

London Region day

14 December 2024

Talk by Fr Matt Blake.

Venerable Ana de Jesus Lobera OCD

And John of the Cross

Born in Medina del Campo, 25th November 1545. Ana was baptised the same day. Her father Diego Lobera died when she was a few months old and her mother, Francisca de Torres died when she was nine years old. She is brought up by her paternal grandparents until the age of 15. Then she moves with her only brother, Cristobal Lobero [future Jesuit] to Plasencia (Caceres) to the home of her maternal grandparents.

In 1563 she comes under the spiritual direction of the Jesuit, Pedro Rodriguez, while she is completing her education. In 1569 she is very ill for a few months and during this time she comes into contact with Teresa of Avila.

Important contacts –St Teresa and St John of the Cross

Ana had contacts with all the right people. In July 1570, Teresa admits Ana into the community of San Jose in Avila and on August 1st Ana receives the habit.

While still a novice, Teresa decides to transfer Ana to Salamanca. They travel together to Salamanca and en route, they stop off at Mancera, the first community of Carmelite friars – here she meets John of the Cross for the first time. She makes her profession in Salamanca 22nd October 1571.

December 1574 she and Teresa set out for Andalucia. They arrive in Beas 18th February 1575 and make the Foundation on 24th February 1575.

Ana will remain there as Prioress and will be re-elected Prioress in April 1578. In October of that year, she will have her second meeting with

John of the Cross. He escaped from prison in August 1578 and is now appointed Prior of El Calvario near Beas.

Carmelite Foundations and the patronage of Dona Ana de Penalosa y Mercado.

January 15th, 1582, Ana, accompanied by John of the Cross and a group of Carmelite nuns will travel from Beas to Granada to make the Foundation there. They arrive in Granada on 20th January 1582 and the nuns will live for the first six months in the home of Dona Ana de Penalosa y Mercado [for whom John will write the Living Flame]. John will take up his position as Prior of the Carmelite Friars at Los Martires, just outside Granada.

Ana's achievements

There were some aims that Teresa could not achieve, but Ana could.

1. Madrid

The foundation in Madrid, Ana achieved with the help of John of the Cross. In July of 1586, Anna leaves Granada, accompanied by John and a group of Sisters, to make the foundation in Madrid. The Foundation is officially made on 16th September 1586, and Ana of Jesus is elected Prioress.

2. St Teresa's book of her life.

Ana was Prioress in Madrid Carmel, when she recovered and had published the original copy of Teresa's 'book of her life' from the Inquisition with the help of the Empress of Austria, Brother Luis de Lion and the Bishop of Portugal. This was something St Teresa was trying to do before she died.

Teresa's writings

Ana asked her friend Fray Luis de Lion to edit the first edition of Teresa's writings. Another of Anna's contacts, the Bishop of Portugal, wrote a

prologue for the 1st edition in 1588 of Teresa's writings. This included all Teresa's books except the Book of Foundations. The book's Prologue [Letter] was addressed to Mother Ana and the Sisters of the Madrid Carmel.

The Spiritual Canticle

We can thank Ana for the *Spiritual Canticle, how to live the spiritual life*. It is while in Granada that John will write his Commentary on the Spiritual Canticle, at the request of Mother Ana. The Prologue is written by John as a letter to Mother Ana.

Wisdom

John of the Cross describes Wisdom arising from spiritual understanding. Even those experiencing such spiritual understanding cannot put it into words. There is a need to express it, but it is difficult to do it justice. Therefore, John shows that art and culture can compensate for difficulty of expression. Who can express in words, spiritual understanding, that only artistic endeavour can help in trying to represent?

John's reading and understanding of the scriptures

John of the Cross has a very unusual way of talking about scriptures. The Holy Spirit is speaking now in scripture but cannot be contained in one set of words. No one style or book can express the similes of the Holy Spirit. John's practical advice is that it is better to explain utterances of love in broad, general outlines, rather than narrowing them down. Description must be suitable and adaptable. John adds that we may find it hard to understand but counsels us not to try to understand – 'let understanding find you.' What is relevant and important will get to you.

Ana's Conflict in Carmel

Towards the end of 1589, Ana is removed from her Office of Prioress due to conflicts in the Carmelite Order. This is a time of great suffering for Ana. She returns to the Carmel of Salamanca but enroute, visits Avila and Alba de Tormes and has the opportunity to pray at the tomb of Teresa.

In 1596 she is elected prioress of the Salamanca Community despite opposition from the Carmelite Superiors in Madrid.

France

In 1604, Ana leaves Spain with five other Sisters to make the Foundation in Paris. They arrive in Paris on October 15th and make the foundation on October 18th. Ana is elected Prioress. In January of 1605, and makes the Foundation in Pontoise. In September 1605, she establishes the Foundation of the Carmel of Dijon. She becomes very ill at Dijon. She is replaced as Prioress of Dijon by Mother Ana de San Bartolome in December 1606. Ana of Jesus then returns to Paris.

Belgium

Mother Ana soon leaves Paris for Flanders, arriving in Brussels on 22nd January 1607. She lives to see Teresa of Avila Beatified. While in Brussels with the collaboration of Fr. Jeronimo Gracian, they publish Teresa's Book of Foundations for the first time.

She remains the rest of her life in Brussels, she dies there on 4th March 1621 at the age of 75.

Depths of Divine Love

Truths of faith are expounded in a certain way, but John believes the need to translate scholastic theology. Mystical theology is learnt via love. God lives through every person - a love song.

Confident truth is understood. John of the Cross tells Ana that he does not speak about prayer but its resultant effects and fruits. John helps us

into a mysterious world of prayer. He tells Ana that Our Lord carried her into the depths of divine love. Quite an assessment! Mother Ana de Jesus, knows and understands this and is living the spiritual canticle.

Mother Ana's Beatification

In 2023, on the feast of St John of the Cross, Pope Francis authorized the beatification of Mother Ana of Jesus. Beatification means the person is needed by the church.