

The Essential Teresa of Ávila



The Book of Her Life

The Interior Castle

The Way of Perfection

New Editions in Modern English

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Preface

This book is the fruit of a long-standing devotion to the spiritual writings of Teresa of Ávila—one of the most luminous and courageous voices in the Christian contemplative tradition. For many years, I have engaged with her work not as a scholar in search of doctrine, but as a seeker drawn to the clarity, depth, and radical freedom of her inner journey. What began as a personal dialogue with her texts gradually evolved into a desire to make them available to others in a form that remains faithful to the original while being accessible to modern readers.

This volume brings together Teresa's three major works—*The Book of Her Life*, *The Interior Castle*, and *The Way of Perfection*—in a modern English version, carefully updated in language but free of interpretive commentary or theological notes. My aim is to let Teresa speak for herself: directly, vividly, and without mediation.

These are not academic translations, but living texts shaped by contemplation and long familiarity with their original Spanish sources. The modernization respects Teresa's spirit, tone, and intention, while making her insights more approachable to contemporary readers—regardless of background or belief.

Each of the three works included here reveals a different facet of Teresa's vision:

The Book of Her Life is a deeply personal account of her spiritual awakening and inner transformation. Written under obedience, it narrates her struggle with mediocrity, her mystical encounters with Christ, and the gradual emergence of a mission that would lead her to reform the Carmelite Order. The tone is intimate, candid, and often surprisingly earthy—marked by flashes of humor and unflinching honesty.

The Interior Castle, composed near the end of her life, is her most refined and mature expression of the soul's journey toward union with God. Using the image of a crystal castle with seven concentric dwellings, Teresa maps out the stages of prayer and transformation with both symbolic richness and psychological precision. This is not a theoretical treatise but a practical guide, drawn from lived experience, and shaped by her profound understanding of human nature.

The Way of Perfection was written for the small community of Discalced Carmelite nuns that Teresa founded. It offers a clear, direct, and deeply human path to interior freedom, grounded in humility, detachment, and persevering prayer. Teresa speaks as

a mother and friend, guiding her companions toward a life of authentic love and spiritual resilience in the midst of everyday reality.

Together, these three works form a coherent whole: the story of an awakening (*The Book of Her Life*), the structure of the spiritual path (*The Interior Castle*), and the practical discipline to walk it (*The Way of Perfection*). They are different in tone and purpose, but united in the same inner impulse: to respond fully to the call of God with everything one is.

Readers who wish to explore these texts in greater depth may be interested in a separate edition I have prepared, which includes detailed commentary, historical and theological notes, and cross-references to other mystical traditions. It is intended for those who seek not only inspiration but also a fuller understanding of Teresa's language, context, and teaching.

Extensive excerpts from both the annotated and unannotated editions are available for download at www.gongarola.com.

May this book serve, in its simplicity, as a door through which the voice of Teresa may once again reach the hearts of those who long for truth, transformation, and the quiet strength of the soul turned toward God.

Chronological Biography

1515 (March 28): Born in Gotarrendura (Ávila), Spain, to Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda and Beatriz de Ahumada. Her birth name is Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada.

1527: At the age of 12, she loses her mother—a deeply formative experience that leads her to take the Virgin Mary as her spiritual mother.

1531: Sent to the convent of the Augustinian nuns of Santa María de Gracia in Ávila, where she begins to feel drawn to religious life.

1535 (November 2): Enters the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Ávila, against her father's initial wishes.

1537 (November 3): Professes as a Carmelite and takes the name Teresa of Ávila.

1538–1539: Suffers a severe illness that brings her to the brink of death and ushers in a period of intense spiritual introspection.

1542: After recovering, she resumes life at the convent, though she begins to feel dissatisfaction with the laxity of the Carmelite Rule.

1554: Experiences a profound spiritual conversion upon contemplating a deeply wounded image of Christ—an event that marks the true beginning of her mystical life.

1560: Takes private vows to pursue a life of greater perfection and begins to consider reforming the Carmelite Order. Her mystical visions and states become more intense.

1562 (August 24): Founds the convent of Saint Joseph in Ávila, the first house of the Carmelite Reform, established under strict conditions of poverty, prayer, and enclosure.

1565: Completes the writing of *The Book of Her Life*, a spiritual autobiography composed out of obedience, recounting her mystical experiences and interior development.

1567: Meets Fray John of the Cross and inspires the reform of the male branch of the Carmelite Order, giving rise to the Discalced Carmelites.

1568: The first Discalced Carmelite monastery is founded in Duruelo, under the guidance of Saint John of the Cross.

1571: Appointed prioress of the Convent of the Incarnation in Ávila, where she faces resistance from the non-reformed nuns.

1573: Completes *The Way of Perfection*, a work written to guide her nuns in the interior life and contemplative prayer.

1575–1577: Encounters opposition from the Calced Carmelites, who resist the Reform. Endures ecclesiastical trials and interrogations, particularly during her time in Seville.

1577: Writes *The Interior Castle* or *The Mansions*, her most profound mystical work, in which she portrays the soul as a castle inhabited by God. It will be published posthumously in 1588.

1582 (October 4): Dies in Alba de Tormes (Salamanca) at the age of 67. Her last words are: “At last, Lord, I am a daughter of the Church.”

1610: *The Book of the Foundations* is published for the first time, recounting her travels, hardships, and experiences in founding new reformed convents.

1614: Beatified by Pope Paul V.

1622: Canonized by Pope Gregory XV, alongside Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Philip Neri, and Saint Isidore the Farmer.

1970: Proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, becoming the first woman to receive this title.

THE BOOK OF HER LIFE

*Autobiography of Mother Teresa of Ávila, founder of the monasteries of
Discalced Carmelite nuns and friars of the First Rule.*



Saint Teresa of Ávila

PROLOGUE

1. I would have liked that, just as I was instructed and permitted to write about my way of praying and the graces the Lord has granted me, I had also been given the freedom to speak in detail and with clarity about my great sins and my wretched life. This would have been a great consolation to me. However, this has not been allowed, and I have been placed under many restrictions in this regard. Therefore, I ask, for the love of the Lord, that whoever reads this account always bear in mind that my life has been so miserable that I find no saint who returned to God with whom I can compare myself. For I understand that, once called by the Lord, they did not return to offend Him. I, on the other hand, not only grew worse but seemed to deliberately resist the graces His Majesty granted me, like someone who, feeling more obligated to serve, also realized that they could not repay even a small part of what they owed.

2. Blessed be He forever, who waited so long for me. I beg Him with all my heart to grant me the grace to tell this story with clarity and truth, as my confessors have instructed me to do, and because I know that the Lord has willed it for some time, though I had not dared to do so before. May it be for His glory and praise, and so that those who read this, knowing me better, might help me in my weakness to serve Him in at least some small measure of what I owe Him. May all things praise Him forever. Amen.

CHAPTER 1

In which it is discussed how the Lord began to awaken this soul in her childhood toward virtuous things and the importance of having virtuous parents.

1. Having virtuous and God-fearing parents would have been enough, if I were not so wretched, combined with the help the Lord gave me, to become a good person. My father had a great love for reading good books and had them translated into the vernacular so that we, his children, could read them. This, together with the care my mother took to ensure that we prayed and became devoted to Our Lady and certain saints, began to awaken in me, as I recall, from the age of six or seven, a desire for virtue. I was greatly aided by the fact that my parents encouraged only virtue in us, as both of them were very virtuous themselves.

My father was a man of great charity toward the poor and deep compassion for the sick, even toward the servants; so much so that he never allowed slaves in his household because he felt immense pity for them. Once, a slave belonging to his

brother stayed at our home, and he treated her with the same care as his own children. He said he could not bear, out of compassion, for anyone not to be free. He was a man of great integrity. He was never heard to swear or gossip, and he was exceptionally honest.

2. My mother also possessed many virtues and endured her life with great illnesses. She was extremely modest. Despite her great beauty, she never showed vanity, nor did she seem to notice it, for when she died, at barely thirty-three years of age, she was already dressing as if she were much older. She was very gentle and had great understanding. She suffered much hardship in her life but died as a true Christian.

3. There were three sisters and nine brothers among us. All, by God's goodness, turned out virtuous—except me, who was my father's favorite. It seems that, before I began to offend God, there were reasons for this favoritism, as when I think of the good inclinations the Lord had given me, I feel great sorrow for how poorly I took advantage of them.

4. As for my brothers, none discouraged me from serving God. There was one who was almost my age, and we read the lives of the saints together. He was the one I loved most, although I also felt a great affection for the others, and they loved me in return. When we read about the martyrdoms the saints suffered for God, it seemed to me they paid a very small price to go and enjoy Him, and I greatly desired to die in this way—not out of love, as I thought, but out of the desire to enjoy soon the great blessings I read about in heaven. So, with this brother, we looked for ways to achieve it. We planned to go to the land of the Moors, begging for the love of God to be beheaded. It seems that the Lord gave us courage even at that tender age, though we never found a way, as having parents seemed to us the greatest obstacle.

We were greatly moved by reading that punishment or reward was eternal, and we often spoke about it. We would spend long periods repeating to each other: "Forever, ever, ever!" In doing so, it seemed the Lord was engraving in us from childhood the path of truth.

5. Seeing that it was impossible to go somewhere to be killed for God, we decided we would become hermits. In an orchard that was part of our home, we tried as best we could to build hermitages, piling small stones that quickly collapsed. Thus, we found no way to fulfill our desires. Now, in remembering this, I am moved to see how early the Lord gave me what I later lost through my own fault.

6. I gave alms as much as my means allowed, though they were very limited, and I sought moments of solitude to pray my devotions, which were numerous, especially the Rosary, as my mother was very devoted to it and instilled that devotion in us. I loved playing with other girls at being nuns and creating monasteries,

and it seems that, deep down, I wanted to be one, although not as much as I desired the things I have already mentioned.

7. I remember that when my mother died, I was about twelve years old, perhaps a little younger. Realizing what I had lost, I went in distress to an image of Our Lady and begged her, with many tears, to be my mother. It seems to me that this plea, made with such simplicity, has helped me because I have clearly experienced that this sovereign Virgin has always aided me whenever I have entrusted myself to her, and ultimately, she has brought me back under her protection. Now I deeply regret not being steadfast in the good intentions that began in me at that time.

8. Oh, my Lord! It seems You were determined to save me. May it be so, for Your Majesty's sake. And in showing me so many mercies as You have, would You not also have wanted, not for my benefit, but for Your honor, to prevent this dwelling, where You so constantly desired to reside, from becoming so defiled? Even saying this exhausts me because I know that all the fault was mine, for I do not believe there was anything left You could have done to make me wholly Yours from that age.

When I think of blaming my parents, I cannot do so either, for in them I saw nothing but goodness and care for my well-being.

But when I passed that age and began to recognize the natural gifts the Lord had given me (which, according to others, were many), instead of being grateful to Him for them, I used them to offend Him, as I will now recount.

CHAPTER 2

How she gradually lost these virtues and the importance of associating with virtuous people during childhood.

1. I believe I began to stray for the reasons I will now recount. Sometimes I reflect on the mistake parents make when they do not ensure that their children are always surrounded by examples of virtue in every aspect. Although my mother was as virtuous as I have mentioned, by the time I reached the age of reason, I barely learned from her virtues, and instead, the wrong things I saw harmed me greatly.

She had a fondness for books of chivalry, though she never read them to the detriment of her duties. She would read them while working, perhaps to distract herself from the great challenges she faced or to keep us occupied and away from other dangers. However, my father was so concerned about it that he did everything possible to prevent her from reading them in front of us.

I began to imitate her and acquired the habit of reading these books. This small fault I observed in my mother was enough to cool my desire for virtue and to start committing other faults. I thought there was nothing wrong with dedicating many hours of the day and night to such an empty pastime, even though I did so in secret from my father. My obsession grew to the extent that if I did not have a new book, I felt discontented.

2. Gradually, I began to become overly concerned with my appearance. I became obsessed with looking good and pleasing others. I took great care of my hands, my hair, perfumes, and all the superficial things that could catch my attention. These vanities absorbed me greatly because I was very curious and meticulous. I had no ill intentions, for I never wished anyone to offend God because of me. However, I lived for many years with an excessive obsession with cleanliness and details, which at the time seemed harmless but now I clearly see were detrimental.

In our home, my father allowed only close relatives to enter, as he was very modest. I wish he had been equally careful with some of my cousins. Now I understand the danger of associating, during the age when virtues should be formed, with people who not only lack them but also encourage indulging in worldly vanities.

My cousins were about my age, or a little older. We were always together. They loved me dearly, and I pleased them by conversing with them and listening to stories of their interests and nonsense, which were not at all good. The worst part was that this relationship began to incline my soul toward things that ultimately became the root of many of my errors.

3. If I could advise parents, I would tell them to be extremely careful about whom their children associate with during this stage of life because it is a very delicate period. Our nature tends more easily to evil than to good.

This happened to me. I had an older sister who was very honest and virtuous, but I did not take her as an example. Instead, I was influenced by a relative who often came to our home. Her behavior was so frivolous that my mother tried many times to keep her away from us, as if she sensed the harm she would cause me. However, she could not prevent it, as there were many reasons for her to enter our home.

I grew fond of this woman and spent much time with her, sharing conversations and amusements. She not only supported my pastimes but even introduced me to new vanities and spoke to me of her own experiences and superficialities, further fostering my inclination toward them.

It was when I began associating with her, around fourteen years of age or a bit more, that my soul started to lean toward what would become my greatest

problem. Up until that point, I had not lost my fear of God, nor had I committed mortal sins. I had a deep sense of honor and would have done nothing to compromise it. This respect for my honor was so strong that no circumstance or person could have made me renounce it.

Oh, if only I had had the same strength to avoid going against God's honor that I had to preserve my reputation! I did not realize that, by protecting my honor in some respects, I was losing it in many others.

4. My obsession with maintaining my honor was extreme, yet I did not take the necessary means to preserve it completely. I only cared about not ruining it entirely, though I did not make enough efforts to protect it fully.

My father and my sister were concerned about this friendship and frequently reprimanded me. However, they could not prevent this woman from continuing to enter our home. I was also very skillful in keeping this relationship secret. Now, as I recall all this, I am astonished at the harm that a bad company can do. Had I not lived it, I would not believe it.

Especially during youth, a bad influence can cause enormous harm. This relationship changed my character so much that practically nothing remained of the natural inclination toward virtue that I had as a child. This woman and another friend with similar interests practically shaped my character toward superficiality.

5. Here I understand the great benefit of a good company. I am convinced that if, at that age, I had been surrounded by virtuous people, I would have persevered in virtue. If I had had someone then who taught me to fear God, my soul would have gained the strength not to fall. But having lost that fear entirely, all I had left was the fear of losing my honor, and that fear tormented me in everything I did. I dared to do many things that went against my honor and against God, always thinking they would not be discovered.

6. At first, I thought that the bad influences I had were what caused me harm. However, the fault was not entirely theirs but mine, because later my own malice was enough to incline me toward evil. I also had maids who gave me opportunities for all sorts of faults. If any of them had had the courage to advise me well, perhaps I would have benefited from it. But just as my affections blinded me, their interest blinded them.

Although I was not inclined toward very evil things, as I naturally abhorred dishonorable acts, I did enjoy frivolous pastimes and conversations. However, by putting myself in dangerous situations, I not only put myself at risk but also my father and brothers. God protected me from greater evils, making it clear that He sought to save me even against my own will. Still, my honor was damaged, and it aroused suspicions in my father.

It seems that no more than three months had passed since I began with these vanities when they decided to take me to a monastery in the city. There, young people like me were educated, though none had such base customs. Everything was done with great discretion: only I and a few relatives knew the reason. They took advantage of the fact that my sister had married and that I was left alone at home, without my mother, to do it without raising suspicion.

7. My father loved me dearly, and I was so skillful at hiding things that he would never have believed all the evil within me. Thus, I did not fall out of his favor. The time of my faults was brief, and although there were suspicions, nothing was clear. As for me, I was so afraid that my honor would be compromised that I did everything possible to keep it secret, though I did not think that what I was doing could not be hidden from God, who sees all.

Oh, my God! What harm comes from thinking that our faults can remain hidden from You! I am convinced that many evils would be avoided if we understood that it is not about protecting ourselves from people but about not displeasing You.

8. The first days in the monastery were very difficult for me, more because of the shame that my vanities had been discovered than for being there. But I was already tired of my previous life and still greatly feared offending God. I tried to confess frequently, and that gave me some peace.

Within less than eight days, I was already feeling much more at ease and even happy to be there, more so than in my father's house. All the nuns loved me greatly, for the Lord gave me the grace to be pleasing wherever I was. Although at that time I was entirely opposed to the idea of becoming a nun, I was glad to see the life of those religious women, who were very honest, fervent, and reserved.

Despite this, the devil continued to tempt me, and some people from outside the monastery tried to disturb me by sending me messages. As there was no opportunity for them to reach me, nothing came of it.

My soul began to recover the good desires of my early childhood, and I realized the great favor God grants by placing someone in the company of good people. It seems that the Lord sought every possible way to bring me back to Him. Blessed be You, Lord, for Your patience with me! Amen.

9. There was one thing that could serve as a slight excuse, though my faults were many: the relationship I maintained was with someone whom I believed would end in marriage. Moreover, there were people, even those who heard my confessions, who assured me that in many things I was not offending God.

CHAPTER 3

How good company began to awaken her desires again and how the Lord began to enlighten her about the deceptions in which she had lived.

1. When I began to enjoy the good and holy conversation of a nun who slept with the young women in the monastery, I was very happy to hear her speak of God, for she was a very discreet and holy woman. I remember that I always liked to hear good things about God, at any moment in my life. This nun told me how she had decided to become a religious just by reading that passage from the Gospel that says: "Many are called, but few are chosen." She also spoke to me about the great reward that the Lord gives to those who leave everything for Him.

The influence of this good company began to dispel the bad habits I had acquired before and to bring back thoughts of eternal things. It also managed to diminish somewhat the great aversion I had towards the monastic life, which was very strong.

If I saw any of the nuns weeping while praying or displaying special virtues, I felt great envy for them. This caused me much grief because my heart was so hard that even when reading the Passion of Christ, I was unable to shed a tear.

2. I stayed in that monastery for a year and a half, and during that time, I improved significantly. I began to pray many vocal prayers and asked all the nuns to pray for me, so that God might show me in which state I should serve Him. However, I still desired not to be a nun, and I prayed that God would not call me to that state, though I also feared marriage.

After that time, I felt a bit more inclined towards religious life, though not in that monastery. Some of the virtuous practices I observed there seemed exaggerated, especially in the younger nuns around me, which did not help to consolidate my decision. If they had all had a more unified and consistent attitude, perhaps they would have influenced me more positively.

I also had a very close friend in another monastery, which inclined me, if I ever became a nun, to want to go where she was. At that time, I thought more about what pleased my senses and vanity than what was truly best for my soul. Thoughts about becoming a nun would appear from time to time, but they would soon vanish. I could not bring myself to take that step.

3. During this time, although I was not entirely neglectful in seeking my salvation, the Lord seemed more interested than I was in preparing me for the state that truly suited me. He gave me a serious illness, which forced me to return to my father's house.

Once I recovered, they took me to visit my sister, who lived in a village. My sister loved me dearly, and if it had been up to her, I would never have left her house. Her husband also loved me very much, or at least showed me all the affection and attention possible. I owe this to the Lord, who always granted me a warm reception wherever I went, something I now see as a great favor from Him.

4. On the way to my sister's house, I passed by where one of my father's brothers lived, a wise man of great virtue. He was a widower, and the Lord was also preparing him for Himself, for in his old age, he gave up everything, became a friar, and died in such an exemplary way that I believe he now enjoys God's presence. This uncle wanted me to stay with him for a few days. His life revolved around reading good books in the vernacular, and almost always, his conversations were about God and the vanity of the world. He would ask me to read to him, and though I was not very fond of those books, I pretended interest in pleasing him.

I have always had an extreme inclination to please others, even when it was inconvenient for me. In other people, this might be a virtue, but in me, it has been a great fault, for often I acted without discretion.

Oh, my God, what paths You took to prepare my soul for the state in which You wanted me to serve You! Without my desire, You forced me to strive against myself. Blessed be You forever. Amen.

5. Although I stayed with my uncle for only a few days, the words of God, both those I read and those I heard, and his good company, had such an effect on my heart that I once again remembered the truth I had known as a child: that everything in this world is fleeting, and the vanity of the world soon comes to an end. I began to fear what would happen to me if I died at that moment, for I understood that I deserved hell.

Despite everything, my will was not yet inclined to become a nun. However, I saw that it was the safest and best state. Gradually, I began to decide to force myself to accept that path.

6. For three months, I fought this inner battle, forcing myself with the thought that the sufferings and trials of being a nun could not be greater than those of purgatory, and I certainly deserved hell. So it was not so much to live my life as if in purgatory, since afterward, I would go directly to heaven, and that was my greatest desire.

In this inner struggle that led me to decide on this state, I believe what most motivated me was servile fear rather than love for God. The devil constantly put it into my head that I would not be able to endure the hardships of religious life because I was used to too many comforts. I countered this by remembering Christ's sufferings and thinking that it was not too much to endure some trials for Him.

Even the thought that He would help me bear them encouraged me. Although I do not remember clearly, I think I thought in this way. During those days, I suffered many temptations.

7. Around that time, fevers and intense fainting spells had left me very weak, as my health had always been delicate. However, my love for good books had already taken root, and this gave me new life. I read the *Epistles of Saint Jerome*, which filled me with encouragement, so much so that I finally decided to speak with my father. Telling him was almost like taking the step of taking the habit, for I was so careful with my honor that, once spoken, I would never have gone back.

My father loved me so much that I could not convince him to allow it, not even with the pleas of other people whom I asked to intercede for me. The most I could obtain from him was that he would let me do as I wished after his death.

However, I already distrusted myself and my own weakness. I feared I would not fulfill what I desired if I let more time pass. Therefore, it did not seem right to wait, and I sought another way, as I will tell next.

CHAPTER 4

How the Lord helped her to force herself to take the habit and the many illnesses His Majesty began to give her.

1. During the days in which I was struggling with these decisions, I convinced one of my brothers to become a friar by speaking to him about the vanity of the world. We both agreed to leave together early in the morning for the monastery where my friend was, which was the one I felt most inclined to join. Although, in this last decision, I was already in such a disposition that I would have gone to any monastery where I thought I could serve God best, or wherever my father wanted, because what mattered most to me was the remedy for my soul, and I was not at all concerned with seeking rest or comfort.

I remember, with absolute clarity and truth, that when I left my father's house, the pain I felt was so immense that I do not think it will be greater even when I die. It felt as though each bone in my body was separating from the other. Since I did not yet have such a strong love for God as to surpass the love I had for my father and my relatives, it was an enormous struggle. If the Lord had not helped me, my own reflections would not have been enough to make me move forward. It was He who gave me strength against myself, allowing me to accomplish it.

2. As soon as I took the habit, the Lord made me understand how He favors those who strive to serve Him. No one understood the immense inner effort I had made; they only saw my great desire. From that moment on, I experienced

immense joy for having chosen that state, a joy that has never left me to this day. God transformed the dryness of my soul into great tenderness.

Everything related to religious life filled me with happiness. I remember that sometimes, while sweeping for hours I used to dedicate to vanities and pleasures, I felt liberated from them, and this produced in me such profound joy that I could not understand where it came from.

When I remember this, I feel there is no difficulty, no matter how grave it seems, that I could not face. For I have experienced that if, at the beginning, one strives to act for God, even though the soul may feel fear at first, the greater the effort, the greater the reward and joy afterward.

Even in this life, the Lord rewards it in ways that only those who experience it can understand. I have verified this many times, even in very difficult matters. That is why I would advise that when a good inspiration presents itself insistently, do not hesitate to put it into practice out of fear. If the intention is pure and only seeks to please God, there is no need to fear that anything will go wrong, for He is powerful in all things. Blessed be He forever. Amen.

3. Oh supreme Good and my rest! All the mercies You had granted me up to this point were sufficient. With Your compassion and greatness, You led me through so many paths to such a secure state, to a house where there were many of Your servants from whom I could learn to grow in Your service.

I do not know how to continue when I remember the way I made my profession, with how much determination and joy I lived it, and the betrothal I made with You. I cannot speak of this without tears, and they should indeed be tears of blood, for my heart should break from the pain of having offended You so greatly after all of this.

Now I understand that I was right in not feeling worthy of this great vocation, for I have used it so poorly. But You, my Lord, allowed Yourself to be wronged by me for almost twenty years, bearing with my faults so that I might improve.

It seems, my God, that I promised You not to fulfill any of what I had offered. Although that was not my intention at the time, my subsequent actions showed otherwise. This only highlights even more who You are, my Spouse, and who I am.

It is true that many times, amidst the sorrow for my great faults, I find consolation in the joy I feel at the abundance of Your mercies.

4. In whom, Lord, can Your mercies shine more brightly than in me, who with my evil deeds have darkened the great favors You began to grant me? Alas, my Creator! If I try to find an excuse, I have none. No one is to blame but myself. For if I had responded with even a bit of the love You showed me from the beginning,

I would not have been able to direct it towards anyone but You, and that would have resolved everything. But since I did not deserve it nor was I fortunate enough, now I turn to Your mercy, Lord.

5. The change in lifestyle and diet affected my health greatly. Although I felt great joy, it was not enough to keep me well. The fainting spells began to worsen, and I suffered such intense heart pain that it frightened those who witnessed it, in addition to many other ailments. I spent the first year in very delicate health. Although I do not think I offended God much during this time, the physical suffering was so severe that it often left me senseless, and sometimes I lost consciousness completely.

My father, seeing my condition, did everything he could to find a cure. Since the doctors in my city could not help me, he decided to take me to a place where it was said they cured similar illnesses and assured they could treat mine. A family friend who had lived with us for a long time accompanied me, since the monastery where she was a nun did not have strict enclosure.

6. I remained in that place almost a year, and for three months I underwent a treatment so painful that I still do not know how I managed to endure it. In the end, although I withstood the cures, my body could not bear it, as I will explain.

The treatment was supposed to begin at the beginning of summer, but I arrived at the place in the middle of winter. During that time, I stayed at the house of the sister who lived in the village, waiting for April, as it was nearby, and it was more practical not to keep coming and going.

7. Before leaving, my uncle - the one I already mentioned - gave me a book called *The Third Alphabet*, which teaches the prayer of recollection. Although during that first year I had read good books (since I already understood the harm other books had done me and decided not to use them anymore), I did not know well how to proceed in prayer or how to recollect myself. For this reason, I was very happy to find this book, and I resolved to follow its teachings with all my strength.

The Lord had already given me the gift of tears and a love for reading. So I began to dedicate time to solitude, to confess frequently, and to follow the path that the book indicated, using it as my teacher. Because I did not find a confessor who truly understood me, even though I searched for the next twenty years, it harmed me greatly, causing me to fall back many times and, on some occasions, almost lose myself completely. A good spiritual guide could have helped me avoid the occasions when I offended God.

The Lord began granting me so many mercies at the beginning of this journey that, by the end of the nine months of solitude I spent there, I already felt His great favor. Nevertheless, I was not as free from offending God as the book indicated I

should be, although I tried. It seemed almost impossible to maintain such purity, although I did take care not to commit mortal sin. Oh, if only I had always taken such care! But unfortunately, I paid little attention to venial sins, and that ended up harming me.

The Lord began to grant me so much on this path that, by His goodness, He granted me the prayer of quiet and, on some occasions, even union. However, I did not understand either of these states or how much I should value them. I believe it would have greatly benefited me to understand what they meant.

It is true that these experiences of union lasted so briefly, perhaps not even as long as it takes to say a Hail Mary. But the effects they left on me were so profound that, although at that time I was not yet twenty, I felt as if I had the world under my feet. I remember feeling pity for those who pursued worldly things, even when these were lawful.

I tried, as much as I could, always to keep Jesus Christ, our good and Lord, present within me. This was my form of prayer. If I thought of any passage of His life, I represented it internally. However, I spent most of my time reading good books, which were my greatest delight.

I did not have much capacity to reflect with the intellect or use my imagination, which has always been very dull in me. Although I tried to represent the humanity of the Lord internally, I never managed to do it well. Although this practice, if persevered in, leads more quickly to contemplation, it is also very laborious and difficult.

When the will does not find something present upon which to place its love, the soul feels unsupported and inactive, which causes great loneliness and dryness, as well as an intense struggle against thoughts.

8. People with my disposition need to have a greater purity of conscience than those who can rely on their understanding to act. Those who reflect on what the world is, what they owe to God, what Jesus suffered, and how little they serve Him, find strength in these reflections to defend themselves from thoughts, occasions, and dangers. However, those who cannot resort to this have more difficulty and need to spend much time reading, as they cannot draw anything from within themselves.

This way of proceeding is extremely burdensome. If a teacher insists that someone with this disposition remain in prayer for a long time without the aid of reading, it can be so difficult that the person may not be able to endure it. It could even harm their health if they persist, for it becomes a heavy burden. For those who cannot enter into mental prayer, reading, even briefly, can be an indispensable tool for recollection.

9. Now I understand that it was the Lord who arranged for me not to find someone to guide me at those times, because it would have been impossible for me to persevere during the eighteen years in which I went through this work and great dryness. Since I could not reflect or delve deeper, I never dared begin to pray without a book, except immediately after receiving communion. I felt that without a book, my soul was as defenseless as if I were going into a great battle without weapons.

The book was for me like a shield that protected me from the blows of the many thoughts that assailed me. It helped me recollect my soul and gave me comfort. The dryness was not constant, but it always appeared when I lacked the book, for my soul became disordered, and my thoughts scattered. Upon opening a book, I began to find calm, as if it caressed my spirit. Sometimes I read a lot, other times very little, depending on the grace that the Lord gave me at that moment.

In those beginnings I mention, it seemed to me that as long as I had books and the possibility of being alone, nothing could take away the good I had found. I believe it would have been so, with God's help, if I had had a teacher who advised me on how to avoid occasions of sin from the beginning and helped me quickly escape from them if I fell.

If the devil had attacked openly at that moment, I believe I would not have sinned gravely again. But he was so subtle, and I was so weak, that all my good resolutions did not help me much. Still, the days I served God faithfully strengthened me to endure the terrible illnesses I later suffered, with the patience that His Majesty gave me.

10. Many times, I have marveled at God's great goodness, and my soul has been filled with joy contemplating His magnificence and mercy. Blessed be He for everything, for I have found that He never leaves unrewarded, even in this life, any good desire, however small or imperfect it may be.

My deeds, though vile and imperfect, this Lord of mine improved, perfected, and gave value to them. On the other hand, He hid my sins and faults, even from those who had seen them, allowing their eyes to be blinded and removing them from their memory. He covered my faults and made virtues shine in me that He Himself placed, almost forcing me to have them.

11. Now I want to return to what I have been commanded. If I had to describe in detail how the Lord dealt with me in these beginnings, I would need a much greater understanding than mine to express what I owe Him and to reflect my great ingratitude and wickedness, for I forgot all of that. Blessed be He forever, for bearing with me for so long. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Continues discussing the severe illnesses endured, the patience the Lord granted during them, and how He brings good out of adversity, as will be seen in an event that occurred in the place where recovery was sought.

1. I forgot to mention that during my year of novitiate, I went through great turmoil over matters that, in fact, were unimportant. Often, I was blamed unfairly, which caused me considerable pain and revealed my own imperfection. Even so, the immense joy I felt in becoming a nun helped me endure it all.

Since they saw me seeking solitude and occasionally crying over my sins, they thought I was discontent, and spoke about it. I truly enjoyed all aspects of religious life, but I lacked the patience to endure the slightest contempt. I enjoyed being valued and was meticulous about everything I did. I saw all of this as a virtue, though it doesn't excuse me, because I knew perfectly well how to pursue my own interests, and thus, ignorance does not absolve my guilt. It is true that the convent was not founded on a basis of great perfection. And as for myself, being flawed, I focused on the shortcomings I saw while overlooking the virtues.

2. At that time, there was a nun gravely ill, suffering from a very painful condition. She had sores on her abdomen caused by obstructions, through which she expelled everything she ate. She died soon after from this illness.

All the nuns feared contracting something similar, but I found myself deeply amazed by the patience with which she endured her suffering. I prayed to God that, if He granted me the same patience, He might give me whatever illness He saw fit. I do not recall ever fearing any disease, as I was so focused on gaining eternal blessings that I was willing to earn them by any means.

It astonishes me to recall this now, because I believe that at that point I did not yet possess true love of God—at least not as I felt later, once I began praying. What I did have was a kind of inner light that made all transient things seem insignificant and the blessings that could be attained seem invaluable, because they were eternal.

The Lord answered this prayer so thoroughly that, within two years, I was suffering from an illness that, though different from that of the nun, was just as painful and challenging. This suffering lasted three years, as I will describe later.

3. When the time came for treatment, I was at my sister's home, in the place where I had been waiting. My father, my sister, and a nun friend who had come with me took care of me with much love and devotion, as they cared for me deeply.

It was during that time that the devil began to trouble my soul, though God ultimately brought much good out of it. In that place, there was a cleric, a man of good character and understanding, though of limited learning.

I started to confess to him, as I always preferred confessors with proper training. However, confessors with limited knowledge did considerable harm to my soul, as they lacked the level of understanding I would have desired.

From my own experience, I have learned it is best that confessors, even if virtuous and of holy conduct, be well educated. Those who lack this knowledge often seek advice from those more knowledgeable, and I found myself unable to fully trust them. The confessors who were learned never led me astray. Those who weren't probably didn't intend to deceive me but simply didn't know better. Still, I assumed they knew everything, and that I had only to trust them. Because their counsel was lenient and allowed me greater freedom, I found it comfortable. If they had been stricter, perhaps I would have sought other confessors, as I am weak enough to avoid anything that seems too difficult.

They told me that what was a venial sin was nothing at all, and what was a very grave mortal sin, they categorized as venial. This caused me so much harm that I cannot help but mention it here as a warning for others.

Though I know this doesn't excuse me before God—since it should have been enough that the actions were inherently wrong for me to avoid them—I understand that He allowed this error in both my confessors and myself as a consequence of my sins. Still, I, in turn, misled many others by repeating what they had told me.

I remained in this blindness for over seventeen years, until a Dominican father, a great scholar, corrected many of my misconceptions. Later, the fathers of the Society of Jesus completed my education, leading me to deeply regret my misguided beginnings, as I will describe later.

4. When I began confessing to this priest I mentioned, he developed an extreme affection for me. At that time, I had only a few sins to confess—at least compared to what I would have later. I hadn't even committed any major offenses since becoming a nun. While his affection for me wasn't inherently wrong, it became inappropriate due to its excess.

He genuinely believed that I would never do anything serious against God for any reason, and he assured me he wouldn't either. This led us to form a relationship of deep communication. Personally, due to the fervor I felt toward God, I found it most gratifying to talk about matters related to Him. However, because I was still so young, my behavior confused him.

Due to his deep affection for me, he began to confide in me about his own spiritual downfall. His state was dire—he had been in a dangerous relationship with a

woman from the same place for nearly seven years, all the while continuing to say Mass. This affair was so public that he had completely lost his honor and reputation, and no one dared to reproach him.

I felt great pity for him because I cared about him a lot. This revealed my own foolishness and blindness, as I considered it a virtue to be grateful and loyal to those who cared for me, even when it went against the will of God. Damned be that kind of “loyalty” that goes against God’s laws! It is a grave mistake that continues to be practiced in the world, and it has always confused me—believing that we must repay those who do us good, even if it means acting against God.

What blindness the world has! Oh Lord, how I wish I had been ungrateful to everyone, but never to You! Yet, my sins led me to do the opposite.

5. I wanted to understand more about his situation, so I spoke to people in his household. I discovered that his ruin was even greater than I had thought, though I also realized it wasn’t entirely his fault. The woman he was involved with had convinced him to wear a small copper idol around his neck that she had asked for as a gesture of love. No one had managed to make him part with it, as he stubbornly refused to let it go.

I am not entirely sure whether I believe in spells, but I recount this here as a warning for men to avoid women who seek to control them in this way. If they have lost all shame before God—whom they are more obligated than men to be honest with—then there is nothing in them worthy of trust. These women, driven by the desire and passion that the devil instills in them, will stop at nothing to achieve their ends.

Though I myself have been weak, I never fell into anything of that kind. I never sought to harm others, not even when I could have. Nor did I ever try to force anyone’s will to return my affection. The Lord protected me from falling into that, but had He not, I might have been as wicked as I was in other ways where I did fail.

6. When I learned all this, I began showing him more affection, with the intention of helping him out of that situation. Although my intention was good, my approach was flawed, as no evil, however small, should be permitted for the sake of doing good. I spoke to him often about God, which surely helped. However, I believe it was primarily his affection for me that led him to give me the copper idol.

Once I had it, I threw it in the river. And when he parted with that object, it was as if he woke from a long sleep. He began to recall all that he had done over those years and, horrified by his own actions, started to detest them deeply. I am convinced that Our Lady helped him a great deal, as he was very devoted to the Immaculate Conception and celebrated a grand feast in her honor.

Eventually, he stopped seeing her entirely and never tired of giving thanks to God for having enlightened him.

Exactly one year after the day I met him, he died. He had spent that time in service to God, and I always felt that the affection he had for me, though perhaps not entirely pure, was not bad. In fact, I think it kept him from committing more serious sins, as he saw in me a tendency toward virtue that inspired respect in him.

I am confident that he is on the path to salvation. He died in a very good spiritual state, completely removed from that occasion of sin. It seems to me that the Lord intended to use these means to save him.

7. I stayed in that place for three months, suffering immensely, because the treatment they gave me was far stronger than my body could handle. After two months, due to the sheer number of medications, my life was nearly exhausted. The heart condition, which was the reason I had gone there for treatment, worsened to the point where it felt as though sharp teeth were biting me from the inside. They even feared that it might be rabies.

In addition, I couldn't eat anything solid—only liquids—and I had a constant fever. Since I was given a daily purge for almost a month, my body was utterly weakened and burned from the inside. My nerves began to contract, causing me unbearable pain day and night without any respite. I fell into a deep sadness.

8. Faced with this situation, my father decided to bring me back home so that other doctors could see me. They all agreed that my condition was beyond hope and that, on top of all my existing ailments, I now had tuberculosis. This last diagnosis didn't concern me much; what truly tormented me were the pains that spread from my head to my feet. The doctors said that, being nerve pains, they were practically intolerable. My body was so twisted from the pain that I could barely move.

I spent three months in this condition, a period that now seems impossible to endure without divine help. When I remember it, I am astonished, and I see the patience His Majesty granted me as a great grace from the Lord. This was clearly a gift from God.

It helped me greatly to have read the story of Job in the *Moralia of St. Gregory*, as if the Lord had wanted to prepare me to endure this suffering with strength. It was also key that I had started to practice prayer, as my entire dialogue was with Him. I often repeated Job's words: "If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, why should we not also accept the bad?" This gave me strength to endure.

9. The feast of Our Lady arrived in August, and since April I had been suffering through this torment, with the last three months being even worse. I decided to confess urgently, as I have always been very devoted to frequent confession.

However, my father thought I wanted to do so out of fear of dying and, to spare me from distress, he refused to let me confess.

Oh, how harmful excessive human affection can be! My father, though he was very Catholic and prudent, was swayed by his love for me, and this could have caused me great harm.

That very night, I had such a severe attack that I lost all consciousness for nearly four days. They administered the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, as they believed I was about to die at any moment. They constantly recited the Creed, though I understood nothing. They even placed wax on my eyes, believing I had already passed.

10. My father was devastated with grief for not having let me confess. Cries and constant prayers to God were lifted up. Blessed be He, who chose to hear those prayers. They had already opened my grave at the monastery where they planned to bury me, and even held funeral rites at a nearby convent. Yet the Lord decided to bring me back to life.

As soon as I regained consciousness, I asked to confess, and I received Communion with many tears. Still, I feel that I did not have the kind of true repentance that would have been enough to save me, as I was still deceived by what some confessors had told me—that certain things were not mortal sins when, in reality, they were. Despite this, the Lord granted me the grace to make a full confession of everything I remembered having done against Him.

Since I began receiving Communion, I never ceased confessing what I believed to be sin, even if it was merely venial. Nevertheless, I am convinced that my salvation would have been in grave danger if I had died at that time. This was due to both the lack of training of my confessors and my own wretchedness.

11. Now, as I remember how the Lord practically brought me back to life, I am filled with profound awe, and I almost tremble as I write this. I wonder why, my soul, you did not cease to offend Him, at least out of fear, if you were not able to do so out of love. He could have let you die a thousand times over, and in a much worse state.

I do not think I exaggerate when I say "a thousand times," although those who asked me to moderate my account of my sins might correct me. However, the faults I recount are already somewhat softened.

For the love of God, I ask that none of my shortcomings be concealed, because by revealing them, the greatness of His mercy and all that He endures for a soul becomes even clearer. Blessed be He forever. I ask His Majesty to consume me rather than allow me to ever stop loving Him again.

CHAPTER 6

Deals with how much was owed to the Lord for granting acceptance amidst great suffering, and how St. Joseph was taken as mediator and advocate, and how greatly he helped.

1. After those four days of convulsions, I was left in such a terrible state that only the Lord could understand the unbearable torments I suffered. My tongue was shredded from biting, my throat was completely damaged, unable to swallow even water due to the extreme weakness that was suffocating me. It felt as if my entire body was dislocated. My head was full of confusion, and my whole body was curled up like a ball.

I had lost all mobility; I couldn't move my arms, legs, hands, or head. I could only move one finger on my right hand. The pain was so intense that no one could touch me without causing me great suffering. To move me, two people had to lift me up using a sheet.

This lasted until Easter. The only relief I had was that, if no one touched me or came near, the pain would ease somewhat on many occasions. I used those moments of relief to feel a little better, and I considered myself fortunate, though I greatly feared losing patience. Even so, I was very glad to have been freed from those constant and excruciating pains, though the severe chills caused by recurring fevers were hard to bear, and the extreme fatigue never left me.

2. I insisted on returning to the convent as soon as possible, and they took me there in that condition. The community, expecting to receive a corpse, welcomed me with joy for the salvation of my soul, though my body was in worse condition than death. My weakness was so extreme that I was nothing but skin and bones. I remained in that state for more than eight months. Though I slowly improved, I was crippled for almost three years.

When I could finally start crawling, I praised God with all my heart. I spent all this time with great inner acceptance and, except for the initial moments, with much joy. Everything seemed insignificant compared to the pains and torments I had suffered at the beginning. I felt entirely content with God's will, even if it meant remaining in that state forever.

My greatest desire was to recover so that I could devote myself to solitary prayer, as I had learned, because in the infirmary I didn't have the proper space for it. I confessed frequently and spoke much about God, thereby edifying those around me. Everyone was amazed at the patience the Lord granted me, as it seemed impossible to bear so much suffering with such joy if not for His grace.

3. One great grace the Lord had granted me through prayer was understanding what it means to love Him. Though the virtues I experienced initially were neither strong nor consistent, I did notice a change in myself. For example, I avoided speaking ill of anyone, even in small things, and I did my best to avoid gossip. I constantly reminded myself not to say anything about anyone that I wouldn't want said about me.

I took this to an extreme in many cases, though I did not always manage it perfectly. At times, when the provocations were very great, I would fail. However, in general, this was my way of acting. I also instilled this attitude in those close to me, whom I tried to convince to avoid gossip. Over time, this became a habit among them. It became understood that those around me could feel safe from criticism.

Despite these improvements, I know I must account to God for the bad example I set in other areas. I beg His Majesty to forgive me, as I was the cause of much harm, even though it was never my intention to do any damage that later came from my actions.

4. I was left with a great desire for solitude and to speak of God. I found more joy and comfort in this than in any worldly conversation, which now seemed crude and vain to me. I became very devoted to frequent Communion and confession, and I felt a profound desire to do so. I also became very fond of reading good books, and I felt deep repentance whenever I offended God.

I remember that many times I didn't dare to pray because I feared the deep pain I felt in recalling how I had offended the Lord. This torment grew over time, reaching a point that I cannot describe. It wasn't a pain caused by fear of punishment, but by the sorrow of seeing how much God loved me in prayer and how little I reciprocated.

I would grow angry with myself for shedding so many tears for my sins, as despite my repentance, I could not reform myself and would fall again as soon as I found myself in the same situation. This filled me with anger and an even greater sense of guilt because I saw that the Lord was granting me the gift of tears and true repentance, but I couldn't change.

I tried to confess as soon as possible and did everything I could to reconcile with God. However, my biggest problem was that I didn't cut off the occasions of sin at their root, and my confessors didn't help me understand the danger I was in or my obligation to avoid certain relationships. I am convinced that if they had warned me, I would have changed, as I would not have been able to bear being in a state of mortal sin even for a day if I had truly understood.

All the fear I felt toward God began with prayer, but it was full of love, not fear of punishment. During the time I was ill, I took great care of my conscience regarding mortal sins.

Oh my God! I desired health to serve You better, but it ended up being the cause of my greatest harm.

5. Seeing myself so incapacitated at such a young age and having lost all hope in earthly doctors, I decided to turn to those in heaven and ask them to heal me. Even though I longed to regain my health, I accepted my condition with joy. Sometimes I thought that if being healthy would lead to my condemnation, it was better for me to stay as I was; but I also believed that with health, I could serve God much better. This is the mistake we fall into: not leaving everything in the hands of the Lord, who knows far better than we do what is best for us.

6. I began to carry out approved devotions, such as attending Mass and praying, because I was never fond of certain devotions practiced by some people, especially women, involving ceremonies that I could not tolerate. Later it was understood that many of these practices were superstitious and inappropriate.

I decided to take the glorious St. Joseph as my advocate and protector, and I entrusted myself to him with fervor. I clearly saw that this father and lord of mine not only delivered me from this need, but also from other, far greater ones, involving my honor and the salvation of my soul. He always responded with more favor than I knew how to ask for. To this day, I do not remember ever asking him for something that I did not obtain.

I am amazed at the great mercies God has granted me through this blessed saint, delivering me from dangers both of body and soul. It seems that the Lord grants certain saints the grace to help with specific needs, but I have found that St. Joseph assists in all matters. The Lord appears to want to teach us that just as on earth He obeyed St. Joseph—who, although his guardian, had the authority of a father over Him—now in heaven, He grants all that this glorious saint asks of Him, demonstrating the great power He has given him as an intercessor.

This has also been confirmed by other people whom I encouraged to entrust themselves to him. Many have become devoted to St. Joseph after experiencing this truth for themselves.

7. I tried to celebrate his feast with all the solemnity I could, though I was more concerned with external details than with the spirit. I made efforts to ensure everything was done splendidly and carefully, though with good intentions. However, this was full of imperfections. Every good deed the Lord gave me the grace to perform, I did with many flaws, mixed with my own curiosity and vanity, in which I placed great effort. May the Lord forgive me.

I would like to persuade everyone to be devoted to this glorious saint, because I have much experience of the favors he obtains from God. I have not known anyone who is truly devoted to him and renders him special services who has not made significant progress in virtue. St. Joseph powerfully assists the souls who commend themselves to him.

For many years, on the day of his feast, I have asked him for something, and I have always seen my petition fulfilled. If at any time I have asked for something inappropriate, he has corrected it for my greater good.

8. If I had the authority to write, I would gladly extend myself by detailing the favors that this glorious saint has granted to me and to others. However, so as not to exceed what has been commanded of me, I will be brief on many matters I wish I could elaborate on, and perhaps more extensively on others than necessary. In all of this, I recognize my lack of discretion.

For the love of God, I ask those who do not believe me to test it for themselves. They will see the great benefit that comes from entrusting themselves to this glorious patriarch and having devotion to him. People of prayer, in particular, should have a special affection for him. I do not understand how anyone could think of the Queen of Angels during the time she lived with the Child Jesus and not give thanks to St. Joseph for his care and help toward them.

Those who do not have a teacher to guide them in prayer should take this glorious saint as their guide, for they will not go astray. I pray to the Lord that I have not erred in daring to speak of him, for although I publicly declare my devotion to him, I have always failed in imitating and serving him as he deserves.

St. Joseph, in his kindness, restored my ability to walk and freed me from being paralyzed. But I, in my wretchedness, did not know how to make good use of this grace.

9. Who would have thought that I would fall so soon after receiving so many favors from God! After His Majesty began to grant me virtues that pushed me to serve Him, after I had been nearly dead and in danger of damnation, and after He had restored the life of both my soul and body, something that amazed everyone who saw me alive.

What is this, my Lord? Must we live a life so full of danger? As I write this, I feel that, by Your mercy, I could say—though not with St. Paul's perfection—that it is no longer I who live, but You, my Creator, who live in me. I say this because, to the best of my understanding, I have experienced in recent years that You sustain me with Your hand, and I feel a firm desire and determination not to do anything that goes against Your will, not even the smallest thing.

Although, without a doubt, I commit many offenses against Your Majesty unknowingly, it also seems to me that there is nothing I would not be willing to face with determination for love of You. Indeed, on some occasions, You have helped me to move forward. I no longer want the world or anything that comes from it, and it seems to me that I find no contentment in anything outside of You. Everything else feels like a heavy cross to me.

I could very well be mistaken, and perhaps what I say is not true. But You, my Lord, know that, as far as I understand, I am not lying. Still, I rightly fear that You may leave me, because I already know how fragile I am and how little virtue I have unless You constantly strengthen and help me not to stray from You. May Your Majesty grant me that You have not abandoned me, even if it appears so to me.

I do not understand how we can want to live with so much uncertainty. It seemed impossible for me to ever separate myself from You, my Lord. However, I have abandoned You so many times that I cannot help but fear. For, as soon as You distance Yourself from me, I fall completely to the ground.

Blessed be You forever, because although I abandoned You, You never entirely left me. You always helped me rise, giving me Your hand. And many times, Lord, I did not even want to take it, nor did I want to recognize how You called me again and again. Now, I will tell of it.

CHAPTER 7

This chapter deals with how she gradually lost the graces that the Lord had granted her and the life of dissipation that she began to lead. It also speaks of the dangers inherent in nunneries that are not strictly enclosed.

1. Thus, I began, from one distraction to another, from one vanity to the next, and from one occasion to another, until I found myself in very compromising situations, with my soul completely entangled in many vanities. I reached a point where I felt ashamed to come before God in as intimate a relationship as prayer.

This was aggravated because, as my sins grew, I began to lose the taste and comfort I once found in virtuous pursuits. I saw clearly, my Lord, that this lack of consolation was nothing but the consequence of having distanced myself from You.

Here, the devil laid one of the worst traps for me, under the guise of humility. I began to fear prayer, feeling so lost. It seemed better for me to behave like other people, since being so wretched, I was among the worst. I thought it would be preferable to limit myself to the vocal prayers I was obliged to say and not engage in mental prayer, nor seek such a close relationship with God when I felt I did not deserve it.

I told myself that, with so many sins, I deserved to be among demons, and that, moreover, I was deceiving people by giving an outwardly good appearance.

However, I do not blame the convent where I lived, for I myself managed to ensure that others held a good opinion of me. It was not something I did deliberately or by pretending to be pious. Thank God, I do not recall ever having fallen into hypocrisy or vainglory. Whenever I had such thoughts, they caused me so much pain that the devil ended up losing, and I gained.

Despite everything, it weighed heavily on me that others held me in high regard, because I knew my inner self well and understood how far I was from what I appeared to be.

2. The fact that I was not considered so depraved was because, being young and exposed to many occasions to fall, I would often retreat to pray and read in solitude. I spoke a lot about God, liked to have His image painted in various places, and kept a private oratory that I tried to adorn with things that inspired devotion. I did not usually speak ill of anyone, and I engaged in other actions that appeared virtuous.

At the same time, I was quite vain and valued in myself those things that the world often considers important. Because of this mixture of attitudes, I was given more freedom than the older nuns, and others trusted me completely.

Despite this, I never took improper liberties nor did things without permission, such as communicating through hidden places or going out at night. I never dared to do such things, and the Lord always held me by His hand.

Reflecting deliberately on many things, I thought it would be a terrible act to endanger the reputation of so many virtuous people just because of my own wickedness, considering how good they were. It seemed to me that this was very wrong, though at the same time I justified myself by thinking that other actions I engaged in were not so grave, as if they were acceptable.

The truth is that my faults were not as premeditated as committing such a serious error, but they were still quite severe.

3. For this reason, I think it greatly harmed me that I was not in an enclosed convent. The freedom that others, being good, could manage properly—since at that time enclosure was not required—for me, being so wretched, would have led to my perdition. I am sure I would have ended up in hell if the Lord, in His infinite mercy and great favors, had not rescued me from that danger.

It seems to me that a convent of women with too much freedom is a great risk. For those who seek evil, it is more like a direct path to hell than a help to overcome their weaknesses.

To be clear, I am not referring to my own convent, because there were many women who served the Lord with true devotion and perfection, and His Majesty could not help but favor them because of their goodness. Moreover, it was not an entirely open place, and the religious rule was observed. I am referring more to other convents that I know and have seen.

4. This saddens me greatly. The Lord needs to make very special calls—not just once, but many times—to save some women, given the worldly distractions that are allowed in these places: honors, recreations, and a poor understanding of their obligations. May God forbid them from considering a virtue what is actually sin, as often happened to me.

It is so difficult to make them understand this mistake that only the hand of God can intervene directly to correct it.

If parents asked me for advice, I would tell them that if they do not want to ensure their daughters follow a secure path to salvation and prefer to risk them in a convent like these, they should at least think of their honor. It would be better to marry them to men of humble condition than to place them in environments where they could be in greater danger than in the world.

If their daughters are not well-inclined from the start—and may God grant that they are and benefit from it—it would be better to keep them at home. Because if they wish to do evil, they will not be able to hide it for long, and at home, it will be discovered soon; but in such a convent, they may spend a long time deceiving others until finally the Lord exposes them.

They not only harm themselves but also bring harm to others. Sometimes, poor young women who are blameless get influenced by what they see around them. It is a pity to see many who wish to leave the world, thinking they will serve the Lord and escape worldly dangers, only to find themselves in a world even more complicated, as if surrounded by ten worlds together.

Amid this confusion, youth, sensuality, and the devil push them to follow practices that are purely worldly. In these places, these things even come to be accepted as good, at least in appearance.

This reminds me, to some extent, of the heretics. They blind themselves, trying to convince themselves that what they follow is good, even though deep down they know it is not. There is something within them that tells them they are mistaken.

5. What a great evil, a most grievous evil, when in monasteries of religious—both men and women—the true religious life is not kept! When in the same monastery there are two paths: that of virtue and true religion, and that of the lack of religion, and almost everyone follows the latter equally. Better said, not equally, because, due to our sins, the imperfect path is the one most taken and favored.

The path of true religion is practiced so little that a friar or nun who wishes to fully follow their vocation has more to fear from their own community members than from all the demons. They need more caution and concealment to express their desire for a close relationship with God than for any other relationship or desire that the devil sows within the monastery.

I do not know why we are surprised that there are so many evils in the Church if those who should be models of virtue for all have completely blurred the example of holiness left by the religious of the past.

I pray to the divine Majesty to remedy this, for it is evident how greatly it is needed. Amen.

6. When I began involving myself in these conversations and friendships, I did not believe—seeing how common they were in many monasteries—that they could cause me harm or distract my soul. I thought they would not do me more harm than they did to other nuns whom I saw as good. I did not understand that they were much better than I was, and that what was a great danger for me might not be so for them. However, I doubt that these practices do not at least represent a waste of time, even for those who do not fall entirely into them.

At the beginning of my involvement with one of these people, the Lord wanted me to understand that such friendships were not good for me. In His mercy, He wanted to illuminate me in the midst of my blindness.

Christ appeared to me with great sternness, clearly showing me how much what I was doing pained Him. I saw Him with the eyes of my soul, more clearly than I could have seen Him with my bodily eyes. This vision left such a deep impression on me that, more than twenty-six years later, I still have it present.

I was completely terrified and disturbed, and from that moment on, I did not want to see the person I was involved with again.

7. Not understanding that it was possible to see something without the bodily eyes caused me much harm. The devil helped me believe that this was impossible, that it was all my imagination, or even that it could be from him. He filled me with doubts and arguments to dismiss it. Despite everything, deep down, I still believed it came from God and was not merely a whim of my mind.

However, since this experience was not to my liking, I convinced myself that it was not real. I did not dare to speak of it to anyone, and over time, the devil insisted again, making me believe that it was not wrong to have dealings with that person, that my honor was not at risk but was even enhanced. So, I resumed that interaction and later continued similar relationships with other people, which were a true spiritual distraction and poison for my soul.

For many years, I sought out this kind of harmful entertainment, although it did not seem as bad to me as it truly was. Sometimes I saw clearly that it was not right, but none of those relationships distracted me as much as the one I mentioned, because I came to feel great affection for that person.

8. On one occasion, while I was with this same person, we saw something approaching us. It looked like a large toad, but it moved much faster than would be normal for such an animal. Others who were there also saw it. I cannot imagine how such a creature could appear in that place, in broad daylight, nor where it could have come from, as nothing like it had ever been seen there before.

The impression this incident left on me seems to have had meaning, and to this day I have not forgotten it.

Oh, greatness of God! How carefully and mercifully You warned me in so many ways, and how little attention I paid.

9. In the convent, there was a nun who was a relative of mine, an older woman and a great servant of God, very devoted to the religious life. She also warned me at times, but not only did I not believe her, I also became upset with her, thinking she was scandalizing herself for no reason.

I have recounted this so that the magnitude of my wickedness may be understood, as well as the immense goodness of God and how much I deserved hell for my great ingratitude. I also recount it so that, if any nun reads this in the future, they may learn from my experience.

For the love of our Lord, I ask them to flee from this kind of recreations and friendships. I pray to His Majesty that, by my testimony, someone may be disillusioned, since, in my blindness, I misled many by saying there was nothing wrong in it and by assuring them that there was no danger. I never did this with the intent to deceive, but I was the cause of much harm due to my poor example and my foolishness, without realizing the true damage I was causing.

10. In those early days when I was still ill and did not know well how to take care of myself, I felt a great desire to help others. This is a very common temptation for those who are just beginning, though in my case, it turned out to be something positive.

Since I loved my father so much, I wanted him to experience the good I felt in practicing prayer, which at that time seemed to me the greatest thing one could attain in this life. So, subtly and as best as I could, I began to encourage him to pray. I gave him some books for this purpose, and, since he was already as virtuous as I mentioned before, this exercise took root very well in him.

In five or six years, his spiritual progress was so great that I praised the Lord for it, and I was filled with consolation to see him advance so much. He went through very difficult trials in many circumstances, but he always faced them with great conformity to the will of God.

He often came to see me, and we found comfort in talking together about matters of God.

11. Later, when I was so distracted and had stopped practicing prayer, I could not bear to see him deceived, thinking that I still had the relationship with God that I used to have. I spent more than a year without praying, mistakenly believing that it was humbler. This was, as I will explain later, the greatest temptation I suffered because, for that reason, I was on the verge of being completely lost.

When I had prayer, if I offended God one day, the next day I could collect myself and avoid occasions of sin. But without it, I no longer had that refuge.

When my father came, it was very difficult for me to see him convinced that I was still in the same spiritual state as before, so I finally decided to disillusion him. I told him that I no longer prayed, though I did not explain the cause. I justified my abandonment of prayer by citing the illnesses I was suffering.

Although I recovered from that severe illness, I have never ceased to have major health problems. To this day, I still have them, although in recent years they have not been as severe. For twenty years, I had constant vomiting in the mornings, which often prevented me from eating until after midday, and sometimes even later. Now that I receive Communion more frequently, the vomiting occurs at night, before going to bed, and it is more inconvenient.

I have to make a great effort to induce it using feathers and other methods, because if I do not, the discomfort is severe. I am almost never without pain, which at times is very intense, especially in my heart. Though the more continuous illnesses, such as the recurrent fevers I used to have, have disappeared for about eight years, I still face other ailments.

However, they no longer affect me as much. Many times, I even rejoice in suffering them, thinking that, in some way, I serve the Lord through them.

12. My father believed that this was the true cause, as he never told lies and, given our relationship, did not think I could lie to him. To convince him even more—because I knew my excuse was not enough—I told him that attending choir was already quite an effort for me.

However, even this did not justify giving up prayer, since physical strength is not needed to pray, only love and perseverance. The Lord always provides opportunities if we truly wish to pray.

I say "always" because, even though circumstances or illness may prevent prolonged moments of solitude, there are other times when we can pray. Even in the midst of illness and difficulties, true prayer consists in offering those moments to the Lord, remembering for whom we are suffering, conforming ourselves to His will, and using those situations to exercise love. It is not necessary to wait for solitude to pray, nor to think that other moments do not count as prayer.

With a little effort, great benefits are found even in the times that seem stolen from prayer by the work the Lord places before us. I had experienced this before when my conscience was at peace.

13. But my father, due to the good opinion he had of me and the great love he bore me, believed everything. He even pitied me. However, since he was already in a very advanced spiritual state, he did not spend much time with me. As soon as he saw me, he would leave, saying that being with me was a waste of time. I did not mind much, as I was already distracted by other vanities.

Not only with him, but also with other people, I endeavored that they should have prayer. Even while I was immersed in my own distractions, when I saw those who were friends of prayer, I spoke to them about how to meditate and helped them. I gave them books and advice because I had always desired that others serve God.

Since I began to pray, this desire had remained in me. I thought that, since I was not serving the Lord as I should, at least what His Majesty had taught me should not be lost, and that others should do it on my behalf.

I say this so that the extent of my blindness may be understood: I was losing myself, but I strove for others to gain.

14. During this time, my father fell ill with the ailment that would eventually lead to his death, which lasted several days. I went to take care of him, though my soul was sicker than his body, distracted by many vanities. Even so, I do not believe I was in mortal sin, for if I had known, I would have done everything possible to avoid it.

I went through many hardships during his illness. I think in some way I was able to repay him for the care he had given me during my own illnesses. Despite being quite ill myself, I made every effort to care for him.

I knew that with his death, I would lose all the comfort and support he provided, as he was like everything to me. However, I gathered enough strength not to show him any grief or sorrow and remained calm until he passed away.

It felt as if my soul was being torn out watching his life fade, for I loved him immensely.

15. It was truly praiseworthy to the Lord the way my father died and the eagerness he had to meet God. After receiving the Last Rites, he gave us touching advice, asking us to pray for him, to implore divine mercy for his soul, and to always serve the Lord. He reminded us with tears in his eyes that everything in this life comes to an end.

He confessed to us the deep sorrow he felt for not having served God better. He said he wished he had become a friar, and not just any friar, but one who lived with the greatest rigor.

I am convinced that the Lord allowed him to understand, fifteen days before his death, that his time in this world was coming to an end. Before that, although he was ill, he did not think of dying. However, after those days, despite the improvements the doctors observed, he paid no attention to them. Instead, he devoted himself to preparing his soul.

16. His main ailment was an intense pain in his back, which never subsided. At times, the suffering was so great that it deeply distressed him. I told him that since he was so devoted to the Passion of Christ, he should think that His Majesty was allowing him to feel a little of the pain He endured while carrying the cross. This comforted him so much that I never heard him complain again.

He spent three days with his senses greatly affected, but on the day of his death, the Lord completely restored his lucidity, which left us amazed. He remained conscious until, while reciting the Creed himself, he passed away halfway through it. His body looked like that of an angel.

To me, he was already like an angel in his soul and in his way of being. He had a pure heart and a truly good disposition.

I do not know why I am telling this, except to reproach myself even more for my wretched life. After witnessing such a holy death and knowing such an exemplary life as his, I should have improved my own life to resemble, even a little, such a good father.

His confessor, a very wise and learned Dominican, said he had no doubt that my father had gone straight to heaven. He had confessed him for several years and always highlighted his purity of conscience.

17. This Dominican, a very pious and God-fearing man, was of great help to me. I confessed to him, and he began to seriously care for my soul. He helped me understand the wrong path I was on and encouraged me to receive Communion every fifteen days. Little by little, as I spoke with him, I told him about my prayer. He told me not to abandon it, that under no circumstances could it do me harm, but only good.

So, I returned to prayer, although without giving up the occasions of sin. From that moment on, I never left it again.

I led a very difficult life because prayer made me more aware of my faults. On one hand, God was calling me; on the other, I was still clinging to the world. I enjoyed the things of God greatly, but worldly things had me ensnared.

It seemed as though I was trying to reconcile two opposing and enemy realities: the spiritual life and the pleasures and entertainments of the senses. In prayer, I experienced great conflicts, for my spirit was not free but enslaved by these attachments. For this reason, I could not enter within myself without a thousand vanities accompanying me.

I lived like this for many years, and now I am amazed at how I could endure that struggle without giving up one thing or the other.

I know well that not abandoning prayer was not something that depended on me, but on the Lord, who held me with His hands, for He had plans to grant me greater graces.

18. Oh, my God! If I had to recount all the occasions of sin from which You delivered me during those years, and how I kept putting myself back into them, I would never finish. Also, the dangers of completely losing my reputation, from which You protected me. I did things that revealed what I truly was, but You covered my faults and made some small virtue, if I had it, appear great in the eyes of others.

Thus, I was always held in high regard. Though sometimes my vanities would surface, people did not believe it when they saw me do other things that seemed good to them.

All of this happened because the Lord, who knows all things, understood that it was necessary. He wanted me, later on, when I spoke in His service, to have some credibility. In His infinite goodness, He did not look at my great sins, but at the sincere desires I often had to serve Him and the sorrow I felt for lacking the strength to do so.

19. Oh, Lord of my soul! How can I describe the mercies You bestowed upon me during those years? And how, at the very moment when I offended You most, You gave me such great repentance and prepared me to enjoy Your favors and graces?

It is true, my King, that You chose the most delicate and painful way to punish me, like someone who knows perfectly well what would hurt me most. You punished me with great gifts and mercies.

I do not think I am saying something absurd, though it would be reasonable if it seemed so, recalling now with clarity my ingratitude and wickedness. But it was much more painful for me to receive mercies after having committed grave sins than any punishment.

A single one of those mercies would undo and confuse me much more than many illnesses or great trials put together. For I understood punishments as something I deserved and felt they somehow compensated for my sins, though never sufficiently, because they were many. But receiving new mercies after having responded so poorly to the previous ones was a terrible torment for me.

I believe this would be the same for anyone who has some understanding or love for God. To see myself receiving so many gifts, knowing I was about to fall again, was a cause for anger with myself and for tears. Though, at those moments, my desires and resolutions were firm, I knew how weak I was.

20. It is a great danger for a soul to be alone amid so many threats. I believe that if I had had someone to talk to about all of this, someone to help me, at least out of shame I would not have fallen again, since I had no such shame with God.

For this reason, I would advise those who pray, especially those who are just beginning, to seek friendship and companionship with others who also dedicate themselves to the same pursuit. It is extremely important, even if only to support each other with their prayers—how much more so with all the benefits it brings!

I do not understand why, if friends are sought to talk about human matters and vain pleasures, those who begin to truly love and serve God should not be allowed to share their joys and difficulties with others. Those who pray also experience both joys and trials.

If their friendship with God is sincere, they should not fear vainglory. And if this thought arises, they can overcome it with merit. I am convinced that anyone who discusses these matters with good intentions will benefit not only themselves but also others, even without realizing it. They will teach their friends and, in turn, learn more.

21. Anyone who feels vainglory in speaking of these things could also feel it by attending Mass devoutly if others see them, or by carrying out other practices that, as Christians, we are obligated to do. They should not be abandoned for fear of vainglory.

It is crucial for souls that are not yet strong in virtue—surrounded by so many temptations and friends who incite them to evil—to find support in others who seek to love and serve God. I cannot emphasize this enough.

The devil has cleverly used this deception, for it suits him well that those who truly wish to love and please God should hide and not dare to show it. Meanwhile, ill intentions and dishonorable desires are openly displayed and so often that they seem fashionable. Even the offenses made against God are publicized as if they were a source of pride.

22. I do not know if I am saying something incorrect. If I am, Your Grace may disregard it; and if not, I ask that you complement my shortcomings with your own insights.

Nowadays, the service of God is so weakened that those who serve Him need to support one another to move forward. Vanities and worldly pleasures are so common and accepted that no one seems to question them. But if someone begins to give themselves to God, criticism and murmurs quickly arise.

Therefore, it is necessary to seek companionship that helps one stand firm, at least until the person becomes strong and prepared to endure criticism without becoming discouraged. Otherwise, they may find themselves in great difficulties.

Perhaps this is why some saints withdrew to the desert: not out of pride, but out of humility, not trusting in themselves and believing that God would help them through those around them. Charity grows when shared, and from this exchange innumerable benefits arise.

If I did not speak from my own experience, perhaps I would not dare to say this. Although I am the weakest and most wretched of all, I believe no one will lose anything by humbling themselves and seeking help, even if they are already strong. Whoever does not fully trust themselves and accepts the counsel of those with experience will benefit.

In my case, I know that if the Lord had not shown me this truth and had not given me the means to interact with people who pray, I would have fallen and would not have been able to get up. Without that support, I would have ended up inevitably in hell.

I had many friends who helped me fall, but no one to help me rise. Now I am amazed at how I did not remain down permanently, and I praise the mercy of God, who was the only one who held me up.

May He be blessed forever. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

On the great benefit of not abandoning prayer, even in times of falling, and how it is an excellent remedy for finding the lost path. Encourages everyone to practice prayer and explains its enormous gains, even if later abandoned.

1. Not without reason have I dwelled so much on this period of my life, because I know well that no one will enjoy reading something so base and despicable. Honestly, I wish that those who read this would feel aversion toward me for having been such a stubborn and ungrateful soul to the One who has granted me so many favors.

I would also like to have permission to detail how many times I failed God during this time, because they were numerous.

2. However, thanks to being supported by that solid pillar that is prayer, I managed to cross this stormy sea for almost twenty years. They were years of falling, attempts to rise, and constant relapses, living a life so far from perfection that I barely considered venial sins and feared mortal ones, but not as deeply as I should have, as I did not avoid occasions of sin.

I can say that this was one of the most painful lives imaginable, because I found no satisfaction in either God or the world. When I gave myself to worldly pleasures, I was tormented by the memory of how much I owed to God. When I tried to be with God, the attachments and affections of the world troubled me deeply.

It is such an exhausting internal war that I do not understand how I could endure it for a month, let alone for so many years.

Despite this, I clearly see the immense mercy that the Lord had with me: even though I was trapped in the world, He granted me the strength not to abandon prayer.

I say strength because I believe there is no greater courage than facing God in prayer, knowing one is acting like a traitor to the King and that He knows it. Although we are always before God, those who practice prayer perceive it differently, for they are aware that He is watching them constantly. Others may go entire days without even remembering that God sees them.

3. It is true that during those years there were months, and I even believe there was one entire year in which I managed not to offend the Lord and gave myself fully to prayer. I made many efforts to avoid falling into sin.

Because I wish to recount this with absolute truth, I mention it now. However, I remember little of those good days, which surely were few, and many of the bad ones.

I devoted long periods to prayer, and few days passed without me practicing it, except when I was gravely ill or very busy. Curiously, when I was ill, I felt closer to God. I also endeavored to bring those I lived with closer to Him and constantly prayed to the Lord for them. I often spoke of God in my conversations.

So, except for the year I mentioned, during the twenty-eight years since I began to pray, I spent eighteen in a constant battle, divided between God and the world. The remaining years, which I must now recount, were different: the cause of my struggle changed. Although the war did not cease, at least it was to be in God's service and with a full understanding of the vanity of the world.

Everything, from then on, became more bearable, as I will explain later.

4. Everything I have recounted so far has a clear purpose: to show the infinite mercy of God and my profound ingratitude towards Him. Additionally, I want to convey the great good that God does for the soul when He leads it to practice prayer with willingness, even if it is not fully prepared as it should be.

If someone perseveres in prayer, despite sins, temptations, and the falls that the devil can provoke in countless ways, I am convinced that the Lord, in the end, will bring them to a safe harbor. Thus He has done with me, as it seems now. I ask His Majesty not to let me be lost again.

5. Regarding the benefits of prayer, many saints and scholars have written wonders. I refer to mental prayer, and glory be to God that they have done so! Even if I did not have their support, I would not be so arrogant as to dare to speak of it without my own experience.

From my experience, I can assure you that, regardless of the mistakes committed by those who begin to pray, they should not abandon it. Prayer is the path through which they may find remedy, and without it, it will be much more difficult. Let the devil not deceive them, as he tried to do with me, by suggesting that they should leave it out of humility. Trust that God will not fail to respond. As soon as you sincerely repent and decide not to offend Him again, God will welcome you back as a friend, granting you the same graces as before, and even more, if your repentance is genuine.

To those who have not yet begun, I urge you, for the love of the Lord, not to deprive your soul of such great benefit. There is nothing to fear, but much to gain. Even if you do not advance to reach perfection or experience the delights and consolations that God gives to those who go further, at least you will learn the way to heaven.

If you persevere, I trust in God's mercy, for He has never left unrewarded those who take Him as a friend. To me, *mental prayer is nothing more than cultivating a friendship: being alone many times with One whom we know loves us.*

If you do not yet love God as you should—because for love to be true and enduring, both sides must share similar qualities—know that the Lord is perfect and lacks nothing. In contrast, we are full of vice, sensuality, and ingratitude.

Perhaps you do not feel capable of loving Him as He deserves because it is not in your nature. But at the very least, understanding how much His friendship benefits you and how deeply He loves you, you can make the effort to spend time with One so different from yourself.

6. Oh, infinite goodness of my God! When I contemplate You and contemplate myself, I feel the desire to dissolve into pure love for You! How true it is that You bear with those who tolerate Your presence by their side! What a good friend You are, my Lord!

How You care for us, wait for us, and endure our imperfections, giving us time to conform ourselves to Your nature while You endure ours! You consider every small moment when we want You, and with a single act of repentance, You forget everything with which we have offended You.

I have seen this clearly in my own life. And I do not understand, my Creator, why the whole world does not try to draw closer to You to have this special friendship.

Even sinners, who are so far from Your purity, can become good just by enduring Your presence for two hours a day, even if they are distracted by a thousand worldly thoughts, as happened to me.

You, Lord, see that at first, they cannot do more, and sometimes not even later. But merely by trying to be in such good company, You strengthen their spirit. You prevent demons from attacking them so fiercely and give them the power to resist.

You do not destroy anyone's life, Life of all lives! To those who trust in You and want You as a friend, You give health to the body and Life to the soul.

7. I do not understand the fear that some have of beginning mental prayer, nor what they are afraid of. It is a fear that, without a doubt, the devil takes advantage of to do us real harm, because it distances us from reflecting on how much we have offended God, what we owe Him, the reality of hell and glory, and the great sufferings Christ endured for us.

In my case, during times when I was in danger, my prayer was reduced to thinking about these things whenever I could. However, many times, I only wished for the hour of praying to end; I was more focused on listening for the clock than

on anything else. There were occasions when I would have preferred doing a difficult penance rather than facing the effort of gathering myself for prayer.

It is true that the devil, or my own bad habit, made it so difficult for me to go to prayer that sadness overwhelmed me as soon as I entered the oratory. I had to muster all my courage to force myself to do it. Although my will was not small—God gave me a strength that many would not expect from a woman, even though I have used it poorly—it was very difficult for me.

However, once I managed to make that effort, I experienced a peace and consolation that often surpassed the moments when I genuinely desired to pray.

8. If the Lord endured someone as vile as I for so long and used prayer to remedy all my ills, who can fear approaching Him, no matter how sinful they may be? No one can be as wicked as I was, nor for as many years, after having received so many mercies from the Lord.

Who can doubt that God will welcome them, if He bore with me for so long, simply because I desired and sought a moment and a place to be with Him, often without will and only forcing myself, or being driven by Him?

If even those who do not serve God but rather offend Him find in prayer a necessary help, why should those who wish to serve Him abandon it? Prayer can never cause harm that is worse than not having it.

I do not understand why those who serve God would renounce it, except if they wish to face life's difficulties with more weight and less comfort. It is like closing the door on God, preventing Him from giving us peace and joy amidst our struggles.

I feel sorry for those who serve God without prayer, for they do so at their own expense. In contrast, those who persevere in prayer receive direct help from the Lord, who gives them comfort to endure difficulties.

9. I will speak later of the consolations the Lord grants to those who persevere in prayer. For now, I will only say that prayer has been the door to all the great mercies He has granted me.

If that door is closed, I do not know how He could grant them, because to enter a soul and fill it with His gifts, He needs it to be ready, clean, and willing to receive Him. If we fill our soul with obstacles and do nothing to remove them, how can God approach us?

And yet, we still want Him to fill us with great gifts!

10. To understand the immense mercy of God and the great benefit it was for me not to have abandoned prayer and spiritual reading, I am going to recount—

since it is crucial to understand—how the devil attacks a soul to win it over and how the Lord, with His wisdom and mercy, constantly seeks to draw it back to Himself.

I beg, for the love of our Lord and for the great love with which He pursues us to save us, that all avoid the occasions of sin. Once we place ourselves in those situations, there is no way to trust in ourselves, for we face too many enemies, and our own weaknesses are not enough to defend us.

11. I wish I could clearly express the enslavement in which my soul lived during those times. I knew I was captive, but I could not fully understand what that captivity entailed, nor could I completely believe that what the confessors did not consider so serious was as bad as I felt it was within me.

One of them, whom I approached with scruples, told me that, even if I attained a high degree of contemplation, there was no problem in having those occasions and dealings.

This happened toward the end, when, with God's help, I was distancing myself from great dangers, although I had not yet completely avoided the occasion. Since they saw me with good intentions and dedicated to prayer, they thought I was already doing a lot. However, my soul knew that I was not fulfilling what I owed to the One to whom I owed so much.

Now, looking back, I feel pity for all that I went through and how little help I received, except from God. Moreover, I found many justifications and excuses to maintain those pastimes and indulgences, justified by the fact that they were deemed lawful as I was told.

Another torment I suffered was the sermons, even though I was greatly fond of them. If I saw a preacher speak with spirit and accuracy, I developed a special love for him, without seeking it, as if someone had placed it in my heart.

I almost never disliked a sermon; even those that others considered poor seemed worth listening to. But if the sermon was good, it brought me particular joy.

Talking about God or listening about Him never tired me, since I began practicing prayer. On the one hand, sermons gave me great comfort, but on the other, they tormented me because I understood that I was not living as I should in many aspects.

I begged the Lord to help me, but now I believe I failed in not putting all my trust in Him and not abandoning myself completely to His will while continuing to rely on myself. I sought remedies, made decisions, but I did not understand that

nothing serves if we do not place all our trust in God and stop relying on our own strength.

I longed to truly live, because I understood that I was not alive but was struggling with a shadow of death. I found no one who could give me that life, and I was not capable of taking it for myself.

The only one who could give it to me had good reasons not to, for I had so often returned to Him and then abandoned Him again.

CHAPTER 9

How the Lord began to awaken her soul and bring light into the darkness, strengthening her virtues so that she would not offend Him.

1. My soul was already exhausted. Although I longed for rest, the bad habits I had acquired did not allow it. One day, upon entering the oratory, I saw an image of the wounded Christ that had been brought to the house for a celebration. The image was so striking and devout that, as soon as I looked at it, I shuddered. It depicted so vividly what Christ had suffered for us that I could not contain myself. I felt great sorrow for how little I had appreciated those wounds; it felt as if my heart were breaking. I threw myself before the image, and amidst a torrent of tears, I begged the Lord to strengthen me once and for all so that I would never offend Him again.

2. I had always had a deep devotion to the glorious St. Mary Magdalene, and on many occasions, I reflected on her conversion, especially after receiving communion. Knowing that the Lord was present within me led me to imagine myself at His feet, as she did, believing that He would not reject my tears either. I did not fully understand what I was saying, but I am grateful that He allowed me to shed them, for even with such intense feeling, I would soon forget. Therefore, I entrusted my pleas to this saint, asking her to intercede for my forgiveness.

3. However, this experience before the image marked me in a special way. I was very tired of relying on myself and decided to place all my trust in God. I remember, filled with determination, telling Him that I would not rise from there until He granted me what I asked of Him. I sincerely believe that that moment helped me greatly, for from then on, I began to improve significantly.

4. In my prayer, I often tried to picture Christ within me, as I could not concentrate well with my intellect. I found more comfort in imagining Him during moments when He was most alone. I thought that seeing Him afflicted and in need, He would not reject me if I approached Him. I had many simple thoughts like these, which helped me.

In particular, I found great solace in accompanying Him during His prayer in the Garden. I reflected on His suffering and the sweat of blood He shed. I wanted to wipe away that painful sweat, but I never dared to because my sins seemed too grave. Nevertheless, I stayed there with Him as long as my thoughts would allow, as they constantly tormented me.

For many years, before going to sleep, I used to commend myself to God and think for a few moments about the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. I did this even before I became a nun because I had heard that by doing so, many indulgences could be gained. I am convinced that my soul gained much from this habit because, without knowing what prayer truly was, I had already begun to practice it. That deeply rooted custom ensured that I would not cease to do it, just as I never stopped making the sign of the cross before sleeping.

5. Returning to what I said about the torment caused by my thoughts, I must point out that this type of prayer, where the intellect does not wander, requires the soul to be very recollected or to completely abandon any reflection. When one advances in this way, the benefit is enormous, as the focus is on love. However, reaching this point is often an arduous process, except for those whom the Lord quickly leads to the prayer of quiet, as I have seen in some cases. For those who follow this method, a book can be of great help to facilitate recollection.

Nature also helped me greatly: fields, water, or flowers. These things awakened in me memories of the Creator, invited me to recollection, and served me as a book that spoke of His greatness. Moreover, they made me reflect on my ingratitude and my sins. But in higher matters, such as imagining heaven or sublime things, my understanding was so crude that I could not conceive them until the Lord showed them to me by other means.

6. My mind had no skill in picturing things with understanding. If I did not see something with my own eyes, imagination was of no use to me, as it is for others who can use it to collect themselves. I could only think of Christ as a man, but even then, I never managed to picture Him within me, even if I read about His beauty or contemplated images of Him. It was like being blind or in darkness: I knew He was there, I understood and believed it with certainty, but I did not see Him.

For this reason, I loved images so much. What a misfortune for those who lose this resource through their own fault! It seems they do not love the Lord, for if they did, they would delight in contemplating His portrait, just as here on earth, even the portrait of someone we love brings us joy.

7. At this time, the *Confessions of Saint Augustine* came into my hands, something the Lord arranged, as I had neither sought them out nor knew of them. I feel great devotion to Saint Augustine, both because the monastery where I was a lay member belonged to his Order, and because of his story of conversion. In the saints