

Saint John of the Cross



- Feastday: December 14
- Patron Saint of: Contemplatives, mystics and Spanish poets
- Birth: 1542
- Death: December 14, 1591
- Canonized: on December 27, 1726 by Pope Benedict XIII

"Strive to preserve your heart in peace; let no event of this world disturb it."

"It is best to learn to silence the faculties and to cause them to be still so that God may speak."

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Saint John of the Cross was born in Spain into a very poor family. From a young age, he resolved to follow a religious vocation. In 1563, he was able to join the Carmelite Order and later became a priest in 1567. He was not satisfied with the lenient Carmelite order of the time and considered leaving to join the Carthusians. However, he met Saint Teresa of Avila, who was reforming the Carmelite sisters. She encouraged him to stay with the Carmelites and join her effort to reform the order from within. He took her advice, changing his name to John of the Cross.

Around 1575, the rift within the Carmelite order began to grow and create controversy between various monastic houses. There was disagreement between the Calced (the more traditional Carmelite order) and the Discalced (the Reformed order) Carmelites. In 1577, John was kidnapped in Avila by a group of Calced Carmelites. He was taken by force to the order's main house in Toledo. He was brought before a court and placed on trial for disobedience. He was punished by imprisonment.

A cell was made for him in the monastery that was so small he could barely lie on the floor. He was fed only bread and water, and occasional scraps of salt fish. Each week he was taken into public and lashed, then returned to his cell. His only luxuries were a prayer

book and an oil lamp to read it by. To pass the time he wrote poems. After nine months, John managed to pry his cell door from its hinges. Using a rope made of blanket strips, he made his escape with his poetry in hand. After recovering in the hospital for 6 weeks, he was sent to the town of Baeza to be rector of a new college and to support the Discalced Carmelites in Andalusia. During the last few years of his life, John traveled and established communities of Discalced Carmelites across Spain. In 1591, he became ill with a skin condition that resulted in an infection and fever that ultimately ended his life.