

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) Teresa was born Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada in Avila, Spain, on March 28, 1515, to a wealthy and pious family. She was a vibrant, social, and attractive young woman, even experiencing a childhood desire to be a martyr with her brother, as noted in her autobiography. Saint Teresa of Avila lived in an age of exploration as well as political, social, and religious upheaval. It was the 16th century, a time of turmoil and reform.

She was a Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, and reformer known for founding the Discalced Carmelite movement, which emphasized a return to stricter observance of the Carmelite Rule. After a period of spiritual awakening and mystical experiences, including divine visions and ecstasies, she established seventeen new, more austere convents throughout Spain despite facing significant opposition.

Teresa faced a long period of illness and inner turmoil, which ultimately led her to embrace deeper personal prayer and mysticism. She was a woman “for God,” a woman of prayer, discipline, and compassion. Her heart belonged to God. Her ongoing conversion was an arduous lifelong struggle, involving ongoing purification and suffering. She was misunderstood, misjudged, and opposed in her efforts at reform. Yet she struggled on, courageous and faithful; she struggled with her own mediocrity, her illness, her opposition. And in the midst of all this she clung to God in life and in prayer. Her writings on prayer and contemplation are drawn from her experience: powerful, practical, and graceful. She was a woman of prayer; a woman for God. In herself, in her prayer, in her life, in her efforts to reform, in all the people she touched, she was a woman for others, a woman who inspired and gave life.

Teresa became one of Spain's most prominent spiritual writers, authoring works such as "The Book of Her Life" (her autobiography), "The Interior Castle," and "The Way of Perfection". These works articulate her mystical experiences and teachings on prayer, contemplation, and the presence of God within the soul.

Teresa of Avila was canonized as a saint by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. In 1970, Pope Paul VI recognized her as a Doctor of the Church, the first woman to receive this title. She remains a revered figure for her profound spiritual insights, literary works, and her role in the reform and spiritual renewal of the Carmelite Order, influencing countless individuals in their personal spiritual journeys.

Saint Teresa of Avila is the patron saint of headache sufferers, Spain, Spanish Catholic writers, lacemakers, the sick, and those in religious orders.