

Feast of St Teresa of Jesus
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Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD

When a person is going to be proclaimed a saint, the Church chooses experts to study the works and the life of that person. When the Church prepares the Liturgy of the Word, or prayers, these prayers or the Liturgy of the Word will be able to capture the spirit of that person.

The Church, looking at St Teresa of Jesus, decided to pick up a reading from the Book of Wisdom, a reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans and another reading from the Gospel of John. Now, the Gospel of John was picked up long before St Teresa was proclaimed Doctor of the Church, together with St Catherine of Sienna and later on also St Therese. These are three women which the Church recognizes as Doctors of the Universal Catholic Church. In the Gospel, Jesus Christ said these words "My teaching is not from myself, it comes from the one who sent me, and if anyone is prepared to do his will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether my doctrine is my own." "If any ... he will know". To do the will of God. St Paul writing to Timothy says "This is the will of God; that all will come to the knowledge of the truth, and do the same." It is God's will that we, together, not only as individuals, but as a community as the "Kahal", as the assembly, as the church, work together, not only for our own salvation, but for the salvation of everyone.

St Paul says "with fear and trembling, work out your own salvation." It is not that we are going to earn it, far from it. Salvation is free, the Bible says "by grace you are saved", and this is not your doing. It is not based on merit or on works, so that no one will be able to boast about it, it is by grace. We must learn how to open our life to the grace of God. Sometimes we take it lightly because, as we pray the prayer for the Holy Spirit to come to guide us, to mold us, while He is molding us, we begin to grumble. Sirach is clear about this "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation for as gold is tested in fire, so the acceptable in the furnace of humiliation." Any person who has read any literature that St Teresa of Jesus has written will see how much suffering she had to pass through.

Usually, people of great importance, people of certain value, try to summarize their life in a phrase or in a sentence. You see it in Jesus Christ "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." You see it in Jesus Christ's words "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. And those who belong to the truth will listen to my voice." "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down his life as a ransom for many." We find these expressions on the lips of Jesus Christ "Go and learn that I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Go and learn, as if it is a continuous learning that we have to learn that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. As we have to learn, hearing the prophet Samuel speaking to King Saul, telling him that obedience is better than sacrifice.

There are certain words, brothers and sisters, such as "sacrifice, suffering, pain, sorrow, obedience". These words today are in a crisis. Obedience, what is obedience? Is it blind obedience? When you speak about obedience people will ask you "Do you mean blind obedience? Do you mean I have to obey? What do you mean I have to obey?" No, you do not have to obey, no you don't have to obey. You need only to follow Jesus Christ - obedience unto death, even death on the cross. Of course, Jesus Christ said "If you love me, you will obey my commandments." That is why we have the Rule of St Albert that tells us that we should meditate on the Word of God day and night. We have our own Constitutions too, that give great importance to the Word of God. We have our Holy Mother, St Teresa, who tells us how important it is that you and I embrace the Gospel. We look at the life of St Teresa, St John of the Cross or Edith Stein, and we discover the phrases that we discover also on the mouth of Jesus Christ. St John of the Cross will say "Domine Pati et con temini pro te" St Teresa will say "Aut

pati, Aut mori". Edith Stein will say "Ave Crux spes unica".

The Monastery from where I came, was built in the 1600's, and it was an International College for Missionaries from all over Europe. Before they were sent to the Land of Mission, they used to come to this Monastery in Malta and be trained in the culture and the language of the place where they would be going. It is not something new. We are going to Canada, and we have to know how to handle these Canadians, they might be ultra sensitive. This refectory is humungous, and when you enter the refectory, there is a big cross in the middle, a big picture of St Teresa of Jesus on one side, and one of St John of the Cross on the other, and big letters on wood with the motto of St Teresa "Aut Pati, Aut Mori" and the motto of St John of the Cross, "Domine Pati et con temini pro te". "Aut Pati, Aut Mori", either I suffer or I die, either I suffer for you, or I die for you. St John of the Cross, the same.

Knowing the importance of the Word of God and how to hold on to this Word, brings persecution, like it did to the prophet Jeremiah. When he was preaching the Word of God, he was faced with great persecution, and he decided to no longer preach the Word, but then he said "I felt like fire inside me, burning my bones. I tried to hold this fire inside me, but I couldn't, and I had to return again to preaching." This is the fire that the Saints feel, the fire of God's presence. God is a consuming fire. It is this fire that makes them sing songs of praise, full of joy, even in the middle of suffering, even in the middle of the flame, like the youth of Daniel, obedience brought them to the fire. Many times obedience brings us to the fire. Not only do we see with St Teresa of Jesus that obedience brought her face to face with the fire, with persecution, with suffering, with pain, but it is our life. Obedience - take this office. I should have never said 'Yes, I will take it.' Obedience to accept that office. They will crush you. Sometimes you think that I am joking when I hand over the certificate for the Promises, and I tell you that this is not a diploma, it is a 'death sentence'.

Sometimes we don't give importance to the words of St Paul when he says "We rejoice in our suffering, know that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

"I prayed, and Wisdom was given to me." This is the first sentence that came to us today. "I prayed, and Wisdom was given to me." The concluding verse from the Gospel says "Let the man come and drink who believes in me! As Scripture says: 'From his breast shall flow fountains of living water.' He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive." For those who believe in me living waters will gush out, will overflow from them. Brothers and sisters, in holding on to the Will of God, in striving to the way of perfection, suffering and tribulations are indispensable. Tribulations are the sharpening tools in the hands of God. When God wants to use us, He makes us pass through tribulation. He makes us pass through suffering. It is no wonder that Oscar Wilde comes with that beautiful expression "Pleasure for the beautiful body ... pain for the beautiful soul. Where there is sorrow, you are to find holy ground." It is this pain and this sorrow that make the saints, like St Teresa, very strong in front of many obstacles, convinced with the words of the Psalmists, encouraged by the words, "With him on my side, I can climb any wall." That is why, brothers and sisters, people like St Teresa, St John of the Cross, St Therese and St Benedicta of the Cross, you do not find the word "defeat" in their writings, because for them, a crisis and a defeat is "you hit rock bottom, and you bounce higher than you were before." That is what it is. For the saints, defeat is "you hit rock bottom, and as soon as you hit there, you bounce back up much higher than you were before. Of course there is suffering and pain. This is what St Teresa means in carrying the Cross and what St Paul means when he says "You complete in our body what was lacking in the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ." The reading that we heard this evening "We complete in our body what was lacking in the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ." What was lacking in the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing. But how are people going to see this in the twenty-first century? By meeting a person like you, like me, like any

other person who absorbs this suffering in such a way that he is convinced that God is going to come to his rescue, and out of this suffering and pain, he is going to bring something good. Suffering is not a mystery, suffering is a revelation, it reveals whether we really believe in this God. That is why the prophet Habacuck will enter into a deep crisis. The prophet Habacuck, looking around him is seeing that the evil prosper, and the good are crushed. The evil people touch the sand, the mud and it turns into gold, and the good people touch gold, and it is becoming sand and mud, and so he entered into a crisis like the people of God. He enters into this big crisis. How long, do I have to wait for you to come? How long? Why?

You see a stillborn child, and you have to say "Why? Why does the child have to be born this way? His mother waited so long for this child, she is childless, she needed this child. Why?" When we find ourselves face to face with suffering we are scandalized. We think that St Teresa was not scandalized? Of course she was. When she comes out with the expression half jokingly, half serious, "It is no wonder that you have so few friends if you treat them in this way." I mean I don't see much difference from the words of Habacuck. "How long, how long?" What kind of life is that? What was the reaction? What was God's response to the prophet, to you and to me, to St Teresa? Because she too, for twenty years was in a crisis of faith. We heard recently, even with Mother Teresa, how people were scandalized because she spoke about doubt. What was the response to the prophet Habacuck? He told him "Write this vision." A vision, not those kinds of visions that we constantly hear about, like this morning after the Mass, a guy came to relay a vision to me. Yesterday, after Sunday Mass, another lady comes to tell me a vision. Not that kind. He told him "Write this vision, and write it in big letters, so that those who are in a hurry will be able to read it. If I delay from coming, wait for me because I will surely come." What is the lesson? The lesson is this - in the life of the person of God, in the life of the Christian, there is no room for impatience, much less for doubt. There is no room.

If I delay from coming, wait for me, because I will surely come. You should not have any doubts about my words. I said that I will come, and I will. I said that I will be there to save you, and I will. The whole history of Redemption stands on two words. Pakod and Pakadti. I have seen, I have taken notice, I have heard the cry of my people, and I have come down to help them. I have come down to their rescue.

The Saints saw this. St Teresa, through the intercession of St Joseph, especially in her Foundations and in her life, you can see why she calls him the Saint of the Impossible. You can see why she can say "There was not a grace that I asked him that he did not do it for me." And how did she repay him? By naming the Foundations, one after the other, in his name. Pakod, Pakadti. I have taken notice, I have remembered. I have taken into account what is going on. I am writing it in a book. You cannot cheat God brothers and sisters.

Then, later on, God can say, through Joseph "And when God will take notice of you, and when God remembers you, do not forget to take with you my bones." God has taken notice of you sent you out of Egypt, you take notice that you will take the bones with you. Few are those people who can penetrate into the meaning of the Words of the Good Thief on the cross, when he turns to Jesus and says to Him "remember me". He might have been a biblical scholar this guy. He knew about those two words, that God, in the suffering and the pain is going to come down and rescue him, and so he turns to Jesus Christ and he says "remember me". We think that it was a risk, because can you imagine a thief, saying to Jesus Christ who knows everything "remember me". Jesus Christ could have told him "what do you think, that I am stupid, that I am blind, that I am deaf, that I do not see how many families you have ruined by stealing from them? How many families you pushed into bankruptcy because you stole their property?" No, He does not say this. He says "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Remember ... to remember, because for the Jewish people, you are what you remember. Not only for

the Jewish people, also for you and for me. You read the life of the Saints, like St Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St Therese, and you begin to imagine who is their guest ... who they have in their hearts. Did you notice what the Church chose as a response to the first reading today? The Church said "My heart sings with joy to the living God." Their life has become a hymn of joy, a hymn of praise to God. Jesus Christ said "Let your light thus shine in front of others, so that seeing your good deeds they will give praise to your Father who is in heaven." With your words, with your actions, with your behaviour, you will entice them, lead them, to praise God. But sometimes what do we do? We meet and we throw another log in the fire. That is what we do with each other. Instead of trying to calm each other down, trying to help each other, to see the good qualities in the other person ... no we do the opposite.

Brothers and sisters, every person has the right to be judged on his best moments. That we look at the worst moments, at the mistakes of the other person, and try to judge that person on their mistake is wrong. Do you think that there were no mistakes in the life of St Teresa? Of course there were. Do you think that there was no craziness in the life of St Therese? Of course there was. It is no wonder that some scholars think that she was not all there, especially when she was very young. She had great pride, we all know the stories, like when she did not want to bend over to pick up a penny. There was no need for her to bend down ... I mean it's not like she was seven feet tall that it would be difficult. But even with all this craziness, they discovered the image of God inside of them, and they came to the same conclusion that St Paul has arrived to. "The life I now live is for Christ who loved me and gave me himself for me." For me to live is Christ. Life = Christ. Without Christ, there is no life in me.

It is no wonder that we are trained that when we look at the Cross, we see the plus (+) sign. This is a person who has learned to embrace the Cross. St Teresa in her meditations on the Song of Songs, when she speaks about embracing the Cross, any person who learns how to embrace the Cross, lives life with a plus. But many times we just touch it and we know what St Teresa tells us, she says "many people think that they are carrying the Cross, in reality they just touch it, and by touching it, it breaks them to pieces. But, if they embrace it, they will discover that it carries them, which is far from them carrying the Cross. Like St Paul says, "Let no one disturb me, let no one give me trouble, because I carry in my body the marks of Jesus Christ".

What is the meaning of suffering for the good news. A person who is proclaiming the Gospel of Peace finds himself in prison, because he is preaching peace. He is preaching peace. This is two thousand years ago, and we are still living this experience brothers and sisters. How many missionaries suffer because they are preaching peace, preaching love - love towards your neighbour? But we? No! We massacre each other left right and centre, and then we claim that we are following the charism of St Teresa - humility, love of neighbour and detachment. Without these three, there is no genuine prayer, and as Carmelites, we are not called to pray, we are called to become a prayer. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, or do something else, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving praise to God.

I know that some of you have heard this story, but most of you have not heard it.

There were two persons walking along the river. All of a sudden they came to a sharp turn, and as soon as they turned, on the other side of the river, there was this humungous castle. One person said to the other, "Do you see that castle?" "Yes." "It is beautiful yes?" "Yes."" When I was very young, I used to come here every day, and I watched that castle in the evening, and by the amount of light that was in that castle, I knew who the guests were. When there was only one window lit, I knew that it was only the watchman there. When there were two windows lit, I knew that there were some members of the family there. When there were quite a good number of windows lit, I knew that they were throwing a social, and that they had guests. But when the Prince was the guest, the whole castle was lit."

People who look at your face, will hear your words, and they will know who your guest is. They will know whether it is anger, jealousy or envy. They will know who is your guest, because you radiate it. You arrive near someone "How are you doing?" "Fine", and that's it, and you move away. "Nice weather." "Yes, nice weather." "It's getting cold." These are empty phrases, pretending that I am opening a communication to the other persons. In reality you are not opening a communication brothers and sisters. Who is your guest? Do you want Jesus Christ without the Cross? That is not what St Teresa took. Notice the beautiful pictures of the saints. In the drawing of Fr Martin, we see a cross in her hand. The same with St John of the Cross, he put crosses everywhere and clocks everywhere. Why? To make him conscious about tension, because life is a tension. When eternity wants to enter time, there is tension, because time cannot contain eternity. When we become conscious of God's presence among us, the presence of God in your brother and sister, there is tension. Sometimes people say without even knowing "because when I talked to him (or her) he (or she) makes me so tense. If you were to see the image of God in him, or in her, perhaps you would not be so tense. Perhaps you would thank God that you are in front of a vision. (I do not mean the visions you may have because you ate some peanuts before you went to sleep, and you had indigestion and thought it was a vision. No.)

St Teresa comes to you and to me brothers and sisters as a very down to earth person. She tells us explicitly about the importance of community life. We know how much she suffered from the community herself, from the Superiors, the people who should have helped her. They put obstacles in her way. It is these obstacles that will train us. A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner. It is not a matter of seeing a picture of St Teresa or St John of the Cross, and commenting on how beautiful it is. Or reading her life to see how much she suffered. She has the spirit to embrace without being discouraged, to continue on, to keep her focus on Jesus Christ crucified, to the extent that she wants to suffer for Him or to die for Him, and she left it in the hands of God. The same it is with our Father St John of the Cross, with St Therese. So many people misinterpret her teachings, because she is young and looks like a nice lady, but there is the cross. So much so that she wanted you and me not to leave it apart - St Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face. And we know the Holy Face. Isaiah says "in front of him you hide your face." He was stricken, wounded, and with all that he was accursed by God, and through His wounds we were healed. He was carrying our infirmities, our sins, we thought that He was accursed by God. And this is what St Therese embraced too. It is not just the Infant Jesus, but also of the Holy Face. It is the same with Edith Stein. Her love for the Cross. So when we come to study the life of the Saints, it is not a matter of reading a book, it is a matter of hearing them, allowing them to teach us how to be flexible to God's Will in our life, the way they were flexible to God's Will. The pain and the suffering that St Therese had to pass through was something incredible. Also with St John of the Cross, perhaps it is more clear with St John of the Cross than in St Teresa, but even St Teresa, the trouble that she had to undergo in making the Foundation, and having the approval of the Constitutions was something incredible. That is history, and we have to learn to live it in order to benefit. History can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward. So, listening to the Word that the Church chose for you and for me; the first part, prayer and wisdom, the second part this childhood, "You did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of sonship, crying out "Abba! Father!" Who are you? Who am I? If someone meets you and asks "Who are you?". You will just say your name perhaps, very few would answer "I am a child of God." "God is my Father." Perhaps you will be confused like Adolph Shofenhouar the philosopher, when he hit that lady, and dashed her to the ground. She was so furious, "Who are you?", and he answered "That is exactly what I was thinking about lady, 'Who am I?'"

I hope that the courage that St Teresa had in embracing God's will, will be the same courage that you and I will have.

"I prayed and wisdom was given to me." It is this wisdom which will lead us to the summit of the mount

of perfection, that is Jesus Christ. Because as long as we travel, if we hold on to the Word of God we will discover the truth, and in discovering the truth we discover life, and as we discover life, we discover that Jesus Christ is the Way. He is the Way that leads to life. He is the Way that leads us to the truth. This is why he told us "If you continue my work, you will be truly my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." St Paul said "I am in prison, but the word of God is not in prison, it is not chained, it is still free to liberate you and me from our own enslavement." Yes, as we come today honouring our Mother St Teresa. Look at her embracing the Cross. If we want to follow her and have her spirit, let us have a greater love for the Cross, because in the long run, Edith Stein summarized it very well. "Hail Cross, our only hope." When you are lost, the Cross is magnetic North, it will help you to take your bearing to discover how much God loves you to the point of giving His only Son for our Salvation.