

## DAY 9: CHARITY

“The blessings gained through true poverty I think are many, and I wouldn’t want to lose them. I am often aware of a faith within me so great that I think God cannot fail anyone who serves Him. I know that there never is or will be any time in which His words will fail; for I cannot persuade myself otherwise, nor can I fear...It seems to me I have much more compassion for the poor than I used to. I feel such great pity and desire to find relief for them that if it were up to me I would give them the clothes off my back. I feel no repugnance whatsoever toward them, toward speaking to or touching them. This I now see is a gift given by God. For even though I used to give alms for love of Him, I didn’t have the natural compassion. I feel a very noticeable improvement in this matter.”

—SPIRITUAL TESTIMONIES II.3-4

According to Teresa, while interior development necessarily involves continued progress in self-knowledge and self-awareness, it is not egotistical, because it also encourages us to look beyond ourselves to God and to others. Thus, progress in the spiritual life really authenticates itself in charity. God’s love, as the evangelist John tells us, is for all, and is so profound that He sent His Son for our redemption. For those engaged in a life of prayer, we must also love with this Divine love. It is a transformative love that changes the way we see and approach our fellow men and women, as Teresa illustrates in the passage above.

May we, therefore, learn to love others with the love that God loves us, that our prayer may be truly perfected.

**Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.**

**V.** St. Teresa, pray for us:

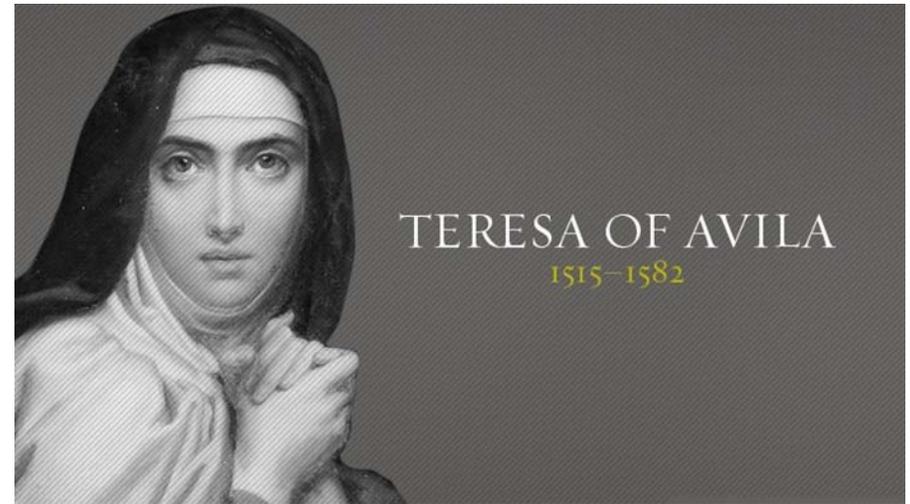
**R.** *That we may become worthy of the promises of Jesus Christ.*

**Let us pray:** Graciously hear us, O God of our salvation! that as we rejoice in the commemoration of the blessed virgin Teresa, so we may be nourished by her heavenly doctrine, and draw from it the fervor of a tender devotion; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

## Novena to St. Teresa of Jesus

Reflections written by Fr. Emiel Albalahin, O.Carm.

OCARM.ORG/EN/CONTENT/OCARM/ST-TERESA-JESUS-NOVENA



## DAY 1: QUALITY SPIRITUAL READING

“The prioress should see to it that good books are available, especially *The Life of Christ* by the Carthusian, the *Flos Sanctorum*, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Oratory of Religious*, and those books written by Fray Luis de Granada and by Father Fray Pedro de Alcantara. This sustenance for the soul is in some way as necessary as is food for the body.”

— CONSTITUTIONS 8

In chapter 4 of her autobiography, Teresa recounts the story of a particular visit to her uncle, Pedro Sánchez de Cepeda, wherein he gave her a copy of Francisco de Osuna, OFM’s book, the *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. It provided the foundations for her spiritual life, and remained an important reference for many years. In time, Teresa added other works to her list of spiritual influences, including those listed in her *Constitutions*. It was essential to her spiritual growth and to that of her sisters to be educated by knowledgeable people in the realm of the interior life.

Through her example and counsel, we are also invited to enrich our faith and our interior lives by reading and studying the writings of the many holy authors whom the Church recommends to us. Of course, among these, Teresa is one who is especially recommended. Perhaps one way of preparing

for the feast during these nine days of novena would be to prayerfully read and reflect on one of her writings.

May she and all of the saintly authors continue to inspire us through their teachings and experience.

***Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.***

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## DAY 2: INTIMATE AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRAYER

**“W**hoever has not begun the practice of prayer, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good. There is nothing here to fear but only something to desire...And if one perseveres, I trust then in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. In order that the love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord.”

— *AUTOBIOGRAPHY VIII.5*

On September 27, 1970, Pope Paul VI proclaimed Teresa a doctor of the Church. In his address, the Pope celebrated Teresa’s gift of spiritual doctrine, a fact underlined by the title written on her statue in the basilica in Ávila: *Mater Spiritualium*. She certainly merits this title.

Her writings are not theoretical abstracts, but concrete lessons drawn from her own experience and interaction with the Divine. In entering the struggle of spiritual growth, she came to discover some very important truths about the process of prayer, the truth of God and the realization of self in this context. She realized in a very real and personal way Jesus’ words: “I call you friends.”

Learning from Teresa, let us make ample space for prayer, taking time and having the courage to open ourselves to all of the possibilities that lie open to us when we enter this deep and profound relationship, including our own transformation in God and His love.

***Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.***

Let us not tire of making our sacrifices of love, but instead take courage, sure in the knowledge that we are already loved.

***Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.***

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## DAY 8: VIRTUES

**“I** repeat, it is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs. And, please God, it will be only a matter of not growing, for you already know that whoever does not increase decreases. I hold that love, where present, cannot possibly be content with remaining always the same.”

— *INTERIOR CASTLE VII:4.9*

Teresa writes these words toward the end of her description of the interior journey, when the soul arrives at union. Fundamental to spiritual progress is the development of a life of virtue, as virtues and prayer shape one another. In the context of Teresa’s definition of prayer as the intimate sharing between friends, virtues are all that we do and suffer for the love of God our great friend. Therefore, engagement in recollection helps us to cultivate practices to enhance our relationship with God, while the continual exercise of these virtues helps us to be gradually more receptive to interacting with Him.

In our prayer today, let us ask for the grace to develop and grow in lives of virtue, that God’s love for us may be expressed and nurtured in our love for Him.

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The theme of hell appears often in her writings, and underlines humanity's gift of free will and its natural consequences. The redemption wrought by Christ is intended for all, and the Divine plan is that all should be saved, but this does not preclude one's possibility to choose. Hell is the result of a lifetime of choices made of separating oneself from God through sin, resulting in the suffocating experience of being completely bound in the darkness of God's absence, without freedom and without hope.

Not wanting to see others end like this, Teresa exercised her own free will, dedicating her life to participating in Christ's own saving action via her life of prayer. May we, like Teresa, give thanks to God for the truths revealed to us about eternal life, for our redemption through Christ's blood, and for the gift of free will that allows us to choose and love him freely. Let us also pray for all those who most need our prayers for conversion of heart today.

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## DAY 7: SURRENDER

**M**yself surrendered and given, The exchange is this: *My Beloved is for me, And I am for my Beloved.* When the gentle Hunter Wounded and subdued me, In love's arms, My soul fallen; New life receiving, Thus did I exchange *My Beloved is for me, And I am for my Beloved.*

The arrow he drew Full of love, My soul was made one With her Creator. Other love I want not, Surrendered now to my God, *That my Beloved is for me, And I am for my Beloved.*

— ON THOSE WORDS “DILECTUS MEUS MIHI”

This beautiful poem is the result of Teresa's reflection on *Songs* 2:16: “My Beloved belongs to me and I to him.” In her verse, she expresses a fundamental truth of the interior journey: God himself initiates and sustains the relationship, and invites us to surrender to Him in faith. Our efforts of self-renunciation, sacrifice and humility about which Teresa constantly discusses in her writings are our personal response to this love. In renouncing ourselves, we allow the Lord to unite us to Himself.

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## DAY 3: THE CENTRALITY OF THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

**“T**he thought comes to me now that our good Jesus showed us the weakness of His humanity previous to the trials, and when He was in the abyss of His sufferings showed such great fortitude that He not only did not complain but did nothing that would make it appear He was suffering with weakness. When He went to the garden, He said: *My soul is sorrowful even to death.* Yet, while on the cross, for He was already suffering death, He did not complain.”

— MEDITATIONS ON *THE SONG OF SONGS* III.11.

Teresa desired to share her reflections on the *Song of Songs*, a rather daring act for her time. Her ponderings on *Songs* 1:2, led her to describe the peace and union granted the soul, opening the person to the possibility of accepting trials in the service of God, opportunities that also bring one's weaknesses and limitations to the fore. Desiring to encourage her sisters, she looks to Christ's own experience during his Passion.

Indeed, the humanity of Christ plays a crucial role in her doctrine on prayer. In his Incarnation, he expresses the profundity of God's love for humanity, and is the perfect mediator between the two. Moreover, his earthly life serves as the example and guide for our spiritual growth. In this way, he leads us to discover our true selves as we pray.

Thus, as we continue to pray through the intercession of the saint, let us recognize that she invites us to be in love with Jesus Christ, Emanuel, “God-with-us.”

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the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

#### DAY 4: THE SOUL

“It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight...I don’t find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity. Indeed, our intellects, however keen, can hardly comprehend it, just as they cannot comprehend God, but He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness.”

— INTERIOR CASTLE I:1.1

Teresa uses a variety of images to describe the soul, likening it to a beehive, a garden, and in this case, a castle. In doing so, she attempts to explain its innate fecund richness brought about through its creation.

Made in the image and likeness of God, our souls mirror the Divine in our natural interior profundity and in our capacity to do His loving and saving will. Moreover, our souls are where Christ resides and interacts with us, and desires to permeate with his light. The experience of God, therefore, is not something beyond the human experience, but intimately connected to it. Indeed, the work of personal transformation takes place in this interior environment.

May we learn from Teresa how to appreciate and care for our souls, that we may radiate Christ to others and give thanks to God for making us his home.

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#### DAY 5: HUMILITY

“O Eternal Father! How much this humility deserves. What treasure do we have that could buy Your Son? The sale of Him, we already know, was for thirty pieces of silver. But to buy Him, no price is sufficient. Since by sharing in our nature He has become one with us here below—and as Lord of His own will—

He reminds the Father that because He belongs to Him the Father in turn can give Him to us. And so He says, “our bread.” He doesn’t make any difference between Himself and us, but we make one by not giving ourselves up each day for His Majesty.”

— WAY OF PERFECTION XXXIII.5

Teresa composed these words as she reflected on the words of the Our Father: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Her meditation on this phrase brought her immediately to Christ’s experience of the passion and its significance for her and her contemporaries. For her, Jesus is the foundation and model of humility in the spiritual life.

Humility plays an important role in interior progress, because through it we come to appreciate and understand the beauty of our souls and our limitations, to gradually cede control of our lives to God in faith and trust and develop a sensibility for perceiving and carrying out His will, to love others properly, and to accept and cherish the depth of the love God has for us.

So let us ask for the grace of humility, that we may grow in truthful relationship with God, ourselves, and others.

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#### DAY 6: HELL

“A long time after the Lord had already granted me many of the favors I’ve mentioned and other very lofty ones, while I was in prayer one day, I suddenly found that, without knowing how, I had seemingly been put in hell...The fact is that I don’t know how to give a sufficiently powerful description of that interior fire and that despair, coming in addition to such extreme torments and pains. I didn’t see who inflicted them on me, but, as it seemed to me, I felt myself burning and crumbling; and I repeat the worst was that interior fire and despair.”

— AUTOBIOGRAPHY XXXII.1,2

Teresa experiences the vision described above within the context of God’s salvific action, both universal and personal, in order that she might understand the torments from which she was freed because of His mercy, and also to motivate her to realize her personal vocation of reform.