(NB. Text from the audio of the video presentation)

The Teresian Charism: An Illumination in the Constitutional Process

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A warm greeting, a fraternal greeting. I am Father Emilio Martínez, a Discalced Carmelite friar from the Teresianum community. I am a professor here, and among other subjects I teach, I offer courses on Saint Teresa of Jesus.

I am deeply grateful—and that is the first sentiment with which I present myself before you: gratitude; gratitude to our Father General for entrusting me with this service, this commentary, and also to the Sisters of the Commission who requested this reflection from me.

For me, it is truly a joy, because I believe any assistance I can offer you in this process is something wonderful, and I hope it will be so.

Moreover, I sincerely tell you that I come before you with great respect. I want my words to be simply —or that they may create, so to speak —a space where we can share our common vocation. I do not intend to give a lecture or to convey ideas or concepts. As I began drafting these pages, I thought the best thing I could do was to tell you a story—a story you already know: the story of Mother Teresa of Jesus, and to do it from my perspective so that you may take from it whatever may help you

Father Tomás Álvarez once said it was worth noting that if we consider the four great works of Sant Teresa as a whole, we will notice that her story is linked to the idea of home.

Indeed, Father Tomás pointed out that *The Book of Her Life* begins by recounting the life in her family home—the life of Teresa, her parents, her siblings—and everything culminates in the home of the divine Spouse and of the soul-bride, which is the "interior castle" of which Mother Teresa speaks in her work of the same name.

I would add that *The Way of Perfection*, the most charismatic of her works, describes for us the necessary elements for the home, the space where the family of sisters and brothers lives, to fulfill its role in the world and in the Church.

And in *The Foundations*, she speaks of the foundations of the house that we inhabit today, of the first steps that were taken, and how those steps—steps of trust in the Lord—illuminate our journey.

We cannot forget something that, in my opinion, is essential to understanding Saint Teresa. This is that the home is a space of relationships: relationships among sisters; with brothers; and with God, whose Spirit sustains everything and whose faithfulness is visible in Jesus, our Spouse and Teacher, Friend and Companion. Those relationships challenged the Saint throughout her life, yet she managed to direct them through the light of divine wisdom, which ordered charity in her heart.

These relationships—which I aim to present to you, understood as deep, radical attitudes, not mere commitments—are the foundation of the entire structure. They are the starting point of any sincere relationship with the Lord that we wish to establish and any ecclesial service we hope to carry out. At the same time, they grow and improve as these relationships are built, imitating the Captain of Love, Jesus—our greatest Good—as the Saint tells us in *The Way of Perfection* (6, 9). All of this unfolds in the light of our relationship with Him, a virtuous circle that repeats constantly in the Saint's thought.

A Style of Sisterhood

In telling you the story of Mother Teresa, I feel like those parents who must tell their children a story they already know, but the children are so captivated that they want to hear it repeated over and over—because it's truly a thrilling story. So, don't be surprised that we all love it. It might surprise you a little, but to give it a fresh touch, I'll start by telling you about Saint John of the Cross.

Or rather, about Fray Juan de Santo Matía, a young man who, in 1568, restless and newly ordained as a priest, felt disillusioned by the experience he had just had at the University of Salamanca. He deeply desired to live a more recollected life—in quotes—in the Carthusian Order.

In Medina, he met Mother Teresa of Jesus, who invited him to live a new experience. Fray Juan accepted and went with her to Valladolid. She wanted him to learn, as the Saint herself tells us in *The Book of Foundations*, Chapter 13, Paragraph 5, "our way of life so that he would have a clear understanding of everything, whether it concerned mortification or the style of both our community life and the recreation we have together." A little later, the Saint insists that her greatest interest was for John to internalize the Sisters' way of proceeding.

Here, the word mortification does not refer only or even primarily to penances which the sisters practiced, but to the demands of community life, which we must all recognize as sometimes the most complete mortification and the most complete penance. What Teresa wanted was for Fray Juan to learn to live the life that the Sisters were already living since the foundations of San José de Ávila, Medina, and now Valladolid.

Ultimately, she wanted him to build, or help to build, the home of the Discalced Friars in the image of the one already guarded and built by the Discalced Nuns. And there in Valladolid, Fray Juan de Santo Matía stayed and later emerged into the world as Fray Juan de la Cruz. For truly, deepening the Teresian charism transforms the person.

We cannot go back to the Saint's Valladolid, but we can encounter her in the style of Fray Luis de León, as this great Augustinian said of her daughters and her works. I dare say that a constitutional process—a process of revising and reforming the Constitutions—must seek light and guidance in the grateful memory of the way that the first Sisters proceeded, with Teresa at their head. In this way, you may find a current method to express that way faithfully and creatively, responding to the demands of our time and of the Church today.

And now, let us return to Saint Teresa.

Milestones Along the Way

The saint confesses that when she entered the monastery of the Incarnation, "I was motivated more by servile fear than by love" (*Life*, 3, 6). Her existence in those early days as a religious was more about surviving than about truly living. This eventually left her unsatisfied, so she confesses a little later in

Chapter 8, Paragraph 12: "I wanted to live, for I well understood that I was not living, but was struggling with a shadow of death."

Despite everything, Teresa persevered on her interior journey—a journey we are all invited to take. She tirelessly sought an encounter with Jesus, to the point that she would recognize one of her greatest errors as having been tempted to abandon prayer altogether. She says this in Chapter 7 of *The Book of Her Life*.

In the midst of everything, however, one certainty remains: the certainty of God's faithfulness. And this is a very important message that the Saint conveys to us. She is convinced that God is faithful; she is convinced that God is waiting for her. And so she will refer to Him in the prologue of the *Life* as "the One who waited for me so long." I invite you to read paragraphs 18-19 of chapter 7 of the *The Book of Her Life*. That God who covers over bad deeds that are already done. "Oh Lord of my soul," she will say, "How can I extol the favors You gave me during these years! And how at the time when I offended You most, You quickly prepared me with an extraordinary repentance to taste Your favors and gifts! Indeed, my King, You, as One who well knew what to me would be most distressing, chose as a means the most delicate and painful punishment. With wonderful gifts You punished my sins!." This was the punishment of love: "You are not faithful, you do not keep Your word, it doesn't matter to Me, I will keep loving You." I believe this experience of God is fundamental – of that merciful God, the God who waits for us for so long.

Teresa discovered that God's faithfulness, God's generosity, is independent of her merits. This goodness will lead Mother Teresa – still Teresa de Ahumada at the Incarnation – to prostrate herself before an image of a much-wounded Christ and, recognizing all He did for us, to beg Him to change her heart, as He did with St. Augustine, whose Confessions she was reading at that very moment (we find this in chapter 9 of *The Book of Her Life*). And then a new life begins. She herself tells us this at the beginning of chapter 23 of *The Book of Her Life*: "This is another, new book from here on -- I mean another, new life. The life dealt with up to this point was mine; the one I lived from the point where I began to explain these things about prayer is the one God lived in me -- according to the way it appears to me -- because I think it would have been impossible in so short a time to get rid of so many bad habits and deeds. May the Lord be praised who freed me from myself." (23, 1).

A life characterized by the continual presence of the Beloved who makes Himself known – that mystical theology of which she speaks in chapter 10, paragraph 1 of *The Book of Her Life*.

Teresa understands that there is no longer a life to save, but rather a Life with a capital L to safeguard, a life that has been gifted to her, which consists fundamentally in a relationship that orients all other relationships: the relationship with Jesus; the encounter with Christ, with the Lord, which is progressive and always new.

This is what will now launch her forth. During this time, she receives a series of mystical graces, the meaning of which St. John of the Cross explains very well in *The Living Flame of Love*, speaking specifically about the grace of Transverberation. The saint says that few souls reach such a height as this – that particular grace. But some have reached it, "especially those whose virtue and spirit were to be diffused among their children." Notice how important this is: their virtue and their spirit, the interior path of the Saint which must be diffused in us. St. John of the Cross continues, "God accords to founders wealth and value commensurate with the greater or lesser following they will have in their doctrine and spirituality" (The commentary on the second stanza of *The Living Flame of Love*, paragraph 2).

These graces are therefore an invitation to Teresa, which we can call charismatic – that is, an invitation for her to share that gifted life.

Indeed, from her fruitful relationship with Jesus, two desires spring forth in her: to make Him known (*The Book of Her Life,* 18, 8: "to attract souls to so high a blessing") and to please Him, knowing that the best way to please Him is precisely to draw others to Him – something St. Thérèse of Lisieux knew very well ("to attract," she will say at the end of her *Manuscript C*). I invite you to read a text from the *Conceptions of the Love of God* or *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (4, 8), where I believe Teresa expresses this idea very clearly.

Thus, with this experience, the walls of the monastery of the Incarnation become too narrow, and another home must be built—one to safeguard that gifted life. A home with a door where Mary stands on one side and Joseph on the other, and Jesus at the center, like a new kind of Bethany where we may once again hear the Master's voice. A group of Sisters accompanies her, and soon they will ask her: How and where do we hear that voice? It is in prayer that our relationship with Him is born and nurtured. "So, speak to us about prayer," they will say to Teresa—but later comes *The Way of Perfection*.

And the Saint surprises them—and us too—because before speaking of prayer, and even before beginning to pray, Holy Mother Teresa knows: we must prepare the place; we must set the house in order.

WHAT MUST WE BE LIKE?

That is the third part of my talk. And it is the great question Teresa repeatedly poses to the Sisters in the early chapters of *The Way of Perfection*.

This question not only marks the beginning of the book *The Way of Perfection*, but also marks the start of the journey she proposes to each and every one of us.

It is the key that invites us to the inner process that will allow us, within the community, to build the home where we will all encounter Jesus.

And Teresa, as we know—and as I've already said—sets this out in a book, *The Way of Perfection*. She did not title this book as such; she titled it rather: *This book deals with the advice and counsel Teresa of Jesus gives to her religious Sisters and daughters who live in the monasteries that, with the help of our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mother of God, our Lady, she founded. These monasteries follow the primitive rule of our Lady of Mount Carmel.* This Marian emphasis is also very interesting, though it is not for me to delve into—others will do so, and very well.

So, these are admonitions and counsels for the Sisters of St. Joseph's—which also apply to each of us, and to you in particular, during this process.

Ultimately, in *The Way of Perfection*, Mother Teresa gifts us her experience—her spirit. And we must welcome it with the same thirst with which her first daughters welcomed it.

The small community of St. Joseph's—the book's first recipients—wants to learn from their Mother how to serve, and she wants to teach them.

As I mentioned to you, what she will recount to them—and to us—is her own story, her own journey, so that they may make it their own.

In fact, Father Maximiliano Herráiz reminds us that Don Teutonio de Braganza—that Portuguese bishop who was so dear to Saint Teresa—said of his edition of *The Way of Perfection*: "Here, in *The Way*, the spirit of Saint Teresa is alive and well."

In the task of communicating her spirit, Teresa is not alone—for God, the true author of all things (as Teresa tells us in *The Way, The Life, The Foundations,* and *The Interior Castle*)—wishes to help and accompany us, the same generous God who surely, without any doubt, also accompanies this Constitutional process.

The Way of Perfection, therefore, is a living formulation of the charism, of the lifestyle that Teresa lives and wants to transmit to her daughters.

They want her to speak to them about some aspects of prayer—we already mentioned this—but, as she said earlier too, the Mother will surprise them by first speaking about the way and manner of life lived in this house.

Thus, through this approach, the saint explains two things to them: first, that the life of prayer requires certain conditions without which it will never reach its destination, never become a relationship of friendship with Jesus.

Second, to speak of prayer is to speak of life, of the long journey one must undertake to reach the fountain of living water.

In this way, *The Way of Perfection* becomes a formation manual for the person who prays, and that is our vocation: not to do prayer, but to be persons who pray (which is a quote from Father Maximiliano Herráiz).

We cannot build the house starting with the roof; we cannot put the cart before the horse. If we wish to speak of Teresian prayer—or, Christian prayer, which is the same, —we must pay great attention to the style of brotherhood/sisterhood, the primary dispositions, which are the conditions of possibility for carrying out, with the help of the Spirit, that true prayer.

And so, in the first 15 chapters of *The Way of Perfection*, the saint goes into detail about these preliminary conditions, which we could summarize in the famous question or exclamation called: ¿Qué tales habremos de ser? (What must we be like?)

And take note—because sometimes in productions one must be careful—Teresa never speaks of doing, of "what we must do"—no, away with that! Teresa says: "What must we be like?"

The first thing, in order to know what we must be like, is to ask ourselves: Why have we come here?

It seems obvious, but we must first discard one thing entirely: we did not come here to fulfill a personal project.

We did not come here to pursue a path of self-fulfillment, as they say, of self-realization.

Yes, undoubtedly the experience of encounter, of friendship with the Master in the community, leads us to full happiness, to salvation—if we wish to put it that way too.

But that is not the essential thing—as the Saint will make this very clear to us.

The essential thing is service: to serve the Church, to serve the world, to serve others, particularly the Sisters or Brothers with whom we live.

Why? The Saint will say: "This is not the time to be discussing with God matters that have little importance. " (*The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 1, Paragraph 5).

There is a memorable paragraph in *The Way of Perfection*; it is found in Chapter 3, Paragraph 6.

I am only reading a few lines, not the whole thing, due to time constraints.

It says: Some people consider it harsh not to pray much for their own soul. But what better prayer is there than this?

If you grieve because your time in purgatory won't be shortened, know that this prayer will also relieve you of it.

What does it matter if I remain in purgatory until Judgment Day if through my prayer even one soul were to be saved?

Just imagine! To renounce praying for my own needs—to pray for others, to live for others.

So even if that means I must stay in purgatory until the end of time, until the Final Judgment, it doesn't matter.

I do it gladly, because perhaps thanks to this—or indeed, precisely because of this—one soul has been saved.

It's almost like renouncing one's own salvation, or at least not worrying about it.

This is truly a memorable passage, and it's definitive—literally—for our vocation.

Well, Teresa quotes this to us, as to the first Sisters of Saint Joseph's, to place us face-to-face with life. Obviously, I'm referring to St. Joseph's monastery. Ávila.

To confront us with life, with the concrete realities before us.

She compels us to pay attention to the history of the men and women in this world, to stop worrying about ourselves, and to be in solidarity with those near and far. This must be the nourishment of our prayer and our life.

We must live feeling ourselves involved and responsible.

I believe this is quite clear in other texts by Saint. Teresa, like in *The Interior Castle,* Fifth Mansions, Chapter 3, paragraphs 7–8, and also paragraph 11: "The Lord asks of us only two things" — surely you recall this...

And in the Seventh Mansions, another memorable text: Chapter 4, paragraph 8. Though there are many others we could quote.

In this spirit—to also reference a very recent text from the Church's Magisterium—I'd invite you to read paragraphs 168 to 171 of *Dilexit Nos*, the latest encyclical, which we might call Pope Francis's testament.

Well, now we know why we are here.

What remains is to understand this: How must we "be" here? What should "our style" be, our way of living, that which will allow the praying community to flourish?

As you know, there are three fundamental attitudes we have also called Teresian virtues or great virtues. Teresa speaks of these very well, as you also know, in *The Way of Perfection*, in Chapter 4, paragraph 4.

"Do not think, my friends and daughters, that I shall burden you with many things —I shall enlarge on only three things…The first of these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is true humility, which, even though I speak of it last, is the main practice and embraces all the others."

If you notice, love for one another, detachment from all created things, and true humility are evangelical virtues because they are virtues that Jesus lived perfectly in the Gospel. Teresa's aim is to bring us back to the Gospel, the same Gospel she herself lived.

I cannot elaborate on each of these virtues now, nor do I think it is strictly necessary. Following Father Maximiliano Herráiz, I want to emphasize that these "great virtues," as noted by Father Tomás and other Teresian scholars, prepare us to live a life of prayer—whether vocal, mental, contemplative, or otherwise. Teresa discusses this in great detail in Chapters 16 to 26 of *The Way of Perfection*. From Chapter 27 onward, she offers a beautiful commentary on the Lord's Prayer, deepening what she taught about prayer in chapters in 16 to 26.

But more than what we do with the specific content of prayer—be it the prayer of recollection, the prayer of quiet, or the various stages she describes—is the fact that, in my view, these three virtues allow us to pray within a space of freedom. Refer to the Valladolid version of *The Way of Perfection* (19, 4) and the theme of self-giving (donación) in *The Way of Perfection* (32, 9).

Allow me to share a slightly lengthy but worthwhile quote from Father Maximiliano:
"To teach prayer, or to address the way of life in the early Teresian community, is to teach us how to be free—to form individuals who consciously choose friendship with God. Whatever threatens freedom blocks the path of prayer, while whatever nourishes and strengthens freedom opens the way to authentic, transformative prayer. Here lies what may seem paradoxical: When are we completely free? When we give ourselves entirely."

To be free is to be happy. Saint Thérèse expresses this when she speaks of the "grace of Christmas." She explains that when she resolved—enlightened by the grace the Lord gave her on the night of His Incarnation—to serve others and bring them joy, she became free, and from that moment, she was truly happy.

Indeed, as Father Maximiliano's quote affirms, true freedom is the complete gift of oneself to God and to our brothers and sisters. Properly understood, this is the deepest meaning of being "hermits," something to which Saint Teresa invites her spiritual children (both sons and daughters). It is not merely about living in silence or seclusion, for she always unites the hermit's life with community.

This calls for a far more profound attitude: to live soberly, free from attachments, free from whims, and independently—not independent from the community of brothers and sisters, but independent from what we might call the "winds of the world."

It's also expressed in Spanish as "going along with the crowd," but no—I'm free. I don't have to conform to trends. Let me give a lighthearted example: just because Black Friday comes around doesn't mean I have to buy something. No, the hermit doesn't do that. I use this recent example since it just happened...

Being a hermit, as Saint Teresa might say, is above all about being engaged and responsible in the world, yet not of the world—just as the Letter to Diognetus tells us.

Christians live in the flesh, but not according to the flesh. They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. What a beautiful text! I'll share just a fragment here. There are also two passages from Saint Teresa that I find very relevant: *The Way of Perfection* 13, 6 and *The Method of Visiting the Monasteries*, paragraph 42.

Well, I'd like to end with a brief word about Community.

When Teresa gave birth to new communities, she didn't propose structures serving the individual, but neither did she want people enslaved by structures.

Saint Teresa speaks of persons serving one another, who together build a home—a shared project. Let me share a few examples:

In *The Way of Perfection* 8, 2, as I mentioned earlier: "There are only twelve here and His Majesty desired that you be one of them."
Freedom is joy (*The Way of Perfection* 41, 4–6).
Forgetting oneself is what fulfills us (*The Way of Perfection* 6, 6–7 and parallel texts).
Sharing is a path to holiness (*The Way of Perfection* 41, 7–9).
The personal path—in the selfish sense—is misguided (*The Way of Perfection* 10, 6).
Whereas the community path is virtuous (*The Way of Perfection* 16, 6–7).
To truly love is to serve (*The Way of Perfection* 4, 5)—and to do so in Jesus' style, for that is the love He taught us: service. That's undoubtedly what He lived.

This aspiration will extend outward, to the exterior—as mission.

As the relationship among the Sisters and with Jesus deepens, so does the desire to share it grow—just as Mother Teresa describes in the early chapters of *The Book of the Foundations*.

I recommend reading paragraph 6 of Chapter 1—it's beautiful! She speaks of the wonders that the Sisters witness, the precious things they experience, and how she longed to communicate them. Speaking of herself, she says: "I often felt like one who has a great treasure stored up and desires that all enjoy it, but whose hands are bound and unable to distribute it. So it seemed my soul was bound." This was because the spiritual graces the Lord granted her soul in those years were immense. "And it

all seemed wasted on me"—just listen to this beauty!—"if it was only for me. What good is that? I don't want this just for myself—I want it for everyone." That is the meaning of mission. That is the meaning of self-giving in the Teresian way.

And a little further on, it says: as these little dovecotes of Our Lady began to be fill up—the foundational work had already begun—"the divine Majesty began to show His greatness in these weak little women, who were strong though in their desires and their detachment from every creature. When practiced with a pure conscience, such detachment must be what most joins the soul to God." (*Foundations* 4, 5).

Regarding this, take note: I previously quoted Pope Francis in *Dilexit Nos.* He also speaks of this theme, and what he says is very beautiful. I'll read a small excerpt from number 173: " Our union with Christ is meant not only to satisfy our own thirst, but also to make us springs of living water for others." Origen wrote that Christ fulfills His promise by causing streams of water to well up within us. "The human soul, made in the image of God, can itself contain and pour forth wells, fountains and rivers."

Therefore, the ecclesial mission of the Carmelite nun, linked to the Teresian charism—and of the Carmelite friar too, evidently—is to make others fall in love [with God]. And note the adjective, which is very important: ecclesial. If you wish to explore this further in *Dilexit Nos,* delve into numbers 205 to 216.

Returning to the Saint, let us turn to *The Conceptions of the Love of God* or *The Meditations on the Song of Songs*, chapter 7, paragraph 5: "These persons will serve His Majesty, and they profit much. But, in my opinion, such are not the works and flowers asked for by the bride; she looks only for the honor and glory of God in everything. Truly, I don't believe that souls brought to this state by the Lord, from what I have understood of some, think of themselves, and of whether they will lose or gain, any more than if they did not exist. They look only at serving and pleasing the Lord. And because they know the love He has for His servants, they like to leave aside their own satisfaction and good so as to please Him and serve and tell souls beneficial truths by the best means they can. Nor do they, as I say, think about whether or not they will themselves lose. They keep before their minds the benefit of their neighbor, nothing else. So as to please God more, they forget themselves for their neighbor's sake, and they lose their lives in the challenge, as did many martyrs. They are not aware of the words they say while enveloped in so sublime a love of God, in their inebriation from that heavenly wine. And if they are aware, they don't care if they displease men. These souls do much good."

Father Gracián has a beautiful passage in the *Dilucidario del Verdadero Espíritu* where he says it is good to share all the graces received from God. Some say we should not, that we ought to be cautious; this has somewhat been the prevailing approach—not only in our Order but in treatises on the spiritual life —where it was advised: "my secret is for me alone."

This is all very respectable, but Gracián says: if you share these graces, it is like a woman who appears before her friends wearing exquisite jewels, necklaces, perfumes, and beautiful clothes. Naturally, they all ask, "Where did you buy those?" Then they all go to El Corte Inglés [a department store], or to that shop where such things are sold—they're splendid and so affordable!

In other words, speaking of God's grace entices others to seek those same graces, to position themselves to receive them. Clearly, Father Gracián was a good student of Saint Teresa.

To conclude, I have left you a selection of texts from *The Way of Perfection*, organized by theme. I hope they aid your personal reflection.

I won't list them here, because it would be a waste of time. But I will just give you the titles, and then later you'll see the quotes, and you yourselves can go searching, can study them in depth. This might also be helpful for this process you're experiencing.

“The World in Flames” is the first heading. CV 1,1-5; 3,1
“Barefoot”, the second heading. CV 2,1-2. 5. 7-9
“Being Such” (“Qué tales habremos de ser?”). We've talked quite a bit about that. CV 3,2-5; 4,1; 18,5; 20,3. 6
'“Human Balance”. CV 8,2; 10,6; 13,6-7; 15,3 41,4-9
“Love”. CV 4,5; 6,3-7. 8-9; 7,1-4. 5-9; 20,4; 26,10; 32,6-7; 33,4; 40,1-4. 7
“Freedom or Detachment”. CV 4,8; 5,2-6; 8,1-3; 9,4-5; 10,1-2. 5; 11,15-5; 32,5
“Humility”. CE 24; CV 2,6; 7, 10; 12,4-5. 7-9; 13,1-3; 15,1-2. 7; 16,7; 17,1; 18,7; 27,5-6; 28,3; 36,3-4. 6-7; 38,5-8; 39,1-2. 4-5
“Determination'. CV 16,8; 19,14; 20,2-3; 21,2; 23,1-3. 5; 28,12; 32,8.

So then, with steadfast determination, continue walking this path, knowing that we watch you with hope and also with the desire that you reach your destination, as we accompany you with our prayers.

Once again, many thanks, thanks to Father General.

Thanks to the Sisters of the Commission.

And thank you all for listening to me.

Over there, I have a beautiful image of Saint Joseph that was given to me recently.

Surely his intercession will not fail us.

A very big hug, Sisters.