# *CARMELUS TOTUS NAZARENUS EST*

## *SAINT TERESA AND THE FAMILY OF NAZARETH*

### *II PART – L33, 14-15*

> *a la una puerta nos guardaría San José y Nuestra Señora la otra, y Cristo andaría con nosotras*
>
> *Santa Teresa de Jesus*

In the first part, already published, we began our reflection by referring to four important coordinates in Teresa's writings: Jesus, Mary, Joseph and salvation. We also commented on L32, 11 and saw how Teresa receives the confirmation that the new Carmel will be a house guarded by Saint Joseph and Our Lady, where Christ will be present: the Carmel is born from the House of Nazareth. However, with an important nuance: at the centre of Teresa's experience is the Risen Christ, for whom L28 is important. This is one of the major new elements introduced by L33, 14–15, which deepens the place of Teresa's christological and salvific experience within the Holy Family. So, without further ado, let us turn to what Teresa experienced.

### ***Vision of the Holy Family*** **(August 1561, L33)**

E. Mâle says, regarding this experience of August 15, 1561, the day of Our Lady of the Assumption, that «no vision seems more important for the Carmelo than the one Saint Teresa has when she meditates on the Reform of the Order»[1]. In turn, L. Rueda notes that with the exception of the transverberation this grace «is the theme most frequently represented in the Carmelites' convents»[2]. T. Alvarez too does not spare praise, saying that «it was the most splendid marianophany of her entire life»[3].

An analysis of the passage (L33, 14–15) shows that it is closely related to L32. «Its content is like the visual development and the confirmation of what was expressed in the previous text [L32, 11]»[4]. In it we see how God invites Teresa to live this awareness of the Carmel as the House of Nazareth.

Before proceeding, it is relevant to underline that «this vision recounted by Saint Teresa has a great symbolic value»[5], which, incidentally, runs throughout her writings. But

> «'more than pure symbols [– explains Tomás Alvaréz –], we are here talking about a 'symbolic language' (…) [to which Teresa resorts] before the ineffability of the deep religious experience (…). Obviously, the segment that most requires the coverage of symbolic language is the spiritual domain, especially the mystical experience»[6].

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[1] Emile Mâle, *Iconographie aprés le Concile de Trente* (Paris: 1932) in Laura Gutiérez Rueda, *Gracia y hermosura: Ensayo de iconografia teresiana* (EDE: Madrid, 2012) 108

[2] Laura G. Rueda, *Gracia y Hermosura* (2012) 108

[3] T. Alvaréz, *Comentarios al libro de la Vida* (2009) 297

[4] François-Marie Lethél, *La luce di Cristo nel Cuore della Chiesa* (2011) 283

[5] François-Marie Lethél, *La luce di Cristo nel Cuore della Chiesa* (2011) 283

[6] T. Alvaréz, *Simbologia Teresiana* in Diccionario Teresiano (2000)

This gives rise to an authentic *symbolic theology* which, intimately associated with the experience of God, or *mystical theology,* encompasses a deeply existential dimension of the theology produced by the saints. In this sense, «the existence of the saints is living theology»[7].

This experience in Teresa's life takes place at a time of difficulty, when it seems there are no means by which to carry the reform forward. Although her provincial initially supported her, he later changed his mind when he saw the whirlpool of opposition to this project. It will be because of this whirlpool that Teresa will consult Pedro Ibañez in the autumn of 1560, as we have already mentioned. With a few twists and turns hidden between the lines, Teresa relates his favourable opinion. Thus, with this help she will face all the difficulties that lie ahead. She will, as we have also seen, have the second vision of Christ in January 1561, which gives her clarity about the Risen One. Eight months later she will then have this vision of L33, 14-15, during these difficulties. We now present the text, numbered by us to facilitate its commentary:

> [1] At that time, on the day of Our Lady of the Assumption, while I was in a monastery of the Order of the glorious Saint Dominic [2] thinking about my many sins, and other things of my sinful life, which in past times I had confessed there, [3] I was overcome by such a great rapture that it almost took me out of myself. I sat down, and it seems to me that I could not even see the Elevation, nor hear Mass, which brought me some scruple. [4] In such a state, it seemed to me that I was being dressed in a garment of great whiteness and clarity. At first I did not see who was dressing me; [5] afterwards I saw that it was Our Lady, on the right side, and my Father St. Joseph, on the left side, who dressed me. [6] It was made clear to me that I was already clean of my sins. Once dressed, in an immense delight and glory, [7] soon it seemed to me that Our Lady was taking me by the hands. [8] She told me that she was very glad that I was serving the glorious St. Joseph; that I should believe that what I intended regarding the monastery would be done, and that there the Lord would be greatly served there, as would the two of them; [9] that I should not be afraid because within it this service would never be interrupted – even though jurisdiction had not been given according to my wishes – since they would keep watch over us and His Son had already promised to walk with us. [10] And as a sign that this would be fulfilled, she was offering me that jewel. [11] It seemed to me that they were placing around my neck a very beautiful gold necklace, with a very precious cross. [12] That gold and those precious stones are so different from those here that there is no comparison. Its beauty exceeds everything that on earth we can imagine. the mind cannot comprehend what the garment is made of, nor can it imagine the whiteness that the Lord wishes to be represented. Let us say that everything that is of the earth, compared with that, is a charcoal drawing. [13] The beauty of Our Lady was exceedingly great. I was not able to observe any of her features in particular, but only the arrangement of her face as a whole. She was dressed in white, surrounded by an immense but gentle light that does not dazzle [14] I did not see the glorious St. Joseph so clearly, although I could see well that he was there as in those visions of which I spoke, where no images are seen. [15] Our Lady seemed very young to me. [16] After being with me for a short time, – and I with such very great glory and delight as perhaps I had never had and of which I would never wish to be separated – it seemed to me that I saw them rise up to Heaven accompanied by a great multitude of angels.

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[7] Paola Mostarda, *La simbolica della natura nella teologia di Santa Teresa di Liseux* (Edizioni OCD: Roma, 2006) 36

Let us begin with the introduction (no. 1-3), in which we highlight no. 2: Teresa is thinking about her sins when God grants her this vision. This is relevant because in no. 6 she will say that «was already clean» of those sins she was thinking about. Where, then, did this forgiveness – and this experience of salvation – come from? Let us look at nos. 4-6.

Teresa sees that she is «being dressed in a garment of great whiteness and clarity[, but] at first I did not see who was dressing me». Therefore, from her perspective the act comes before the subject. She will recognize that it is Mary and Saint Joseph «afterwards». The description of the garment draws attention, because «Saint Teresa saw the Saviour many times, and he was always (...) surrounded by light and dressed in white»[8]. Also «when she describes the Virgin, she uses the same terms»[9]. In her visions she sees what she had already previously seen represented:

> «"God — says J. K. Huysmans — almost always adopts the form of his visions in such a way that those who receive them can imagine them". The idea that Saint Teresa had of the supernatural would be[, therefore,] (…) through the many paintings and images that (…) she had seen (…)[:] "(…) if it were not for what I saw, my imagination would serve me for nothing"»[10].

In this sense, it seems to us deeply suggestive that she sees herself depicted *as if* she were glorified. Here, too, nos. 2 and 6 are significant. We conclude that Saint Teresa seems to undergo an experience of salvation. Indeed, "once dressed, [she was] in an immense delight and glory". An expression she repeats again in no. 16: "and I with such very great glory and delight as perhaps I had never had".

Even more striking, perhaps, is the fact that Mary and Joseph are the ones who bring about this experience of salvation! It is the two of them together who clothe her in "a garment of great whiteness and clarity". Let us keep this important aspect in mind, since we will return to it later.

Let us for now turn to Our Lady's message to Teresa (nos. 7-12). It seems to us faithful to the text to divide this dialogue into three moments: Mary's initiative (no. 7), a promise (nos. 8-9) and a sign of its fulfilment (nos. 10-12).

Our Lady took hold of Teresa's hands. From the description she gives of Mary and Joseph in no. 16, it seems that vision of the Virgin Mary is an imaginative vision: her message must penetrate the most concrete, embodied dimensions of her experience. In this gesture of taking the hands, affection, closeness and intimacy are also conveyed.

The Virgin assures her that "she was very glad" for the dedication to Saint Joseph of this first Carmelite of the "Order of Our Lady" (F27, 11), because in this desire she sees Teresa's intention to serve "my father Saint Joseph", in her own words. And she encourages her to believe that what she "intended regarding the monastery would be done":

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[8] Laura G. Rueda, *Gracia y Hermosura* (2012) 96
[9] Laura G. Rueda, *Gracia y Hermosura* (2012) 94
[10] Laura G. Rueda, *Gracia y Hermosura* (2012) 93-94

> «All my yearning was, and still is, as follows: since He has so many enemies and so few friends, at least let these be good (…). What do we hope for, those of us who, by the goodness of the Lord, are without that pestilential filth, since those others are from the devil? (…) Still, my heart is not kept from breaking to see how so many souls are lost. (…) I would very much like not to see any more lost each day!
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> Oh, my sisters in Christ, help me to ask this of the Lord, who for this purpose has gathered you here! This is your calling. These are to be your occupations. These are to be your desires. For this your tears must be shed. These are to be your petitions (…). The world is on fire. They want to go back to condemning Christ (…). No, my sisters, it is not time to deal with God matters of little importance» (P 1, 2.4-5).

Thus, living our "calling" would mean asking the Lord for salvation – ours and that of all – and actively contributing to the edification of the Church, each one according to his or her state of life and branch in the Order. In this way, the Virgin Mary assures us that, in Carmel, "the Lord would be greatly served there, as would the two of them"!

This was Teresa's desire, and Our Lady assures her that she "should not be afraid because within it [↗ The Discalced Carmel] this service would never be interrupted (...) since they [↗ Mary and Joseph] would keep watch over us and His Son had already promised to walk with us".

"And as a sign that this would be fulfilled, she was offering me that jewel (...)[:] a very beautiful gold necklace, with a very precious cross". "[We already know] the decisive power [of the symbol] at the time of expressing and communicating vital experiences, to which our reason — more theoretical, but less graphic and descriptive — has difficulty accessing»[11]. The question arises: to which vital experience might this symbol refer?

In Exclamation XIV, paragraph 2, Teresa writes:

> «Oh Christians, Christians, see the brotherhood you have with this great God! Know Him and do not underappreciate Him (…). Your Father gave You to us. May I not lose, my Lord, such a precious jewel. I confess, Eternal Father, that I did not keep it well» (Excl. XIV, 2)

In this beautiful prayer, Teresa describes Christ as a "jewel so precious" offered to her and to all Christians by the Father. Also in L33 the necklace is a "jewel" of "gold and (…) precious stones". These are not, however, the only occurrences in which Teresa associates Christ and precious stones:

> «One time, while I had the rosary crucifix in my hand, He took it and when He returned it to me it was made of four large stones, far more precious than diamonds – because there is almost no comparison [between what we have here] and what is seen supernaturally. Compared with the precious stones seen there, the diamond seems fake and imperfect. The cross had the five wounds made in a very beautiful way. He told me that henceforth I would see it this way; and indeed, it happened that I did not see the wood of which it was made but these stones» (L29, 7).

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[11] Pedro Ruiz Calvente, *El itinerario catecumenal y la mistagogía de "las moradas"* (Monte Carmelo: Burgos, 2025) 200-01

This last vision does not associate directly Christ and precious stones, but the *wood of the Cross*. As the Cross of the Saviour shone with the beauty of these jewels, His five redeeming wounds were revealed "in a very beautiful way". Even though these symbols are not exactly the same, both of these texts reveal the recurrence of the same symbolic horizon. The beauty of the "jewels" or of the 'precious stones' appears linked to Christ's mystery of Redemption. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether, in L33, the necklace might once again refer to the Son of Mary and Joseph.

We say "Son of Mary and Joseph" purposely. Does Jesus' absence from the vision not seem perplexing? If the connection with L32, 11 is evident would it not be expected to see Him present? Where is He? In line with our previous reflections, we dare say He is precisely where one would expect Him to be: between His parents. Jesus seems absent because Teresa occupies His place: she is found between Mary and Joseph, who are with her (no 16), who clothe her (no 4), who give her the necklace (no 11) and, at last, who leave her (no 16).

The «"Mary – Joseph" dyad is in perfect harmony with the narrative of the *Life*»[12]. It is the *two together* who prepare Teresa for conformity to the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, incorporating her into divine life through a salvific experience. And here, from the glory of the Resurrection, it is still Mary and Joseph who place Christ upon her heart – a gesture that recalls Song of Songs 8:6, «set me as a seal upon your heart» – thus guiding Teresa along the winding, twisting path of the Passion: the necklace bears "a very precious cross".

It is not merely a cross embellishing the necklace. It symbolizes her progressive conformity to the crucified Christ. As such, years later, Teresa will say that the truly spiritual ones are those who let themselves be marked by the cross:

> «Do you know what it is to be truly spiritual? It is to become slaves of God, *marked with His iron, which is the cross*; in this way, having already given Him his freedom, He can sell them as slaves to the whole world, as He was» (7M4, 8).

At last, we would like to remember the main result of this vision, making use of a text of the prophet Isaiah which helps us to delve deeper in the Teresian symbolism.

> «I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and covered me with the robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom wearing a diadem, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Lord Himself will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations» (Is 61:10-11).

The section in which this text is found (Is 58–66) is usually referred to as the *Third Isaiah* meaning the third and final phase of the book's redaction as we know it today. It corresponds to the period when the Temple of Jerusalem was reconstructed (5th century). This period is associated with the proclamation of salvation through the journey each person undertakes as a servant of YHWH. The pericope in question (Is 61: 1-11; here we quote only the final part) presents the promised Saviour as *prophet* and *king*. His mission

[12] T. Alvaréz, *El primer texto mariano de Santa Teresa* in Estudios Teresianos III (1996) 462

is one of salvation, glory, joy and restoration. We would also like to highlight the image of marriage that frames this passage, which thus serves as a key to its interpretation: the Messiah takes Israel as his bride.[13]. In this sense, the prophet Isaiah announces a wedding and, consequently, liberation and salvation, associating it with a new paradisial garden: the liberation of salvation will lead to the creation of a new beginning!

We do not intend to offer an exegesis of the text; we will limit ourselves to some of its main ideas. Teresa was clothed by God, through the action of Mary and Joseph, "with garments of salvation" and was covered "with the robe of his righteousness, (...) as a bride adorns herself with her jewels". In the light of this image, Teresa appears as one who, clothed by God, is prepared for a fruitful mission… The Lord himself will cause the Carmel to flourish within the Church for all nations. In this way, each person called to Carmel will discover salvation and a new beginning in it.

Once the vision had ended and Teresa had carried these experiences into her daily life, she would be ready to begin the foundation of St Joseph of Avila, the first convent of the Discalced Carmel.

## *Conclusion*

We began our reflection by following Saint Teresa's journey up to the foundation of Saint Joseph, drawing attention to the dimensions we wished to highlight: her concern for her own salvation and that of others and her relationship with Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. It seems possible to recognize that of these dimensions her concern with her salvation and that of others assumes a structural importance: her friendship with Jesus appears to be motivated by these desires for fulfilment and her relationships with Our Lady and Saint Joseph are centred on salvation in Christ.[14].

We would like to end on a final reflexion about the Discalced Carmel and our identity as discalced Carmelites. Our father general, Miguel Marquez Calle, said in his letter on the occasion of the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel that

> «To pass on this treasure that is prayer, it is not enough to offer courses on the art of praying. We must first and foremost be men and women of prayer, both personally and communally. A Carmelite constantly returns to the silence of the Home of Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph have eyes only for Jesus: they love him, adore him, and contemplate him. From this home and from this Holy Family, we, the Carmelites of St.

[13] We have essentially followed Alonso Schokel's line of thought (*Simbolos matrimoniales en la bíblia,* 2ª ed., Editorial Verbo Divino: Navarra, 1997, pp. 72-76) and that of Carlos Granados (*Apuntes para la asignatura de Libros Proféticos,* ad usum privatum).

[14] We do not intend to address the subject of Mary's co-redemption; it is beyond us and the scope of the work we wish to present. For a more in-depth examination, we refer the reader to the article by François-Marie Léthel, *Mary in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church, in the Light of the Theology of the Saints (An Echo of the Doctrinal Note Mater Populi Fidelis),* in blog MariStella, 2025 (https://maristellacarmel.com/en/2025/11/21/maria-nel-mistero-di-cristo-e-della-chiesaalla-luce-della-teologia-dei-santi-4/, consulted in 23/07/2026). Here, we shall limit ourselves to highlighting the Christ-centred nature of this relationship with Mary and Joseph.

> Teresa, have inherited the ideal of Nazareth, with Joseph and Mary as our teachers of intimacy with Jesus in ordinary life (cf. V 32,11)»[15].

The Carmel is a school of prayer precisely because it is first and foremost a home of Nazareth. Mary and Joseph are our "teachers of intimacy with Jesus in ordinary life". Along these lines, Fr François-Marie Léthel reflected, when preaching to the Roman Curia on the feast of Saint Joseph:

> «We know that Prayer is Teresa's key word, the heart of her spiritual teaching, and one of her greatest contributions (…). In her theology, Prayer signifies one's personal relationship with the Lord, as a friendship lived out in faith, hope and charity (…). In this text [L6, 8], Teresian prayer finds its finest evangelical expression in the Holy Family. As our teacher and guide, Saint Joseph teaches us that prayer is a whole life of closeness and profound intimacy with Jesus and Mary, in prayer and in service to our neighbour (…) The Holy Family is the 'place' where all the most fundamental human relationships are present, in the highest perfection, in perfect holiness: man and woman, marriage, fatherhood and motherhood, sonship and brotherhood»[16].

What is here said of Saint Joseph can be also applied to Mary. At the Carmel «the two of them» (L33, 14) are served and, as such, we believe it to be important to revisit, in the fitting words of Tomás Alvaréz, the Mary–Joseph dyad, centring it on their son, Jesus. «The Virgin and Saint Joseph help her [Teresa] to fulfil the will of Jesus»[17] and it is through them, as we saw when discussing L33, that the Carmel becomes a house of salvation: it is within these relationships that Teresa is prepared for her vocation and introduced to the divine life.

«The Carmels[, as the Superiors General of the O.Carm. and O.C.D. reminded us,](...) just like the family of Nazareth were intended to be places in which the humanity of Jesus would find a home, and Carmelites would live only for that end»[18]. There is a relational architecture here that we have inherited[19].

In light of the journey we have undertaken, the Carmel can thus be understood not only as a school of prayer, but also as a home. A home at the heart of the Church. A home of salvation. A home of Nazareth, which gives the Church this experience of communion that we live within the Saviour's Family. *Carmelus totus Nazarenus est*.

Frei Pedro da Sagrada Família

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[15] Miguel Marquez Calle, *Clothed in Mary, Moved by the Spirit. A Renewed Covenant: The Scapular* in blog MariStella, 2026 (https://maristellacarmel.com/en/2026/07/16/clothed-in-mary-moved-by-the-spirit-a-renewed-covenant-the-brown-scapular consulted in 23/07/2026).

[16] François-Marie Lethél, *La luce di Cristo nel Cuore della Chiesa* (2011) 281-83

[17] María del Pilar, *Itinerario mariano-josefino de Santa Teresa de Jesús* (2026) in https://carmeloteresajuan.wordpress.com/2026/07/18/itinerario-mariano-josefino-de-santa-teresa-de-jesus (consultado a 24/07/2026)

[18] Letter from the Prior General O.Carm, Míċeál O'Neill, and the Superior General O.C.D., Saverio Cannistrà, to the carmelite family*, St. Joseph, Patron of Carmel,* 2020. (https://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/documents/superior-general/st-joseph-patron-of-carmel consulted on 29/07/2026).

[19] cf. Andre Brouillet, *Cartografía de la salvación - enseñanzas teresianas sobre soteriología* in Revista de Espiritualidad 76 (2017) 415-432. In his study, A. Brouillet does not refer to the relational architecture derived from the Holy Family, but rather to the other images that Saint Teresa uses to speak of the Carmel.