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## **Anne of Saint Bartholomew: 400th Anniversary**

On the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the death of Blessed Anne of Saint  
Bartholomew (1626–2026)

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**To the whole Order: friars, nuns and lay Carmelites**

Dear brothers and sisters:

On Sunday 7 June 2026, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi in many countries, the Church will commemorate that four centuries ago, in Antwerp, Anne of Saint Bartholomew gave up her spirit to the Holy Trinity, having asked to ‘die without making a sound’. Four hundred years later, that same desire for obscurity – so characteristic of her simplicity – has not prevented her from continuing to radiate light throughout Carmel and the whole Church. On the contrary: it is precisely that silent humility that makes her such an eloquent witness for our times.

I have chosen to address you with this letter not merely as one fulfilling an institutional duty, but moved by the sincere hope that this centenary may be a true grace for the Order. In recent months I have had the opportunity to read and listen to various people who have dedicated their lives to the study of our Blessed. Among them, I wish to share with you two contributions that I have found particularly lucid and complementary. On the one hand, my brother, Father Julen Urkiza, whose historical scholarship has for decades illuminated the history of the Order and the figure of Anne with rigour and devotion. The other, a young historian, Mercedes Jáuregui, who wrote me a long letter a few weeks ago. In her words I found not only erudition, but something even more valuable: a new, fresh and deeply affectionate perspective on our Blessed. To her I owe some of the most beautiful insights that I now wish to share with you.

### **I. A memory in need of renewal**

Over the centuries, Blessed Anne of St. Bartholomew has suffered the same fate as many great figures: she has sometimes been used as a battleground rather than a meeting point. In the Order’s recent historiography, interpretations of her have oscillated between two extremes. Some have presented her as the exclusive heir and sole interpreter of the Teresian charism, the most legitimate custodian of the spirit

of our Foundress. Others, reacting against this excess, have reduced her to a secondary role, or have judged her almost exclusively on the basis of her position in the constitutional conflicts of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Both positions, in their own way, have done a disservice to her memory. The first, because it has constructed a rigid image of Anne, turning her into a standard-bearer for one of the opposing sides. The second, because it has obscured the richness of her witness, thereby impoverishing the charismatic heritage of the entire Order.

But there is something more serious: that image which has reached many of us – that of an Anne of Saint Bartholomew associated with an ascetic and traditional spirituality, with obedience understood as mere submission, with a staunch defence of structural unity – is only a partial reading. It is not false, but it is incomplete. And what is presented incompletely ends up distorting the truth.

As Mercedes rightly wrote to me, “that perceived image is not Anne of Saint Bartholomew, but a partial interpretation based on certain traits of hers, yet one that leaves others in the shadows – traits which, paradoxically, would be in tune with that more contemporary sensibility”. That is why this centenary invites us to an urgent task: to let the Blessed speak to us through her writings and her entire life, not through the projections we have placed upon her. It is not a matter of inventing a new Anne, but of rediscovering the true one.

## **II. The unity that really matters: that of love, not that of uniformity.**

Father Julen has rightly emphasised that Anne of Saint Bartholomew passionately defended the unity of the Teresian Carmel. This point is very important. In times of division – such as the years of the constitutional conflict between 1585 and 1592, and later in Flanders – Anne championed structural cohesion, obedience to common rules and fidelity to the hierarchy. She did not do so out of convenience, but out of a deep love for the legacy she had received from Teresa.

But here a clarification is needed that I believe is crucial. The unity that Ana defended was not a unity imposed from above, the result of a cold uniformity. It was a unity woven from love, from charity lived out in daily life. As she herself wrote, and as Father Urkiza has documented extensively, her defense of unity sprang from her mystical experience: from that living presence of Christ who dwelt within her and whom she saw reflected in Teresa and in every sister.

Anne did not defend unity because she was a woman of blind obedience, but because she deeply loved what she believed unity protected, namely, the charisma, the fraternity, the heritage received. That is the distinction that changes everything.

And this, dear brothers and sisters, is astonishingly relevant to our own times. Outwardly, in a culture that has made the individual the sole horizon of meaning and has lost the capacity to build community without dissolving difference, Anne’s proposal – a unity woven from love and not from uniformity – is more subversive and more necessary than ever. Inwardly, in an Order that still bears wounds not yet fully healed, her figure can be a meeting point rather than a battlefield. Anne was a woman of the frontier, of

charismatic expansion, who lived through wars and difficult tensions without breaking her spirit. And she achieved this because she cultivated fraternal love on every ground she trod.

### **III. Delicacy and sensitivity: the forgotten glue of her holiness.**

There is an aspect of Anne of St. Bartholomew that rarely appears in biographies or popular accounts, and yet is fundamental. It's about her delicacy and sensitivity. I am not referring to a personality trait or temperament, but to something deeper: the thread that underpins and gives coherence to everything else. Without delicacy and sensitivity, her defense of unity would have become an imposed uniformity, and her service a mere functionality or, worse still, submission.

Anne was extraordinarily sensitive, both spiritually and in her dealings with others. One need only read her writings to realise with what detail and delicacy she speaks of her companions, how she understood human psychology, how she knew the right balance of discipline and love with which to treat her novices. She was delicate with her words, meditating at length on what to say and how to say it. When it fell to her to serve a sick sister, she devoted herself as if that sister were her whole world, Christ himself. She kept the bed clean, kept vigil all night if necessary, and anticipated needs. Sometimes just a brief glance and a smile were enough. At other times, she had to accompany the sister through the darkness. But she did both with the same delicacy.

Her vast body of correspondence is perhaps where this sensitivity is best revealed. The way she addressed her sisters and disciples, the tone she adopted depending on the recipient, her attention to the specific details of each person, her memory for particular matters... all this speaks of someone who understood communication as an act of care.

Mercedes reminded me of something neither of us will ever forget. She was present when I phoned a sick sister, María Ángeles, who was convalescing in a hospital in Seville. I offered only a few words of comfort in her final moments. On many occasions I have sent a blessing to brothers and sisters who are about to depart. Mercedes told me that this gesture had struck her as “a great gesture of fraternity, charity and love”, and she added: “That is the thoughtfulness that Teresa recognised as the truest mark of love, and which St John of the Cross practised throughout his life”. On reading this, I realised that what she was doing was thanking me and, at the same time, holding up the mirror of Anne to me: delicacy made part of daily life.

Anne of St. Bartholomew was a revolutionary of sensitivity, delicacy and tenderness. Yes, a revolutionary. Because the world pushes us in the opposite direction: to see sensitivity as a weakness, to think it makes us vulnerable, to force us to distance ourselves in order to survive. But Anne made her tenderness her strength. She went against the grain of her own historical era and of ours as well. Today we are increasingly ‘connected’, yet we are becoming less and less sensitive to others. Perhaps we should once again be radical in our sensitivity, protecting ourselves from others with a wall of love rather than coldness. Let the first thing they see of us be our open arms.

#### **IV. Service and simplicity: the power of the small.**

Anne's vocation of service is the best known, but also the one most easily misunderstood. We know that it was by no means a resigned service. Anne professed as a lay sister, occupied the most invisible and quietest place in the community, and yet was extraordinarily valued by her prioresses. Mary of St Jerome, her novice mistress, was able to see in her something that is not always easy to see in one who serves quietly: an inner life of exceptional richness.

What is extraordinary about Anne is that she never abandoned this attitude of service, not even when the black veil was imposed upon her and she ended up becoming a prioress and founder. Anne held the lowest and the highest office in a community, and in both she did so with the same attitude of service. That, brothers and sisters, is evangelical freedom. That is what Teresa called 'walking in truth'.

At a time when even within consecrated life there is a temptation to measure worth by visibility and prestige – positions, publications, projects, cultural initiatives – Anne embodies a profoundly Teresian and Christological way of being: that of one who builds the Kingdom from the lowest place, without anyone's need to know. Her life is a corrective to any form of spiritual clericalism.

But it is worth adding something that is often forgotten. Anne was by no means an uneducated woman. The most recent research suggests that her writings and poetry reflect a refined and selective knowledge of certain fields, especially patristic texts. Her late learning to write – one of the most frequently repeated features in her traditional hagiography – is only partially true. The image of the illiterate laywoman who learns to write through an almost miraculous intervention is more a hagiographic trope than documented reality. Anne chose to project simplicity, because she understood that simplicity was the language closest to the Gospel. She did not hide her knowledge merely because of the pressures of the times, but because she had understood that knowledge placed at the service of the ego is poisonous, and that which is placed at the service of love is charity.

#### **V. The living presence of Christ: the heart of her spirituality.**

Father Julen has reminded us, with a wealth of documentary evidence, of something central to Ana de San Bartolomé: her experience of the living presence of Christ. This is the core of her spiritual life, of her whole life.

From her childhood, Jesus made himself present to her and brought her joy. Her desire was that He might look upon her and never take his eyes off her. And in Teresa's company, what gave her the greatest satisfaction was precisely that living presence of Christ which she felt when she looked upon the Foundress. That is why, at the hour of Teresa's death, she was concerned about how she would continue to experience that presence of the living Christ.

It is important to emphasise that Anne does not merely live 'in' the presence of God, but lives 'the' presence of God. She lives Christ as Emmanuel, the God-with-us whom the New Testament has revealed to us. This presence is not something static, but dynamic, communicative, existential. It is a free gift of grace, but also a reality which she faithfully guards.

And from this presence springs everything else. From it springs her thirst for souls, her zeal for the Church, her desire that all may know God. From it also springs her capacity to suffer for love. As she wrote in her verses: “Love seeks the cross / to fulfil its desires, / which are strong and sincere / and hungry for the cross”. For Anne, the cross was not an end in itself, but the supreme expression of love. On the cross, Christ bestowed his kiss upon the Church, his bride. In the bridal chamber of the cross, he celebrated his wedding of blood for the souls.

This Christ-centered spirituality, lived so intensely by Anne, also had a notable influence on those around her. Consider Pierre de Bérulle, the future cardinal. His correspondence with Anne had a considerable influence on his spiritual life, his doctrine, the foundation of the Oratory of Jesus and, indirectly, on the French Catholic restoration of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As Jean Dagens acknowledged, Anne “deserves a place in the history of the Catholic restoration of France that historians have not yet granted her”. This centenary may also be an opportunity for the Order to rediscover the historical significance of this woman who, from her apparent smallness, transformed the world around her.

## **VI. Practical advice for the centenary.**

Allow me, at the end of this letter, and following the suggestions that reached me with such intelligence and affection, to propose some practical ideas for making the most of this centenary.

Firstly, let us be mindful of the images we use. For a long time, portraits of Anne in her old age have been shown almost exclusively. They are beautiful and tender, but they have been associated with a traditional narrative that has fixed an image that is perhaps too rigid. The Order possesses other equally beautiful portraits – the one preserved in Segovia, where she appears young and with a rounded face; engravings showing her as a peasant or as a disciple of Teresa – which can help us discover other facets of her personality.

Secondly, let us emphasise her friendships and bonds, not just her rivalries. Anne had wonderful relationships with Teresa de Cepeda (Teresita), with Mary of St Jerome, with her novices in Pontoise, Tours and Antwerp, with Anne of the Ascension, with Father Gracián, with Thomas of Jesus, and with the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia. Her manner was extraordinarily friendly and cheerful, and this drew others to her and forged very strong friendships.

Thirdly, let us make a careful selection from her writings. Not just the most frequently quoted phrases on obedience and humility – important, but already closely associated with a rigid image – but those that reveal her more approachable side, her tenderness, her emotional depth. Short, direct phrases that can be presented on a card or in an image for social media, and that speak to someone today without needing much context.

Fourthly, let us stop presenting her exclusively as Saint Teresa’s “companion and nurse”. It is true, and it is central to her life, but she experienced much more after the Saint’s death. Her spiritual depth had a character of its own. She represented a charismatic development, not merely a mirror of Teresa. We are only just beginning to see this.

Fifthly, I encourage all of you – friars, nuns and laypeople – to get involved in spreading awareness of her figure. Manual or digital work – posters, social media materials, small study groups – is an opportunity to ‘sow’ something of Anne in different settings, however small. Let us not underestimate the power of delegating a great task to a diverse group, for they in turn will act as agents of personal outreach within their own communities.

Finally, I wish to tell you that the Association of Friends of Anne of Saint Bartholomew has carried out commendable work for decades, keeping her memory alive when others had cast it aside. On behalf of the entire Order my deepest gratitude goes out to them. We must all together rekindle the rich memory of Anne of St. Bartholomew, just as we do with Anne of Jesus and other important figures from the early days and throughout our history. This centenary is the perfect occasion to continue nurturing the Teresian heritage and, through our lives, to make it authentic, deepening the living fire that continues to burn today and which captivated Teresa and Anne of St. Bartholomew.

### **Conclusion**

I conclude, dear family of the Teresian Carmel, with a personal confession. When Mercedes wrote that letter to me, it brought to mind the face of María Ángeles, our sister from the Carmelites of Seville. Sometimes, all a sister needs is for someone to pause, for someone to look at her with tenderness, to listen deeply, for someone to remind her that she is not alone. As the Pope told us, the Superiors General (USG), in the Synod Hall on 26 November 2025, presence is essential, as is prolonged and patient listening, and a profound exchange of ideas and feelings; returning to the essential, to the burning heart of God, so that the bonds between us may be transfigured into sacred ties, into channels of grace; discovering and passing on the mysticism of living together.

Anne of Saint Bartholomew did this throughout her life. She served, accompanied, cared for others, wrote letters, watched over the sick, anticipated needs, looked upon others with tenderness, corrected with delicacy, defended unity without imposing it, and loved Christ in every sister. She was not perfect. She had her conflicts, her doubts, her dark nights. But she never stopped loving. That is why she is a saint. That is why she is blessed. That is why she remains a living figure for us.

May this centenary, which we celebrate on Corpus Christi Sunday, help us to rediscover her. May her witness challenge us. May her gentleness teach us how to treat our brothers and sisters. May her unity born of love heal the wounds we still bear. And may her living presence of Christ remind us that, as she used to say, to turn away from God’s presence is like taking fish out of water: it is our element, it is our life.

Saint Teresa taught us that God walks among the pots and pans. Anne of Saint Bartholomew shows us that, among these, one can live the highest mysticism. May we, four centuries later, know how to learn from her.

On the feast of Corpus Christi, I ask you to cherish and nurture the communion, gratitude and unity that Anne of St. Bartholomew passed on to us, in the spirit of our mother Teresa of Jesus and our father and brother John of the Cross.

From Antwerp, with joy and gratitude, my blessing and fraternal affection to all,

Antwerp (Belgium)

7 June 2026



*Miguel Márquez, O.C.D. Gen.*

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