

RETREAT PILGRIMAGE WITH ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

17–23 April 2026 • Spain

“I return to Love”

Day 1 Friday *17th April 2026*

Embrace



Ávila claims her pilgrims with an embrace, from the contour of the mountains against a brilliant blue sky. The shock of green trees in parched, dry earth serves as a reminder for us of the miraculous work of God in the soul; how He alone ‘draws us’, to be more fully who He has called us to be.

Grant Oh Lord that we may fully co-operate with your guiding hand this Pilgrimage, you who alone are good.

After the heat and noise of Madrid airport, we took refuge at the accommodation of “The International Teresian-San Juanist Center” (CITES), the University of Mysticism. As we seek out: “...He who we know loves us...” (St Teresa of Jesus, Life 8), it is fitting our base is an educational institution whose sole mission is to form persons in the teachings of our Carmelite founders.

May we, like them, be set aflame with the living flame of love such that we may be fully of service to God and His Holy Church.

Chapel of “Las Moradas” (The Interior Mansions)



We celebrated Holy Mass in the Chapel of “Las Moradas”, meaning ‘Interior Mansions’. This celebrates St Teresa of Jesus’ 1577 masterpiece the ‘Interior Castle’, in which she draws on the metaphor of a crystal castle with seven mansions to describe the soul’s journey in prayer toward union, spiritual marriage with God.

Today’s homily on John 6: the small offering of bread and fish when faced with crowds of hungry people. The Apostle Andrew adds: ‘...but what is that for so many?’ Fr Kelvin OCD reminded us that what is surrendered to God becomes more than enough, ‘a full measure, pressed down and overflowing’ (Luke 6:38). He urged us to abandon all to God and hold nothing back. A Teresian theme: to be generous with God who will not be outdone in generosity.

Evening Talk — Fr Matthew Blake OCD

A talk followed by Father Matthew Blake OCD, in which he directed our hearts to ponder St John of the Cross’s distinctive ‘Crucified Christ’ image. St John’s gift for us given prior to his imprisonment in Toledo. What is unique about this image is the perspective. John has us looking at Jesus through the Cross; this is God the Father’s perspective, the heavenly viewpoint!

Father Blake urged us to remember that God the Father looks at the world through the Son, on the Cross, through that great love — that there is no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. St John of the Cross shows us that this is our way, through the wisdom of the Cross. Christ, his Cross, our crosses — they are a gift to be embraced. Through suffering the Cross, God transforms the little we are, into that which He created us to be. So we small pilgrims co-operate, and rest in peace knowing this God of love most pure, will do the rest.

After a shared evening meal we entered into the silence of night, to rest and ponder all we had been taught on the tender love of God for us. The joyous bird song and cooing of doves were replaced with the hum of cicadas who, clothed in night, seemed to urge us on in our aspiration to ‘return love for love’.

Written by a Secular Discalced Carmelite at the request of Fr Kelvin OCD