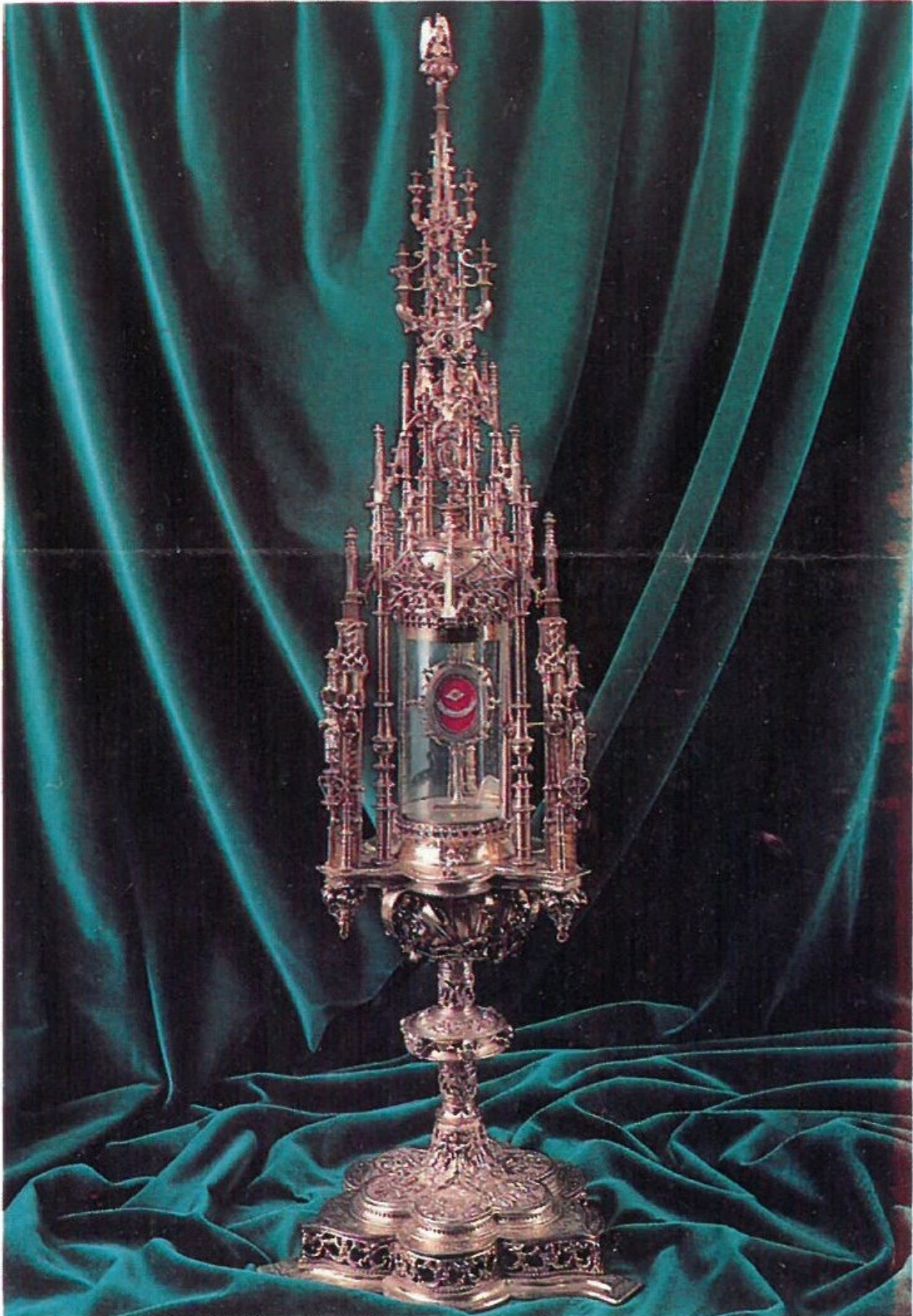


The  
Carmelite  
News

AUGUST 1992



"The Augsburg" Reliquary, Shrine of St. Jude, Faversham

HELLO again. And I thought I was going to have to start this letter off with a notice postponing the Grand Draw. You may not know, if you live in the UK, that there have been two postal strikes in the Republic of Ireland, and we thought the Draw tickets would not get there and back in time. However, as I write this, letters from Eire are pouring in, so we shall be able to have the Draw as planned. That date is still in the future as I write, but the results will be put into this letter just before it goes to the printer next week, so I may be greeting a winner. If so, well done, if not - better luck next year. (And the arrangements for the tickets may be different next year, so watch this space).

### **SAINTS OF CARMEL (6)**

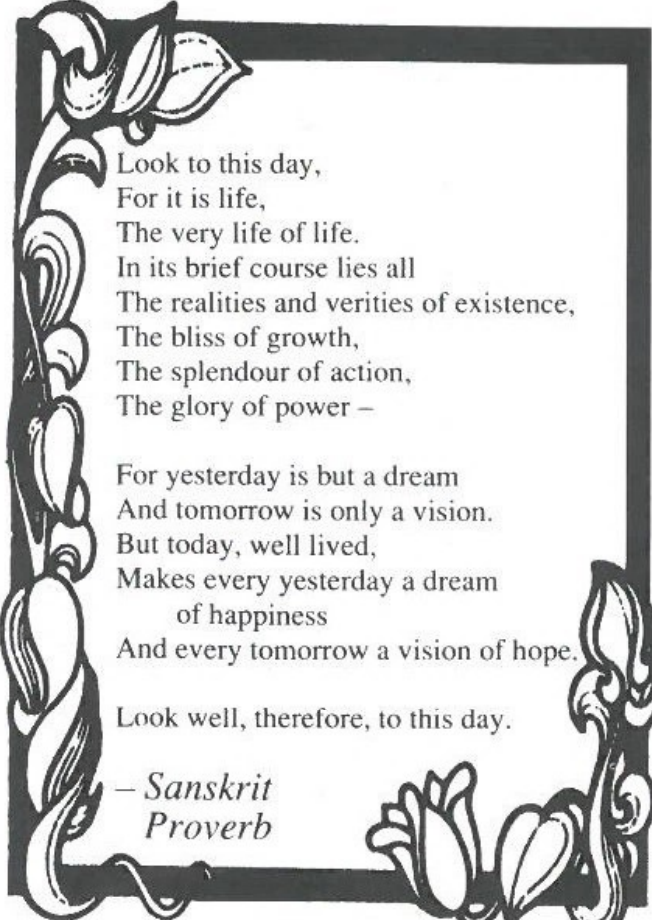
Now officially called **St. Teresa of Jesus** but better known from her place of birth as **St. Teresa of Avila**, our saint for this issue was born Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada on 28th March 1515. Provided with a pious education by her parents, and inspired by reading the lives of some saints, while still a child she tried to go with her younger brother Roderic to be a missionary among the moors to become a martyr! This romantic expedition did not get far because they bumped into their uncle as they were leaving the city gate and he took them back home. When she was 14 years old her mother died, and she adopted Our Lady as her mother. After a couple of years filled it seems with romances, fashion and perfumes, she was sent (1531) to a convent



**How candid we are in confessing other people's sins**

school where her earlier religious fervour was rekindled. But she had to return home soon afterwards (1532) because of poor health. Having decided to become a nun she entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Avila at the age of 20 (1535). Again serious ill health (possibly malignant malaria) made her return home, but she recovered enough to return to the convent to make her profession. But it was three years before she completely recovered her full health. She attributed her recovery to the intercession of St. Joseph, and retained a strong devotion to him all the rest of her life.

For the next twenty years she lived a regular life in the Incarnation Convent, but without (she felt afterwards) any special fervour. There were about 180 nuns there, and their convent was a busy place but not dissolute or immoral as some have suggested because the enclosure was not very strictly enforced. The convent income was not sufficient for such a number of nuns and the nuns were often forced to fend for themselves individually (relying on their families for support). Real community life had partially broken down and class distinctions developed within the community. Teresa felt that the hallmarks of Carmel - prayer, solitude and simplicity - suffered, and this prompted her to desire a more prayerful and less distracted form of religious life based on the life of the hermits on Mt. Carmel as enshrined in the "primitive" Rule of St. Albert. The turning point, she wrote later in her autobiography, came when in 1557 she was reading St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "When I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in



Look to this day,  
For it is life,  
The very life of life.  
In its brief course lies all  
The realities and verities of existence,  
The bliss of growth,  
The splendour of action,  
The glory of power –

For yesterday is but a dream  
And tomorrow is only a vision.  
But today, well lived,  
Makes every yesterday a dream  
of happiness  
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.

– *Sanskrit  
Proverb*

the garden, it seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I that the Lord was calling.” In the following years she had many mystical experiences and visions which strengthened her resolve to walk more closely the way of perfection, and on 24th August 1562 she led a small band of like-minded sisters to the new (and desperately poor) convent of St. Joseph in Avila where the new, reformed, “primitive” way of life was established. In 1567 the Prior General of the Order, John Baptist Rossi, gave Teresa permission to found more Houses for the reformed life, including two for friars who wanted to return to the primitive life as well (and from which foundations the separate Order of Discalced Carmelites eventually (and unfortunately) grew. See the account of the life of St. John of the Cross in the November 1991 issue of the Newsletter for more details).

By the time of her death in 1582 Teresa had founded no less than 16

new convents. These final years were years of travel and of business, of sorrows and preoccupations. But throughout them she constantly visited and encouraged the nuns and continued herself to experience mystical graces. And fortunately for us she wrote - among other things - four important books enshrining her experience of her search for God and the vital importance of prayer in that search. She died - still on the road, having been side-tracked to Alba de Tomez on the way to make final preparations for a new House in Madrid - on October 4th. Her feastday is celebrated on the next day, 15th October.

(Just a minute, you may say, surely October 15th is not the next day after October 4th? Well it was that year! The evening she died was the beginning of the very night when the calendar was reformed, changing from the Old Style (or Julian Calendar, introduced by Julius Caesar and still in use by some of the Orthodox Churches) to the New Style (or Gregorian Calendar) which we use today. The changes concerned the calculation of leap years, but to bring the dates back into step with the seasons the dates from 5th-14th October 1582 were omitted, so October 15th really did follow after 4th October).

She was canonised in 1622, and in 1970 was declared a Doctor (= Teacher) of the Church, the first woman to be so honoured.

She was remembered as a person of extraordinary charm, and she communicated courage to all who dealt with her. Her hallmark was a gentle and contagious joy which renewed the spirits of those she met, and made them recollected. The Franciscan nuns in Madrid, who had been her hosts in 1569 said: “Blessed be God who has permitted us to see a saint whom we

could imitate; she eats, sleeps and speaks like us, and lives without much ceremony.”

St. Teresa’s importance for us today - besides her intercession at the Throne of Grace - lies in her writings, especially her four main books. In them she sets out her ideals and records her own journey as she tried to work them out. From them we can gain encouragement and support and guidance in our journey, recognising with her help when we are on the right path and when we have gone down some blind-alley.

Her autobiography (generally called the *Life*) covers her life and struggles up to the foundation of St. Joseph’s in 1565, and goes on to speak about ways of prayer, using the famous allegory of the four ways of watering a garden.

In *The Way of Perfection* she was writing for her nuns, explaining her ideals of the reformed life and leading and exhorting them to ever greater efforts in their attempts to live it. Put like that it sounds a bit dull, but when you read it, it is as lively and fresh as if she was talking to you across the table.

The *Book of the Foundations* describes the founding of the new convents, but scattered through it are lots of bits of advice to the nuns in the convents. A useful addition to reading this book is the collection of 468 letters that survive from the estimated 15,000 she wrote in her life.

But the undoubted masterwork is *The Interior Castle* (sometimes called *The Book of the Mansions*). In this book she takes us into her soul, describing

## FORTHCOMING NOVENAS

<b>Little Flower</b> .....	23rd Sept - 1st Oct
<b>Holy Rosary</b> .....	7th - 15th Oct
<b>St. Jude</b> .....	20th - 28th Oct

her relations with God. The book is about a castle (which is also the soul) in the centre of which lives

the King. The castle is described as having seven rings of rooms (each ring of rooms forming a “mansion” or “dwelling place”) in which we can live while striving (or not) to reach the central Mansion where we will live with the King (who is God). Each mansion is a world in itself, containing rooms, gardens, fountains and passages. Each of the mansions has its own attractions for the traveller, but the strongest attraction comes from the centre. The atmosphere around the castle is cold and dark, crawling with dangerous creatures. As one enters the castle the darkness gives way to light and warmth coming from the centre. Prayer, says St. Teresa, is the key that opens the way into the castle and the doors that lead from one mansion to the next on the journey through the interior castle to the King.

In all her books Teresa uses powerful images like water, gardens, journey, castle, King, to draw her readers to a deeper understanding of their own lives. These images are attempts to express the inexpressible. They help us to find images for our own story. St. Teresa has expressed better - certainly more accessibly - than anyone else a collective experience so that her “explanations” can move and guide us whose lives seem at first sight so far removed from that of a 16th century Spanish cloistered nun. So get weaving. Don’t sit about waiting for the rain or the dew; find a spring, use a bucket, fill a trough or two, sail

a boat on them (watching for squalls of course), explore a castle, meet a King. Her style is easy, even chatty in places. All the great books are available in paperback - some of them in very useful "simplified" editions. So off to the library or the bookshop and make a start.

### **PRAYER and FAITH**

It is strange how things seem to come in bunches, like bananas. I seem to get letters on the same topics from all sorts of places at the same time. In the last few weeks I've had quite a few asking about the answering of prayer - or more often, as the writer sees it, the lack of answers to prayers. So I have been pondering on how best to answer these questions which usually boil down to this:

*"I've said thousands of prayers; I've made countless novenas; I've visited every church and shrine I can get to; I've lit innumerable candles; I've worn my knees out; and still my prayer is not answered (that is, my petition has not been granted). Why is my faith not strong enough to move God to act on my*

*behalf? What else must I do to get my way?"*

Now, it seems to me that there is a fundamental mistake behind questions like this. The people who ask them seem to think that the granting of their request is a reward for having "faith" in God - by which they seem to mean believing that he can do what they ask. "If I believe strongly enough," they seem to say to themselves, "and show this by doing lots and lots of 'religious' things, God must do what I want done."

But **faith** is not *believing* in God: it is, rather, **trusting** in God. Having faith in God means trusting God to know what he is doing in his world. It means taking what comes your way in the struggle to live a good life even though you cannot see at the moment just how it can possibly work for the ultimate good that God plans for his world and for your share in them - regardless of whether you feel they are sufficient or not, fair or unfair. Faith - trust - is built up by praising God and by doing one's best to follow his will as revealed in the scriptures (especially the Gospels), in his Church

## **GRAND DRAW WINNERS**

### **£500 goes to**

N. Williams, Gwent (392471)

### **£100**

C. Whelan, London (009134)

B. Clarke, Co. Down (123696)

C. Turner, Co. Durham (202570)

M. Jackson, Hants. (324402)

M. Linnane, Galway (446886)

### **£50**

S. McMannion, Cheshire (191367)

Prescott, London (082228)

K. Hanley, Manchester (198350)

A. McGrath, Co. Down (350346)

A. Duffy, Meath (464151)

### **£25**

Sr. M. Sebastian, Limerick (038224)

K. Cornelius, Australia (295459)

P. McGhee, Derry (124218)

M. Keaveney, Dublin (133672)

K. Tweedy, Essex (023289)

M. McCaffrey, Co. Monaghan (086211)

J. McPake, Glasgow (421465)

W. Mallinson, Jersey (385402)

C. Stanislaus, Sussex (298559)

Y. Mounier-Stephens, France (406112)

and its teachings, in your own experience of the world, and in other people.

**Prayer** is the means of offering that praise and sifting that experience. As we praise and sift we include petitions which are our suggestions to God as to how we would like things to be organised in the light of our (limited) experience. But all such prayers of petition are made under the general prayer that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And in our prayer we should always ask for grace to accept his answer even when it doesn't go the way we would like it to go. Having faith (= trust) will enable us to accept the answer "no" to our petitions and still go on praising and petitioning and going about our daily life trusting (= having faith) in his ultimate providence.

The fatal mistake is to think that "faith" is something separate from ourselves (like we have money in the bank) that we can somehow use in prayer to bargain with God: to think that we can, by lighting candles, making novenas etc., magically twist God's arm and use him to make the world go as we want it to go. If this is our faith then when we make a petition we are putting God to the test, and the answer "no" will make us feel either that God has failed (and we will no longer believe in him - we will have "lost our faith") or that our faith was too weak and in some mysterious way we have failed.

True faith is the foundation, not the result, of prayer. We do not pray in order to build up our faith if the answer is "yes" (or have it weakened if the answer is "no"). Rather, because we have faith we can pray, and can accept either "yes" or "no" to our petitions. If we feel that our faith has been weakened when we do not get what we

may have prayed very fervently for, then we should seriously ask ourselves just what we mean when we say that we have faith in God. Our faith should enable us to look the world in the eye, see it as it really is, acknowledge that it may not be as we would like it, and still thank God for it. That is the sort of faith we should ask God to strengthen in us.

### LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

The story is told of a newly appointed junior diplomat nervously attending the ambassador at his first official function in Austria. It was a truly magnificent occasion: hundreds of diplomats and important figures in Austrian society were there. The food was exquisitely prepared, and rare vintage wines flowed freely, making the young diplomat feel that perhaps he need not have been so nervous about the occasion. When the orchestra struck up loudly and filled the large room with a wave of sound our young diplomat was quite overwhelmed. He was swept along with the music (and the wine) and as everybody rose to their feet he had quite forgotten his nerves. He turned with a flourish to the red gowned, jewel bedecked figure next to him and confidently asked for a dance. The figure in the red gown declined, and gave him three reasons. "First, this is a banquet, not a ball. Second, the music you are hearing is the Austrian National Anthem. And third, I'm the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna."

Keep smiling: may God bless you, Our Lady guard and guide you, and may St. Jude intercede for you.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "David J. Fox" with "O. Carm." written below it.

David J. Fox, O. Carm