

# SPIRITUAL BOOK NEWS

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SPIRITUAL BOOK ASSOCIATES

## FEATURED SELECTION

February 2008 Selection

### THE WAY OF PRAYER

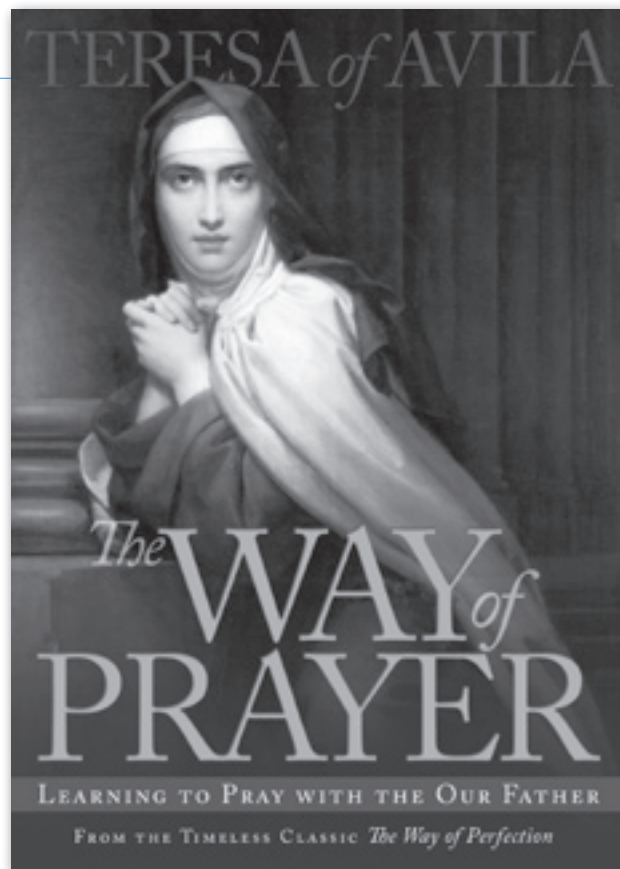
*Learning to Pray with the Our Father*  
St. Teresa of Avila

Edited by William J. Doheny, C.S.C.

*I am delighted to recommend the publication of **The Way of Prayer** by St. Teresa of Avila. This will be a marvelous book for people to use to simply focus on prayer rather than on all of St. Teresa's writings on the spiritual life. It will be an introduction for many and it will be a reminder for those who already know St. Teresa. A valuable contribution to American Catholic literature.*

FR. BENEDICT J. GROESCHEL, C.F.R.

ISBN: 9780870612466 / 160 pages / \$12.95



## MARCH 2008 SELECTION

### AT SEA WITH GOD

*A Spiritual Guidebook to the Heart and Soul*  
Margaret Silf

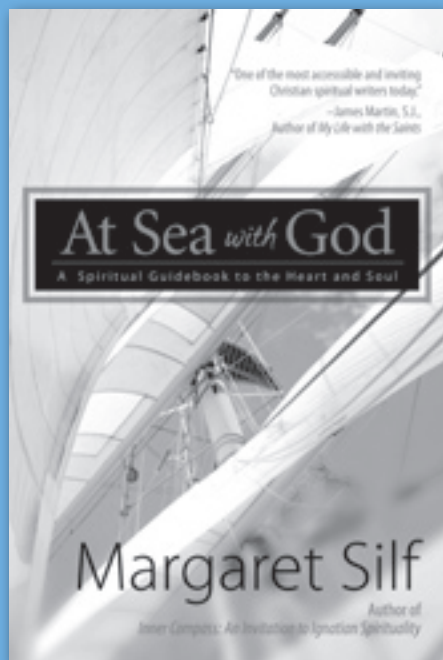
*One of the most accessible and inviting Christian spiritual writers today.*

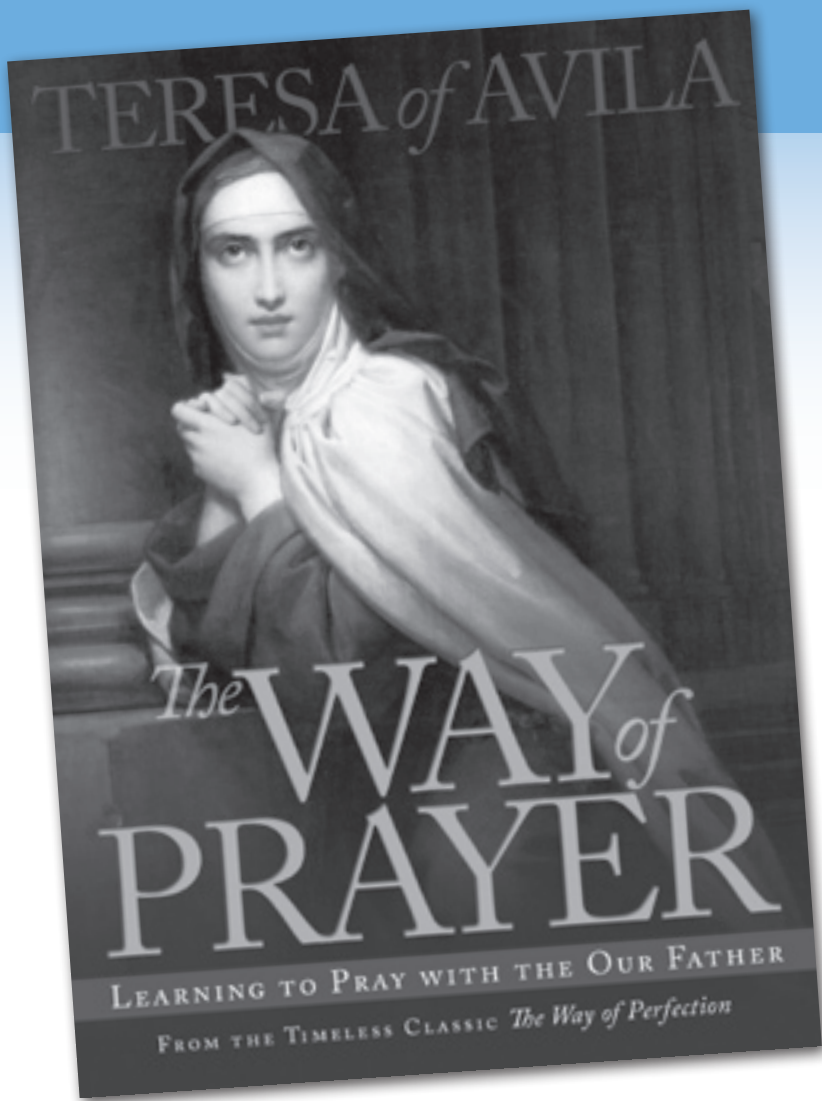
**JAMES MARTIN, S.J.**

Author of *My Life with the Saints*

The art of sailing life's waters is explored with this delightful self-guided retreat. Silf uses seven aspects of sailing to explore the spiritual life: the boat, the cargo, setting sail, navigating uncharted waters, the perils of the deep, being adrift, and dropping anchor. Her creative use of scripture, reflection questions, journal starters, and real-life seafaring wisdom enables readers to reflect on their experience with fresh insight. This gentle spiritual guidebook unites ancient spiritual practices with contemporary experience in a compassionate, enlightening manner that Christians of all faiths will appreciate.

ISBN: 9781933495118 / 192 pages / \$15.95





## THE WAY OF PRAYER

*Learning to Pray With the  
Our Father*

Teresa of Avila

Adapted by William J. Doheny, C.S.C.

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### TERESA OF AVILA

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Teresa was born in Avila on March 28, 1515. Her father, Alonso of Cepeda, was the son of a wealthy Jewish merchant from Toledo who had recently converted to the Christian faith. After the death of his first wife in 1507, he entered a second marriage to Teresa's mother, Beatrice of Ahumada, some two years later. Teresa's mother came from an aristocratic Christian family of Avila. She bore her husband ten children and died when Teresa was fifteen years old.

As a child, Teresa had a deep desire to give her life to Christ. At the age of seven, she even tried to run away with her brother to convert the Moors and become a martyr for the faith. In time, however, this early enthusiasm began to wane. Teresa took her mother's death very hard and gradually set aside her pious interests. To correct this tendency and to offer her sound Christian instruction, her father sent her away to be educated as a lay boarder at the Augustinian convent at Santa María de Gracia. It was there that Teresa first felt the call to enter religious life. She received this inspiration largely through the influence of Mary of Brinceño, who was charged with the lay students at the convent, and by reading the letters of Saint Jerome.

Upon her return home, her father was happy that his daughter had once more regained her Catholic piety, but was adamantly against her becoming a nun. In the face of this opposition, Teresa ran away on November 2, 1535, and entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. In time, her father acquiesced to his daughter's wishes and gave his consent for her to become a nun.

The following year, Teresa received the Carmelite habit and professed her vows. She became deathly ill shortly thereafter and was sent to Becedas to receive treatment from a woman known throughout Castile for her healing remedies. Her health did not improve, and it was during this time that she read and was deeply influenced by Gregory the Great's *Morals* and Francis of Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, a treatise on prayer in which she took great delight. Teresa's health steadily declined, so much so that on August 15, 1539, she went into a coma and was presumed dead. She regained consciousness some four days later, but was paralyzed in her legs for the next three years. When she finally recovered, she attributed her healing to the intercession of Saint Joseph and continued her life at the Monastery of the Incarnation.

# READER'S GROUP GUIDE

All during this time, Teresa continued her life of prayer and even learned to move beyond discursive meditative practices and to simply rest in contemplative silence before the Lord. Although she had sporadic mystical experiences, she entered a period of dryness that lasted for almost eighteen years. In addition, she was held back by her desire to please and win the approval of others.

In 1554, at the age of thirty-nine, Teresa had two experiences that touched her deeply and changed her entire outlook about her spiritual journey. One was an experience of Christ's healing and redeeming power while praying before a statue of the suffering Christ. The other was a deep sense of the Lord calling her as she read the account of Saint Augustine's conversion in his Confessions. These experiences gave her deep peace and a sense of the Lord's abiding presence in her life that helped her let go of her fears and worldly attachments and give herself entirely over to the service of the Lord. As Teresa's mystical communion with God deepened, she had great difficulty explaining her experiences to her friends and confessors. Some of them even became suspicious of her and told her outright that her mystical ecstasies were the work of the devil. She continued her quest for sound guidance from learned and holy confessors and eventually found comfort from such men as Saint Francis Borgia (1510–1572) and Saint Peter of Alcántara (1499–1562). These and other learned and saintly men encouraged her in her trials and affirmed that the Lord was working in her.

Teresa's reputation as a reformer began with these intense experiences of personal conversion that led to her desire to change her life and bring it more fully in conformity with God's will. A sense of dissatisfaction over life at the Monastery of the Incarnation led a small group of nuns to gather in her cell in September of 1560 and dream of initiating a reform in their order. This reform took root gradually and in the midst of great opposition within the monastery, the Carmelite order, and the local townspeople. With the support of Peter of Alcántara, Teresa gained permission from Rome and established a reformed monastery of Carmelites dedicated to Saint Joseph in Avila on August 24, 1562. Her close friend and associate Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591) helped her bring the reform to the male branch of the order and, like Teresa, met staunch resistance at nearly every turn. Teresa spent the rest of her life crisscrossing Spain to further the cause of her reform. She established a total of fourteen reformed Carmelite monasteries in her lifetime and left behind a large literary corpus. She died at Alba de Tormes on October 4, 1582. was beatified in 1614, proclaimed patroness of Spain in 1617, canonized in 1622, and declared a doctor of the Church in 1970.

This biography of Teresa is reprinted from *Interior Castle: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary* by Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. © 2007 Ave Maria Press. All rights reserved.

## A BOOK OF ITS TIME, YET TIMELESS

Everyone experiences God with the colors and clothes of one's culture. We don't experience God in a vacuum. Teresa brought her influences to her experience of God, and we have the culture through which God works. Be aware of the cultural differences as you read. Spain at the time she was writing was quite isolated from the rest of Europe. The Spanish Inquisition used religion and fear to bring people into line and control society to a great extent. Times were prosperous,

and many young people were looking for something more meaningful in their lives. Consequently, religious orders were gaining more and more members, and yet many were plagued with scandals. Teresa reformed her order using this book as an instruction manual. Remember also that she was not well schooled and was not an exceptional writer. Her genius lies in the incredible wisdom at the heart of her writing, not in the words she used.

- As you read, interact with the text. Imagine that she is writing to you.
- What is she trying to say to her sisters and thus to us about meditation on our vocal prayer? What happens when we take prayer for granted? What are we trying to do in prayer, and what are we allowing God to do in prayer?
- In several parts her dialogue with the Father and Son is quite intimate. How do we dialogue with God? How intimate are we with God?
- What concepts that she dealt with spoke to you the most—suffering; submission to the will of God; contemplation leading to action; the centrality of love; others? Why?

## WEBSITES OF INTEREST

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[www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/way.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/way.html)

This link takes you to *The Way of Perfection* page at Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL). Here you can download the entire text of *The Way of Perfection* in several different formats. CCEL contains the text of numerous Christian writings that are in the public domain and are available to download free of charge.



[www.ocarm-ocd.org/eng.index.html](http://www.ocarm-ocd.org/eng.index.html)

A collaborative homepage of the Calced and Discalced Carmelites. Here you will find numerous links to publications, joint projects, individual order sites, and more. A great starting place for all things Carmelite online.

## HER WRITINGS

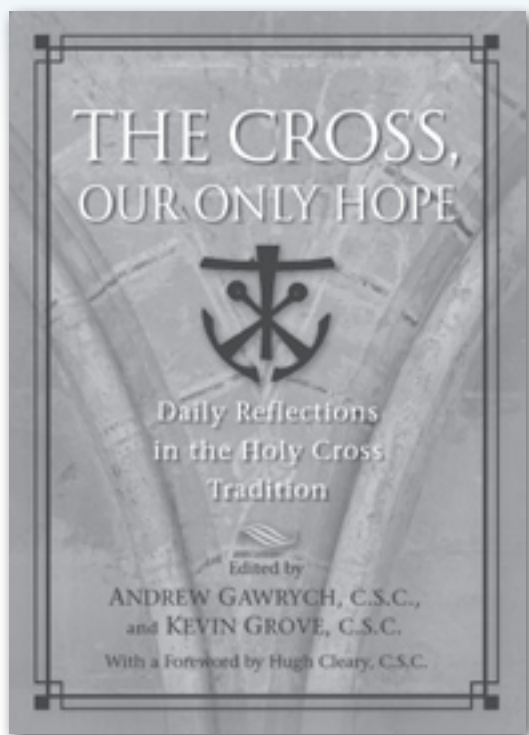
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- Life (Autobiography), 1562
- The Way of Perfection, 1566
- The Book of Her Foundations, 1573-1582
- The Interior Castle, 1577
- Meditations on the Song of Songs, 1566
- Constitutions, 1563
- Response to a Spiritual Challenge, 1572
- On Making Visitation, 1576
- Satirical Critique, 1577
- Poetry
- Letters (more than 459 exist)



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### BASIL MOREAU

*Founder of Holy Cross*

Gary MacEoin

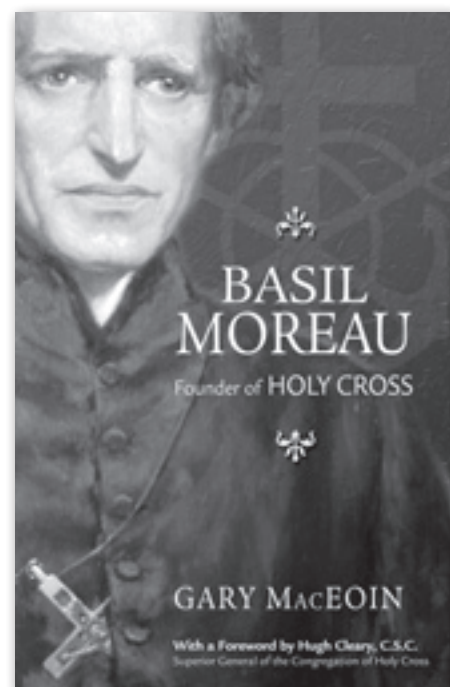
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