

SANTA TERESA

Her Own Story

Of Her Family

I had a father and mother who were devout and feared God. My father was very much given to the reading of good books; and so he had them in Spanish that his children might read them. These books, with my mother's carefulness to make us say our prayers and to bring us up devout to our Lady and to certain Saints, began to make me think seriously when I was, I believe, six or seven years old. It helped me too that I never saw my father and mother respect anything but goodness. They were very good themselves. My father was a man of great charity toward the poor and compassion for the sick and also for servants; so much so that he never could be persuaded to keep slaves, for he pitied them so much; and a slave belonging to one of his brothers being once in his house was treated by him with as much tenderness as his own children. He used to say that he could not endure the pain of seeing that she was not free. He was a man of great truthfulness; nobody ever heard him swear or speak ill of any one; his life was most pure.

My mother also was a woman of great goodness, and her life was spent in great infirmities. She was singularly pure in all her ways. Though possessing great beauty, yet it was never known that she gave reason to suspect that she made any account whatever of it; for though she was only three and thirty years old when she died, her apparel was already that of a woman advanced in years. She was very calm and had great sense. The sufferings she went thru during her life were most grievous, her death most Christian.

We were three sisters and nine brothers. All, by the mercy of God, resembled their parents in goodness except myself, though I was the most cherished of my father. (pp. 2 - 4)

Of Her Early Years

One of my brothers was nearly of my own age; and he it was whom I most loved, though I was very fond of them all and they of me. He and I used to read Lives of Saints together. When I read of martyrdom undergone by the Saints for the love of God, it struck me that the vision of God was very cheaply purchased; and I had a great desire to die a martyr's death, and I used to discuss with my brother how we could become martyrs. We settled to go together to the country of the Moors, begging our way for the love of God that we might there be beheaded; and our Lord, I believe, had given us courage enough even at so tender an age, if we could have found the means to proceed; but our greatest difficulty seemed to be our father and mother.

As soon as I saw it was impossible to go any place where people would put me to death for the sake of God, my brother and I set about becoming hermits; and in an orchard belonging to the house we contrived as well as we could to build hermitages by piling up small stones one on the other, which fell down immediately; and so it came to pass that we found no means of accomplishing our wish. I used to delight exceedingly, when playing with other children, in the building of monasteries, as if we were nuns; and I think I wished to be a nun, though not so much as I did to be a martyr or a hermit.

I remember when my mother died, I was about twelve years old - a little less. When I began to understand my loss, I went in my affliction to an image of our Lady, and with many tears implored her to be my mother. (pp. 4 - 6)

Of Her Frivolity as a Girl

My mother was very fond of books of chivalry and we her children were left at liberty to read them. Perhaps she did this to distract her thoughts from her great sufferings and occupy her children that they might not go astray in other ways. It annoyed my father so much that we had to be careful he never

saw us. I contracted a habit of reading these books. I thought there was no harm in it when I wasted many hours night and day in so vain an occupation, even when I kept it secret from my father. So completely was I mastered by this passion that I thought I could never be happy without a book.

I began to make much of dress and to wish to please others by my appearance. I took pains with my hands and my hair, used perfumes and all the vanities within reach. This fastidiousness of excessive neatness lasted some years.

I had some cousins; for into my fathers house no others were allowed an entrance. These cousins were nearly of mine own age - a little older perhaps. We were always together and they had a great affection for me. In everything that gave them pleasure I kept the conversation alive - listened to the stories of their affections and childish follies, and, what is still worse, my soul began to give itself up to what was the cause of all its disorders. . . .

I had a sister much older than myself, from whose modesty and goodness, which were great, I learned nothing; and I learned every evil from a relative who was often in the house. She was so light and frivolous that my mother took great pains to keep her out of the house. I was very fond of this person's company and gossiped and talked with her; for she helped me to all the amusements I liked, and, what is more, found some for me, and communicated to me her own conversations and her vanities. . . . This friendship distressed my father and sister exceedingly. Still I was never inclined to much evil - for I hated naturally anything dishonorable - but only to the amusement of a pleasant conversation. (pp. 7 - 10)

Of the Convent School

I had not spent, I think, three months in these vanities when they took me to a monastery in the city where I lived, in which children like myself were brought up. For the first eight days I suffered much, but more from the suspicion that my vanity was known, than from being in the monastery. But within eight days, I think sooner, I was much more contented than I had been in my father's house. All the nuns were well pleased with me; for the Lord had given me grace to please every one, wherever I might be. I was therefore made much of in the monastery. Though at this time I hated to be a nun, yet I was delighted at the sight of nuns so good. I remained in the monastery a year and a half and was very much the better for it. I began to say many vocal prayers and to ask all the nuns to pray for me, that God would place me in that state wherein I was to serve him; but for all this I wished not to be a nun though at the same time I was afraid of marriage. (pp. 10 - 13)

Of Her Decision to Become a Nun

At this time . . . our Lord . . . sent me a serious illness, so that I was obliged to return to my fathers house. I began to be afraid that if I were then to die I should go down to hell. Though I could not bend my will to become a nun, I saw that the religious state was the best and safest. And thus little by little I resolved to force myself into it. The struggle lasted three months. I used to press this reason against myself: The trials and suffering of living as a nun cannot be greater than those of purgatory, and I have well deserved to be in hell. It is not much to spend the rest of my life ~~in~~ as if I were in purgatory and then go straight to heaven. I was, I think, more influenced by servile fear than by love to enter religion. (pp. 14 - 15)

Of Her Illness

The change in the habits of my life and in my food proved hurtful to my health; and though my happiness was great, that was not enough. The fainting

fits began to be more frequent and my heart was so seriously affected that every one who saw it was alarmed; and I had many other ailments. And thus it was I spent the first year having very bad health. And as my illness was so serious - I was almost insensible at times, and frequently wholly so - my father took much pains to find some relief; and as the physicians who attended me had none to give, he had me taken to a place which had a great reputation for the cure of other infirmities. I remained there nearly a year, for three months of it suffering most cruel tortures - effects of the violent remedies which they applied. So great was the torment that it was feared it might end in madness. There was great loss of strength, for I could eat nothing, only drink. The pains I had were unendurable, and I was overwhelmed in a most deep sadness, so that I had no rest either night or day. Thereupon my father took me back. Then the physicians visited me again. All gave me up. They said I was also consumptive That night (following her father's refusal to let her go to confession) my sickness became so acute that for about four days I remained insensible. They administered the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and every hour thought I was dying. They must have thought I was dead more than once, for I found afterwards drops of wax on my eye-lids. ... For a day and a half the grave was open in my monastery, waiting for my body; and the friars of our Order in a house at some distance from this place performed funeral solemnities. But it pleased our Lord that I should come to myself. I wished to go to confession at once. The only comfort I had was this - if no one came near me, my pains frequently ceased; and then because I had a little rest, I considered myself quite well, and thus I was exceedingly happy when I saw myself free from those pains which were so sharp and constant..... I was now so anxious to return to my monastery that I had myself conveyed thither in the state I was in. There they received alive one whom they had waited for as dead; but her body was worse than dead. It is impossible to describe my extreme weakness, for I was nothing but bones. I remained in this state more than eight months and was paralytic, though getting better for about three years.

Of Her Lukewarmness

So then going on from pastime to pastime, from vanity to vanity, from one occasion of sin to another, I began to expose myself exceedingly to the very greatest dangers: my soul was so distracted by many vanities that I was ashamed to draw near to God in an act of special friendship as that of prayer. As my sins multiplied I began to lose the pleasure and comfort I had in virtuous things: and that loss contributed to the abandonment of prayer. But those who were about me thought I was not so wicked. They saw that I who was so young and exposed to so many occasions of sin, withdrew myself so often into solitude for prayer, read much, spoke of God, that I had an oratory of my own and furnished it with objects of devotion, that I spoke ill of no one, and other things of the same kind in me which have the appearance of virtue. ... In consequence of this, they gave me as much liberty as they did to the oldest nuns, and even more, and had great confidence in me. (pp. 41 - 42)

Of her first Vision

I was once with a person - it was at the very beginning of my acquaintance with her - when my Lord was pleased to show me that these friendships were not good for me: to warn me also, and in my blindness, which was so great, to give me light. Christ stood before me, stern and grave, giving me to understand what in my conduct was offensive to Him. I saw him with the eyes of the soul more distinctly than I could have seen him with the eyes of the body. The vision made so deep an impression upon me that though it is more than twenty six years ago I seem to see Him even now. (p. 45)

Of the Quickening of Her Soul (1555)

My soul was now grown weary and the miserable habits it had contracted would not suffer it to rest, though it was desirous of doing so. It came to pass one day, when I went into the oratory, that I saw a statue which they had put by there and which had been procured for a certain feast observed in the house. It was a representation of Christ most grievously wounded, and so devotional that the very sight of it, when I saw it, moved me - so well did it show forth what He suffered for us. So keenly did I feel the evil return I had made for those wounds that I thought my heart was breaking. I threw myself on the ground beside it, my tears flowing plentifully, and implored Him to strengthen me once for all, so that I might never offend Him any more..... It seems to me that I said to Him that I would not rise up till He granted my petition. I do certainly believe that this was of great service to me, because I have grown better ever since. (pp 65 - 66)

At that time the Confessions of Augustine were given me. When I began to read the Confessions I thought I saw myself there described and began to recommend myself greatly to this glorious Saint. When I came to his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it seemed to nothing less than that our Lord had uttered it for me: I felt so in my heart. I remained for some time lost in tears, in great inward affliction and distress. (p. 68)

After those two occasions of great compunction and sorrow of heart, accompanied by tears, I began in an especial way to give myself to prayer and to occupy myself less with those things that did me harm... and the spiritual graces grew in me. (p. 70)

Henceforth it is another and a new book - I mean another and a new life. Hitherto my life was my own. My life since I began these methods of prayer (which she explains in chapters X. to XXII.) is the life which God lived in me. (p. 197) When then I began to avoid the occasions of sin and to give myself more unto prayer, our Lord also began to bestow his graces upon me. His Majesty began to give me most frequently the grace of the prayer of quiet and very often that of union, which lasted some time. But as in these days women have fallen into great delusions and deceits of Satan, I began to be afraid because the joy and sweetness which I felt were so great and very often beyond my power to avoid. On the other hand I felt in myself a very deep conviction that God was with me especially when I was in prayer. I saw too that I grew better and stronger thereby. (p. 198)

Of Her First Ecstasy

One day having prayed for some time and implored the Lord to help him in all things, I began the hymn and as I was saying it, I fell into a trance - so suddenly that I was, as it were carried out of myself. I could have no doubt about it for it was most plain. This was the first time that the Lord bestowed upon me the grace of ecstasy. I heard these words: "I will not have thee converse with men but with angels." This made me wonder very much; for the commotion of my spirit was great and these words were uttered in the very depths of my soul. They made me afraid, - though on the other hand they gave me great comfort.

Of the Nature of Rapture

A rapture is absolutely irresistible, whilst union, inasmuch as we are then on our own ground, may be hindered, though that resistance be painful and violent. But rapture for the most part is irresistible. It comes in general as a shock, quick and sharp before you can collect your thoughts or help yourself in any way and you feel it as a cloud or a strong eagle rising upward and carrying you away on its wings. But though we feel how delicious it is, yet the weakness of our nature makes us afraid at first, and we re-

quire a much more resolute and courageous spirit than in the previous states, in order to risk everything, come what may and to abandon ourselves into the hands of God..... So trying is it that I would often resist and exert all my strength, particularly at those time when the rapture was coming upon me in public. This has not happened to me often. Once however it took place when we were all together in choir and I on my knees at the point of communicating. It was a very sore distress to me; for I thought it a most extraordinary thing and was afraid it would occasion much talk; so I commanded the nuns - for it happened after I was made prioress - never to speak of it. But at other times, the moment I felt our Lord was about to repeat the act, and once in particular during a sermon - it was the feast of our house, some great ladies being present - I threw myself on the ground; then the nuns came around me to hold me; but still the rapture was observed. (p. 161)

Concerning the ordinary characteristics of raputres, I have to say that when the rapure was over, my body seemed frequently to be buoyant as if all weight had departed from it, so much so that now and then I scarcely knew that my feet touched the ground. But during the rapture itself the body is very often as it were dead, perfectly powerless. It continues in the position it was in when the rapture came upon it, if sitting, sitting; if the hands were open or if they were shut, they will remain open or shut. For though the senses fail but rarely, it has happened to me occasionally to lose them wholly. But in general they are in disorder; and though they have no power whatever to deal with outward things, there remains the power of hearing and seeing; but it is as if the things heard and seen were at a great distance. (pp. 169 - 70) The soul is frequently absorbed, or to speak more correctly, our Lord absorbs it in himself; and when he has held it thus a moment, the will alone remains in union with Him. When we recover our consciousness, the faculties may remain, if the rapture has been deep, for a day or two, and even for three days, so absorbed, or as if stunned, so much so as to be in appearance no longer themselves. Here comes the pain of returning to this life; here it is the wings of the soul grew to enable it to fly so high. The soul as in a place of safety looks down on those below; it fears no dangers now - yea rather it courts them, as one assured beforehand of victory. It sees most clearly how lightly are the things of this world to be esteemed and the nothingness thereof. The soul now seeks not and possesses not, any other will but that of doing the Lord's will, and so it prays Him to let it be so. If the raptures be true raptures, the fruits and advantages thereof abide in the soul; but if they did not, I should have great doubts about their being from God - yea rather I should be afraid they were those frenzies of which St. Vincent speaks. (170 - 3

Of Her Divine Locutions

If we see visions and hear words it is never at the time when the soul is in union in the very rapture itself. At that moment.... all the faculties of the soul are suspended and, as I think, neither vision, nor understanding, nor hearing is possible at that time. The soul is then wholly in the power of another. But when this moment is passed, the soul continuing still entranced, then is the time of which I, am speaking; for the faculties, though not completely suspended, are so disposed that they are scarcely active, being, as it were, absorbed and incapable of making any reflections. When the understanding and the soul are thus troubled and distracted that they cannot form one sentence correctly; and yet grand sentences, perfectly arranged, such as the soul in its most recollected state never could have formed, are uttered. (pp. 216 - 7)

The words are very distinctly formed; but by the bodily ear they are not heard. They are however much more distinctly understood than would be possible if they were heard by the ear. (p. 214)

For myself I never had a single vision or revelation till God led me on to the prayer of union, unless it be on that occasion, now many years ago when I first saw our Lord. (p. 220)

Locutions that come from Satan not only do not leave any good effects behind, but do leave evil effects. This has happened to me but not more than two or three times. Our Lord warned me at once that they came from Satan. Over and above the great dryness which remains in the soul after these evil locutions, there is also a certain disquiet, such as I have had on many other occasions, when by our Lord's permission I fell into great temptation and travail of soul. (p: 219)

When we were deprived of many books written in Spanish and forbidden to read them, I felt it deeply, for some of these books were a great comfort to me, and I could not read them in Latin. Our Lord then said to me, "Be not troubled; I will give thee a living book." I could not understand it for at that time I had never had a vision. But a few days afterwards I understood it well enough. His Majesty has been to me a veritable book in which I saw all truth. (p. 231)

Of Her Visions

I was in great pain and distress and many prayers were made on my behalf, that our Lord would lead me by another and safer way; for this they told me was so suspicious. (The reference here is objections on the part of her confessors and others of her Order to the locutions) At the end of two years spent in prayer by myself and others to this end, that our Lord would either lead me by another way or show me the truth of this, - for now the locutions were extremely frequent, - this happened to me. I was in prayer one day, when I saw Christ close beside me, or, to speak more correctly, felt Him; for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body, nothing with the eyes of the soul. He seemed to me to be close beside me; and I saw too, as I believe, that it was He who was speaking to me. As I was utterly ignorant that such a vision was possible, I was extremely afraid at first, and did nothing but weep; however when He spoke but one word to me to reassure me, I recovered myself and was as usual calm and comforted and without any fear whatever. Jesus Christ seemed to be by my side continually; and as the vision was not imaginary, I saw no form; but I had a most distinct feeling that He was always on my right hand, a witness of all I did; and never at any time, if I was but slightly recollected or not too much distracted could I be ignorant of His near presence. (p. 234)

It pleased the Lord one day while I was in prayer to show me His hands and His hands only. The beauty of them was so great that no language can describe it. This put me in great fear, for everything that is strange, in the beginning of any new grace from God, makes me very much afraid. A few days later I saw His divine face and I was utterly entranced. (p. 246) This vision, though imaginary, I never saw with my bodily eyes, nor indeed any other, but only with the eyes of the soul. After the vision was over, it happened that I too imagined - the thought came at once - I had fancied these things.... But our Lord made such haste ...to declare the reality of it, that all doubts of the vision being a fancy on my part were quickly taken away, and ever since I see most clearly how silly I was. (pp. 247 - 8)

For two and a half years God granted me this grace very frequently; but it is now more than three years since He has taken away from me its continual presence thru another of a higher nature, as I shall perhaps explain hereafter. And though I saw Him speaking to me, and though I was contemplating his great beauty, and the sweetness with which those words of His came forth from His divine mouth - they were sometimes uttered with severity - and though I was extremely desirous to behold the color of His eyes or His stature, yet I never attained to the sight of them..... Our Lord showed Himself to me almost always as He is after His resurrection. Sometimes I saw Him on the cross, in the

Garden, crowned with thorns - that was rarely -; sometimes carrying His cross because of my necessities or those of others; but always in His glorified body. Many reproaches and many vexations have I borne while telling this - many suspicions and much persecution also. So certain were they to whom I spoke that I had an evil spirit that some would have me exorcised.

The Spear of Gold

Our Lord was pleased that I should have at times a vision of this kind: I saw an angel close by me on my left side in bodily form..... He was not large, but small of stature and most beautiful - his face burning as if he were one of the highest angels who seem to be all on fire..... I saw in his hand a long spear of gold and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out he seemed to be drawing them out also and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan, and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily but spiritual. It is the caring of a love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God. (p.266)

Satan

I was in an oratory once, when Satan in an abominable shape appeared on my left hand. I looked at his mouth in particular because he spoke and it was horrible. A huge flame seemed to issue out of his body, perfectly bright without any shadow. He spoke in a fearful way and said that though I had escaped out of his hands, he would yet lay hold of me again; I was in great terror and made the sign of the cross as well as I could, and then the form vanished but reappeared instantly. This occurred twice. (p. 283)

On another occasion I was tortured for five hours with such pains, such inward and outward sufferings that it seemed to me as if I could not bear them.It pleased the Lord to let me understand that it was the work of Satan; for I saw close beside me a frightful little negro, gnashing his teeth in despair at losing what he attempted to seize. When I saw him I laughed and had no fear. I know by frequent experience that there is nothing which puts the devils to flight like holy water. They run away before the sign of the cross but they return immediately. (p. 284)

Once on the night of All Souls, I was in an oratory, and having said one Nocturne, was saying some very devotional prayers at the end of our Breviary, when Satan put himself on the book before me to prevent my finishing my prayer. I made the sign of the cross and he went away. I then returned to prayer and he too came back (p. 288)

Of Her Periods of Dryness

I suffered at times and even still, though not so often - the most grievous trials together with bodily pains and afflictions arising from violent sicknesses; so that I could scarcely control myself. At other times my bodily sickness was more grievous, but as I had no spiritual pain I bore it with great joy. but when both pains came together upon me, my distress was so heavy that I was reduced to sore straits. I forgot all the mercies my Lord had shown me and remembered them only as a dream, to my great distress; for my understanding was so dull that I had a thousand doubts and suspicions whether I had ever understood matters aright, thinking that perhaps it was all fancy. I looked upon myself as so wicked as to have been the cause, by my sins, of all the evils and all the heresies that had sprung up. (p. 273)..... That it is Satan's work is clear from the restlessness and discomfort with which it begins and the trouble it causes the soul while it lasts, from the obscurity and distress and dryness and indisposition for prayer and for every good work which it produces.

Faith is then dead and asleep like all the other virtues.....And on the other hand temptations seem to press it down and make it dull, so that its knowledge of God becomes to it as that of something which it hears of far away. At other times my trials came upon me - they still come - in another form; and then it seems to me that the very possibility of thinking a good thought or desiring the accomplishment of it were taken away from me: both soul and body are altogether useless and a heavy burden. (p 278)

These sufferings (she refers here to physical illness) were as nothing compared with the anguish of my soul, a sense of oppression, of stifling and of pain so keen, accompanied by so hopeless and cruel an affliction that I know not how to speak of it. If I said that the soul is continually being torn from the body it would be nothing, - for this implies destruction of life at the hands of another; but here it is the soul itself that is tearing itself to pieces. I cannot describe that inward fire or that despair, surpassing all torments and all pain. (p. 299)

Of the Founding of the Monastery of St. Joseph

One day after Communion our Lord commanded me to labor with all my might to this end. He made me great promises, - that the monastery would certainly be built; that He would take great delight therein; that it should be called St. Joseph's; that St. Joseph would keep guard at the door and our Lady at the other; that Christ would be in the midst of us; that the monastery would be a star shining in great splendor. (p. 304) So efficacious was the vision and such was the nature of the words our Lord spoke to me, that I could not possibly doubt they came from Him. I suffered most keenly because I saw in part the great anxieties and troubles that the work would cost me, and I was also very happy in the house I was in then. (p. 305)

Of Her Spiritual Marriage

While praying in the church before I went into the house, and being as it were in a trance, I saw Christ; who it seemed to me received me with very great affection, placed a crown on my head and thanked me for what I had done for His Mother. (p 360)

It is also to be observed that in every vision or revelation which our Lord in His mercy sent me, a great gain accrued to my soul. The vision of Christ left behind an impression of His exceeding beauty, and it remains with me to this day. One vision alone is enough to effect this; what then must all those visions have done which our Lord in His mercy sent me? One exceedingly great blessing has resulted therefrom, and it is this, - I had one very grievous fault, which was the source of much evil; namely, whenever I found one well-disposed toward myself and I liked him, I used to have such an affection for him as compelled me always to remember and think of him. All this was so hurtful that it brought my soul to the very verge of destruction. But ever since I saw the beauty of our Lord, I never saw any one who in comparison with Him seemed even endurable. (p 365 - 6)

My love of and trust in our Lord after I had seen Him in a vision began to grow, for my conversation with Him was continual. I saw that though He is God, He was man also; that He is not surprised at the frailties of men. (p 367)

It is true that I have this day been rejoicing in our Lord and have dared to complain to His Majesty. I said unto Him: How is it, O my God, that it is not enough for Thee to detain me in this wretched life and that I should have to bear with it for the love of Thee and be willing to live where everything hinders the fruition of Thee; where besides I must eat and sleep, transact business and converse with every one, all for Thy love? how is it then that in the rare moments I am with Thee Thou hidest Thyself from me? How is this con-

sistent with Thy compassion? How can that love Thou hast for me endure this? I believe, O Lord, if it were possible for me to hide myself from Thee as Thou hidest Thyself from me - I think and believe so - such is Thy love, that Thou wouldst not endure it at my hands. O Lord, I beseech Thee, look to this; it must not be; a wrong is done to one who loves Thee so much.

I happened to utter these words and others of the same kind when I should have been thinking rather how my place in hell was pleasant in comparison with the place I deserved. But now and then my love makes me foolish, so that I lose my senses. (pp 669 - 70)

Then appearing to me, as on other occasions, in an imaginary vision, most interiorly, He held out His right hand and said: "Behold this nail! it is the pledge of thy being my bride from this day forth. Until now thou hadst not merited it; from henceforth thou shalt regard My honor, not only as of one who is thy Crator, King and God, but as thine, My veritable bride; My honor is thine and ~~My honor is thine~~ thine is Mine. (p. 451)

I was in pain one night and my usual sickness was coming on..... When I was thus distressed our Lord appeared unto me. He comforted me greatly and told me I must do this for His love and bear it; my life was necessary now. And so I believe I have never known real pain since I resolved to serve my Lord and my Consoler with all my strength. (p. 416)

Of Reason and Tradition

She used to say that if any of these things tended to lead her against the Catholic faith and the law of God, she would not need to ~~enquire~~ seek for learned men nor tests, because she would see at once that they came from Satan. She never undertook anything ~~because she was moved by the Holy Spirit~~ merely because it came to her in prayer; on the contrary, when her confessors bade her do the reverse, she did so without being in the least troubled thereat, and she always told them everything.