

Santa Teresa de los Andes (1900-1920)



Teresa de Los Andes (1900 - 1920) is the first Chilean and the first Discalced Carmelite nun outside Europe to be declared a saint.

She was born Juana Fernandez Solar ('Juanita') in Santiago, Chile, on 13 July 1900. The autobiography of the young Thérèse of Lisieux, not yet declared a saint, had an enormous influence on her early life and her own letters from that time reveal an incredibly profound spirituality and commitment to Jesus and her deep Marian devotion. It was not uncommon for her to converse with both Jesus and Mary in a natural and familiar way. When she was fourteen, under God's inspiration, she desired to consecrate herself to Jesus as a religious with the Discalced Carmelite Nuns. She had to wait another five years to fulfil this desire.

On 7th May 1919 she entered the Carmelite monastery of 'Los Andes' (90 kms from Santiago) and was received as a novice on 8th September that same year taking the name "Teresa de Jesus." During this time she also undertook an apostolate of letter writing. "Her letters radiate love for Christ and the happiness of being His alone. Some of her friends, moved by her witness, also enter religious life." In the monastery she happily lived the life of prayer and sacrifice, which was quickly to overtake her with suffering.

It was merely another few months later that she contracted typhus. In April 1920, being close to death, Teresa was allowed to make her religious profession. She died five days later in Holy Week, on 12 April 1920, just three months before her 20th birthday. Her words express her attitude to death. "For a Carmelite, death has nothing to be afraid of. She is going to live her true life. She is going to fall into the arms of the one who loved her here on earth beyond all things. She is going to be immersed eternally into love."

Teresa ('Juanita') was beatified by Pope John Paul II in the city of her birth, Santiago, Chile on 3rd April 1987. She was canonized in Rome on 21st March 1993. Her shrine in Los Andes (Chile) is visited annually by over 100,000 pilgrims.

It is incredible the impact that such a young and relatively brief life can have. The depth of her spirituality and her absolute surrender to the love of Jesus are perhaps best shown in her writings, mainly her journal and letters to her family and friends. These testify to how God works in and through a soul that is attentive and child-like.

The following is an excerpt from a letter to her sister Rebecca, who herself entered the same Carmel after Teresa's death. She wrote it on 15th April, 1916 – she was not yet sixteen years of age.

I have surrendered to Him. I made this commitment on the 8th December. It is impossible for me to tell you all I desire. My thoughts concern nothing but Him. He is my ideal, without limit. I breathe for that day I may go to Carmel, when I can busy myself with nothing but Him, to melt into Him and to live naught but His life: to love and to suffer for the salvation of souls. Yes, athirst I am for them because I know that is what my Jesus wants. Oh how much I love Him....

Source: www.carmelite.com