

Father John Catoir

Banishing Fear

We celebrate the feast day of St. Teresa of Jesus on Oct. 15. She was born at Avila, Spain, in 1515 and entered the Carmelite convent in 1536. Because of illness, Teresa had to leave the convent for two years.

She didn't return until 1540. Her mystical experiences began 15 years later when she felt called to reform the Carmelite Order.



To achieve her goal of reform St. Teresa had to overcome fierce resistance; she also had to battle the demons of fear and self-doubt. Her mind was tormented with negative thoughts: "You're making a fool of yourself." "You're a fraud." "Give up, you know you're going to fail anyway." St. Teresa said "no" to all those fears. She was determined to bring reform and order to her community, and in order to succeed she had to develop a will of iron.

In 1562, she founded the first convent of the reformed Carmelites and wrote this powerful prayer to keep her mind focused:

"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing cause you fear; all things pass. God is unchanging. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God needs nothing else, God alone suffices."

Teresa recited her prayer frequently, especially when she was beset by worry.

Determined to reject fear and anxiety, she turned to Jesus as her model: "Be not anxious about tomorrow, sufficient unto the day are the day's troubles." (Matthew 6:34)

St. Paul reinforced this same idea, "Rejoice in the Lord always ... Have no anxiety about anything." (Philippians 4:4,6)

With Scripture her guide, St. Teresa continued to plod ahead, saying "no" to all fear. Over and over again, she recited her prayer: "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing cause you fear. All things pass ... patience obtains all." This enables Teresa to accept God's calling and to carry out her reform movement with determination and perseverance.

In analyzing her approach to spirituality, we see a woman who decided to be governed by Divine Providence rather than by her own fears. To do this she struggled to fill her mind with positive and constructive thoughts, rather than allowing negative fears to dominate. In this way she exercised her will countless times a day, remaining fixed on her good intentions.

St. Teresa died in 1582, still repeating her battle-cry, "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing cause you fear ... God is unchanging. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God needs nothing else, God alone suffices." We can all learn much from this great saint and doctor of the church. She is a wonderful example of the truth: with God's help all things are possible.

Do not allow yourself to become overcome by fear and discouragement. Fight the good fight and make the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila your own. With God's help you can banish all fear and self-doubt from your life.

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