

Under the rigorous interpretation of the Rule, Teresa attained great heights of mysticism, experiencing mystical phenomena while also founding seventeen convents of the reform. In addition, the saint wrote such spiritual classics as *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle* and her *Autobiography*, among several other works.

While founding convents throughout Spain and writing these books, Saint Teresa suffered recurrent illnesses and severe headaches, as she wrote toward the end of her *Autobiography*: "When I began my prayer that day, my headache was so violent that I thought I could not possibly go on."

On the day before Christmas in the year 1577, Teresa fell and broke her arm. The arm was slow in healing and troubled her for years, due to being incorrectly set. Through the rest of her life the arm continued to cause pain; it actually maimed her so that she needed assistance to dress and undress. Despite the pain and all the difficulties it entailed, she continued her writings and the countless travels she undertook to the seventeen convents she had founded throughout Spain.

It has been reported that the saint suffered a paralytic stroke in March of 1580 and then another the same year in August. This was two years before her death she died in 1582.

Saint Teresa of Avila was canonized in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. Centuries later, she was privileged to be proclaimed the first woman Doctor of the Church. Pope Paul VI conferred this title upon her on September 27, 1970.



*"I do not fear Satan
half so much as I
fear those who fear
him."*

Saint Teresa of Avila

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Heavenly Help for Those Who Suffer from

Headaches

***Seek the intercession of
Saint Teresa of Avila***



(1515—1582)

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Throughout her lifetime, from her youth to her death, Teresa was beset by troubling illnesses which, despite their repeated recurrence, did not interfere with her capacity for intellectual and organizational work or with her spiritual advancement.

Born into a wealthy Catholic family on March 28, 1515, one of ten children, Teresa would be known throughout her life as a beautiful and graceful lady whose charm was undeniable. It is reported that she maintained this charm until the time of her death.

This great reformer of the Carmelite Order was known for her great piety as a child; however, during her adolescence her fervor languished when she became attracted to the romantic, chivalrous literature of her day. After reading religious works given to her by a devout uncle, especially *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* (a work that is still available), she began to reclaim the devotion she had formally experienced.

When she decided upon a religious vocation, her father at first refused. However, Teresa found a way and entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Avila, where she took her vows in 1536. Two years after entering, her health declined to such a startling degree that her father removed her from the convent for treatment. Teresa writes in her *Autobiography*, "For two months my life was nearly worn out; and the severity of the pain in the heart was very keen. It seemed to me... as if it had been seized by sharp teeth. So great was the torment that it was feared it might end in madness..."

In addition to the pains in her heart, Teresa also experienced in 1539 what she called "fainting-fits" (catalepsy), which became frequent. These, together with the heart pains, were so serious "that everyone who saw me was alarmed."

For more than eight months Teresa suffered from heart pains and other complications. One night the sickness became so acute that she

became insensible and remained in a coma for four days. In fact, many thought she was dead, and a grave was even prepared for her. But Teresa recovered, although she suffered greatly, according to a detailed description of her infirmities in her *Autobiography*. She wrote: "I was bent together like a coil of rope...unable to move either arm or foot, or hand, or head, anymore than if I had been 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."

Teresa also revealed: "I have been suffering for twenty years from nausea every morning, so that I can not take any food till past midday, and even occasionally not till later... at night before I lie down to rest, that sickness occurs, and with greater pain, which is sometimes very acute, especially about the heart, though the "fainting-fits are now of rare occurrence. I am also, these eight years past, free from the paralysis and from other infirmities of fever which I had so often."

When Teresa entered the Order, the Rule had been relaxed to such a degree that the speak room was always busy with visitors. Also, royal ladies without vows, accompanied by their servants, lived with the nuns for various periods of time. There were also other practices which were contrary to the original Rule given to the Order by St. Albert of Jerusalem (c. 1149-1214).

After living in these comfortable surroundings for many years, Teresa felt the need to return the Order to its previous, eremitical spirit. She founded the first convent of the reformed or "Disalced" Carmelites in 1562 amid countless persecutions and difficulties. St. John of the Cross, who became a Disalced Carmelite friar, helped to extend the reform to like-minded friars. Thus developed the division between the Carmelite Order of the Ancient Observance (O. Carm.) and the Disalced Carmelite Order (O.C.D.).