

Teresa wrote the first edition of the book of her **LIFE** in Toledo in 1562 while she was staying at the home of Dona Luisa de la Cerda [this book has not come down to us]. In August of that year she returned to Avila for the opening of her first foundation, San Jose. Teresa completes the second edition in the autumn of 1565 at San Jose and this is the book we now have. The Chapters we are reflecting upon form “a book within a book” - chapters 11 - 21 are a treatise on prayer and Chapter 22 speaks about the place of Jesus Christ in the spiritual journey.

Teresa tells us in her Prologue that “*my confessors commanded me to write about the favours and the kind of prayer the Lord has granted me*”. The task of writing this opens her eyes to how her own experience can be helpful for teaching and guiding others: “*I would like some soul to profit a little by all that can be said about me*” [L 40:22]. With this in mind perhaps we can give some indications of the importance of these chapters in Teresa’s overall plan.

1. Teresa’s confessors have asked her to write about her life. Prayer is such an integral aspect of her life that it is impossible to speak about Teresa without speaking about prayer - it is impossible to understand Teresa without understanding what prayer is. More specifically it will not be possible to understand what Teresa wishes to speak about from chapter 23 onwards without this treatise.
2. Teresa becomes aware that this book will be read by many others, not just by the confessors who asked her to write. Many of these people, like her, will not have formal education, yet an understanding of prayer is essential for growth in prayer - she is writing for people like herself. She is writing the book that would have been helpful to her in her many years of struggle [27 years she tells us - from the age of 20 to 47].
3. However she always keeps in mind the confessors who asked her to write: she asks for their help and advice, she trusts them with what she writes [*her soul!*], she helps and encourages them to grow in prayer and most importantly she sees that what she writes can be helpful to them in their ministry.

**Garcia de Toledo:** Curiously Teresa does not give names but the most important of these spiritual directors from the point of view of the writing of this book is the Dominican, Garcia de Toledo. Teresa tells us in Chapter 34 [par. 6 onwards] about the time they spent together in Toledo in 1562, the time when she is writing the first edition of this book. Let us listen to a little of what she says: “*if he continues to advance like this he will become one of God’s most distinguished servants for the great benefit of many souls. Within a short time he has had much experience in spiritual things: these are gifts God gives when He desires and how He desires, and they depend neither on time nor on service....Let him not be surprised or think these things are impossible but strive to strengthen his own faith and humble himself in that the Lord makes a little old woman wiser, perhaps, in this science than he is, even though he is a very learned man*” [L 34:11/12].

So let us begin to listen to this “*little old woman*” who is “*wiser in this science*” than we are [interestingly Garcia de Toledo and Teresa were born the same year!]. Let us take this Dominican theologian as our model for listening to Teresa. Like him we need to listen with humility and a real determination to grow and change. Those conversations that Teresa and Garcia had in 1562 really had their effects: “*May it please His goodness that I manage*

*to speak about them [the four degrees of prayer] in a way beneficial for one of the persons who ordered me to write this, because within four months the Lord has brought him further than I got in seventeen years. The person has prepared himself better, and so without any labour of his own the flower garden is watered with all four waters, although the last is still not given except in drops. But he is advancing in such a way that soon he will be immersed in it with the help of the Lord” [L 11:8].*

Teresa tells us that these chapters are being addressed to those “*who are beginning to be servants of love*”. The theologian who ordered her to write this is held up to us as an example of someone who listens to Teresa’s teaching and makes rapid progress in the following of Jesus Christ. To be a servant of love for Teresa means “*to follow resolutely by means of this path of prayer Him who has loved us so much*” [L 11:1].

Let us pray for grace, courage and determination.