

**St. Teresa de Ávila
(St. Teresa of Jesus)**

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1515–1582 • Spain

A seven-year-old Teresa de Ávila and her older brother were running away. She had convinced her brother that they should be missionaries for Christ. Fortunately, their uncle found them on the road outside of town and brought them home before they fell into trouble. After that, Teresa showed few signs in her childhood that she would one day become a great saint!

As a young girl, she was more interested in parties and attention than in the love of God. When she was eleven, her mother died. A grief-stricken Teresa was sent to a convent for her education. Afterward, she decided to become a Carmelite nun. She thought that being a nun would protect her from distractions and help her lead a holy life. But being holy at the convent was not as easy as she thought. Many nuns did not care about leading a holy life, and so they would spend too much time on their appearance; they would gossip; they would entertain guests. In the convent, Teresa found it much easier to spend time impressing her friends with her lively conversation than talking to God through prayer. Sometimes she did not pray at all.

Then, Teresa became terribly ill and began to pray. In her prayers, she received visions and ecstasies. During this time, she felt that she was completely united with God. These visions and ecstasies frightened her because she did not believe she was worthy of such graces. But her confessor told her not to be frightened, because her visions came from God. In one of her visions, an angel holding a long spear of gold appeared to her. He pierced her heart with the spear, and Teresa felt consumed with the fire of love for God. Teresa wrote about her spiritual experiences and the life of prayer.

Teresa decided that she must do all that she could to make the Carmelite convent a place where nuns could strive for holiness without distraction. This meant returning to earlier rules of poverty and simplicity. Many of the nuns resisted. They did not want to give up their lives of comfort. Finally, Teresa was allowed to found her own convent, named after St. Joseph, in Ávila. There, the nuns lived in poverty, as originally intended. They even went without shoes. Teresa's reforms to the Carmelite order attracted other women desiring holiness to become nuns. Soon, Teresa was starting other convents. She even started monasteries for Carmelite monks with the help of another saint, St. John of the Cross. All throughout her work, Teresa was persecuted by those who did not want to see the convents reformed, but she triumphed through God's grace. She founded new convents until she died a holy death. St. Teresa de Ávila, please help me grow closer to Jesus through prayer!