

RETREAT PILGRIMAGE WITH ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

17–23 April 2026 • Spain

“I return to Love”

Day 2 *Saturday 18th April 2026*

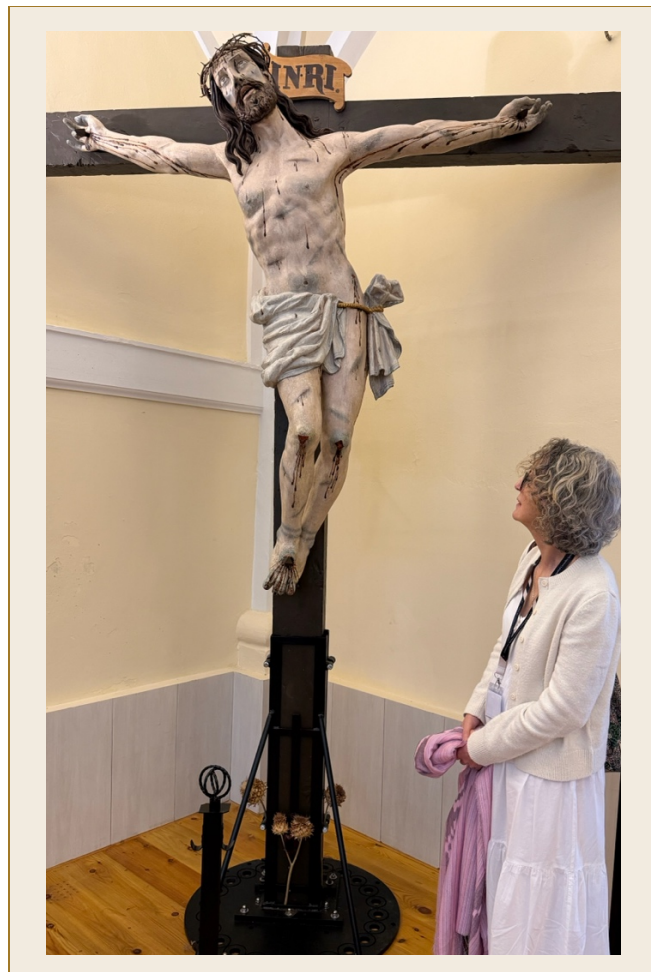
Where have you hidden, Beloved?

A new day begins with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Listening to a recitation of St John of the Cross’s “The Dark Night” poem leads us into silent, meditative prayer spending time with: “...He who we know loves us” (St Teresa of Jesus, Life). St John speaks of how darkness and annihilation of spirit becomes transformative, a “sheer grace” for the soul in the hands of God the Divine artisan. After Morning Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hour we shared breakfast and began our journey to Medina del Campo.



Holy Mass — Foundation of San Jose, Medina del Campo

St Teresa's second Foundation of Discalced Nuns, formed 15 August 1567.



Medina del Campo is where Saint John lived more of his life than anywhere else. His parents Catalina and Gonzales met here at the Medina square trade fairs. John spent his formative years here after his father's death; his mother, a weaver, found work here. Medina is the place of St John's education. His mother, unable to pay for it, was dependent on charitable institutions, firstly a school for orphans and then the Jesuits who gave him a good education.

Here St John encounters the rawness of the human condition. He works in his teen years in a hospital for sexually transmitted illnesses, encountering and caring for the socially excluded, persons living acute holistic suffering. He worked as a nurse and begged on patients' behalf.

We know he chooses the Carmelites, which will have been known as Mary's order. From 1563–1564 he completed his novitiate in Medina. This was where he was formed, and then he went on to Salamanca to complete his studies.

The image of 'lover and beloved' and 'bride and bridegroom' is found frequently in his writings and the tender image too of 'mother and child'. These images will have been implanted in him in Medina. In Medina he sees first hand the marriage of his brother and his wife who have six children together only one of those lives into adulthood. The pain and impact this had on this

sensitive and intelligent young boy along with all the aforementioned experiences forged within him an intimate insight into the relationship between God and the human being.

Seminal Meeting of Hearts

The most important event of St John's life was meeting St Teresa of Jesus in 1567 in Medina del Campo. At the time of their meeting St Teresa is making her first foundation outside of Avila in Medina, she has permission from Rome to found as many communities as she can including two communities of friars. However, she has no friars and no money to do this!

St John is now ordained and back in Medina, to celebrate his first Mass in his hometown and he is brought to see St Teresa of Jesus. Before their meeting he has made the decision to leave the Carmelites to go to the Carthusians, we do not know why. We know he was drawn to a different kind of life in his time in Salamanca as he was introduced to her by a third party as someone who lives in a devote manner.



In the parlour of this dilapidated run down foundation house in Medina; St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross meet for the first time. San Jose Foundation II, the actual parlour St Teresa and John met.

We only have what St Teresa of Jesus tells us of this meeting, in the book of her Foundations:

"Shortly afterward, a young friar who was studying in Salamanca happened to arrive there, and he was accompanied by another man, who told me wonderful things about the life this friar was leading. His name is Friar John of the Cross. I praised our Lord, and speaking with him, I was greatly pleased, and I learned from him how he also wished to join the Carthusians. I told him what I intended and earnestly begged him to wait until the Lord gave us a monastery, and how much better it would be, if things were to improve, to be in His own Order, and how much more It would serve the Lord. He gave me his word to do so..." (St Teresa of Jesus, Foundations, 3).

St Teresa helps him understand what is happening within him and opens up the possibility of him staying in the Carmelite Order in her reform. This is what he was born for. He agrees to join her reform and places one condition, that he does not have to wait too long.

This urgency is characteristic of someone called by God. Within the year she has completed her foundation in Medina, another and is on her way to a foundation in Valladolid. He spends time there with her and her sisters learning from them. He then continues onwards to walk with her and

becomes our founding father along with St Teresa our Foundress.



His writings were completed in other locations, but this underscores how important Medina was to him — the John who we now know was formed here. Teresa wanted continuity of the Carmelite spirit across her foundations. That this Teresian spirit could travel — she had no way of knowing this until Foundation II happened. It set a precedent.

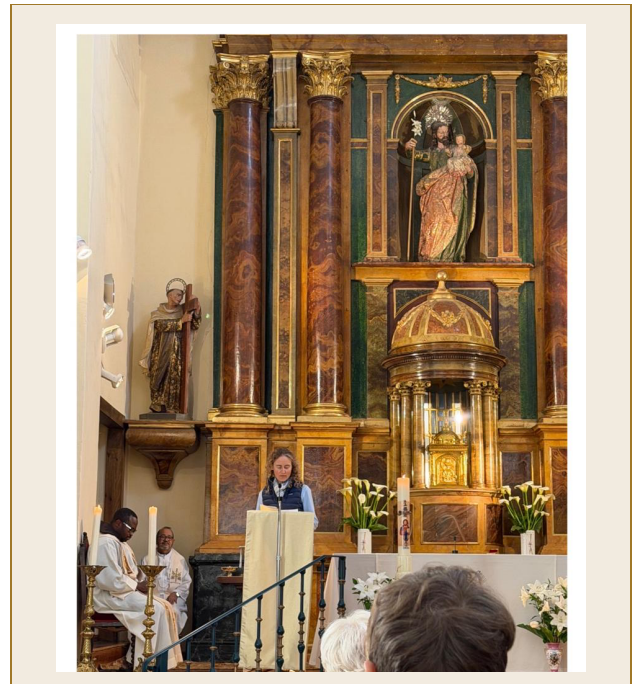
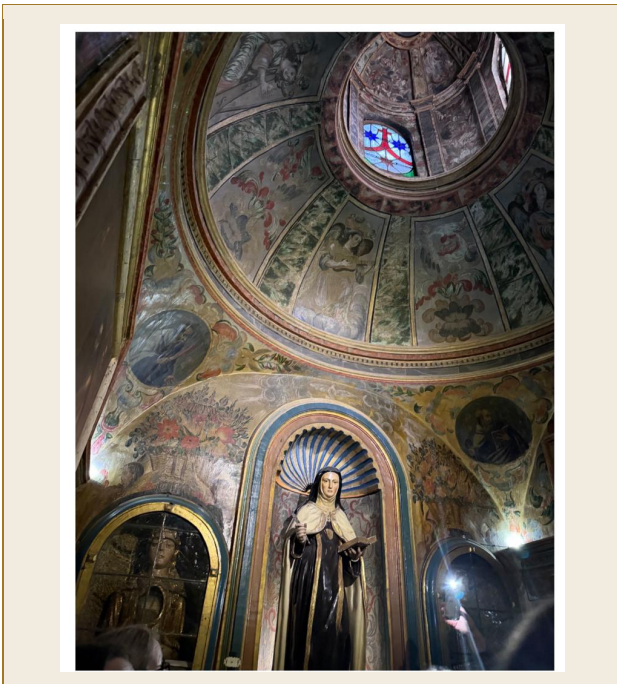
Saint Teresa was brave, adventurous and decisive. She began an unponderable adventure. Things were not easy for her. She was often misunderstood. Today she is co-patroness of Medina but on her first arrival she received a very poor welcome. There were already 18 functioning convents in the city in 1566 and many were hostile to her, doing everything possible to stop her making the reform foundation. She was so determined she took dilapidated houses and transformed them into a convent.

Teresa arrived at Medina at midnight with two sisters, a novice and a chaplain; after a few hours of work, Mass was celebrated. The foundational Mass was between 5–6am that morning. St Teresa took these steps and then passed all into God's hands with trust. Presently there are 19 nuns in residence at the Medina convent. There has never been a shortage of vocations in this house.



San Jose, Foundation II, Medina

The church of San Jose, Medina, where we celebrated Mass was built after St Teresa's time, in 1596. The original foundation chapel space can be seen: notice the grills of the original foundation hung on the walls. Here we see the original location of the primitive chapel where St Teresa celebrated the Medina founding Mass. We visited the museum which displayed an array of Carmelite treasures including primary relics of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Jesus. We also visited the original cells of the nuns in Medina, and encountered Teresa's own cell — transformed and hand-painted with ornate designs in celebration of the centenary, 100 years after her death in 1682. The size and floor are original but it is now adorned with hand-painted flowers, angels, birds, reliquaries and art. No-one other than the cloistered nuns could enter here until 2015 when it was opened to the public. We discovered that St Teresa wrote her writings whilst sitting on the stone floor of her cell, using a plank of wood for some warmth.

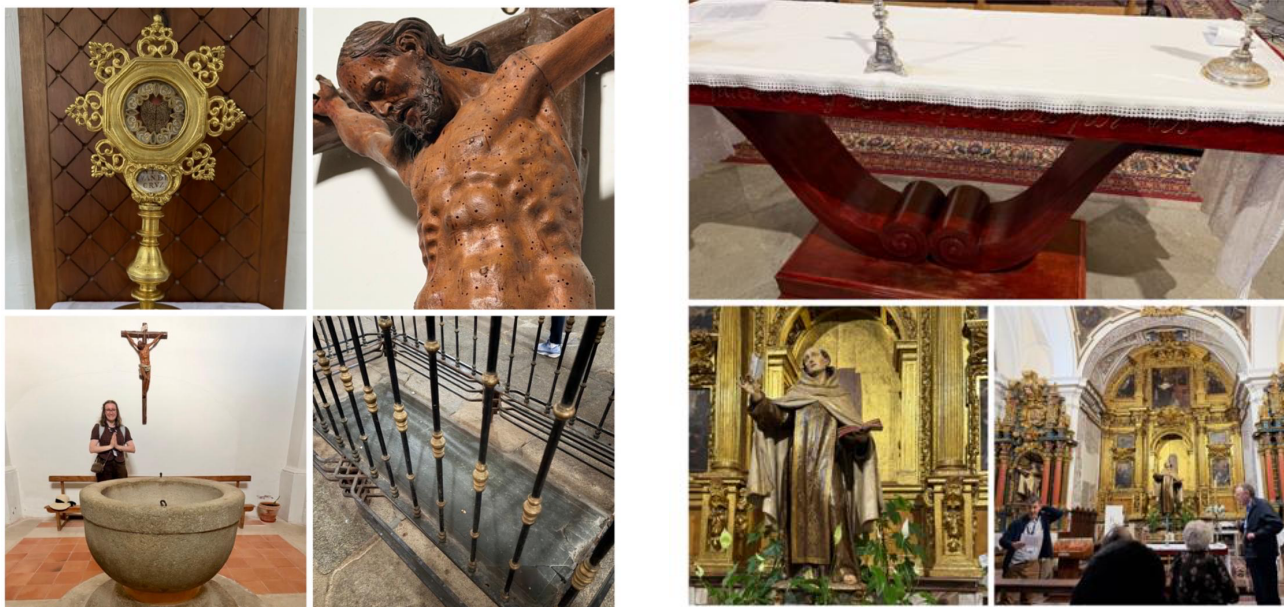


Fontiveros, Birthplace of John of the Cross



A short drive brings us to Fontiveros St John's place of birth. We visit the Church of St John of the Cross' birthplace. The altar, marks the place of St John's actual birth, Fontiveros We also visited the Parish Church of San Cipriano. Juan de Yepes was baptised at the Baptismal side

Chapel here on June 24, 1542. A grate on the floor shows us the place where Gonzalo and Luis de Yepes, father and brother, respectively, of San Juan de la Cruz, are buried. They died in 1543 and 1545. We conclude today's abundant blessings with Evening Prayer of the Divine Office and sharing an evening meal.



Returning to today's theme a phrase from St John of the Cross poem the Spiritual Canticle; 'Where have you hidden beloved?' It speaks of a heart wounded by love of Christ. A wound that nothing except seeing His face satiates and leaves the lover searching, seeking audaciously Christ alone. Grant Oh Lord that we may seek only you. Cauterise that which takes us from you. For in truth, it is us that takes ourselves from tending to you with many distractions and much noise. As the evening fades, re-centre us on the truth. That you alone suffice. Let us seek no other face but yours

Having walked where this Great Saint and true friend of Christ walked, we refreshed ourselves sharing Spanish Tapas al fresco at Restaurante Gloria overlooking Medina del Campo Square. Leaving, we are left inspired to follow her in striving to be Christ's good and true friends.

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