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Jesus Washing Peter's Feet by Ford Madox Brown (1852-56)

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Pope Francis is coming to the church down the street from me here is Washington, DC—the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Preparations are being made at the Basilica and at adjacent Catholic University for his visit. There are fences seemingly everywhere, which I assume are for crowd control, and stands are being built for the Eucharist that he will celebrate on September 23rd.

We here in Washington are grateful that he is visiting our city. But we are also grateful for the message of love that he brings with him, a message that he has spoken of often and clearly, as seen in these excerpts from his Twitter account: “Let us allow the love of God to take deep root within us. In so doing, we will be able to give ourselves to others.” and, “The one who helps the sick and needy touches the flesh of Christ, alive and present in our midst.”

Pope Francis clearly states that in loving others we are loving Christ, in tending to the needs of others we are ministering to Jesus. Francis is simply echoing the foundational command of the Christian faith: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (Jn 13:34). Pope Francis is challenging us to imitate Christ in all that we do and thus bring Christ to the world we live in. As he states, “How wonderful it is to proclaim to everyone the love of God, which saves us and gives meaning to our lives!”

Edward O'Donnell

Teresa of Avila: Mentoring for His Majesty

In this year of Teresa of Avila's 500th anniversary of birth, I gratefully celebrate the fifty years of getting to know her. Like Gregory of Nyssa, who speaks of cheering another on in the "divine race along the course of virtue" (Prologue, *Life of Moses*), Teresa's contagious spirit pulsates in her written work and cheers *me* on. In what follows, I would like to share: 1) being introduced to Teresa, 2) listening to her advice, 3) receiving her mentoring on prayer, and 4) making a contemporary comparison with her times.

Introduction to Teresa as Mentor

As a young religious, I received a copy of Teresa's *Life* from a fellow camp-counselor. I only thumbed through it and read small sections because I had other pressing obligations, and who has time for a sixteenth-century book? Later, however, I did read the autobiography and began to underline and even laugh with some of Teresa's statements. The energy in her words leapt right off the page. Today, because of its sentimental value, I still have the original book—yellow with age—sitting on a shelf over my computer.

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Perhaps my resistance was like Teresa's when she commented on the household spinning she needed to do rather than writing. She especially felt there were plenty of other manuscripts on prayer that were far better than hers. With possible time constraints, Teresa didn't even want to reread some of her work but, with a wry sense of humor, blamed the people who made the request for her written wisdom.

Closer Listening to Teresa as Mentor

Coincidentally, while at that summer camp, I was going through my own trauma of relationships. Therefore, despite selective reading, I was taken with two events in Teresa's *Life*. First, there was the young priest under the spell of a woman in his village. Winning his confidence, Teresa managed to get the pendant given to him by the woman. After Teresa threw it in the river, it seems that the priest's spell was broken. His death, a year later, was a warning to Teresa that perhaps she too needed to get her life in order. Secondly, Teresa struggled with social distractions that kept her from prayer. Being a bit of an extrovert myself, I wondered if—indeed—I had some of the same issues.

When entering my own middle age at forty, I again read Teresa's description of herself as a mediocre religious, oscillating in fervor from one year to the

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next. That was something that I could relate to as well. Admittedly, I was shocked that there was one year in which Teresa engaged in no personal prayer at all. Tired of mediocrity, she describes how—at about age thirty-nine—she knelt down before an image of the scourged Jesus and refused to get up unless she was given the grace of conversion.

I too had my own mid-life crisis, searching for a new fire in my heart. I chose to make a thirty-day Ignatian retreat. Although not as dramatic as Teresa's experience, I happened to go into the chapel of the retreat house late in the evening. At a side altar, under the dim lights, I saw one of the Jesuit brothers, crippled with arthritis, kneeling with his arms partially outstretched. To me he looked like the corpus of Jesus on the cross. I was in awe, and it demonstrated for me a way that Jesus walks, or struggles to walk, now. The following day, I saw his fellow Jesuits taking care of his needs by bringing him his food, which was equally awesome.

Also, having been in community for years, Teresa's insights were reassuring. She confesses:

“I know only too well what a great many women are like when they are all together. Believe me, I am more afraid of a discontented nun than of a horde of devils.”¹

I thought, “Yes, Teresa, you moved out of the Convent of the Incarnation to live the primitive rule

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when some thought you didn't live the mitigated or current one very well. Others thought you were extremely arrogant. Then, when you were appointed prioress and had to return to it, you were diplomatic in putting a statue of the Blessed Mother in your place and introducing her as the new prioress. Clever thinking!"

Teresa as Mentor for Prayer

Regarding prayer, it was consoling to hear Teresa say, "I was more anxious that the hour I had determined to spend in prayer be over than I was to remain there" (*Life*, 8:7). Restless by nature, I understood those words. With these sentences portraying a real human being, I pursued an interest in the *Interior Castle*. Truthfully, at first I was assessing my own location in Teresa's seven stages of prayer. Discouraged by thinking I was only in the first dwelling, the book then gathered dust on a shelf until I undertook a second, more fruitful, reading. Perhaps more maturity helped me to grasp that the stages are not about accomplishment but acceptance, not about gratification for achievement but gratefulness for what is given, and certainly not about measurement but meaning.

Jesus, His Majesty, is at the center of the castle, and his "sweet whistle," like that of a shepherd, is alluring and encouraging. Just being inside the

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courtyard of the castle is a gift to be responded to with gratitude. The first dwelling is foundational humility or truth about oneself and must be returned to often. I realized that with the determination to be faithful, His Majesty will allow the process to unfold in a way uniquely suited to the person.

As for most people, it is difficult for me to schedule a routine for daily prayer. It took a long time to establish the nine o'clock reminder. Twice a day, unless there is a serious interruption, I try to enter the quiet zone. For Teresa, prayer is necessary to stay out of danger. Using the concept of the bullfight, Teresa claimed that people who pray "are like those in the (stadium) stands watching the bull in comparison with one who is right in front of its horns" (*Way*, 39:7). Even with prayer, the horns of temptation and confusion are plentiful enough but more so without it.

So what helps with prayer? Hearing people describe how they would have followed Jesus if they had lived during that time, Teresa just laughed and said that they have him just as real in the Blessed Sacrament. She also believed that if one said the *Pater Noster* (*Our Father*) with awareness, one could become a mystic.

Nevertheless, since I am far from Teresa's spiritual stature, I only wonder about her visions, locutions,

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and other supernatural phenomena. Then again, perhaps there are more ordinary ways that God makes his presence known. While on a trip to Germany visiting congregational members, I was sitting in church feeling exhausted. I looked up at the dome over the altar and saw a massive icon of the *Pantocrator*, the *All Powerful One*. To me, that picture of Jesus with the piercing eyes and strong arm seemed to be repeating the words, “I am with you always; yes, to the end of times” (Mt 28:20). I received an instant renewal of energy. God’s signals are all around us. Teresa and John of the Cross both attest to the fact that unusual phenomena are not necessary; the love of God and neighbor is.

A Mentor Who Knew Similar Times

Finally, we could say that 500 years ago Teresa lived in exciting and turbulent times. Columbus reached the New World almost twenty-five years before Teresa’s birth. Then two years after it, Luther emerged, initiating a reform movement and Christendom began to break apart. Teresa’s three brothers set sail to discover the New World, while Teresa discovered her own inner world and initiated a reform of her Carmelite Order.

Today, a little less than fifty years ago, we landed on the moon and the renewal of Vatican II had begun. Our challenges are just as exciting and our

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times just as turbulent as those of Teresa. Currently, our new world includes spectacular shots of a universe revealing more of its secrets. In Christendom, at least in the Western world, there is not just a splitting up but a diminishment of numbers. Many have no denominational identification or attachment.

Teresa's last words, however, made her identification clear: "I die a daughter of the church." Her life was a passionate testimony to His Majesty's dwelling within, and she desires to share that with us. The saints, as Gregory of Nyssa implies, through the power of the Spirit are ready to help if requested. Armed with His Majesty's presence, we can revitalize and heal our times. Today, I thank God for the colleague who launched me on a path with the simple gift of Teresa's *Life*.

NOTE

1. Shirley du Boulay, *Teresa of Avila: Her Story* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1991) p. 143.

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St. John of the Cross on How to Attain Perfection in the Life of Prayer

Part 1.

THE *Counsels to Religious on How to Attain Perfection* by St. John of the Cross may sound strange to modern ears, but they provide a perennial guide to the life of prayer. In his journal, *The Sign of Jonas*, Thomas Merton wrote on March 20, 1947:

“I prepared for profession by praying over the *Cautions* and *Counsels* of St. John of the Cross. For the rest of my religious life I would like, by keeping these *Counsels*, to dispose myself for the work God wants to do in me and to which I am now completely consecrated. They are very simple, the *Cautelas*. It is because they are simple that they are difficult. They do not leave you a chance to compromise.

“And so it probably takes a lifetime to clear away the obstacles they are designed to remove. Nevertheless, they seem to me to be the most detailed and concrete and practical set of rules for arriving at religious perfection that I have ever seen. From a certain point of view they may seem cold and negative. I think, however, that they can

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be taken as complementing St. Benedict's *De Zelo Boni* (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter 72, "On the Good Zeal which Monks Should Have.")

The Counsels

In the *Counsels*, St. John is not speaking of perfectionism as if striving for perfection in the life of prayer were *my* project. The perfection of which he speaks consists of bringing myself before the Divine as I am, with all my faults and failings, and begging the Beloved to lead me to a more perfect union with his indwelling spirit. What we seek are not postures of perfect holiness but an overall orientation of love for God and neighbor, despite setbacks and sinfulness.

St. John wrote the *Counsels* at the request of a religious superior to teach her and her sisters the art of abiding always in God's presence, whatever the external circumstances of one's life may be. He wanted the sister to have a better idea of why the peaceful reception of God's word would lead her along the way of the cross. Merton captures this same spirit in his October 7, 1949 entry in *The Sign of Jonas*:

"Spiritual joy depends on the cross. Unless we deny ourselves, we will find ourselves in everything, and that is misery. As soon as we begin to deny ourselves out of love for God, we begin to

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find God, at least obscurely. Since God is our joy, our joy is proportioned to our self-denial for the love of God. I say, “our self-denial for the love of God,” because there are people who deny themselves for love of themselves.

“It is not complicated to lead the spiritual life. But it is difficult. We are blind and subject to a thousand illusions. We must expect to be making mistakes almost all the time. We must be content to fall repeatedly and to begin again to try to deny ourselves for the love of God.

“It is when we are angry at our own mistakes that we tend most of all to deny ourselves for love of ourselves. We want to shake off the hateful thing that has humbled us. In our rush to escape the humiliation of our own mistakes, we run head first into the opposite error, seeking comfort and compensation. And so we spend our lives running back and forth from one attachment to another. If that is all our self-denial amounts to, our mistakes will never help us.

“The thing to do when you have made a mistake is not to give up doing what you were doing and start something altogether new, but to start over again with the thing you began badly and try, for the love of God, to do it well.”¹

To live these counsels is to know that we will make mistakes on our spiritual journey, but God in his

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mercy is there to help us reclaim what ultimately matters. These religious counsels present us with an ongoing challenge to seek the perfection not of an isolated self-sufficient ego but of a way to live in humble harmony with the Holy Trinity.

Though the *Counsels* are directed to contemplative religious, I believe they apply to all Christians in need of finding “classical clues” to living a deeper life of prayer and presence.

First Counsel

The first counsel concerns the virtue of “resignation.” It says:

“You should live in the monastery as though no one else were in it. And thus you should never, by word or by thought, meddle in things that happen in the community, nor with individuals in it, desiring not to notice their good or bad qualities or their conduct.... You should practice this with great fortitude, for you will thereby free yourself from many sins and imperfections and guard the tranquility and quietude of your soul with much profit before God and man....”²

In the secluded atmosphere of a contemplative monastery, we can readily understand the importance of this counsel. Cloistered sisters live in proximity to one another. That kind of “rubbing shoulders” can lead easily to envy and jealousy, to

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the spread of gossip and to getting involved in one another's business. But how does the directive to be resigned apply to us?

Are not all of us tempted to stick our noses in the business of other people, to form power groups and gossipy cliques in the name of friendship, and to meddle too much in each other's lives? The *where-is-she-going-what-is-she-doing* syndrome steals the other's right to privacy. We can destroy a reputation by innuendo. Even worse than this, we can mask our violence as love, aiming to put others in their place "out of love for the common good."

We can mask our violence as love, aiming to put others in their place "out of love for the common good"

These are only some of the imperfections that can happen if we do not practice spiritual resignation. It does not mean either passivity or apathy. According to St. John, it is the best way to preserve and guard the tranquility and quietude of our soul. The more we are busy about the business of others—seeing the sliver in their eye and missing the plank in our own—the less likely we are to live in prayerful presence to all people (see Lk 6:42).

The preservation of inner tranquility is the main goal of spiritual resignation but finding that peace is not easy. Most of us have probably had the experience of going into the chapel for a few moments of quiet only to find that it takes us several minutes to

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gain some small semblance of inner calm. No wonder it is difficult to find the quietude out of which we can best radiate the gentleness, peace, joy, and patience that are the fruits of Christian living.

St. John wants us to become people of deep prayer, but first we need to preserve our tranquility of soul. One way to do so would be to catch ourselves when we are so overly involved in this or that plan or project that we forget to foster our primary relationship with God. This balance of inner tranquility and outer service is the key to becoming active contemplatives and contemplatives in action.

Second Counsel

The second counsel prepares the ears of our heart to resist whatever deflects our attention from God. St. John says that:

“To practice the second counsel, which concerns mortification, and profit by it, you should engrave this truth upon your heart. And it is that you have not come to the monastery for any other reason than to be worked and tried in virtue, that you are like the stone which must be chiseled and fashioned before being used in the building.”

“Thus you should understand that those who are in the monastery are craftsmen placed there by God to mortify you by working and chiseling at you. Some will chisel with words, telling you

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what you would rather not hear; others by deed, doing against you what you would rather not endure; others by their temperament, being in their person and in their actions a bother and annoyance to you; and others by their thoughts, neither esteeming nor feeling love for you.

“You ought to suffer these mortifications and annoyances with inner patience, being silent for love of God and understanding that you did not enter the religious life for any other reason than for others to work you in this way, and that you become worthy of heaven. If this was not your reason for entering the religious state, you should not have done so, but should have remained in the world to seek your comfort, honor, reputation, and ease.”³

Once again a lay person might feel that this *Counsel* applies only to contemplative nuns. One could say, “She doesn’t have to put up with the world as much as I do. She comes to the monastery with the sole motivation that God has called her to fidelity with him. If she has come to this cloister for any other reason, it would have been better for her to stay in the world.” What, then, are the universal implications of this *Counsel* for the Christian community?

We know from experience that human relations do chisel, mold, and grind away at us. Christ uses others to help us find our true selves in him. We

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have no choice regarding where we are born or who our parents will be. We find ourselves surrounded by people who seem to specialize in molding and chiseling us from youth to old age. Sometimes grumpy morning faces or a snide remark another person thinks we didn't hear hammer away at us. The advantage of such mortification and why it is an aid to prayer is that due to it we recognize anew our total dependence on the Lord.

Christ uses others to make us more aware that it is to him we must turn for friendship and trust. He uses the words of others to tell us what we do not want to hear; the deeds of others to try our patience; the temperament of others to test our endurance; and the words of others to humble our arrogance and show us that we are not perfect yet!

In all of these ways we die daily to our own egoism. Such a death is exactly what spiritual mortification means. Others, allowed by Christ, become instruments to make us more like the self he wants us to be. It is a necessary part of spiritual growth to be ground down, to be refined in the fire, so we can become faithful souls and servants of God.

Fruits of This Process

What are some of the fruits of this process of dying to self and how do they affect our life of prayer? Several are listed below:

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Diminished Expectations

Daily dying diminishes unrealistic expectations of what a community should be or do for us. No human community in and by itself can ever fulfill us totally. It will always be there to chisel us with bad tempers, interpersonal conflicts, and petty tensions. The only solution to peace in this situation is to center our attention not on others but on Christ. Loving him above all else enables community relations to fall into place as we pray to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Inner Patience

Patience is a virtue most of us strive, with limited success, to gain. We fly off the handle quickly. Growth in this virtue is part of the grinding process. In God's own good time, the seed of communal love will blossom forth. True community is a by-product of living with Christ. We can afford to be patient if we trust that he will take care of our needs personally and communally.

Being Silent for Love of God

We need to grow in the art of recognizing the fine line between speaking and not speaking. We gain in prayerful presence by following the master's counsel and learning to be silent for the love of God, especially when it would not do any good for us to speak. Without this sense of timing, we may walk

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“where angels fear to tread” and fail to be pens in God’s hand. All of this is part of the process of dying to egoism and of praying for the grace to consent to the will of God speaking in our hearts that we may bear fruit in daily life.

Part 2 of this article—Counsels 3 and 4—will be published in the Winter *spiritual life/Online*.

NOTES

1. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, Harvest Book, 1981.
2. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).
3. *Ibid.*

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Words of Wisdom from Teresa of Avila

- * Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon Him in yourself.
- * I cannot understand how humility exists, or can exist, without love, or love without humility.

Teresa of Avila—Teacher of Prayer

We cannot know whether we love God, although there may be strong reasons for thinking so, but there can be no doubt about whether we love our neighbor or not. *Teresa of Avila*

As she was about to establish a fifth religious community—this one in Toledo, Spain—Teresa of Avila was questioned how she could possibly do it when all she had was a mere five ducats—approximately ten dollars. With confidence she answered, “Teresa and this money are nothing But, God, Teresa and these ducats suffice.” With that minimum focus on materialism and maximum trust in the Divine, Teresa of Avila would emerge as the towering figure of sixteenth-century Catholic Spain. She was a mystic, poet, religious reformer, feminist, founder of convents, author of four books, and a spiritual master in meditation and prayer.

Teresa’s Family Life

Teresa was born on March 28, 1515, into an upper class, privileged family. Her parents, Alonso and Beatriz, were both devout in their faith. Though it

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was customary and even proper for an individual of Alonso's wealth to own slaves, he refused to do so. Furthermore, Teresa reported that when a slave girl belonging to Alonso's brother was present, Alonso treated her like one of his own children. "He used to say that it caused him intolerable distress that she was not free," Teresa wrote. Teresa's mother, who nurtured the Christian faith in Teresa, died when Teresa was fourteen. In shock and grief stricken, Teresa's faith was tested, so she turned to the Virgin Mary seeking motherly comfort and support.

Alonso arranged for Teresa to be educated at a local convent. There her spiritual interests were heightened and at the age of twenty, she decided to become a nun. Her father opposed this decision, but she ran off to join a Carmelite convent in Avila (1535). She took her first vows a year later but withheld a deeper, more permanent commitment for twenty years. During this time she struggled with various illnesses, some of which made her an invalid for months at a time. This difficult period of her life was also permeated with several powerful spiritual experiences and visions, which moved her deeply. In her autobiography, titled *Life of St. Teresa of Avila by Herself* (trans. David Lewis), she describes one such experience of Christ:

"One day, when I was at prayer, the Lord was pleased to reveal to me nothing but His hands,

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the beauty of which was so great as to be indescribable.... A few days later I also saw that Divine face, which seemed to leave me completely absorbed.... At last I realized his Majesty was leading me.” (chap. 28, sec. 1)

Those spiritual experiences led her to the conviction that she had been careless, timid, and hesitant about her own spiritual growth. She resolved to give herself fully to a life of devotion and prayer.

Deeper Devotion

For Teresa, this meant adhering to the original and more strict rule of the Carmelites. The convent where she had been for several years was deficient in spiritual discipline. She felt called to establish a new and reformed Carmelite convent, which would come to be called Discalced Carmelites. With considerable persistence and patience, Teresa was finally granted permission to proceed in this direction, establishing her first new convent in Avila in 1562. She and her sisters adopted a life dedicated to poverty, chastity, obedience, prayer, fasting, solitude, and manual labor.

Furthermore, she did not want the order to be sustained by endowments from wealthy patrons but primarily by their own labor and alms gathering. The convent maintained a rigorous cycle of silence and prayer.

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Almost immediately, Teresa received opposition and hostility from various groups. Spanish ecclesiastical authorities, already fanatically suspicious over anything which appeared Protestant, debated and disputed her private spiritual visions. Municipal officials of Avila brought a lawsuit to prevent her from establishing a convent in the city, fearing that a convent without an endowment would become dependent on civic financial resources. In spite of opposition, which seemed to plague her throughout her life, Teresa forged on, eventually establishing seventeen new convents. The criticisms and hostilities that came her way may have been the inspiration for her famous poem *God Alone Is Enough*:

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone is enough.

Though Teresa's order adopted a strict asceticism, she encouraged her sisters to act kindly and lovingly toward others, especially to the other sisters, so that they would not become spiritually rigid and emotionally harsh. In *The Way of Perfection*, she offered this advice:

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“Try, then sisters, to be as pleasant as you can, without offending God, and to get on as well as you can with those you have to deal with, so that they may like talking to you and want to follow your way of life and conversation, and not be frightened and put off by virtue. This is very important for nuns: *the holier they are, the more sociable they should be with their sisters*. Although you may be very sorry if all your sisters’ conversation is not just as you would like it to be, never keep aloof from them if you wish to help them and to have their love. We must try hard to be pleasant, and to humor the people we deal with and make them like us, especially our sisters.” (WP, 41)

A Feminist

Teresa has been described, both positively and negatively, as a feminist. Her writings do make clear that, even in conservative Spain, she resisted views of women as the inferior sex. She admired women, their dedication and their contribution to the church. In *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa wrote this spirited defense of women:

“When you walked on this earth, Lord, you did not despise women, rather you always helped them and showed great compassion toward them. And you found as much love and more faith in them than you did in men.... Is it not enough, Lord, that the world intimidates us, so that we may

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not do anything worthwhile for you in public or dare to speak some truths that we lament over in secret, without your also failing to hear our petition? I do not believe, Lord, that this could be true of your goodness and justice, for you are a just judge and not like those of the world. Since the world's judges are sons of Adam and all of them men, there is no virtue in women that they do not hold suspect.... When I see what the times are like, I feel it is not right to repel spirits that are virtuous and brave even though they be the spirits of women.” (WP, 3)

Teresa not only established convents but also remained an important source of inspiration for the nuns. The prayer poem, *Christ Has No Body*—the work is principally by two authors: Methodist minister Mark Guy Pearse (1842-1930), and Quaker medical missionary Sarah Elizabeth Rowntree (dates unknown)—expresses well Teresa's awareness of the important role of her Carmelite sisters in the world:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks
to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses
all the world.

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Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Conclusion

Teresa of Avila died on October 4th, 1582 at the age of sixty-seven. In the years and centuries after her death, her life continues to impress, inform, and inspire. She was canonized in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. In 1970, Pope Paul VI named her the first female Doctor of the Church. On the occasion of her 500th birth anniversary in 2015, Pope Francis sent a message to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites saying, “Saint Teresa is above all a teacher of prayer.”

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Book Notices

Fruit of the Spirit: Pauline Mysticism for the Church Today.

By Michael H. Crosby. OFM Cap. Orbis Books. Softcover

When Saint Paul writes about the “Fruit of the Spirit” in his Letter to the Galatians, what does he really mean? What are we to make of the list Paul provides and that others have elaborated on over the centuries? Michael Crosby argues that by exploring Paul’s understanding of the Spirit’s fruit, we can envision a “mystical theology” that would transcend the divide between “episcopal nomists” who think the church can simply be equated with the bishops, and the many disaffected Catholics of the past 30 years who found little in institutional Catholicism that gave them joy or hope. Using insights from biology, neuroscience, scripture, spirituality, and literature, Crosby also includes suggestions for spiritual practices to help the reader achieve the graces of the *Fruit of the Spirit*.

How the Light Gets In: And Other Headlong Epiphanies

By Brian Doyle. Orbis Books. Softcover.

*Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.* — Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*

In this rich treasury of prose poems on matters theological, spiritual, and mystical, Brian Doyle offers readers a lyrical but commonsense take on the ways grace, prayer, sin, love, boredom, joy, suffering, and redemption play out in our daily lives. Doyle’s hundred-plus poems are lyrical creations resembling poetry but devoid of any meter or typical poetic structure—and yet they are not strictly prose either. Some are droll and acid takes on modern life; others, spirit-lifting paeans to the joy of creation; still others, humorous and light appreciations of the grace-filled moments that can fill the day of any person paying close enough attention.

