

TERESA OF ST. AUGUSTINE (Louise of France, 1737-1787)
Venerable (D)

Teresa, the eighth and youngest daughter of Louis XV and Mary Leszczynska, was born at Versailles on July 15, 1737. Together with her princess-sisters, she was educated in the abbey of Fontevrault, whose abbess, Madame de Rochechouard, was a woman of great merits. At the age of fourteen Teresa returned to court, very determined to give the example of a Christian princess in all she did.

She first heard the call to religious life soon after her return to her family. It occurred during the clothing of a religious, at which she was present and which took place on Oct. 7, 1751, in the chapel of the Parisian Carmel in the Rue de Grenelle (today transferred to Créteil in Val-de-Marne). She immediately understood that her consecration must have as its scope the conversion of her father, whose conduct was a source of serious preoccupations. But circumstances forced her to wait for almost twenty years. While she lived at court, she sought recollection by means of an intense interior life, she conformed to the rules of a cloistered life and lived deeply the spirituality of the cenacle that the queen had gathered around herself. When the queen died in 1768 Teresa thought that the moment had come for her to inform her father, the king, of the choice that she had made. The archbishop of Paris, Christopher de Beaumont, a confidant of her secret, was willing to assume the task of intermediary. For this purpose he chose a private audience with Louis XV, who, after a delay of fifteen days, gave his consent. Louise prepared herself immediately to enter the Carmel of St. Denis, chosen by her because of its poverty and austerity. It was, in fact, the poorest Carmel in Paris and financially near ruin; but it was well known for the spirit with which the rule of the Order was observed. Rigorous norms, unknown in other places, were followed, so much so that it was commonly described as the Trappe of Carmel. By now the desire of immolation had deeply penetrated Teresa's spirit, and her religious life was to be its bright witness.

Her departure from court roused unanimous regret. The royal family multiplied their signs of affection; the news affected all the people of France and also of other countries. Pope Clement XIV showed his paternal affection, and wished to be represented during the clothing (Sept. 10, 1770) and profession (Sept. 12, 1771) ceremonies by his nuncio in France, Bernardine Giraud, titular archbishop of Damascus. The overjoyed Louise, who received the name of Sister Teresa of St. Augustine, aroused the admiration of her superiors and of the mother mistress, who had placed great hopes in her. Her Sisters in Carmel were struck, above all, by her ardent love for God, Who transcends everything. It was a distinctive characteristic of her precious soul, as she followed in the footsteps of her Sisters who had most loved Love: Teresa of Jesus, Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, Magdalen of St. Joseph. The whole community became witness of her attachment to the rule, which, day by day, made her the example of a perfect Carmelite.

Her virtues and her merits led to her election as prioress of the community on Nov. 27, 1773, and a subsequent re-election. Her term of office was marked by a general

reorganization of the administration, by repair of the buildings, by the construction of a marvelous chapel, by a rigid observance of the rule and by the international fame of the house; this period was the zenith of the monastery. In addition, Louise had become a nun urged on by a desire of immolation for the spiritual salvation of her family. From the first moments of her vocation this had been her cry: «I a Carmelite, and the king all for God!» This program of life was to be realized point by point. The entrance of the royal princess at St. Denis', rather than separating her from her father, brought her closer to him. The sovereign made frequent visits to the monastery, he conversed at length with his daughter, he followed the office of the nuns or wept for his sins, prostrate on the pavement of the choir, and he shared in the sorrows and the joys of the community. These details transmitted to us by the nuns, throw a new light on the figure of the worldly old king, leave his defects in the shadow and reveal many secrets. At any rate, this intimate transformation permitted the sovereign to look into eternity with the eyes of a Christian; he died in 1774, reconciled with God and after having asked pardon for the scandals of his private life.

Teresa lived on for thirteen more years. She strove to support Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the difficulties that they faced. She was encouraged in this role of guardian angel on several sides, and especially by the empress, Maria Teresa of Austria. Her solicitude, on the other hand, was not limited to France: she committed herself to helping the Carmelite nuns of Bruxelles, who were victims of the laws of Joseph II, to intervene before the king of Spain, Charles III, at the request of the father general of the Spanish Carmelites, in order to obtain the solution of a problem relating to the Iberian province of the Order.

Nevertheless, from year to year she felt the ever more heavy weight of the trials that afflicted the Church and France. This sorrow was increased by the extremely painful suffering that afflicted her own person; in her penitential life, a habitual state of aridity, of privations, of interior anguish came to substitute the pleasant joys of the presence of her divine Master by which she had been favored for a long time. Yet her spirit of faith made it possible for her to accept these trials and sustained her in her apostolate. This sorrowful state continued to the time of her death, which overcame her in particularly dramatic circumstances. She had already been a victim of several attempts of poisoning on the part of the enemies of the dynasty, but each time she had escaped. In Dec, 1787, the attempt was repeated by means of a packet of false relics sprinkled with poison. After having opened the packet, mother Teresa immediately fell ill. She died on Dec. 23, 1787, pronouncing these words: «The hour has arrived; let us hurry to paradise!»

Because of the effects of the poison that had killed her, it was not possible to expose her body, as was customary. She was buried in a crypt of the monastery church. In 1793 her relics were profaned; what remained of them was placed in a crypt of the abbey church of St. Denis, by order of King Louis XVIII.

After Teresa's death, some graces were obtained by her intercession, and a real reputation for holiness enveloped her name. The French revolution did not permit the process of

beatification to be initiated. When calm returned, the Carmelite nuns of St. Denis, who had been able to rebuild their monastery, initiated action on her cause in 1856. Her writings were sought out and pertinent documents were gathered. The report was sent to Rome in 1869. In 1870, the following worked successively on her cause of beatification: the Cardinal C. Matthieu, archbishop of Besancon, and J. B. Pitra, librarian of Holy Church; the whole French episcopate, gathered in Rome for the ecumenical council; the general of the Dominicans, Jandel; the abbots of La Trappe; the general of the Capuchins; the Benedictines of «Pierre-qui-Vire» and sixty Carmels. With the report of Cardinal Caterini, the proponent, Pope Pius IX acceded to the unanimity of this consensus and on June 19, 1873, signed the decree for the introduction of the cause; hence, according to the norms of the old canon law, Teresa from this moment received the the title of venerable. On Dec. 24, 1891, the decree of non-cult was published; on Nov. 28, 1906, that on the validity of the ordinary process. From that date on the cause has made no further progress (see Ind. Cans., p. 281).

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