

THE CECILIAN

A NEWSLETTER TO HONOR ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR
AND A CHRONICLE OF MICHAELA SASSE'S DISCERNMENT AS A CONSECRATED VIRGIN LIVING IN THE WORLD

ISSUE NO. 10 | OCTOBER 15, 2026 | FEAST DAY OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA



OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY - OCTOBER 7TH

To say a lot can happen in a year is a massive understatement. Exactly one year ago, I was at Zion National Park with my friend, Lauren. On the morning of October 15th, I met virtually with the Kansas Board of Examiners in Optometry, a step in obtaining Kansas licensure. I was excited to return to my home diocese to discern the vocation of consecrated virginity and practice optometry in WaKeeney, yet obtaining a reciprocal license required jumping through several hoops. The meeting went well, and I was informed that pending passage of my Kansas optometry law exam, I would be granted state licensure. After the Zoom call, Lauren and I traversed the park via Zion-Mount Carmel Highway. It seemed divinely inspired that the Feast Day of St. Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun, was commemorated this way.

Before moving to rural Kansas, there were many events that happened in my life that may appear coincidental to some, but the Lord truly plans every detail; the hairs on our heads are numbered (Lk 12:7)! Pope St. John Paul II said, "In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences." After I attended Mass on October 22nd, the Feast Day of St. John Paul II, I felt at peace giving my 90-day notice at work. Again, another saint (and one influenced heavily by Carmelite spirituality at that) interceded on my behalf.

After a lot of hiccups with scheduling, I was able to take my optometry law exam on November 7th, and I breathed a sigh of relief when the proctor told me I had passed. That day I also received an e-mail from Fr. Andy Hammeke, chaplain of the Fort Hays State University Comeau Catholic Campus Center, inquiring if I would be interested in meeting with students as they discerned religious life. I had shared with Bishop Vincke that I would love nothing more than to accompany women in their discernment of the Lord's will. I remember bursting into tears (in the best way possible!) when I received Fr. Andy's e-mail as I recognized it was the anniversary of my baptism.

My last day at work in Hastings was January 20th, which also happened to be the birthday of the optometrist I was going to practice with in WaKeeney. Additionally, it marked a year since I adopted my dog, Chloe, who I have decided would be a Carmelite due to her black and brown fur and love of contemplation. Underlying the excitement was the question of when my house would sell; it had been on the market since November. Regardless of whether it sold, I planned to move to WaKeeney at the beginning of February. Upon waking the morning of January 22nd, a still, small voice told me, "Your house is selling today." By noon that day, my real estate agent texted me to say there was a buyer who would like to look at my house. The buyer came at 5 o'clock that evening, and by 5:30 pm I received an offer. After a brief exchange of messages, I received the precise offer I had hoped for. January 22nd is a particularly meaningful day regarding the dignity of human life, and this was not lost on me.

I started my new optometric role on February 2nd (2/2), the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. I have been ridiculed for making such connections involving the number twenty-two, but again, God plans all the details, small as they may seem. In Hebrew tradition and biblical numerology, twenty-two represents divine light and complete order. What some may write off as happenstance, I see the mark of providence.

My life looks quite different from what I imagined, but I can testify to the incredible amount of grace I have received in following God's call. Bishop Vincke said in a recent newsletter, "God doesn't necessarily call the qualified, but equips us when we say 'yes.'" AMEN. I praise God and our Lady of the Rosary who led me to her Son!

PRAYER INTENTIONS

- Sr. Miriam James Heidland, SOLT, has entered a public state of discernment regarding the establishment of a new religious community, Friends of the Bridegroom. The apostolate will focus on healing and fostering a culture of vocations. This movement is an answered prayer. Please pray for all involved. I have attached a document with more information.
- Pray for those discerning a call to the priesthood or consecrated life.

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Even at a young age, Teresa had a knack for getting into trouble. She was born to a prominent and pious couple in Old Castille, a city of Avila, Spain. Inspired by the stories of the saints, at the age of seven, Teresa recruited her younger brother Roderigo as a travel companion and set out for Africa where they intended to become martyrs for the faith. Their plan was foiled when they were captured by an uncle, who returned them to their disgruntled parents.

Motivated by her love for God, and possibly annoyance at her father's strict rules, Teresa secretly entered the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation against her father's wishes in 1535. She was the life of the party in the convent, which in those days focused on prestige and comfort. Her days were often spent charming guests with her wit and humor in the parlor and gossiping with acquaintances. In between the conversations, the servants, and the jewelry, there was hardly any time or encouragement to develop a deep spiritual life. In addition, Teresa was plagued by serious physical and mental health issues, which she struggled with throughout her life. Living with a lukewarm spiritual life, Teresa often gave up mental prayer entirely, blaming her illness for her lack of enthusiasm. But in her forties, she was encouraged by a priest to take up prayer again. She did, but with great difficulty, and an hour of prayer became a grueling task of counting the minutes. She was constantly met with distraction. She later recalled, "I was more anxious for the hour of prayer to be over than I was to remain there. I don't know what heavy penance I would not have gladly undertaken rather than practice prayer."

As a mystic, Teresa was bombarded with supernatural experiences and visions. Jesus once said to her in a vision, "I would create the universe again just to hear you say that you love me." Teresa suffered discouragement when rumors of her visions spread through the convent and she was the subject of gossip and mockery. When complaining to Jesus about this injustice, He simply said, "Teresa, that's how I treat my friends." She responded, "No wonder you have so few!"

At the age of forty-three, Teresa decided to reform Carmel back to its fundamental state of simplicity, prayer, and poverty. No more frivolous conversations, jewelry, or servants. This initiative was most unwelcome and Teresa encountered hostile reactions from her own convent, the papal nuncio, other religious communities, and the surrounding towns. As she traveled and founded new convents, she often entered towns at night to avoid starting a riot. But Teresa, a woman with an iron will, persevered and continued to establish foundations for her new community, the Discalced Carmelites. She had a strong spiritual friendship with St. John of the Cross, who also became involved in her reform of Carmel, and they worked closely together to set up new convents and monasteries. Teresa died at the age of 67, and was named a Doctor of the Church for her writing and teaching on prayer. Her spiritual and psychological insights led her to compose a number of works on the spiritual life, including "The Way of Perfection" and "Interior Castle."¹

REFLECTION

"For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything."

What I perhaps love most about St. Teresa of Avila is her candid nature, particularly with the Lord. Really, what is the point of not presenting to God exactly as we are, as He is omniscient?

She also demonstrates that the art of prayer takes time. Even as a great mystic and Doctor of the Church, prayer did not always come naturally to St. Teresa of Avila. If frustrations arise in your prayer life, it is important to press on; the desire to please God is in itself pleasing to Him.

St. Teresa of Avila, pray for us.



OFFICE OF CONSECRATED VOCATIONS UPDATES

- Yesterday I spoke to around 70 young women at the Respect Life Retreat in Salina. It was a tremendous honor!
- From October 9th – 11th I attended a discernment retreat with the Little Sisters of the Poor in Kansas City, Missouri. They are dedicated to the care of the elderly poor and serve in over 30 countries.
- The registration deadline for the Heart of the Bridegroom retreat is October 30th. This is a retreat I am facilitating for single women in the Salina Diocese aged 18–40 on November 7th. Please see the attached flyer.
- National Vocation Awareness Week occurs from November 1st through November 7th. Ideas to promote vocations may be found by visiting www.vocationministry.com.

THE FEMININE GENIUS OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA

"You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him."

"We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God; for, beholding his greatness, we realize our own littleness."

"In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel."

"The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes."

"From silly devotions and sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!"



ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Patron saint of Spain, sick people, people in religious orders, people ridiculed for their piety, lacemakers

CHARISM CORNER

The Spiritual Gift of Wisdom

Wisdom empowers an individual to creatively apply knowledge with insight to help solve problems, accomplish goals, or make decisions. The charism of wisdom may be found in visionary leadership roles, directorial positions, fundraising, and non-profit and charity work. It is especially seen in positions which require large amounts of complex decision making.² It may also be found in the friend whose advice you always seek.

Perhaps the most famous example of biblical wisdom is King Solomon. After Solomon inherited the throne of his father, King David, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and stated, "Whatever you ask I shall give you." (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon was a mere youth when he was given the daunting task of overseeing the twelve tribes of Israel. In response to the Lord, Solomon said, "Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil. For who is able to give judgment for this vast people of yours?" (1 Kings 3:9). The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request, and responded, "I give you a heart so wise and discerning that there has never been anyone like you until now, nor after you will there be anyone to equal you." (1 Kings 3:12).

Solomon's wisdom was put to the test when he was approached by two women who lay claim to being the mother of the same child. Solomon requested a sword and instructed that the living child be cut in two, giving one half to either woman. One woman promptly showed compassion and said to Solomon, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby—do not kill it!" While the other woman said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours. Cut it in two!" The king then directed that the child be given to the woman who showed compassion, as she was the true mother. (1 Kings 3:16–28)

I would be remiss if I did not highlight St. Teresa of Avila's gift of wisdom. She spoke of the nature of God in the following maxim: "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away. God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices."

¹ St. Teresa of Avila. The GIVEN Institute. (n.d.). <https://giveninstitute.com/st-teresa-of-avila/>

² Simons, J. (n.d.). *The Spiritual Gift of Wisdom*. Many Parts Ministries. <https://www.manypartsministries.com/spiritual-gift-of-wisdom>
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