

BRINGING THE CARMELITE SAINTS ALIVE

SIXTEENTH EDITION 2025



IN THIS MONTH OF JULY, WE WILL BE HIGHLIGHTING
“BLESSED TERESA OF SAINT AUGUSTINE AND COMPANIONS” (CARMELITE MARTYRS OF COMPIEGNE)
WHOSE FEAST DAY IS JULY 17TH



📷 “The Martyrs of Compiègne,” St. Teresa Convent, Palma, Spain (photo: Public Domain)

“PERMISSION TO DIE, MOTHER?”

THE TIME HAD COME. NODDING, MOTHER OPENED HER PALM AND REVEALED A TINY CLAY
STATUE OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

“YES, GO MY DAUGHTER!”

On July 17 we commemorate Madam Lidoine, prioress of the Carmel of Compiègne (Blessed Mother Teresa of St. Augustine and Companions), and the 15 other Blessed Carmelite martyrs of Compiègne who were executed on July 17, 1794 during the French Revolution.

The Sisters had refused to comply with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, a law passed in 1790, which subordinated the Catholic Church to the revolutionary government, confiscated all Church land and banned religious orders. The Carmelites of Compiègne resisted the suppression of their monastery and so were arrested in June 1794 and imprisoned at the former Visitation convent of Compiègne, where they offered themselves daily for the peace of France and the Church. On July 17th they were tried in Paris, convicted of treason and sentenced to death by guillotine. Providentially, they were wearing their outlawed religious habits, since their own secular clothes were being washed on the day of the trial.

The community sang as they were loaded into tumbrels – the open carts used during executions – and paraded for three hours through the streets of Paris to the guillotine. Their song included the Miserere, the Office of the Readings, the Salve Regina, and the Office of the Dead for all those who had gone before them. The silence of the spectators, it was noted, was unprecedented, perhaps inspired by the beauty of the song heard, as well as the joy on the nuns' faces, reminders of days not so long ago when God had been loved and worshipped in their country in peace. Could the same ever be true again?

On reaching the place of execution, Blessed Teresa intoned the Te Deum, and the Veni Creator Spiritus. Then all of the sisters renewed their vows. Blessed Teresa inclined her ear toward the youngest in the community, 29-year-old Constance, whom Mother had allowed to make her Final Profession of Vows. After the vows were complete, Constance approached and knelt at Mother's feet according to the Carmelite custom of obedience to God through one's superior. "Permission to die, Mother?" The time had come. Nodding Mother opened her palm and revealed a tiny clay statue of the Virgin Mary. "Yes, go my Daughter!" Gently kissing Mary's image, Constance then stood, turned to the guillotine, and startled everyone as she burst into praise of God, singing Psalm 117 – Laudate Dominum Omnes Gentes.

"O praise the Lord, all you nations; acclaim him all you peoples. Strong is his love for us; he is faithful forever." As she waved aside the assistance of the executioner and his valet and strode like a champion to the top of the scaffold steps and placed her face against the horizontal wooden plank as she continued to sing, "His mercy endures forever!" This was taken up by all the sisters, who continued to sing, with diminishing voices, until all had died. Usually, executions were accompanied by shouting and cheers but there was only silence.

Many believe that the sacrifice of Blessed Teresa of St. Augustine and her community brought about the end of the 'Reign of Terror', which happened just ten days later on July 24th, 1794. Their story has captured the popular imagination, inspiring a novella by Gertrud von le Fort, a play by Georges Bernanos and an Opera by Francis Poulenc. They were beautified by Pope St. Pius X on May 27th, 1906.

There is a British connection with the Compiègne Martyrs. The English Benedictine community of Cambrai were ejected from their monastery in 1792 and imprisoned at Compiègne. From June 1794, the Carmelites joined them, although they were detained separately. The

Benedictine community testified to the holiness of the Compiegne sisters and believed that the Carmelites' martyrdom saved their lives.

OUR CARMELITE MISSION

MAY WE EMBRACE MARY'S PURITY OF HEART (PURITAS CORDIAS), AS SHE HELPS US TO PONDER THE LAW OF THE LORD DAY AND NIGHT ASSISTING US TO BE CONTEMPLATIVES AND TEACHING US TO LISTEN. AS WE WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHER AND LEADER ST. ELIJAH; WITH HIS FLAMING ZEAL AND COURAGE WHICH ALLOWED HIM TO COMBAT THE EVILS OF HIS DAY. MAY WE PRAY THAT HIS PROPHETIC SPIRIT BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR CARMELITE LIFE."

MAY OUR LADY'S MANTLE WRAP YOU ALL WITH HER PRECIOUS LOVE. ALL THROUGH THE IMMACULATE & SORROWFUL HEART & TEARS OF MARY, ALL THROUGH THE PURE AND CHASTE HEART OF ST. JOSEPH, ALL IN UNION WITH THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS.

YOUR SISTER IN CARMEL,

LINDA

