even the smallest detail is important because it is the work of God and it would be a great offense to God in some way not to be attentive. Teresa writes with reverence for God's work, it's a listening, an honouring, a work of prayer, like painting a great work of God, like an icon, written on paper, so God maybe praised and more people drawn to God. So others may see the great gifts God has granted to the Order of Carmel.

Talk 2 (What it means to be a Foundress)

Foundations is a book of founding; the work of a Foundress. It is a special gift of the Holy Spirit. In St. Peter's Basilica there are various statues of Founders and Foundresses; people whom the Church publicly recognised had this gift. Just as the Church beatifies and canonises an individual as a sign of public recognition of their sanctity; or declares them to be a martyr or doctor of the church, as they have a particular charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit, that is at the service of the Church or a gift from God that belongs to the whole Church; so we have certain individuals who have the gift of Founder or Foundress. Teresa is one of these. When we read the book of Foundations we listen to Teresa speaking to us of her direct living out the call of God. It is her inside view of what it is to found and to partake in this work. So the book of Foundations is a rather privileged book.

To help understand this better Fr. Matt read out a text from St. John of the Cross; he knows no other, where this gift of God is so clearly described. Refer to Commentary Stanza 2. The Living Flame of Love paragraph 10,11and 12 (The Collected works of St. John of the Cross by K.Kavanaugh OCD O.Rodriguez OCD pg661, copied below).

John is at the point of the Flame where he is describing these rare or mystical gifts of God; this light which the Lord gives in the very depths of the soul of the person. Last evening we looked at the seventh dwelling place, that place which Teresa tells us God dwells and God dwells within every person. Here St. John of the Cross speaks about what God does there in the very depths of the person and how these gifts flow out in various ways. Now he comes to the point of describing, or attempting to describe this particular gift that Founders and Foundresses have. *Paragraph 10, 'Who can fittingly speak of this intimate point of the wound,'* (John has been speaking before paragraph 10 of this wound that God gives within the person, something like Teresa's transverberation or similar gifts that various saints have; the sense that God has wounded them. Sometimes this may even become a physical wound like the stigmata. But for the most part St. John says it is a spiritual wound. There's a sense of being struck by the spirit of God.) Continues para. 10 *'which seems to make its mark in the middle of the heart of the spirit, there where the soul experiences the excellence of the delight? The soul feels that the point is like a tiny mustard seed, very much alive and enkindled, sending into its surroundings a living and enkindled fire of love. The fire is issuing from the substance and power of that living point, which contains the substance and power of the herb, is felt to be subtly diffused through all the spiritual and substantial veins of the soul in the measure of the soul's power and strength. The soul feels its ardour strengthen and increase and its love become so refined in this ardour that seemingly there flow seas of loving fire within it, reaching to the heights and depths of the earthly and heavenly spheres, imbuing all with love. It seems to it that the entire universe is a sea of love in which it is engulfed, for conscious of the living point or centre of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love.*

11. There is nothing else to say about the soul's enjoyment here except that it realizes how appropriately the kingdom of heaven was compared in the Gospel to a grain of mustard seed that, by reason of its intense heat, grows into a large tree, despite its being so small (Mt.13:31-32).For the soul beholds itself converted into the immense fire of love that emanates from that enkindled point at the heart of the spirit.

12. Few persons have reached these heights. Some have however, especially those whose virtue and spirit were to be diffused among their children. With respect to the first fruits of the spirit, God accords to founders wealth and value commensurate with the greater or the lesser following they will have in their doctrine and spirituality.

John here explains what he has written, before he tells us what he means. He explains the gift, but then tells us that the people he is speaking about are Founders. There may be others who have this gift, but it is mainly founders and people who will have a great influence on others; people whose doctrine and spirituality will be diffused amongst others. If doctrine and spirituality are to be diffused amongst others then it has come from this place John is trying to describe, this place within. John attempts to describe this **intimate** point of the wound which God makes (it is not the whole wound).....'**which seems to make its mark in the heart of the spirit'**.... trying to get into the very centre of a person which St. John of the Cross tells us in the Living Flame is God. The very deepest centre, the very heart of the centre of a person' soul is God. Everything that John is speaking about in the Living Flame happens there, at that very deepest centre point. John has all kinds of expressions in the Living Flame to try to express this, but words fail him here. Images fail him. He can't capture it. The whole imagery and words of the Living Flame try to express what happened in the deepest centre of the person which Teresa calls the seventh dwelling place. What Founders and Foundresses 'do' flows from this inner centum, the place where God dwells. John uses very interesting terminology; (para 10)... '**flow seas of loving fire,'**..... flowing from this place. Next '**the entire universe is a sea of love** '... the universe is **engulfed** in this sea of love that flows from that centre point in the person '**for conscious of the living point or centre of love within itself it's unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love.**' So from the deepest place within, this love flows so far it's impossible to catch sight of the boundaries of it. The entire earthly, heavenly spheres are contained within it. He uses an image from the Gospel which has been traditionally used by the Church. It's not original that John uses it, it has been used again and again by the Church in trying to describe this gift. It is the **mustard seed**. John puts his own slant on it. Yes Jesus said it is the tiniest seed that can grow to be the largest shrub. Yet contained within it, is this seed. Look at a seed you can't see a big plant. How can it be possible? But contained in there is everything which will eventually grow, and produce more seeds etc. These people come to see and understand the truth, through the grace of God the the importance of this image of the mustard seed.

If we are trying to define what this gift is, the first thing we would have to begin with that even God, to use John's term wounds the person. God does something extraordinary, something unique, at the heart, of the centre of this person, the very depths of this person. Reading Teresa's story in the book of her Life, her spiritual testimony, one is so aware of God's presence in her life. What is also apparent is her

struggle to understand that presence. What's happening within Teresa is something unique, but very real. It is a lifetime journey to understand what is happening within her. There will be given times in her life, where Teresa will speak about certain manifestations of that certain particular experience. But more fundamentally than those, the sense that God is present and that everything Teresa does is a work of God. To use a phrase from John of the Cross, that this **point**, this centre within, is **very much alive and enkindled** by the God within. The way St. John of the Cross describes it is that the person is so completely taken over by this fire, by this love, that what this something is within this person, is so powerful, uncontrollable and is constantly going out, constantly doing things, constant action. John continues. The gift is given to these people but is for others to be **diffused amongst their** followers. So what these people have is not just a gift, but the gift of passing this on to others, diffusing it among others and the gift grows and develops among others life fire. Fire will catch fire in another place and somebody else will catch fire and then it will spread and it will grow. It is love, the fire of love, therefore an act of love. When we read the foundations we are reading a description of an act of love. This is a work of love. Love for God, love for the Church, love for all the people who are involved in this work. When we read some of Teresa's descriptions, the way she writes about some of the people involved shows the love and the reverence for these people. This is a work that is bigger than the individual involved, bigger than Teresa. Teresa has a sense of this which she can't explain. Therefore she's always telling us this is a work of God. This hit her very strongly in the first foundation she describes here in Medina del Campo. So many things go wrong yet it bears fruit and she is convinced that it is God who has made this foundation. She holds on to this right on to the end of her life.

So reading the book of Foundations in the light of what St. John of the Cross tells us; we are reading the external expression of what is happening at the deepest centre of Teresa. Or because of this wound that God puts there, because of the fire that he ignites there, the light that he gives there, this is what Teresa must set in motion. This is a work she is merely at the beginning of, a gift of God. This is going to flow and evolve and grow and continues today well right into the future. This is the nature of a gift of God, it's not taken back, it does not die. There are no limits to it, the world and everyone, because it is much bigger than we can comprehend. John tells us here, (para11) **'For the soul beholds itself converted into the immense fire of love that emanates from that enkindled point at the heart of the spirit.'** For the soul beholds itself, What John says here and applying it to Teresa, she has some sense of this, though one must not

interpret that she knows how it will work out or what will happen. Teresa had a sense at the beginning of Foundations when God said to her 'Wait a little daughter and you will see great things happen.' At various times she receives direct assurances from God. So there is a consciousness in her that God is with her and sustaining her. This is why Foundations is as important for her as the Interior Castle. It is as important as the seventh or any other dwelling place as this is where the work is coming from. Teresa does not plan the work of founding, it is not a human project. No human project can last 500years. Human projects don't operate in this way, empires fade, human constructs do not have this power to influence, to grow, or develop and evolve in the way that a gift of the Holy Spirit does.

In the next talk we will see, the way Teresa writes the book of Foundations confirms this for us, because she is not just writing about buildings, or places, or systems, or structures. Though she writes about all these things, they are at the service of, but cannot be contained in any of these. In the Book of Foundations we find many different forms of writing and many different ways of expressing this gift; from the account of the Founding, to the lives of individual people, advice about prayer, to difficulties encountered, etc., etc. This Spirit, this gift of God has no boundaries. All is consumed, the fire reaches everywhere and there is a sense that it's out of control. It's powerful, it's energy, no matter what happens, nothing is going to stop it. The gift of God which John of the Cross describes here in the Living Flame cannot be stopped. The person has no power over it. Every possible force will try to stop Teresa founding, but nothing will because the work is being done with a stronger force. This power of the Holy Spirit at the deepest centre of a human person is the most powerful force on earth. This is what Teresa is describing in Foundations. When the Holy Spirit strikes, the very centre of a human being, calls them to do something, and that person responds with a generosity, with self-sacrifice then something truly great takes place, something that nothing else can stop.

Lord we give thanks for this gift, may this gift of the Holy Spirit bear great fruit in us who are Teresa's daughters and sons, in this time, in this place at this moment of our lives and at this moment of history.

Talk 3 Teresa's relationship with the Superior General

The Book of the Foundations at this time a community is being canonically established is a sign of growth, the work of the Holy Spirit continues. In St John of the Cross's words, that fire is still strong and effective. The grace that God gave to Teresa is still bearing fruit in our church. Teresa sets out in this book to tell the story, in a number of different ways. One way is through the lives of people, the relationships she has with various people, so we hear about a vast range. It would be interesting to pick out some of them and look at them, but we haven't time. This afternoon we will look at Teresa's relationship with the Superior General. This was a very important relationship for Teresa. This relationship is fundamental to being Carmelite, for friars, nuns and secular Carmelites. It is the most fundamental of all relationship that Teresa writes about in this book.

Chapter 27 is a very important chapter for it is a reflection on everything else she has written, as she thought it was the end of the book. Here she is reflecting upon her relationship with the superior general.

Ch 27, 19: You have heard...I love him much.

This is written in the context of Teresa being instructed by the Superior General not to make any more foundations. She is to choose a Carmel and go and live there. She goes on to say that the General has been misinformed, and she is right. But the point here is: it is her relationship with the Superior General that makes what she is doing Carmelite. The Superior is the centre of unity of the Order. It is no different today. As we see in the Decree of Canonical Establishment, he establishes every secular Carmelite community throughout the world. It is that relationship with the Superior General that makes the community Carmelite, which makes it part of the Order, he is the point of unity for the entire Order, seculars, nuns and friars. Teresa is so aware of the importance of that; even when things are going very badly, nothing shakes her loyalty to the General that. And her desire for the unity of the Order is seen even towards the end of her life, when she sends two friars to Rome to reassure him of her loyalty to him and the loyalty of the disclalced Carmelites to him.

Everything she does is about building up the Order. She is writing (in the Prologue) about all that the Lord has done for the Order. It is for the building up of the Order; only in that way is it a service of the Church. It is not a service of the Church if it is *Teresa's* project, if it breaks the union of the Order, if it goes off in another direction. It is a service of the Church if it is faithful to the true spirit of the Order, and the General is the guarantee of that.

She wrote to the General about every foundation that she made, and he replied. There was constant communication and encouragement. In chapter 27 she is writing about

the personal relationship she had. They came to know each other well, got on well, shared a vision, and wanted the same thing.

In the beginning of the book, Teresa writes about that visit of the General to Avila. The most important part of the meeting was at a personal level: she was able to open up her soul to him, and he to her. the meeting was also important for the reform of the Order, because his support was more than she could ever have imagined. It confirmed that what she was doing was faithful to the true spirit of the Order.

Ch 2: account of this visit:

2, 1: Our generals always reside in Rome and none ever came to Spain... The Lord did better than I had imagined.

When the Lord intervenes, nothing is impossible. For her The Superior General's coming was a sign of God's intervention; it would bear great fruit. She felt a bit cut off, fearful. These two fears she mentions are very real and go to the very heart of how she understood herself and the reform of the Order.

It was not so much because she was against the Monastery of the Incarnation, but because of the Rule. It was very important for her to be authentically Carmelite, but it was impossible in a community of 150 nuns. (There were 180 in fact.)

This Superior general was one of the great Generals of the Order, discreet and learned: a great servant of the Lord. This is Teresa's assessment of a person: everything is about the service of the Lord. He got on well with her.

2, 2: When he arrived at Avila...order me to leave St Joseph's.

The community was under the Bishop who had the right of Visitation. As he gave that right to the Superior General, she could welcome him in. Her openness with him was as with God, whatever the consequences; it is an act of great trust in God and the Church. He represented the Church.

He affirms what she is doing, personally and from the point of view of the Order. It is a very important moment for Teresa. Now she has the personal approval, the Church approval and Carmelite approval. She knows that what she has founded is truly Carmelite. Teresa emphasises this in the next paragraph:

2, 3: He rejoiced to see our manner of life...were great.

He was a General who wanted to reform the Order, to promote the true spirit of the Order. Teresa knew this. If her reform was truly authentic, he would recognise the authenticity. There is something in the nature of vocation that a Carmelite knows a Carmelite, there is something there in the identity, and we identify with each other. We have something profound in common. She had confidence that he who had the authentic spirit of the Order would see that this reform was truly Carmelite. He would recognise a *portrait of the origins of the Order*: the true spirit of the Order being expressed in the lived experience of the community. She wanted him to see this and that is what he saw – it was more important than what she told him. What he saw was the true spirit of the Order being lived there.

He gives her what she wants and more than she wants. The word “desires” we find often in this book. The General expresses his desire that this work should expand and develop. He understood her desire to help souls come closer to God. This is the mission of the Order and of the Church.

2, 4: “When these desires come....aside”

She has the letters and permissions for the nuns (and friars soon also) but nothing else. She is totally dependent on the Lord.

2, 6: Here I was...I set to work.

What happened in those meetings is really what brought about the Discalced Carmelites, and sustained it. She would build up an ongoing personal relationship with the General. More importantly it would guarantee the work of the Order, of the Church and of God. An Order that would serve the Church, relying on God’s grace and help, because this is a call of God.

This afternoon we have a canonical establishment. We can reflect on our own calling to be Carmelites, our own desires, what being part of the Order means to us. The spirit of unity and mission symbolised and guaranteed by that relationship with the Superior General; so it is with us.

14, 6: The following Lent....but weep.

This is an indication of how busy Teresa is, at the beginning of Lent she is on her way to her second visit to Duruelo. Happiness is what she would look for in any community; you can almost recognise a Carmelite community by happiness. Teresa’s communities were happy places. She set out to make them happy places. This is a sign for Teresa that this friars’ foundation was authentic: Fr Antonio’s great happiness.

Another sign that Teresa uses when making her foundations, a confirmation that it is right, is the effect it has on the local people. She trusts their instinct, that they will be drawn to her communities, with devotion. Her communities were places of prayer, where people were uplifted by coming. So also was the effect on these merchants. Even when things were going badly, she would say “but there were still some people coming to pray, who were prepared to offer help.” It was a sign that it was a work of God, that it would bear fruit even if people were trying to stop it, even if there was all sorts of opposition. The work of God never stops. Duruelo is having a great effect.

14, 8: They used to go and preach....consolation when I learned of it.

The mission, the building up of the Church, the purpose of these foundations is being fulfilled. It might be in a very small way, in a rural place, but it is where God wants the beginning to happen. Teresa is always conscious of mission.

So she is pleased with what she sees, but not a hundred percent pleased:

14, 12: I spoke of some things... that I may be able to serve somehow for the many things I owe him.

Teresa had a niggling doubt that would grow into something much bigger as the years went on. The historic background is important. There was a lot of emphasis being put on reform in the Church. But like any reform, people would take it too far. One of the ways was a rigorous penitence, ascetical practices, external manifestations that for Teresa were a distraction or at times damaging. Some of the friars were a bit excessive, but not John of the Cross. It is not the Teresian spirit.

By the standards of the time, for penitential practices in the Church were very common, the religious life of Teresa and John of the Cross would be considered to be mild. These were not the essential, they always cautioned against any excess. John began with the trust and the charism she had passed on. Later she would move John and put him in charge at Pastrana to moderate the excessive penitential practices there. For now, we can see how important he is to her in the passing-on of the charism, and how she has entrusted to him her vision and her spirit; also how she approves of how he is proceeding.

We pick up in this book something of the depth of their relationship and the oneness of mind and heart that there is between Teresa and John of the Cross.

Talk 4: Contemplation in a busy life

In this morning's Gospel, Peter asks Jesus, "What about us Lord? What is in it for us? What are we going to get out of it?" It is a natural question. Here are these men who have become the followers of Jesus, the twelve of them, his closest collaborators. They are listening to him talking about the Kingdom of God, and all the things that are going to come about. "We are the closest to him, we are the first to whatever we are getting to; there must be something in this for us." Jesus tended to reprimand them when they asked questions like this. Curiously, he didn't today, he did something else. He raised the bar high: "When the Kingdom of God comes, you will be judging the twelve tribes of Israel". The Kingdom of God is not here yet, but in the meantime whoever leaves this world and follows Jesus will be paid a hundred-fold in this world *and* the next.

Teresa faces the same problem with her communities. "What is the purpose of this? What do we get? How do we judge if we are good or successful at this?" in the fifth chapter of the *Interior Castle* Teresa tells us that everyone who comes to Carmel is called to prayer and contemplation. That is the purpose of the life. Even that has to be understood properly or we miss the point of life in Carmel. Teresa tackles this question head-on in chapter five of the *Foundations*, the major chapter of her parenthesis of chapters five to eight that deals with this question. The central purpose of the life must be understood. The vocation has to be understood.

At the end of chapter four, she sets the scene for us:

4, 8: The favours the Lord plants in this house are so many....who receive this latter favour.

She is telling us that everyone is called to prayer and contemplation and that in these houses the Lord is very clearly giving his gifts. Yes, one has to be careful in discerning things like visions and raptures, but sometimes it is clear that these are from the Lord. She will, later on, give the signs for discernment. But here it is clear that the Lord is gifting these people, that they are reaching the heights of contemplation.

As Teresa says in the fifth, sixth and seventh mansions of the *Interior Castle*, there is no doubt that all of her communities are virtually in this place. But Teresa is not going to pat them on the back and tell them, "You are doing wonderfully well, congratulations". No, the very success can be misleading. That is the point Teresa wants to make: these are favours from God. It doesn't mean that these people are better than others, or that they are better at prayer and contemplation. These favours are not signs of success. They are not rewards. God doesn't have an award system; that is not how God works. But it is tempting for us as human beings to depict God in that way. We think, "If I am

really good at that, I'll have visions and ecstasy, and prayer of quiet and of union. That is the purpose of it, I will be wonderfully successful". Teresa says, no, that is absolutely not what it is about.

4, 8: Well do I understand.....have a purpose.

To have these gifts does not mean one is holy, or that in not having them a person is not holy. She is only pointing them out because of what she wants to say.

In chapter five she tells us what perfect prayer consists of. It is interesting as an illustration she does not hold up any of these nuns she is addressing, even less so her friars. The model of perfect prayer that she holds up is that of lay people. Not any lay people, but those whose ties are such that they do not have the time, space or leisure for prayer and contemplation that the nuns or friars have. These people lead busy lives through their obligations and responsibilities, yet God leads them to the highest of prayer. Teresa takes us through a subtle argument, because if we push it too far, we would ask "What is the point of setting up these Carmels if the real holiness is out there somewhere?" She is really saying, "You, sisters, have to learn from the experience of people whose lives are very different to yours, from people who do not have the luxury and privileges that you have".

Being placed in a special atmosphere or place or system is not a fast track towards holiness. The real work must be done where one is. The circumstances or situation do not do the work for us. In chapter four Teresa tells us of the common situation of *blaming the times*. "If only I was in a different time or circumstances, or if this or that was different, then of course I would be up there in the heights." It is always *God's* time.

In chapter five Teresa wants to deal with the substance of perfect prayer. It is not about thinking, it is not about having wonderful wisdom or reflections or having some well worked out system. It consists in loving. *All souls are capable of loving.* (5, 2) They may not be capable of this or that, but progress *does not lie in thinking much but in loving much.* (*ibid*)

5, 3: How does one acquire this love? By being determined to work and to suffer ...occasion arises.

The *Book of Her Foundations* is the fulfilment of that. In her work of founding she is working and suffering as and when needed. It means leaving the life that she really wants to live and going out to work and to suffer as the occasion demands.

Teresa did not go out as an escape – we can escape into work, into sorting the whole world, we can escape into some big project which is really only building my kingdom. That is not what Teresa is speaking about. The two necessary criteria are obedience and charity. By obedience Teresa means all the responsibilities that a person has in their lives. These could mean one's occupation, one's family life, spouse, parents and obligations to people: big or small things. Often the most challenging are the small things. The demands of charity occur when love is needed.

Otherwise, she says, prayer can become selfish. There can be a natural resistance in contemplative people, a reluctance to leave my silence, the beautifully constructed and ordered life that I think is necessary for me to be close to God, to pray. On the one hand Teresa is putting into place this ordered way of life by setting up these Carmels, on the other hand, this very system carries with it these dangers. We can be misled by the very thing that we most need. The systems of silence and solitude and prayer are at the service of something else.

The problem, as she said, is self love. We allow so much self love to creep in. *This self love does not allow one to understand what it is to please ourselves rather than God (5, 4).*

We can want to be Carmelites to please ourselves rather than God. We can want vocations, times of prayer or retreats to please ourselves. Inherent human selfishness can creep into even the most spiritual of things.

5, 4 For clearly...it is more pleasing for the body to be resting without work and for the soul to be receiving delight .

It can be a wonderful way of life, this prayer. It can be very pleasing at a natural human level if I'm so busy with prayer that I can't do any work. Teresa met plenty of people who held that view. Plenty of them tried to enter her Carmels.

5, 5: It would be a distressing thing....one path.

We are limiting God. Here we find *it is in the kitchen, the Lord walks among the pots and pans. (5, 8)*

If it is in the kitchen that we must be then so be it. We find God most where we are meant to be.

5, 10: The highest perfection.... to please the one we love.

Here she is talking about love, how love grows through truly seeking God's will. By not allowing this self love, one's own will to creep in, even in something as spiritual as one's prayer life.

She also deals in chapter five with another temptation that creeps in very easily: we can want to be in solitude, away from people and the struggle of human life: “so that I won’t commit sin, so that I’ll be better. If I am away from this sinful world, cut myself off somewhere, I’ll be a better person.” Teresa gives a definite no to that also, that does not work either. That is another illusion into which we fall.

5, 15: Here, my daughters is where love will be seen...incomparably greater.

Love grows where temptation is, not where love is safe and life is going to be just as I would like it to be, where no-one is going to disturb me...This is a form of selfishness.

Teresa says, all through her writings, that temptations, faults and sins are a good thing to have. Even in the heights of prayer, the Lord won’t take away all our temptations or our weaknesses. We need them, she says, otherwise pride takes over, which is far worse. For self knowledge we need these falls, these difficulties, these struggles. To see ourselves as we truly are.

Teresa’s communities are not gathering of the perfect. They are not some safe haven keeping one free of temptation and sin, some easier road to God. All the same subtle temptations creep in because we are there ourselves. We don’t get away from ourselves. Just as God is within us, so also all the faults and failings are within me. They are not out there somewhere, they are inside me.

5, 15: We must desire solitude...means of knowing this.

This desire is constantly present. It is not so much the solitude but the *desire* for it that is a good thing in itself. One of the signs of the dark night described by St John of the Cross is a pull towards quiet, silence and solitude, even if for some people the time for it is impossible or very limited. The desire to have time with God is there.

As Teresa describes In the last page of *the Interior Castle*, the test of prayer is the people we are living with, the ones we are closest to. They will tell you how well you are doing or not! Not the people at the other end of the world, who are great to get on with.

That is her test that will tell you how well you are doing in prayer: how well are you getting on with the people around you, with whom you have to deal every day? This is where patience and humility and all of this is learned.

This is what community life is for Teresa. A bit later on she will tell St John of the Cross about this life, and how important recreation is – because that is where the sisters’ faults are seen. It is in the human relationships that we see our faults. That is essential for spiritual growth.

5, 16: I consider one day of humble self knowledge...better than many days of prayer...when off in some corner.

When prayer is confined to a corner, it is not prayer. We are praying all the time, everywhere, that is what a person of prayer is. Not what takes place in times of solitude but in the whole experience of life. We need to balance both all the time:

5, 16: I do realise that the prayer in the midst of preoccupations..alone enjoying You.
One little sigh, when we haven't the chance to be alone, is enough. That is all we need. One little word, one little thought, one raising of the heart to God.

5, 17: Let souls believe me....for ever.

One short time of good works can be a better preparation for prayer than many hours of reflection. Whatever the Lord is asking us at a particular time: that is what we do. We have that sense of being available, being open.

A few weeks ago, i was doing a few days on John of the Cross. They asked me what his mission, his apostolate was. This was hard to say because he did all sorts of things. We looked through various stages of his life: sometimes he was teaching, sometimes he was involved in formation of the novices. Other times he was going around parishes, preaching, helping victims of the plague, helping in the hospital, setting up schools for the poor, building houses, or raising funds. The house was falling down in Granada so he had to build a house. There was a plague so he would spend all his time helping people who were suffering from it. In Avila there were children who had no education so he sets up a school for them. Whatever the need was, that is what he did. There was no particular specialisation.

This is what Teresa is telling us about the life of the Christian. This is what prayer consists of, this love that she is talking about, to do whatever the will of God is. It might be something small, in the kitchen among the pots and pans: he is there. It might be some great work that needs to be done: he is there.

This understanding that Teresa is giving here is essential for the living of the vocation. I find that people often cut out chapter five and use it for teaching about prayer. But we miss the point if we take it out of this context. We must understand what she is really getting at here. Essentially she is talking about the vocation, the right understanding of the vocation. Specifically, she is telling us how to live the vocation in the right way.

Talk 5: Teresa's relationship with St John of the Cross

This relationship is tied in closely with the foundations of the friars. For Teresa, the reform of the friars was as important as that of the sisters. They were the one project, inseparable one from the other. Teresa had more difficulty convincing the General – not that he was against the reform of the friars, quite the opposite, that was why he came to Spain. That was the time in the Church when there was a big push for the reform of the Orders. Unlike other countries in Europe, there had been no reform in Spain, but the General found so many problems among the friars that he was afraid to attempt reform. Not at that time, for fear that it would cause division - which it did turn out to cause. Initially he did not give permission, but she wrote to him. He then gave permission subject to two conditions, both of which he was certain could never be fulfilled. She needed the permission of the current provincial and of the previous provincial. Even if she could convince one, certainly both would not agree! The General underestimated Teresa! When she had that permission, *everything* was going to happen, because it was the work of God.

Central to the story is John of the Cross. She told us about her first meeting (3, 17) with this young man. She had just made the foundation at Medina, where his mother and brother were currently living. John's family moved to Medina when he was ten or eleven. He joined the Carmelites and after his novitiate there, was sent to Salamanca to study and had another year to do. He was in Medina for the summer holidays. His companion gave a good account of him:

3, 17: A little later...as long as he wouldn't have to wait long.

There is a lot more being said there than just what Teresa's words tell us. Here is this Carmelite, just ordained, returning to his home town. He has taken the decision to leave the Order and join the Carthusians. That wasn't just an idea; it is even known which monastery he was going to. It was a definite decision, even though it would appear that nobody in his community at Salamanca knew about it. There is a certain mystery about it, but it was his decision. What his reasons might be, we don't know. Also very unclear were his reasons for joining the Carmelites because, growing up in Medina, the main influence in his life would have been the Jesuits, they educated him. He would also have received a lot of help from the diocesan clergy, and been with them in the hospital for people with incurable diseases and sexually transmitted diseases (where he worked as a teenager). He was even offered a chaplaincy there. There is little evidence of any contact with the Carmelites, only some evidence that the Carmelite Marian tradition attracted him, we don't know. Four years later something has obviously changed greatly; he is disappointed or has some other difficulty.

He confided his story to Teresa at that first meeting. She helped him, listened to him, guided him and showed him the wisdom of staying in the Order. So for John, that meeting was a life-changing moment. A real encounter, one of those moments of grace in life, those times when life truly changes. It is Teresa ministering to John, an older woman helping and guiding this young Carmelite, this young priest. She had a great effect on him, he could confide his own story in her and trust that she was giving him the right advice, that this reform was not just a whim, a crazy idea in this crazy nun, it was something to which he could entrust the rest of his life.

This meeting changed the direction for both of them: for John remaining in the Order and for the second part of Teresa's great reform. Now she has some-one she can trust and rely on, in whose hand she can place the project (of the friars' first foundation).

Roll on a year and she meets him again, when she is making her foundation in Valladolid. By now she has the house in Duruelo. It might be a very poor place but the possibility of a beginning is there. She has already made a foundation in Malagon and returned; it was phenomenal what she did in that year. Plans were now definitely in place for her first foundation for friars. She has John and Br Antonio, a much older man, prior of the Carmelites in Medina. She doesn't fully trust him (rightly so, as history will point out) but he is a good man in his own way. One of the ironies of history is that he was older than Teresa or John but not only would he be present at her death he would also be present at John's death-bed. He remains faithful in spite of ups and downs along the way.

Another very significant event at Valladolid:

13, 5: Now what remained....I taught him about the lifestyle of the sisters.

This is an important passage, sometimes forgotten about historically: it is through John of the Cross that Teresa passes on the charism to the friars. He is her direct link. It is to him that she entrusts the full knowledge of the life the nuns are living. She sets about to teach him, she is giving him a course of formation here, of what the life is. She is doing it with him living with the nuns and listening to her. He could have taught her many things, but that wasn't what she was going to do – she was going to teach him, so he would pass this on.

This one grace of God, this one charism given to Teresa by God was to be diffused among the followers, at this particular hour through John of the Cross. Teresa takes great care to pass it on. She trusts that he is the right person - a further illustration of the closeness between them, the meeting of minds that unites their ways. When it comes to what it means to be Carmelite, they are of one mind. Here, Teresa is

confirming that, though they were different in other ways, he truly understands the charism. What she is passing on to him is not just some teaching; it is a way of life, a lived experience. He experiences the life as it is being lived by the nuns. She is giving him an explanation of what lies behind this way of life. The gift cannot be passed on as a theory or through books; it is passed on through lived experience: personal contact with the nuns, time spent with Teresa, breathing in the air of the charism.

Did John get it right? Good question. In chapter 14 she tells us about her visit to Duruelo

14. 6: On the first...1568...little stable of Bethlehem, it doesn't seem to me that the house was any better.

It is interesting that she calls it a little stable of Bethlehem. In her speaking about the nuns there are two gospel images she always keeps before her: Jesus and the twelve apostles (that is where she gets her ideal number of a community from) and the family at Nazareth united with Jesus. Friendship and family were so important for Teresa, they expressed the charism. She wanted her community to be family, to be friends with each other and to be close to Jesus. The two groups of people closest to Jesus were the twelve apostles, and Mary and Joseph.

Talk 6: Foundation at Malagon

These foundations are the fulfilment of this call from God that Teresa has, to live this gift of the Holy Spirit and to pass it on. As we saw in St John of the Cross, the grace of being a founder is one who receives this gift of God for others. In Teresa's life and experience there was a gradual awakening to that. It doesn't come instantly, God doesn't produce a sheet of paper and say it is going to be this and this and this, he doesn't work like that. It is a whole journey in faith, a gradual awakening to what God is giving, what God is doing, what God is calling her to do. How this is going to come about may not be clear. Teresa has nothing, yet because of her faith and what God has shown her there is a certainty that it is going to happen.

With absolute security in God, the "how" is a whole other journey. There is also something else: is it going to work? Will the end result be what it is meant to be? This is going on all the time at different layers because it is a living reality. In his sermon this morning, Fr Jimmy spoke about the Kingdom of God as a living reality. Jesus says it is like a seed, a plant, a fishing net that pulls in all kinds of fish. It is something that is constantly evolving.

Looking at Malagon will give us a sense of what this living reality is, also a sense of our own calling. Teresa said we are all called to be founders for those who come after us. The passing on of the charism is fundamental to the vocation.

At the end of chapter 3, Teresa has just made her foundation in Medina and has had her first meeting with John of the Cross. Medina is the first foundation she has recounted

3, 18: The nuns were gaining esteem...the same ...to be loved.

“Much affection” is an important indicator for Teresa; it shows that this is of God. She believes in the presence of the Holy Spirit among the people. It was never a case of telling the people “this is what you need.” It is the Holy Spirit answering a need. It indicated the same charism as at St Joseph’s in Avila.

Then there is the long parenthesis of chapters 4 to 8: about prayer, difficulties, a spiritual understanding of what these foundations are and the challenges that they face. In chapter 9 she speaks about the foundation at Malagon, the shortest account of all the foundations. Each foundation is significant in their own way, none a carbon copy of the previous ones. Each one is a development of the Order. Teresa learns from each, there is a growing experience, not just a model being tried out.

She begins by picking up the theme before the long parenthesis:

9, 1: How far I have wandered...follow it.

The life, the charism, the gift of the Holy Spirit has been transported. There was no guarantee that that would happen. Would this be something new or essentially the same? The local people are providing for their needs. The right people are entering with the right spirituality, not just those brought from Avila who are trained and have their formation. Again, all these aspects are a sign that this foundation is of the Holy Spirit.

We can sense that Teresa’s confidence is rising here. Before the founding at Medina she knew it would happen but didn’t know how. Now she has seen it happen, this is right, this is of God. There is an energy and life to Teresa here. She is setting her sights on going forward, but there is a lot of learning still to be done. Malagon might be only her second foundation but it is going to challenge her greatly. There were certain rules and decisions she had made which she thought were very important.

At the beginning of the *Way of Perfection* Teresa outlines the style of life for the community (writing for the community of St Joseph's in Avila) founded in poverty and dependent on the alms given by the people. She does this for two fundamental reasons: she has had too much experience of communities where there were wealthy benefactors who then exerted control of the community. It is important that her communities are autonomous. Also the giving of alms builds the relationship with the local community. Her Carmels were not isolated places; they were at the heart of the local community, the local church. Therefore she favoured the big cities, the wealthy places where there would be people and means of support.

Medina del Campo and Valladolid are such places, but Malagon creeps into the equation, against her will because of Dona Luisa de la Cerda who has been a friend of Teresa for quite a few years. Before Teresa founded St Joseph's in Avila she was asked to go for a few months to Toledo to help a young widow whose husband had just died. She stayed a few months, when she wrote a lot of the Book of her Life, a book tied into this foundation. Teresa describes what happens:

9, 2: "There was a lady in Toledo....to which I was very much opposed."

Teresa thought it was a waste of time going to spend a period with this person just because she was important and influential, but now she sees that God had a greater plan. No-one knows how this lady found out about Teresa's permission to make foundations. Teresa is very determined not to say Yes, but she does because her confessors and learned men and Dona Luisa herself persuaded her. The Council of Trent, just finished, had given permission for closed communities to have endowments. Teresa was told, the Church has given permission, so why are you being so stubborn? She went to Malagon, quite a journey:

9, 4: When we got there, the house was not yet ready...

Meanwhile T rounded up the people of the town to help her get things ready. It was a very poor place but they rallied round and perhaps nowhere else gave her such a welcome.

9, 5: In the year 1568....great devotion in everybody.

The key moment was the Blessed Sacrament being put in place, a new place where God would be given honour. For her now, the foundation is made. This, plus the support of the local people, gave her confirmation that it was right.

Teresa received further confirmation: "On one of those days, while at prayer...that house." (ibid) The Lord confirmed that the courageous decision she had taken was right, and history has proved how true that was.

There were other changes at Malagon. Teresa believed strongly that her communities should eat fish, because fish was the poor person's diet, meat was a luxury. However she is now in a place where that was not the case, so again something else that she held very dear had to be adapted. Another was in the style of community life. In the *Way of Perfection*, all the sisters were equal, there was no hierarchy. In Malagon she had to accept lay sisters, who wouldn't have the full obligations of the Divine Office but would work in the community. There were a number of reasons for that: partly because of the particular type of Carmel and the work they would be doing there. Also because a lot of the people there just didn't have the level of education, many couldn't even read. One unique thing that Teresa did was insist that all the sisters in her Carmels should be able to read - very unusual at this time.

We get a sense here of how Teresa has to constantly adapt and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Her understanding of what God was calling her to do was constantly evolving. These changes did not mean that Malagon was less a Carmel than any of the others, or less an expression of this charismatic gift. As a reformed Carmel, certainly not. Malagon would become one of the jewels in the crown, an indication being the number of sisters that she used from Malagon to make her foundations later. It would produce some of the best leaders that the reformed Carmel had. Another great leader was a servant in Dona Luisa's house in Toledo, who would later become Sr San Jose. She would be one of the sisters closest to Teresa, a prioress of Seville Carmel and one of the great leaders of the Carmelite nuns after Teresa's death. There is a lot of development taking place around this foundation

We cannot leave Malagon without mentioning probably the most important of all contributions that Malagon has made to the whole tradition: it is the only Carmel that Teresa could build from the ground up. It is the only architectural legacy of Teresa that has come down to us. All the other buildings were adapted as best they could, and there are great stories about the repairs of buildings and the sorts of places in which they ended up. This happened at the start at Malagon too, but Teresa wasn't long in pointing out to her friend Dona Louisa that the house she had given them was not suitable, so she gave them the land to build a new house. She even allowed Teresa to choose the site (she refused the first one offered), design the building exactly as she wanted it so as to put into the architecture her vision for the Carmels. There is no doubt of this, the records are all there at Malagon –Teresa designed the house and oversaw the building. However, it would take eleven years to build; as always in building projects, it wouldn't be without its problems.

At the conclusion of this project, in 1579 (three years before her death) she arrives in Malagon for what she thinks will be the official opening of the foundation. Her arrival is described by Sr Anna of St Bartholomew, who was with Teresa through the last years of her life as her nurse, her secretary, her confidant, everything; she was always at Teresa's side.

After a dreadful journey and bad nights, she arrived so ill that every bone in her body ached and she was unable to leave her bed. But a woman of Teresa's energy is difficult to keep in bed. As soon as the builders reported that the work would take about another six months, she was up at dawn the following day to see for herself. She inspected what had been done, made her calculations regarding the remainder and announced that it was to be ready for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, just twelve days away. Leaving masons and builders to recover from that shock as best they could, she went on site from morning to night, skipping prayer times, meals and rest. When she was not lending a hand herself, she directed operations from a stone podium which is still preserved to this day. Needless to say the builders met her deadline.

That was her. This was the kind of determination, life and energy that went into this work. It was the work of God, yes, but the work of a genius called by God to bring this about. Because the building itself, like everything else, was a work of honour and glory to God. Teresa took great care with the buildings. She speaks a lot about poverty, not needing this or that, but the buildings were places where God was going to be given honour and glory. The house, the chapel had to be right. They were essential to the living of the life, both for the sisters within and for the local community. These Carmels were a witness to the presence of God. God is going to be given honour and glory in this place.

Malagon is particularly significant because Teresa's vision can be seen there in bricks and mortar. Plans for it have been sent all over the world in past centuries, to try and depict what Teresa had in mind. We also can see this in the *Interior Castle* where she depicts the inner architecture of the soul, the castle, mansions, passages, rooms. Various attempts have been made to artistically lay out her vision. For her the two are the same reality: the God who lives within the castle of clear crystal and diamonds within the person and the God who lives in the house built by human beings. He who lives in the midst of it is the one God, and is given honour and glory in both castles. Both are homes of God, precious places where God dwells. The same care and attention to detail, the same reverence, is given to both. Missing prayer and supervising the builders was for Teresa a work of giving glory and honour to God.

Malagon is still there and the people still honour and love Teresa, as they did all those years ago.

Talk 7: Obedience to the Church

Looking at the chronology of these foundations, they began in 1567 at Medina and continued to Seville in 1575 and Toledo in 1577. Then there was a gap. In Seville she hears news from the General Chapter in Italy that she is to cease founding, to go into a Carmel of her own choice and stay there. Some people say there is no record of that decree having been made but it was communicated to her, indirectly at first (so she chose to ignore it), then officially. Certainly there were strong forces trying, not only to stop further foundations, but indeed to put an end to the whole reform of the Order. Teresa dutifully obeys, travels back to Toledo and chooses it as the Carmel where she will stay. During her time there she begins writing the *Interior Castle* (up to the fourth dwelling place) and takes it up again later that year when she has moved to Avila, finishing it a few days before John of the Cross is arrested and imprisoned. These were difficult times. Not until 1579 will she be able to get back on the road. Her next foundation will be in 1580, so there were five years during which there were no foundations. Three years of that five she was not allowed to travel.

We need to reflect upon this from Teresa's perspective. We have been looking at the foundations as the fulfilment of her call from God, a work of God. To get a sense of what that means to her, we will look at chapter 28. She finished in chapter 27 believing that was the end of her work and doesn't pick it up until she starts founding again. The foundation at Villanueva de la Jara has just been made, and she is reflecting on what has taken place and the surrounding events:

28, 15: One day ...of souls.

Teresa invites us into her prayer life, and what the foundations meant in her prayer life: the service of God and the spiritual progress of souls. That is Teresa's conviction, confirmed for her in prayer. In fact His Majesty reprimands her sternly for not getting on with this, and points out to her something which she repeats: how has this been brought about? - with nothing else but God's help. It could not have been done otherwise.

In considering that, we must also consider the theme of obedience, the spiritual hot potato of the time. She knew what it meant to her spiritually, but in the way the Church operated, it was an extremely complex area. Obtaining, permissions, licences, this and that authority, was a minefield. It deeply troubled Teresa at times but at no time did it

trouble her more, though she doesn't actually speak much about it, was this period when no foundations were being made. Requests were coming in from all over Spain and further afield, she was inundated. There is no doubt that the sentiments she gives above were in her heart: that souls' spiritual progress was being held up and work impoverished because these foundations could not be made. Yet, in obedience to the Church, she stops. We can only surmise that that must have been a very painful decision for her, a painful time in her life. There was also a real possibility that the reform would be brought to an end.

The discalced friars were in a difficult position, many were in prison or under house arrest, all kinds of restrictions were put on them. The Inquisition was looking at Teresa's writings, which may be suppressed. So the official Church was a real cloud over Teresa at this time. Yet devotion of the people was still there. They wanted the Carmels, the friars as preachers and teachers. What could give great honour to God and spiritual progress to souls was being held up, or could even be ended. Undoubtedly, Teresa's obedience to the Church is really tested here. On her deathbed she said, "I die a daughter of the Church", she professed her loyalty to the Church. At the beginning of the Foundations she says her purpose is the building up of the Church. Yet that very Church seemed to be an obstacle to the work of God. She would have been getting all kinds of conflicting advice, what to do and what not to do, encouragement and support from here and opposition from there. Yet in this, just like in everything else, what brings Teresa through it all is her conviction that this is God's work. If this is God's work, not only is it going to survive, but it is going to succeed.

History will prove her right. There is a lesson for us in the way Teresa handles it. We must get our heads round the bigger picture of this book. It is Teresa's account of her real test of loyalty to the Church. The virtue of obedience that she speaks about so much in the book and holds up as being so essential is tested to its very limits. Teresa chooses obedience when events would say the opposite, or holy and upright people were urging her to something different.

But Teresa's obedience was never done in a passive way. It wasn't indifference. Teresa never stopped working to change the situation. She was never unfaithful to the personal call of God to her. A person could easily choose to be obedient in a way that is unfaithful to a call of God. It is a difficult balancing act to achieve. Teresa will go at great lengths at times to do what needs to be done, to get the right permissions to set up these foundations. There are so many examples, eg Toledo. The archbishop, Carranza, was a holy man who had been in jail eleven years and was destined to spend most of his life in jail, ending up in Rome. The diocese was being run by an administrator who was so hated nobody would speak to him. Teresa needed a licence

from him to make her foundation. As none of the cathedral chapter would speak to him, she finds out where he is celebrating mass one day, turns up in the sacristy and demands his signature. She knew she had every right to get his permission. Also, she constantly supported her Carmels through correspondence and many other ways.

She knows that whatever the human obstacles, the work of God is not going to stop. Some of her Carmels suffered terribly during this time. She continued to remain faithful to the ideal and work for a solution in whatever way she could, but always as the very astute diplomat that she was. When some of the friars got into difficulties, overstepped the mark, she used her gifts of diplomacy and her contacts. But she always had a clear goal in mind, of what the purpose was. It was not an ego trip. This was not her kingdom but God's Kingdom, very much needed; therefore God will not fail her.

What we see in her work of founding is a visible proof of what she writes about. There can be a real danger in spirituality: on the one hand we write and say beautiful things about spirituality, about the fidelity of God and all that he does and his wonderful plans for us. On the other hand, we live a life that is detached from that, in our work lives, our business lives there is something that doesn't quite conform to that. Teresa's work life of diplomacy, setting up structures and systems, are visible truth of what she speaks about. Fidelity to God, sense of mission, call from God, absolute belief in what it means to be Carmelite, the true spirit of Carmel are in evidence. Everything else that she writes about is tested and proven in this work, in the way that she lives, with all its contradictions and all its struggles. It is the proof that Teresa's holiness is real; there is no pretence and no inconsistencies.

We saw in chapter five – the person who prays in a corner never knows if they are patient or humble, that it is only in the occasions of struggle and sinfulness that we really know who a person is. We only really know who Teresa is through this work of foundations. We have the proof that she knows what she is speaking about in the fifth, sixth, seventh dwelling places of the *Interior Castle*. We wouldn't ever be sure that she knew what she was talking about if we didn't know about her experience of these foundations. She experienced struggles, difficulties, opposition and darkness, threats hung over her.

Teresa is not living two lives; one does not take her away from the other. She becomes more holy through this experience of being the gadabout nun whom nobody can control. For her that is the life of Jesus Christ in this world. He had nowhere to lay his head, he had no rest, he had to deal with all kinds of people in all circumstances and deal with all sorts of opposition.

Jesus never lost sight of why he was in this world, what was his mission was. Neither did Teresa. That is the challenge for all of us. In whatever difficult situations we are in, even when whatever vocation we have or think we have is crumbling and falling apart, going completely the wrong direction – never lose sight of that truth of what one really is and of one's calling. That is what Teresa shows us, right to her death bed. Even in dying she is serving the Lord. On her very last journey she is tested to the last. She was ordered to go to Alba de Tormes, on what was a fruitless mission, and she dies there. God's honour and glory and spiritual progress of souls were her whole life and testimony.

There is so much more one could say about the Book of Foundations. It is a fascinating book, as was the situation around her in the last fifteen years of her life. In spite of all this, she was a saint, a saint who, everywhere she went, the crowds were out. To them she was a saint. They saw the good that she and her Carmels were doing. This work of God continues today. So it is an immensely encouraging book, and immensely encouraging to us to listen to Teresa and know that we can all identify with her experience.

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