

RETREAT PILGRIMAGE WITH ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

17–23 April 2026 • Spain

“I return to Love”

Day 5 *Tuesday 21st April 2026*

Leave this place and go to the land I will show you

The shining morning welcomed all pilgrims. As Abraham before us had heard the voice — “Leave this place and go to the land that I will show you” — so we too received the summons of the day: to depart from what had become familiar and beloved place in Avila, and set out once more toward what the Lord would reveal. We headed in the direction of Segovia.



Segovia — The Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites

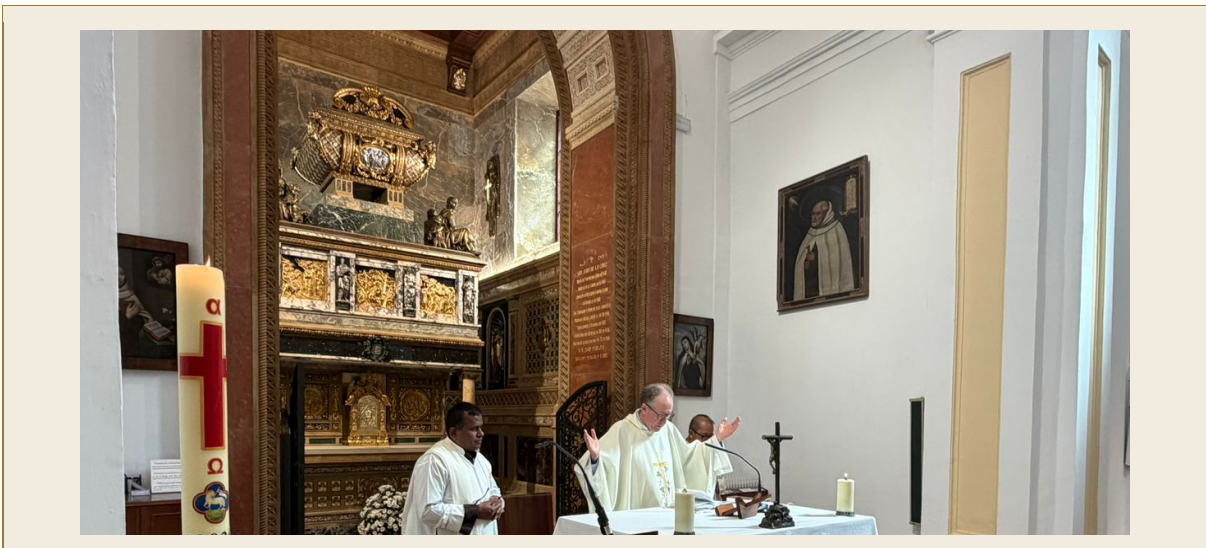
Segovia holds a particular place in the hearts of both Teresa and John. For John, it was the city of his leadership — three years as Prior of the Discalced Carmelite community here, years that proved among the most fruitful of his life. It was in Segovia that he wrote some of his most profound spiritual commentaries, that he loved to take his place among the workmen building his cloister, and that he delighted in hiding himself in the caves on the hillside above the city, losing himself in prayer while gazing out upon the beauty of the countryside and the great Alcázar below.

And it is in Segovia that John rests. His tomb is here. To stand at the tomb of a saint who sang of the “living flame of love” is not merely to visit a historical monument — it is to draw close to a fire that has not gone out.



Holy Mass at the Tomb of St John of the Cross

What a joy — what an extraordinary grace — to celebrate the Eucharist at the very tomb of this great mystic and poet. The community in Segovia, where John served as Prior for three years, still bears the visible marks of his presence: in the architecture of the cloister he helped to build with his own hands, in the spirit of recollection that pervades the chapel, in the continuity of a Carmelite life lived in the same place where he lived it. To celebrate the Eucharist in this space was to touch, however briefly, the world in which John’s mysticism was not theory but daily breath.



Three Unexpected Guests — A Story of Return

At the Eucharist, we were joined by three men — like those who set out from the East in search of Christ, drawn by a light they could not name. It was a delightful story to hear: two had accompanied one of their friends who, after years of ‘estrangement’ from God and from his Church, had just returned home — embracing the Sacrament of Reconciliation and receiving Holy Communion once more. Three men on a pilgrimage of their own, wrapped inside ours.

There is something deeply Carmelite about this kind of hidden grace: the friends who bring the friend; the one who has wandered in the dark and found, at last, that Love had been waiting all along. John himself wrote from a prison cell for those whose interior lives felt like imprisonment. Today, the poem became flesh before our eyes.

“The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union.” — St John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel



A Family from the Far East — and a Word in Mandarin

Among those gathered was a family who had travelled from the Far East — from China — full of delight to find themselves worshipping alongside us at the tomb of this great mystical Doctor. In a gesture of great beauty and fraternity, they presented to the Carmelite community a powerful saying of John of the Cross, written in Mandarin. It was a moment that seemed to fulfil in miniature the vision of the prophet: peoples from every direction drawn to the mountain of the Lord.

And also among us: a family from Portugal, whom we had first encountered in Ávila, who joined us once more in Segovia. The pilgrimage was becoming, quietly, a community — not merely of the original group, but of all those the Lord was drawing in.



On Foot into Segovia — Walking in John’s Steps

After the Eucharist and our visit to the community, we set out on foot through the very path John of the Cross would have taken when he walked down from the monastery into the city below. There is

a particular quality to walking a path a saint has walked: the stone underfoot, the slope of the hill, the widening view of the plain — these become more than geography. They become a kind of companionship.

Segovia received us with all its splendour: the stunning Gothic cathedral rising at the heart of the old city, the extraordinary Roman aqueduct, and the beautiful monastery of the Carmelite nuns whose contemplative life continues what Teresa and John began. We walked as people who had been given, in the Eucharist that morning, the food to sustain the walk.



Toledo — The City of Many Layers

Hearing the call to continue our journey, we set out from Segovia toward Toledo — a city full of history, layered with significance for both Teresa and John. Teresa knew Toledo intimately. It was here that she wrote a version of the book of her life, here that she composed an edition for publication of the ‘Way of Perfection’, and here she began the great work of the ‘Interior Castle’ — the seven mansions of the soul whose chapel gave us our first Mass on Day One of this pilgrimage. Toledo was not merely a city Teresa visited; it was a city that shaped her writing mind.

And for John: Toledo is the city of his imprisonment. Nine months in a cell so narrow he could barely stretch, enduring cold, darkness, humiliation, the lash. And yet it was in that cell — or escaping from it by night — that the greatest mystical poetry in the Spanish language was born. The ‘Spiritual Canticle’, the ‘Dark Night’, — these emerged from the most extreme darkness. Toledo is where John’s doctrine became biography.

“*In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.*” — St John of the Cross



A Warm Arrival — and an Eager Expectation

We settled into the warm embrace of our accommodation in Toledo, tired in the best way — the tiredness that comes from a day full of grace and movement and encounter. Segovia had given us the tomb of John: love completed. Toledo now set before us the prison of John: love in its darkest hour. We waited in eager hope for what the Lord would unfold in this place. As John wrote, perhaps in these very streets: *“I went out unseen, my house being now all stilled.”* We too had gone out. We too were stilled. And we trusted that what emerges from the darkness is always, in God’s hands, more beautiful than what we could have imagined.