

Saint Teresa of Avila

1515 - 1582

HELL

Teresa of Jesus was born in Avila in Spain on the 28th of March 1515 and died in Alba de Tormes on the 4th of October 1582. On one occasion she had the vision of Hell which she recounts like this in her *Autobiography*: “One day while I was in prayer, I found myself all of a sudden transported entirely into Hell. I understood that God wanted me to see the place that the demons had prepared for me, and I that merited it with my sins. It was a vision of very little time, but it also lived on for many years, it seems I am not able to ever forget it. The entrance appeared to be a very long and narrow tunnel, similar to an oven very low, dark, and cramped; the soil was foul mud, full of filthy reptiles. In the distance, on the wall, there was a cavity carved out like a niche, and in it I felt tightly confined. And that which I then suffered exceeds every human imagination, nor does it seem possible to give even an idea because they are things which are indescribable. It is enough to know that how much I said, compared to the reality, makes it seem like a pleasant thing.

“I was feeling in my soul a fire that I do not know how to describe, while intolerable pains horrendously tore at my body. In my life I have suffered very much, some of the most serious, according to doctors, to undergo on earth,

because my nerves were so contracted to the point of rendering me crippled, without saying the many others of various kinds, caused to me in part by the demon.

“Anyway they are not even able to be compared with how much I suffered at that time, especially that the thought of that torment would have had to be without end and without any mitigation. But even this was nothing in comparison to the agony of the soul. It was an oppression, an anguish, a sadness so profound, such a vivid and desperate pain that I do not know how to express myself. To say that they suffer continual agonies of death is inadequate, because at least in death it seems that the life is ripped from others, whereas here it is the same soul who makes himself into pieces. The fact is that I cannot find expressions to neither speak of that interior fire nor to make understandable the desperation which topped these horrible torments. I did not see who made me suffer them, but I felt myself burn and be lacerated, although the worst torment was the internal fire and desperation.

“It was a pestilential (fetid) place, in which there was no longer any hope of comfort, nor space for one to sit or lay out, reinserted as I was in that hole made in the wall. Horrible to see oneself, the sides were weighing down upon me, and



I felt as though suffocated. There was no light, but pitch black darkness; and as much as that could have given difficulty to sight one was able to see equally well regardless of the absence of light: something which I was not able to comprehend.”

