

RETREAT PILGRIMAGE WITH ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

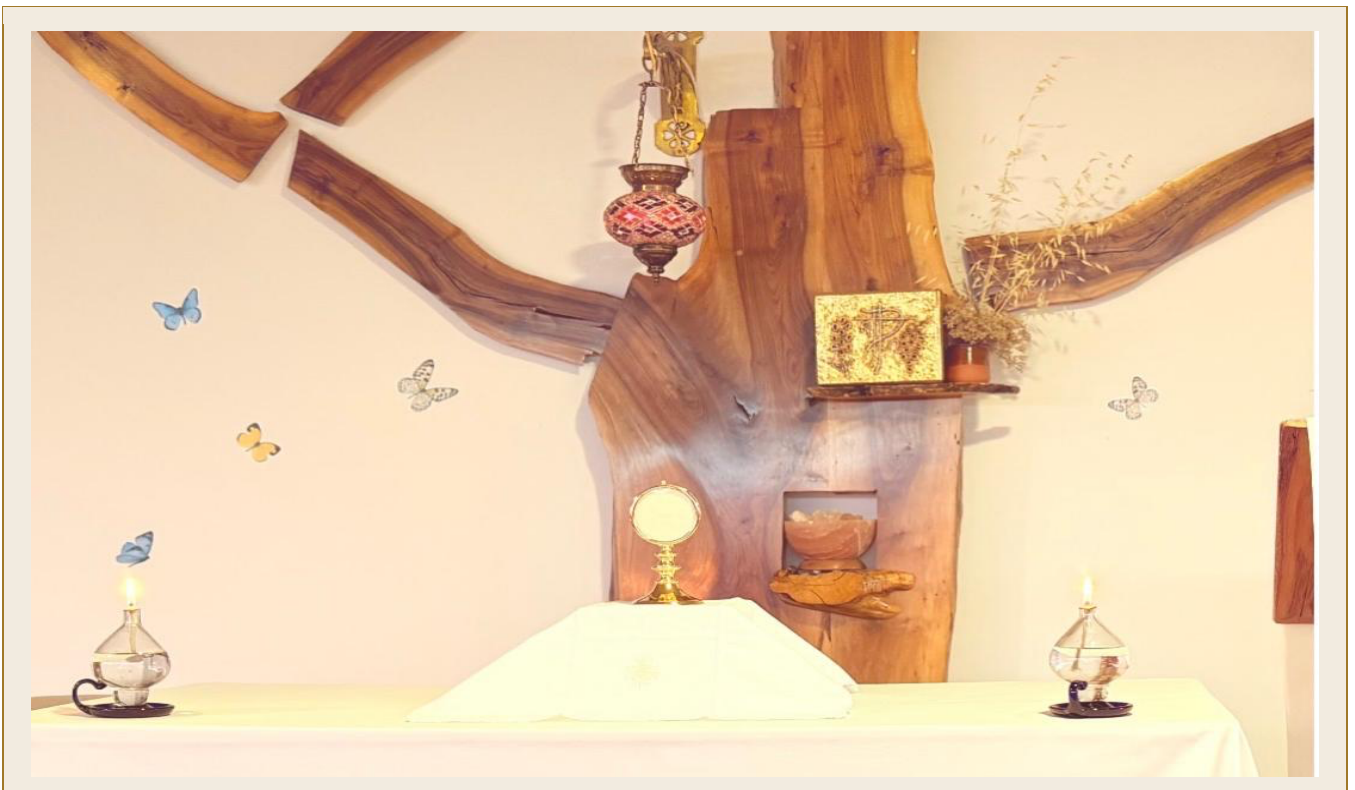
17–23 April 2026 • Spain

“I return to Love”

Day 3 *Sunday 19th April 2026*

Third Sunday of Easter — Did not our hearts burn within us?

A bright morning opened in the presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Before the day made its demands upon us, before the walking and the wonder, there was silence — the silence of adoration, that particular quality of stillness which is not empty but inhabited. In that embrace of silence, we were led into the morning praise of psalms and intercessory prayer, bringing before God the names and needs of our loved ones, those we carry in our hearts across every border.



| *“...He who we know loves us...” — St Teresa of Jesus, Life 8*

The Monastery of the Incarnation — Where Teresa Encountered the Living Christ

Then we set out. Our first destination was the Monastery of the Incarnation, that great Carmelite house on the edge of Ávila where Teresa spent twenty-seven years of her life — years of struggle, of aridity, of gradual transformation, and finally of the most extraordinary mystical graces. To enter the Incarnation is to enter a space that the sixteenth century has never quite vacated. The low ceilings,

the worn stone, the arrangement of the choir — all of it conspires to place you alongside Teresa, not merely behind her.

Here we witnessed, in imagination and in prayer, two of the most significant mystical events of her life: the Transverberation — that piercing of the heart by an angel's flaming dart which she describes in the 'Life' with trembling candour, and which left in her a wound of love she carried for the rest of her days — and the Spiritual Marriage, that final and deepest union of the soul with God which she places in the seventh and innermost mansion of the Interior Castle. These were not events Teresa recounted from a distance. They happened here. In these walls. In this air.



John of the Cross at the Incarnation — Confessor and Companion

John of the Cross was bound to this place by more than history. At Teresa's request and through the reform's growing influence, John served as confessor to the sisters at the Incarnation — a ministry that placed him at the very heart of Teresa's most intense spiritual years. His confessional is still here. To stand at that small grill is to stand at the intersection of two of the greatest mystical minds in the history of the Church, speaking quietly to each other through wood and iron about the things of God.

The visible marks of John's ministry at the Incarnation are multiple: the support he offered the sisters, the spiritual direction he dispensed with such precision, the other pastoral work he carried out in Ávila before his arrest and imprisonment in Toledo. The Incarnation holds the memory of both founders together — not as statues, but as presences whose friendship shaped a movement that continues to form souls to this day.



The Walls, the Font, the House — Tracing Teresa's Beginnings

From the Incarnation we journeyed upward toward the great medieval walls of Ávila, those extraordinary ramparts that seem less like fortifications and more like a crown set upon the head of the meseta. From their height the beauty of the city opened itself to us — the golden stone, the spires, the plain stretching away into the haze.

We came first to the church of San Juan Bautista, where Teresa of Jesus was carried as a newborn and placed in the waters of baptism. A font of water; a name spoken over an infant; a soul claimed for God. We who had contemplated the Transverberation and the Spiritual Marriage now stood at the very beginning — the quiet, unremarkable beginning of a life that would become one of the most luminous in Christian history.

Then to the house of her birth. The place where, on 28 March 1515, Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada first drew breath. We offered thanksgiving here — not as tourists reading a plaque, but as pilgrims who had spent three days in the company of this woman and had begun to understand, in some small way, what the gift of her life has meant for the Church and for the world.



Evening Mass — St Joseph’s Monastery, the First Foundation

In the cool of the evening, the first monastery of the Discalced Reform welcomed us with open arms. St Joseph’s — ‘Las Madres’ — is where it all began. On 24 August 1562, Teresa made her first reformed foundation here, in the teeth of opposition, misunderstanding and institutional resistance, trusting that what God had asked of her, God would sustain.

We celebrated the Eucharist in the primitive chapel, the original space where that founding Mass was celebrated. The walls remember it. We heard Teresa’s own account of that first Eucharist — the four ‘orphans’ who were the founding community, women she described, with characteristically Teresian directness, as ‘great servants of God’. Four souls. An improvised chapel. A vast trust. And God, as always, providing.

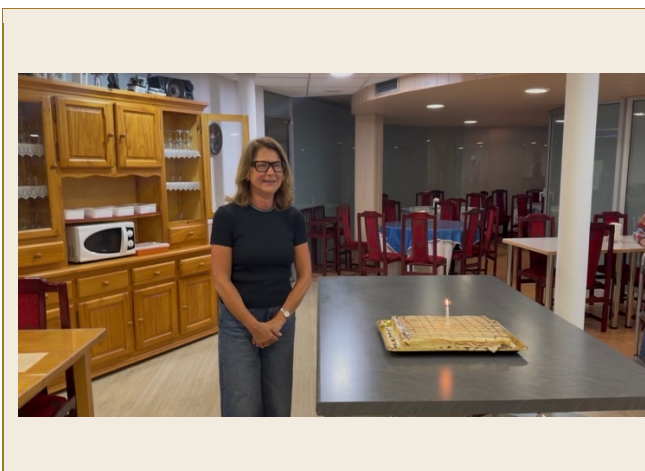


Teresa and the Road to Emmaus

Fr Savariyar, in his homily, offered a luminous reading of Teresa’s life through the lens of the Emmaus story — that Gospel which the Church gives us precisely in this Third Sunday of Easter, the Sunday we were observing.

He aligned Teresa’s early years — her struggles, her half-measures, her years of divided seeking — to the disciples’ downcast walk away from Jerusalem: ‘We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.’ The disappointment of those who had expected God to work differently. The life at the Incarnation, then, became the moment of the unknown companion drawing alongside: the Lord beginning to open the scriptures on the road, the heart beginning to burn, still unrecognised. And Teresa’s work of foundation — the urgent, unstoppable energy of seventeen reformed houses across Spain — became the disciples’ hasty return to Jerusalem, unable to keep to themselves what they had found at the breaking of bread.

“Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” — Luke 24:32



The day ended with the warmth of a shared dinner — and with the delight of a birthday celebration for one of our pilgrims. The festivity that broke out around the table was entirely Teresian: she who

insisted that God is also found in the kitchen, who danced with her sisters and played the tambourine, would have recognised and rejoiced in every moment of it.

