

The Attractiveness of St. Teresa of the Andes
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*"Rejoice always.
Pray without ceasing.
In all circumstances give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen.

It is good being the last speaker, because that at this point, we all know a lot about the many topics that were discussed previously, namely, about St. Therese of Lisieux, about our Holy Mother, St. Teresa, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross, and about St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

The beauty about the format of this Congress is that each speaker talks about a different saint in Carmel, so it makes it refreshing and interesting to hear about different messages and teachings that each saint portrays. So that, there's always something new, something different, that you can learn and appreciate, and derive gainful insight and wisdom from each saint. You know that all of them lived the Teresian charism perfectly, but each one lived it according to their own time, according to the graces they received, and their own personal temperament. Each one had a definite mission within the church. Although it is the same Teresian charism, each Saint conveys a new hymn or a new message for all of us: different message, different call for discipleship, but the same goal, the same purpose, and the same Lord calling.

Which brings us to St. Teresa of Jesus of the Andes, the 4th Saint named Teresa in Carmel that we will be discussing in this Congress. What is St. Teresa of the Andes all about? What is her attraction? What makes her what she was and what she is today? What is her message? What is her mission within the church? I am therefore going to explore these points and discuss about, "The Attractiveness of St. Teresa of Jesus of the Andes."

But where do I begin? How should the story of St. Teresa of Jesus of the Andes be told? How should it to be told in such a way that I could effectively describe to you the admiration and joy that I felt in reading her life story? For days, I was pondering over those questions. I asked myself how I could impart to you her message as accurately as I can in 45 minutes or less.

And then, I came across the book entitled, "God, the Joy of my Life," the book of her diary which was originally in Spanish and translated in English by Fr. Michael Griffin, OCD. The title of her little diary is "The Story of the Life of One of Your Daughters." She wrote this diary to her beloved teacher, Mother Julia Rios, a Religious of the Sacred Heart. Her diary started this way, and I will read this to you. She said, "Dear Mother: You think you are going to find an interesting story. I do not want you to be deceived. The story you are going to read is not the story of my life, but the intimate life of a poor soul who, without any merit on her part, Jesus Christ loved in a special way and filled abundantly with His favours and graces."

Let us try and analyze that paragraph. She said, and I repeat, that her story is NOT a story of HER life but a story of the INTIMATE LIFE of a poor soul. She DID NOT say a story of the intimate life of a soul, but she said, "a poor soul." Poor, soul? "How old was she when she began writing her diary?" I asked myself, and found out that she was only 15 when she began writing her diary. "Those were really deep and exceptionally mature words for a 15 year old," I thought. So, I began to think, and read that line again, "*The story you are going to read is not the story of my life, but the intimate life of a poor soul*" So I asked myself, "If the diary she was writing is NOT a story of HER life, then whose story was it?"

And then she continued, "*without any merit on her part, Jesus Christ loved in a special way* ." And so, I read the line again, "The story you are going to read is not the story of my life, but the intimate life of a poor soul who, without any merit on her part, Jesus Christ loved in a special way ."

"Aha!" I said, it is NOT HER story but THEIR story. "Now, I get it!" I said. It is not her life story because for her, her life is not hers alone, because she was convinced and she truly believed deep down inside, that HER LIFE, is "*Jesus and her together!*" So, therefore, and I conclude, that for her, her life story is not exclusively the story of herself only, but an intimate story of herself and Jesus, "*Jesus living in her.*" Jesus always there with her anywhere she goes, being with her everyday, every moment of her life. Her life story is a story of how Jesus loved her and how she loved him back. As a result of this most wonderful love, she wrote that Jesus "*filled her abundantly with His favors and graces.*" And when I read that line again, all I could say was, "Wow!" End of paragraph!

"Now," I said, "I have found what I was looking for!" With that paragraph alone, I understood that the life story of our little saint of the Andes is a sweet, tender story of love. She knew exactly who she was: who she was, was a poor soul. She knew who has loved her: who has loved her, loved her without any merit on her part. She knew she was special because he who has loved her loved her in a special way and filled her abundantly with His favors and graces! She knew her place; she knew where that intimate love was heading. She knew where she belonged. And where did she belong? She belonged to the arms of her beloved. She knew! And she knew it at a young age! Her life story therefore, was not really her life story only, but THEIR life story: Jesus living in her, sustaining her, inspiring her and most of all, loving her. And because of this consciousness that He is there with her in the center of her being, she just glowed with joy! Pure joy! So that everyday, she was happier. Since she knew she belonged to God, she obtained strength and happiness. She became the happiest person. She no longer desired anything else because her whole being was filled with love. Hers was a story of true love! A very touching, life story of love!

How amazing! With that powerful, opening paragraph alone, written by a 15 year old girl, in her Intimate Diary, I was convinced that I should be reading on. That statement alone moved me to get to know her better. I wanted to know the love of Jesus. I wanted to know how she loved Jesus in return. I wanted to know how this love made a very big impact in her life, and most importantly, I wanted to know how this love transformed her and made her what she was, and what she is today, a Saint for our times! I wanted to know her, so that, secretly, I would be able to imitate her virtues and feel the joy of her beloved in spite of the sufferings of this life. Oh yes, I wanted to read more because pure joy in the midst of the chaos and troubles and tribulations of this life, is hard to find, but which St. Teresa found in her soul when she truly and without any doubt, found the love of Jesus.

Fully realizing and completely convinced about this love, the love Jesus bestowed on her, made her conscious about Jesus's presence in her soul at every moment of her life and because of this, she became more loving towards others and desired others to love Jesus as well. She yearned for Him and He became the only object of her desires. Her utmost concern in life was to fulfill the will of God. This was her driving force: doing God's will and pleasing him in every way. Everyday, she wanted to get closer to God and to become a better person in his eyes because she knows that "*nothing is worthwhile but what brings us closer to God. He is the only one who can fill and satisfy our soul.*" (letter 140.) Hers was a soul that cried out: "*Jesus, alone is beautiful. He is my only joy. I call for Him, I cry after Him. I search for Him within my heart!*" Such was her deep love for Jesus!

Her baptismal name is Juana Enriqueta Josefina de los Sacrados Corazones Fernandez Solar. In short, she was fondly called "Juanita."

Juanita was born in Santiago, Chile, on July 13, 1900 of a wealthy, aristocratic family. In her diary, she wrote, "Jesus did not desire me to be born poor like Himself; I was born in the midst of riches, spoiled by all." Her parents were Miguel Fernandez Jarequemada and Doña Lucía Solar Armstrong. They had 7 children and Juanita was the 4th child in the family. The oldest was Lucia, followed by Miguel, then Luis, then Juana, who died a few hours after birth, Juanita, then, Rebecca and Ignacio, who was the youngest. They lived in Santiago, the capital of Chile, but spent most summers at her maternal grandfather's magnificent 23,000 acre hacienda at Chacabuco which is north of Santiago.

From an early age, Juanita knew suffering, when her parents, Don Miguel and Doña Lucía separated. Her father did not have a good education and was unable to successfully administer his large inheritance and had to live in the country away from the family to manage their farm, so that he would be away from them for long

stretches of time. Doña Lucía lived in Santiago with the 6 children and tried to give them education suited to their social status and tried to live with whatever small amount of money they received from Don Miguel. It seems to me that the most painful thing for Juanita was not really the economic loss, but the tension and problem between her parents.

Another problem they had was in regards to Juanita's closest brother Luis. Luis, for years, had a serious crisis of faith when he had his mind full of scientific and philosophical ideas. Juanita, when she was already in Carmel had to write him letters to beg him to persevere in the faith and trust in God more.

In addition to this problem, her older brother Miguel, was a constant source of worry to the whole family because although he was a very talented man who loved to write poetry, he lived a bohemian style of life and drank excessively. His behavior caused embarrassment to the family and gave them a lot of grief. Her mother often scolded Miguel bitterly for his faults. Although Juanita's mother was an exceptionally upright and pious woman, Miguel's behavior was so upsetting to them that when Miguel become very sick, her mother confided to Juanita that she was praying that God would quickly take Miguel to Himself before he became a total disgrace to the whole family.

Juanita on the other hand, showed tender compassion and love for Miguel, and asked her mother to correct him kindly, even begging prayers to be said for Miguel. Miguel used to say that her sister is a true saint as she was the only one who had tried to understand and sympathize with him.

Their family is what we can typically call, "dysfunctional," just like many families nowadays: father separated from the family, a member of the family leading a rather loose life with drinking problems, not coming home, etc. I myself can testify that it is not easy living in a dysfunctional family because I myself come from a dysfunctional one. In a way, this is something that I have in common with St. Teresa and I think I can relate to her when it comes to this topic of family. It is not easy!

These family problems may sound very harsh and uncomfortable to some, but as they say, "All is well that ends well." God in his infinite mercy and compassion, enabled them eventually to conquer these problems. By God's grace, Miguel ended up living a profoundly religious life during his last years and Luis, in the process of beatification, testified that the greatest moral miracle that ever happened to him through the prayers and example of his sister, was his own personal conversion.

Juanita's father, through the prayers and affectionate letters that Juanita had written to him, realized his daughter's great love and respect for him. Writing letters was the only way she could communicate to him her desire that they could be close despite their distance. Because of her, there was a holy transformation in Don Miguel's life and he was greatly blessed.

Juanita was described as being loving, respectful, very modest, and obedient. In her diary, she mentioned about struggles with her temper and her stubbornness, but fully realizing these faults, she was able to change her ways and develop patience. She was very humble person and used to say that "she had nothing before God except her love for God." Her brother, Luis, said that "When she did not speak, one had the impression that she was listening to what others did not hear. And to listen to her afterwards, was to feel closer to Christ."

As a teenager, she had many friends. Her friendships were so noble and good that 4 of her friends either became Carmelite nuns or entered the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. Later on they admitted that Juanita's words, wise counsel, and example had inspired them to enter the convent and embrace a religious life. Even Juanita's younger sister, Rebecca, who used to be very outgoing and loved parties and dancing, and not in the least inclined to be a nun, entered Carmel after discerning that the Lord was calling her to Carmel as well. (It is worth noting that her mother, Doña Lucia, entered the Secular Order of Carmel.)

As a way of example, I am going to read to you part of a letter that Juanita wrote to her classmate, Elena Salas Gonzalez. Elena entered the convent of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1921. Now, this excerpt from that letter is a bit long, but I will read this to you so you can get a picture of how she expresses herself in her letters and how she brings God to others. This is really interesting.

She said: "Love is a fusion of two souls in one in order to bring about mutual perfection. How can there be a unity of soul more perfect than the unity God makes between Himself and our soul? .. Isn't this the highest grandeur to which a human being can aspire? It's true that we can't see God with our bodily eyes. But God becomes visible to us through faith. We can't touch God with our hands, but we see Him clearly in each of his works. Believe me. I'm speaking to you sincerely: I used to believe it was impossible ever to fall in love with a God who is unseen; with someone who can't be hugged and touched. But today, I can affirm with my hand over my heart, that God completely makes up for that sacrifice. You feel that love so much, and those caresses from Our Lord that it seems God is there by your side. I feel Him so intimately united to me, that I want nothing more, except the beatific vision in heaven. I feel I'm filled with God, and then I hold Him close to my heart and ask Him to make me experience the perfections of His love. There's no separation between us. Wherever I go, God is with me in my poor heart. That's the little house where I dwell; it's my heaven here on earth. I live with God; and despite being on walks, we converse with each other without anyone being able to surprise us or interrupt us. If you knew Him enough, you would love Him. If you were with Him for one hour, you'd know just what heaven on earth is." (letter 40)

As far as her physical appearance and disposition is concerned, I will read to you how her brother Luis described her. He said that, " She was quite tall, well-shaped, had a certain majesty of movement, had white skin and blue eyes. Her head was small and her hair was light brown. She had a really pleasing voice. You could recognize great strength in her deep gaze. She was a very quite person, very much in control of herself .. She was joyful and seemed always happy. Her joy was neither loud nor boisterous. Her character was tranquil and calm. Her will was energetic and ironlike, without seeming so. She had a sense of humor. Juanita's natural way was to go along unnoticed. She was easy to get along with ...Juanita always dressed simply. I never saw her with jewelry or rings. Juanita liked simple, common things I never saw Juanita smoke. I don't think she ever held a cigarette in her hands.. I never saw her do or say silly things."

In school she was an outstanding student, very studious and dedicated in her studies. She taught catechism to little children, something that she was very active and enthusiastic about.

She was also very athletic. She played tennis very well, she was an excellent swimmer, loved horseback riding and rode like a skillful Amazon goddess. She was very athletic that her mother sometimes had to intervene to stop her from playing these games since Juanita was too active in them that sometimes she ends up covered with dirt and mud from the games. She also played the piano, violin and guitar and had a wonderful voice.

There were 4 books that I read about her. The first one was her autobiography, the book entitled, "God, the Joy of my Life," then, I read 'The Letters of St. Teresa of the Andes.'" The 3rd book I read was entitled, "A New Hymn to God" and finally, I read the "Testimonies to St. Teresa of the Andes." These books were very helpful in making me know and appreciate the attractiveness of this young, Carmelite saint. There are other books and resources that are available in Spanish, but as far as I know, those 4 books are the only ones available in English right now. So my research regarding her story is based only on those 4 books I mentioned.

Reading most especially her letters, inspired me greatly and transported me into her times and her ways, her feelings and her sentiments, her disappointments and sorrows, her strong faith and courage, her joys, her laughter! It was as if she was writing to me! It was as if she was my best friend. Her letters and writings were very clear and simple, and as you read along, you can feel her sincerity and concern towards others especially for other people's spiritual well-being. No wonder it has been said that her writings have become a source of grace for many people.

Hers was a short life. She entered the Carmel of Los Andes at the age of 18. She chose the Los Andes Carmel because of its poverty. It did not even have electricity or hot running water, but she was inspired by the joyful spirit of the sisters. In Carmel, she was given the name Sister Teresa of Jesus in honour of St. Teresa of Jesus of Avila, the foundress of the Discalced Carmelite Order. She died of typhus on April 12th, 1920 at the age of 19. She was only in Carmel for 11 months.

The fame of her holiness grew after her death in 1920. Large crowds of people came to her funeral Mass, even though the services were not publicized, and being a cloistered nun, she was unknown to the people in the area. On the words of her brother, Luis, he said: "*How can one explain that a religious unknown to the people*

of Los Andes and known only to a very small group of religious hidden away in an austere cloister, should have drawn such a crowd around her coffin?" He said, "I can only find one explanation. In their wisdom, Christian people, guided by God, have a sense of when true virtue and holiness exist."

After her death, many letters were received in the convent and in the Santiago home. The remarkable phenomenon was that not a single letter was a letter of condolence but rather, all they received were letters of congratulations, thanking God for giving them a new saint!

Santa Teresita, as she is popularly called in Chile, is a contemplative and a mystic, the first fruit of the holiness of the Teresian Carmelites in Latin America, and for the whole of America, for that matter, and as a result, Santa Teresita de los Andes was beatified on April 3, 1987, and canonized by Pope John Paul II on March 21st, 1993. Pope John Paul II called her "*a shining beacon for the young, and proposed her as a model of youth.*" The bishops of Chile declared her the Patroness of Children, especially homeless children and children in juvenile prisons. Sta. Teresita de los Andes is the first Chilean declared a Saint, the first American Discalced Carmelite Saint, and the youngest canonized Saint of Carmel!

Our Saint of the Andes was a contemplative soul. She had a very deep prayer life and personal intimacy with God. "*A soul when it truly loves, only wants to be with the loved one, to gaze on him always, to express what is going on in their hearts, and to embrace him more and more. It is for that reason that by loving Jesus with all our soul, we only desire to contemplate Him and to speak with Him alone and to exchange our miserable sentiments for His divine sentiments.*" (letter 130)

As a mystic, she began receiving extraordinary favors and graces when she was about 7 years old when the Blessed Mother for whom she had a very great devotion, started speaking to her. In her diary, she recorded that at the age of 10, when she received her First Communion for which she seriously prepared herself for 1 year, Jesus himself started to speak to her. She then remarked that since that first embrace, (first communion) Jesus did not let her go, but took her for Himself. For that day on, the earth no longer held any attraction for her.

Her mystical experience began with locutions and interior words and later on, she spoke of "interior voices," which she heard especially after Holy Communion or when praying before the Blessed Sacrament. She had imaginary visions of the suffering Christ and intellectual visions of God's perfection and her own littleness. She experienced ecstasies, levitations and raptures. But we all know from our Holy Mother St. Teresa, that the authenticity of mystical graces is proved by their effects and those who personally knew Juanita saw how she progressed in virtue, in prayer, and in charity, so that they were able to be certain that it all came from God. In the letters that she wrote to her spiritual directors, most especially the letters that she wrote to Fr. Artemio Colom, S.J., Fr. Julian Cea, C.M.F., Fr. Joseph Blanch, C.M.F. and Fr. Antonio Maria Falgueras, S.J., she confided her mystical experiences.

As a model for the youth of today, she is known for her vibrance and her joy. In this world full of tears and sorrows, we look to her life and her story, and we find that her life is not too far from our own. So, if only we try a little bit harder, and are willing to hear and listen to what she has to say, maybe we can make a difference in our lives and the lives of others. If only we give ourselves totally to God like she did, and have a little bit more faith, a little bit more confidence in God, then our minds and hearts can open up better and let the good Jesus take over.

Sta. Teresita de los Andes manifests to us the joy of truly knowing God and sincerely loving Him, with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul. She manifests to us joy, even in suffering! "*When Jesus is loved, everything is joy! The cross is not heavy; martyrdom is not felt. We live more in Heaven than on earth.*" (letter 104.) This is the distinctive feature of her spirituality: "**God is infinite joy!**" Pope John Paul II emphasized this point, and said: "*This is the new hymn of Christian love that rises spontaneously from the soul of this young girl! God is infinite joy!*"

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, Pope Paul VI reminded us that the human person is being made for joy, not for sadness. The mind can give you joy, but this joy is fleeting. True joy is found in the heart,

given as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love and of truth. Where God is, that is where true joy is found. Therefore, a person who knows God's presence among all things, with all things and in all things has joy. True love and joy go together. Where there is love, there is joy. Therefore, the more you love, the more you will experience joy.

When you read her diary, and her letters to her family, her friends, to the prioress of Los Andes Carmel, to her spiritual directors, you will find that the recurring theme of her thoughts and conversations are centered on love of God, the joy and happiness she experienced because of this love, and how hard she wished and prayed that others too will experience this love. She said, "*The life of the Carmel is one of love. This is our profession.*" (letter 104).

In a letter to a friend, she said, (letter 121), "*I wish I could get you to know God and love God the way I do.*" In another letter to another friend, she said, "*I wish you could know Him that you might truly fall in love with Him.*" (letter 136) And still in another letter to her 2nd cousin, she said, "*How happy I'd be if you would fall in love with my Jesus! What a treasure you would find in that divine Heart! Day and night He stands knocking at the door of your heart asking for a little spot, a little love, and will you not open your heart to Him and receive Him warmly?*" (letter 110)

The inscription in her tombstone reads: "*El Amor es Mas Fuerte,*" which means, "*Love is stronger.*" St. Paul teaches us in his letter to the Corinthians 13:1-3 that this is indeed so: Love is stronger! "*I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have all the knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains- but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt - but if I have no love, this does me no good.*"

What this means is that I could be the wisest and most knowledgeable person on earth, I could dedicate my entire life and sacrifice my life for others, I could do all the greatest things to help other people, I could give away my fortune for the welfare of others, I could perform all the greatest deeds for the good of the world, and spend night and day trying to help others but if I have no love in my heart, all of these efforts are worth nothing. Even if I give up my body to be burnt, as St. Paul said, if I have no love, this still means nothing. Therefore, love is stronger than any of the best deeds that one could ever do. Love is always the foundation, the glue that keeps the universe together. Love is stronger than faith, love is stronger than hope. Love is stronger.

Love is stronger, because love comes from God who is love. Whoever loves God will be filled abundantly with His favors and graces, the wondrous gifts of the Holy Spirit. Whoever loves God, possesses everything and he will find joy because He is the source of all joy.

St. Paul exhorts us therefore to set our hearts on the more important gifts of the spirit for which love is the greatest. It is love, therefore that we should strive for!

There is another characteristic of a loving heart that is both encouraging and astonishing: A loving heart is a courageous heart. It knows no fear of separation because when love is true, time, distance, even death cannot separate lovers. As St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans 8:35, "*Who, then can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death?*"

In one of her letters, she wrote: "*Death is not frightening for a Carmelite. Death is when she is going to begin living her true life, when she will fall into the arms of the One she loved here on earth above all things. In death, she is going to be eternally submerged in love.*" (letter 134.) In another letter, she said, "*To die! What greater ideal is there? To die is to live in God. Can there be a greater happiness? Oh! Jesus! You are all powerful, come and steal me away, and may it be soon, very soon, and for always!*"

It is said that more than a million people visit the Sanctuary of Auco-Rinconada of Los Andes each year. Today, countless people have received favours and graces and even miracles through her intercession. What is the reason for her popularity? What is it that makes her very attractive to people everywhere?

For me, the reason for her appeal is her simplicity, her youthfulness, the little things that she does here and there that she performs with utmost care and with utmost affection. Note this: The small, and ordinary things that are performed faithfully and perfectly, is what makes a soul great.

Her life story is attractive because it seemed so ordinary, yet extraordinary because Jesus was her constant companion every step of the way.

Jesus made her life what it was. Didn't she say that hers is "*a poor soul who without any merit in her part, Jesus Christ loved in a special way and filled abundantly with His favours and graces?*"

What did she do to become a saint? When asked that question, her cousin, Francisco Javier Dominguez Solar said, "*She became a saint as a daughter in the family, as a student, and as a Carmelite, by submitting herself humbly and carefully to God's will and without doing anything extraordinary.*" As her brother Luis stated, "*Juanita served God to the ultimate, using the strength she had. She lived only for Christ.*" Yes, these are all true statements, but most importantly, she LOVED.

What did she do to become a saint? The answer is, she just loved! She loved with all the strength of her soul. She was a young woman madly in love! That's all! But love is everything, so she actually chose the best part! Her words were: "*I can't do anything else than love Him. What do you expect when Jesus Christ, that mad lover of mine, made me fall madly in love with Himself?*"

In her letter to her older sister, Lucia, (letter 112) she said, "*I want to tell you about my happiness. Yes, I want you to feel for just a moment, the happiness of belonging entirely to God, but there's no human language that can express the divine feelings in which my soul finds itself submerged. I've given Him everything, it's true, but I've also come to possess the one who is Everything.*"

Love. Endless love ...

One of the most endearing words that she wrote regarding this love was from a letter she wrote to her 2nd cousin, Herminia Valdes Ossa whom she called "Gordita" which means, "Chubby." In this letter, written to Chubby on August 17, 1919, when she was in Carmel, she told Chubby about this love. (This is my favorite! I like the way she expressed this!) She said, "*Jesus and I love each other. He, infinitely, and I, with all my soul's strength.*"

"Jesus and I love each other. He, infinitely, and I, with all my soul's strength."

This is the reason for her attractiveness!

She is just so sweet. So pure, so simple.

Jesus attracted her first and she did not resist. Jesus attracted her and she had been attracted.

That was how it all began .

Hers was a loving and a joyful response to God's call.

We should rejoice, therefore, and hope and pray that we, too, will respond to God's call the way she did: lovingly, and joyfully!

So, then,

*"Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again: rejoice!
Your kindness should be known to all.
The Lord is near.
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,*

*by prayer and petition,
with thanksgiving,*

*make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God
that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)*