

“To conquer or die, selling life dearly”
prophecy of following Jesus today
for the Society of Saint Teresa.

“Living in unity and harmony and standing with the poor are prophetic signs of the Kingdom and a means of promoting the interests of Jesus.”

STJ Constitutions, ARTICLE 18

INTRODUCTION

In this file, we will try to reflect on the prophetic implications of following Jesus in the Society of Saint Teresa. We will see how, from the beginning, the Society had to face what Our Father called **"contradiction of the good."**

Along the way, these contradictions have sometimes been directly confrontational with the evil of this world, especially when the Society has been involved in the defense of life in all its forms. The question we ask ourselves, and for which we ask the Lord for light to answer, is: **what does it mean for us, the Teresian sisters of today, to "sell life dearly" in a world where life is continually threatened?**

WE PREPARE THE HEART

For this first part, we re-remember (we go over it again in our hearts) the lyrics of the hymn of the Society of Saint Teresa. We invite each one of you to read and re-read in silence (hopefully during a moment of personal prayer) this hymn that we always sing on very solemn occasions. What do these words say to us today?

All of us who fight
Under the banners
Of King Jesus and Teresa
Let us fight, let us not sleep
For there is no peace on earth.

Let us truly offer ourselves
To die for Christ, all of us
And at the heavenly wedding
Be the first to love.
Let us follow these banners
For Christ goes before us.

Do not fear, do not sleep
For there is no peace on earth.

Let there be no cowards,
Let us sell our lives dearly
For there is no one who can protect it
better than he who gives it up for lost.

For Jesus is our guide
And the prize in this war
Sleep no more, fear no more
Christ will reign on earth.

To die, to die for Christ,
To pray, to work for Christ.
To fight, to reign, to fight to reign for Christ
To die, to pray, to fight, to reign with Christ
All, all, all, all.

And at the heavenly wedding,
Be the first to love,
Let us follow these banners,
For Christ goes before us!

Do not be afraid, do not sleep
Do not sleep, for there is no peace
on earth
Fear not, do not sleep
Do not sleep, for there is no peace
on earth.

FROM THE BOOK "RETURNING TO THE SOURCES"

Three years after the founding of the Society, in August 1879, Henry de Ossó published an article in the Teresian Magazine entitled "Saint Teresa of Jesus to her devotees" . It was a dynamic and attractive vocational proposal for young women, made by Teresa herself, who inspired the Society, which she presents under a military image, with all the evangelical radicalism and apostolic fire that characterizes the Saint. It is the "chosen or preferred Society, ready to fly to the front line to the place of danger to defend its king and its flag," and which responds to the Saint's "General Plan of Conquest." "It is made up of the most hard-working and battle-hardened people, who seek to distinguish themselves in their work and rewards, and whose motto is: TO CONQUER OR DIE, selling their lives dearly."

What did this motto mean for the Founders and for the first generation of sisters, and what meaning can it have for the Society of Saint Teresa of Jesus in the 21st century?

Back to the Sources, Carmen Melchor, 161

WE MEET

Setting: we decorate the community room with some of the symbols of the Society: flag, coat of arms, colors... A sign can be placed with the "motto" we are discussing in this file: "Conquer or die, selling our lives dearly."

Opening song: All of us who fight

SHARING

Whether the community has had time for personal reflection or is doing so now, we invite you to share:

1. Which phrase, verse, or word from our "Society anthem" has resonated most strongly with me now that I read it in the context of celebrating 150 years since our founding?
2. How can we understand today the Founder's invitation to "sell our lives dearly" in the contexts where the Society is present and the call of the XVIII General Chapter that commits us to "care for threatened life, especially in excluded, displaced, and migrant persons"?

II: We take some quality time to let the words we have shared sink in. (We can have instrumental music playing in the background while we let the words resonate within us).

III: We read some of these texts that reflect how the Society of Saint Teresa, from its inception, has had to be "a work of struggle." We contrast them with other texts that speak to us about the prophetic nature of the VR today.

Since 1878, the Society has experienced moments of real struggle and persecution. Its Founder speaks of this to the sisters and friends and also in the Teresian Magazine. He writes to the sisters encouraging them to live through moments of struggle with a spirit of faith, with a Teresian spirit. We have abundant testimonies from 1878, which was the first year of persecution:

From Falset, to Teresa Plá

"I have received this letter from our Bishop. He tells me verbatim: 'Let the Society prepare itself for persecution. I bless you.' So now you know from an authoritative source: persecution will be our inheritance, prepare yourselves [...]. Let us prepare ourselves, or rather, let us live already prepared for persecution. I have told you many times: the Society, as its name indicates, is a work of struggle, of combat, of persecution, because it is a work of triumph, of greater glory for God, of conquest. It is essential for it to fight and win with the grace of God. Therefore, those who are timid and fearful will not be suited to it. Rejoice, then, at this warning or prediction from our prelate, remembering that the most perfect of the beatitudes is that of those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake"

(Falset 11/17/78, Published in Mexico, the original is in AGSTJ).

“The prophetic attitude does not consist primarily in saying certain things (denouncing, protesting, etc.), but in living in such a way that our own life becomes a protest and a denunciation” (José Ma. Castillo, *The Future of Religious Life. From the Origins to the Current Crisis*. Editorial Trota, 2003, p. 90)

Religious life fulfills its prophetic mission in society when it shows in practice what true humanity consists of. The process of humanization consists precisely in that openness to the absolute and transcendent dimension that constitutes the ultimate vocation of the human being. Religious life must evoke those supreme values that show the fulfilling goal of humanity. But this witness to humanity cannot be given in the current historical circumstances unless it is countercultural, unless it denounces and opposes everything that is inhuman in cultures. In this sense, it is absolutely true that prophetic proclamation or witness implicitly involves denunciation or opposition to the system. But we must continue to ask whether religious life is fulfilling this prophetic mission in today's society... Does religious life have anything extra to contribute to the values or counter-values, to the experiences of modern and postmodern culture? Does today's religious life know and experience other sources of being, goodness, beauty, pleasure... other than those from which liberal and neoliberal culture drinks? Is religious life truly an expert in humanity? (Felicísimo Martínez, *Current situation and challenges of religious life*, *Frontera Hegian* no. 44, pp. 42 and 43)

IV: Once we have read the texts, we have another round of spiritual conversation, sharing our reflections. Some questions may help us:

- After listening to each other and reading the texts, what invitations do the Founder's words hold for the Society at this moment in our lives? "In every well-organized army, my daughter, there is always a chosen or preferred company... ready to fly to the front line, to the place of danger, to defend their king and their flag. It is made up of the most hard-working and battle-hardened people, those who seek to distinguish themselves in their work and in the reward, since their motto is: Either victory or death, selling our lives dearly." (EEO III, 801)

- How has the STJ in our province lived out its prophetic commitment? Have we suffered the consequences for our stance in defense of life, for standing alongside the most vulnerable, or for trying to humanize the reality in which we are inserted?

PRAYERFUL CLOSING

Now that we have shared, we are ready to close this meeting by asking for the GRACE to be consistent with our prophetic commitment. We give thanks for the lives of so many sisters on three continents who have given their lives in suffering realities, being agents of transformation wherever they were sent. And we give thanks and pray for those sisters in different countries who have to face persecution, repression, and threats of all kinds on a daily basis because they stand on the side of justice, the defense of life, the construction of a global citizenship, and the option for the poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalized in this world. (We join in the prayers and petitions of those who wish to express them aloud at this time).

Final song: Speak to us

TEXTS FOR FURTHER READING

To delve a little deeper into the prophetic meaning of the STJ, some texts can help us pray personally or in community.

From the origins of the STJ, contradiction was present and forged the spirit of those first sisters who have been the foundation for those who have come after them throughout these years of history. We read one of the testimonies related to the "lawsuit":

Taken from Volume I, Book 1, Company History (pp. 402-403)

The bishop threatened them with excommunication. The bishop's warnings, and specifically this situation, were repeated several times before and after the interdict was executed on March 17, and the scene was recorded in the house diary. In the middle of the morning, the bishop's secretary and the chief notary of the diocese notified the community, gathered in the reception room, that the house was under interdict and handed the corresponding certificate to Saturnina Jassá in the absence of Hnery de Ossó.

However, the house diary records that Ossó was there. The sisters listened calmly and courageously as they were told that their novitiate period was invalidated, that Mass could not be celebrated, nor could the novices take their vows, and that if these measures were not complied with, the penalty would be excommunication.

At 11 o'clock this morning, the secretary of the Most Reverend Bishop of this city of Tortosa arrived, accompanied by Mr. José María Quinzá, chief notary. The entire community gathered in the reception room, and by order of His Excellency the bishop, he announced in a few words that he had been commissioned to gather the community in the oratory or another room and read to them the notification decreed by the vicar general regarding our school house. He read this notification aloud, and from that moment on, our house was placed under interdict.

Despite the sensitivity of the news, all the sisters, following the example of their superiors, listened calmly and, after the reading, retired to the oratory to give thanks to Jesus and his Teresa for having deigned to visit them on the eve of St. Joseph's Day with this task. Shortly afterwards, our superiors gave us some free time, and then the most affectionate expressions of love for our Father and Superior were made. The afternoon was given free to keep the Lord company, and in the evening, until 11 o'clock, the entire community of was in the oratory. Our Father and our Superior General have departed"

(Diary of Tortosa, March 17, 1884).

"BE FAITHFUL TO THE GRACE OF YOUR VOCATION"

From the curriculum, E.O. writings.

What then, you will ask me, should we do? Should we not move from our safe harbor? No, my daughters in Jesus and his Teresa, that is not your mission.

God abhors the peace of those he has called to war.

God abhors the rest of those whom He has called to work.

God abhors the stillness of those whom He has called to movement.

Do not be afraid of the pirates who cross this sea, nor of the many dangerous shoals and reefs that lie within it, because guided by your experienced Mother and Teacher Teresa of Jesus, and protected by the grace of Heaven, the grace of your vocation, you will emerge victorious from everything... What then is there to fear? Where is the danger? I will tell you. Only one thing is dangerous, and that is failure to respond to grace, resistance to grace, in a word, voluntary neglect in not fulfilling your duty... That is the danger, the greatest danger, the only danger.

Be faithful, then, to the grace of your vocation and fear nothing; for if God has called you to save your soul by saving others through the apostolate of teaching, God, who is faithful in his promises and true in his works, will give you the grace you need to fulfill your mission. (EE.O. II, pg 260)

"Reform" or "alternative"?

There are situations in life where reformist solutions are not appropriate. These are situations where it is clear that only alternative solutions are effective... This was one of the things that Jesus of Nazareth saw most clearly in the specific situation of his people and his religion at that particular moment in time. That is why Jesus did not seek to reform the religion of Israel, its laws, its customs, its ethics, and its institutions. Jesus saw that the solution had to take the path of an alternative to the established system in his people, in his culture, and in his society. And that is the Gospel of the kingdom: the alternative to the established system. (José Ma. Castillo, 186)

From The Way of Perfection, chapter 23, 4:

The other thing is—and this is very relevant—that he fights with more spirit. He knows that, come what may, he must not turn back. He is like one who is in battle, who knows that if he is defeated, his life will not be spared, and that since he will die in battle, he must die later; he fights with greater determination and wants to sell his life well—as they say—and does not fear the blows so much, because he carries forward what matters to him, victory, and his life depends on winning.