

Letter to Don Francisco de Salcedo - September 1568 [No 13]

Don Francisco de Salcedo: Teresa tells us about Don Francisco in Chapter 23 of the Book of Her Life: *“This gentleman is married, but he lives so exemplary a life and is so prayerful and charitable that his goodness and perfection shine throughout the whole town. There is every reason for his renown because great good has come to many souls by means of him....Well this blessed and holy man, with his diligence; it seems to me, was the principle means by which my soul was saved”*. [cf. Life 23: 6 – 12] Don Francisco is the first spiritual director to whom Teresa recounts her mystical experiences. Unfortunately, like so many of her other spiritual directors, he does not understand her and consequently causes her much suffering. However later he changes his view and becomes one of her greatest friends and supports. *{It is noteworthy that one of Teresa’s most important spiritual directors, at a critical time in her life, is a layman – later after the death of his wife he becomes a priest}*.

Don Francisco plays an important role in Teresa’s first foundation of nuns, San Jose in Avila [see Life 36:18] and in her first foundation of friars, Duruelo. [we also met him in last month’s letter No. 177 to Lorenzo de Cepeda].

Teresa: At the time of writing this letter she is in Valladolid having just made her fourth foundation of nuns [15th August 1568] – *“I went with Fray John of the Cross to the foundation of Valladolid....And since we spent some days before establishing the enclosure on account of the workmen who were getting the house ready, there was an opportunity to teach Father Fray John of the Cross about our way of life so that he would have a clear understanding of everything...He was so good that I, at least, could have learned much more from him than he from me. Yet this is not what I did, but I taught him about the life style of the sisters.”* [Foundations 13:6]

Letter: After John’s short “noviciate” with the nuns of Valladolid, Teresa sends him to Duruelo to prepare the house for the first foundation of Discalced Carmelite Friars. She writes this letter for John to take with him and to give to Don Francisco as a letter of recommendation seeking Don Francisco’s help with this enterprise. John left Valladolid 30th September 1568.

John of the Cross: Unfortunately none of Teresa's letters to John of the Cross have come down to us and likewise none of his letters to her. However this is the first of many mentions of John in Teresa's letters. This is Teresa's first written "assessment" of John [the Book of Foundations was written seven years later!]. Let us look more closely at what she says about him.

1. "He is young...small" – both his age and stature {John is 26, Teresa is 53}.
2. "He is great in the eyes of God...his prayer is deep" – Teresa is convinced of John's holiness: this is what impresses her most about him.
3. "He is wise...he has good intelligence" – gifts that Teresa prized highly and especially in her nuns, friars and spiritual directors.
4. "He is just right for our way of life....makes me think we have a good beginning" – He is an ideal "vocation" or a model vocation.
5. "I believe the Lord has called him for this task...The Lord is watching over him carefully...The spirit the Lord has given him has greatly encouraged me...May the Lord lead him on." For Teresa God was always the real founder and God was clearly calling John and was with him.
6. "We will miss him here very much...There's not a friar who does not speak well of him." Very important criterion for Teresa – those who live their vocations well influence others.
7. "He is courageous" – This is a very important virtue for Teresa and necessary for living the life of prayer and the Carmelite vocation.

Purpose: Teresa is now entrusting to John a task and a dream that is very close to her heart. She has total confidence in him but he is alone and needs help. Don Francisco is the ideal person to help him. The help she is asking him for is not just practical help but also she is asking Don Francisco to "counsel him on what you think about his mode of life." Despite her glowing assessment of John, Teresa also tells us that they "met with a number of troubles" and at times she became "annoyed with him". Teresa and John share an ideal and a vision but they are also human and Teresa is very aware of this as she writes

this letter. John is being sent on a very difficult and challenging mission, she is aware of his gifts, and also his vulnerability, and is doing all she can to help.

For Discussion: The great plans and works of God are put in the hands of weak, fragile and vulnerable people. Holiness and vulnerability go together.

Walk with John on his journey from Valladolid to Avila and to Duruelo – his hopes, dreams, fears, doubts, burden of responsibility, etc.