

## From the Vatican

### **The Patron Saints for WYD**

The Patron Saints chosen for World Youth Day 2011 tell us something about the history of the Church in Spain. This has been a history rich in saintly men and women who have left us a great legacy of holiness and spiritual writings. They are:

St. Isidore and St. Maria, the first Saints of Madrid

St. Teresa of Jesus, the founder of the Discalced Carmelites

St. Ignatius who founded the Society of Jesus

St. Francis Xavier, the great missionary to the East

St. John of the Cross, companion of St Teresa, noted for his mystical writings

St John of Avila, who worked to promote the spirituality of diocesan priests

St. Rose of Lima, the first saint of Hispanic America

St. Rafael Arnaiz, a young person from our times, who was recently canonized.

The Holy See has confirmed the choice of Cibeles Square, one of Madrid's most renowned locations, as the place where Pope Benedict XVI will be welcomed by the young people on Thursday, August 18. The vigil and final Mass with the Holy Father will be held at the Cuatro Vientos airfield, where John Paul II met with young people in 2003 during his final visit to the country.

Because of our special focus on things Carmelite, we would like to tell you something about our two great Carmelite Saints, Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross.



**Saint Teresa of Jesus** is the foundress of the Discalced Carmelite life as it is known today.

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in Avila, Spain, on 28th March 1515, into a family that was well respected and influential. Teresa's mother, Beatriz, was especially keen to raise her daughter as a pious Christian. Teresa was fascinated by accounts of the lives of the saints, and ran away from home at age seven with her brother Rodrigo to find martyrdom among the Moors. Her uncle stopped them as he was returning to the city, having spotted the two outside the city walls. As she approached her teenage years, Teresa focused more on dressing up and making the most of her good looks.

She had a zest for life and tells us in the early chapters of her autobiography how she negotiated the pitfalls of some dubious friendships during her younger years. Things became harder for her when she had the great sorrow of losing her mother in her fourteenth year. In the face of this loss, her father thought the best thing for his vivacious daughter was to send her to a boarding school in Ávila run by the Augustinian nuns.

Against the will of her father, she entered the Carmel of the Incarnation in 1536, in her twenty-first year. She lived there for about twenty years until she felt that God was asking something more of her. After many tribulations and heart-searching Teresa, left the Incarnation on 24th August 1562 to found St. Joseph's, a new monastery in which she hoped that the original Rule of Carmel would be kept faithfully.

There was a great deal of opposition to the new Carmel and it was sometime before she was able to live there in peace. Many condemned her as a woman deceived by her experiences in prayer. Eventually the hostility died down and Teresa was asked to found more of these houses of prayer in other cities of Spain. Over a period of

twenty years she founded 15 more houses for the nuns and, in association with St John of the Cross, at least two for the friars.

Teresa introduced a fresh orientation into Carmelite life combining silence and solitude with community living and giving the life of prayer a specific apostolic role in the Church and the world. Prayer was to be the great outreach to others, the one and only work of her nuns. Her energy, resolution and sense of humour were unfailing, animated as they were by her immense desire to serve the Lord as lovingly as she could. She died at Alba de Tormes on 4th October 1582. She was sixty seven years old. When the bells of Avila tolled for her the local citizens said: "The Saint has gone to heaven."

Her feast day is kept on 15th October.

"The Lord doesn't look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done." (*Mansions VII.4.15*)

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**Saint John of the Cross** (Juan de Yepes) was born at Fontiveros in Spain in 1542 into a poor and struggling family. The death of his father soon afterwards and the lack of family

support for his mother meant that he was no stranger to destitution. In fact, one of his brothers died in childhood, probably from malnutrition. John's life was marked by suffering but he knew the security of the genuine selfless love of his mother and elder brother, Francisco is well known for his mystical writings and poetry.

John de Yepes, was the youngest child of Gonzalo de Yepes and Catherine Alvarez, poor silk weavers of Toledo. From his earliest years he knew the hardships of life. His father, originally of a good family but disinherited on account of his marriage, died in the prime of his youth; and his mother, assisted by her eldest son, was scarcely able to provide the bare necessities. Although poor, John experienced genuine, self-less love from his mother and elder brother Francisco.

He was educated in Medina del Campo at a Jesuit school. At the same time he worked in a hospital and was known both for his diligence as a student and his kindness as a nurse. Eventually he entered the Carmelite Monastery in Medina and received the habit on 24 February, 1563, and took the name of John of St. Matthias. After profession he obtained leave from his superiors to follow to the letter the original Carmelite rule without the mitigations then observed by his confreres. He was sent to Salamanca for the higher studies, and was ordained a priest in 1567.

His meeting with St Teresa when he was a young Carmelite friar led him to abandon his plan to join the Carthusian Order for a stricter way of life and wholeheartedly give himself to this new venture of St Teresa's. It was exactly what he was longing for and he, with two companions, began the first monastery of the Teresian reform for the friars at Duruelo.

As the movement grew he experienced hostility from his former brother friars who objected to this reform seeing it as a criticism of their own more lax way of life. He was imprisoned in a dungeon in Toledo but eventually - and dramatically - managed to escape. From his prison experience flowed some of his most exquisite poetry, the fruit of all the hours of silent prayer he

spent in that unlikely place of darkness and cruelty.

John continued to work tirelessly for the expansion of the reform. His great desire was to help others to know and love God through his preaching, work of spiritual direction and writing. He died at the age of 49 in 1591. His feast day is kept on 14th December. John of the Cross has been described as one of the greatest Spanish poets of all time. His commentaries on his poems are classics of mystical theology and are still read today by those seekers after God who look for clear direction and a sure path.

He left the following works, which for the first time appeared at Barcelona in 1619.

The Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night of the Soul: Both these works were written soon after his escape from prison and, though incomplete, supplement each other, forming a full treatise on mystical theology.

The Spiritual Canticle, (a paraphrase of the Canticle of Canticles) composed in part during his imprisonment, and completed and commented upon some years later at the request of Venerable Anne of Jesus.

The Living Flame of Love, written about 1584 at the bidding of Doña Ana de Penalosa.

The Precautions on matters spiritual.

Some twenty Letters, chiefly to his penitents. Unfortunately the bulk of his correspondence, including numerous letters to and from St. Teresa, was destroyed, partly by himself, partly during the persecutions to which he fell a victim.

Poems, twenty-six in number have been hitherto published, A Collection of Spiritual Maxims, culled from his various writings.