

St. John of the Cross
December 14



December 14

St. John of the Cross

1542–1591 • Spain

Alone in the dark prison cell, John reached out to God. In his soul, a song of love was stirring that he would put into words. In the darkness of his prison cell, John of the Cross discovered that the only guiding light he had was the love in his heart for God.

John of the Cross was born to poor silk weavers in Toledo, Spain. As he grew up, he tried out various trades, but he was not particularly good at anything, and so he was invited to serve the sick at the hospital in Toledo. He discovered through his work that God was calling him in a special way, and he entered the Carmelite order and became a priest.

At John's first Mass, he met Teresa de Ávila, the great reforming saint and nun who desired the Carmelite nuns to pursue lives of holiness. When John spoke to Teresa, her words inflamed his heart to seek holiness in the way that she described, and he worked to reform the Carmelite friars the way that Teresa worked to reform the Carmelite nuns.

But not all of the Carmelites liked John of the Cross's reforms. That is why some of these brothers ordered soldiers to seize him, beat him, and throw him into his dark prison cell! A jailer took pity on John and gave him a candle as well as paper, pen, and ink to write with. For over nine months, a candle his only source of light, John of the Cross wrote his mystical poems about the dark night of the heart's search for God.

St. Teresa de Ávila helped obtain his release, and John of the Cross dedicated his life to founding Carmelite monasteries under the rule of his reforms so that Carmelite friars could pursue greater lives of holiness. John himself experienced the deepest consolation and the mystical union of his soul with God in prayer.

But John of the Cross's life was always to be one of suffering, as he followed the way of the Cross, his namesake. His direct superior banished him to a faraway monastery. There, John of the Cross became terribly ill, and he was so neglected that his sufferings grew worse and worse. But his sufferings and his holiness were so great that even his enemies grew to acknowledge his sanctity, and he died a holy death.

St. John of the Cross, help my love for God be a guiding light!