

Lives  
of  
Saints

# St John of the Cross

1542 - 1591

Feastday: 14th December



“Where there  
is no love, put  
love — and  
you will find  
love.”

*St John of the Cross*



www.sdcm.uk

I was born at Hontoveros, Old Castile in 1542. From my earliest years I knew the hardships of life. My father, was originally of a good family but he was disinherited because he married below his rank. When he died, my mother could scarcely provide the bare necessities. I went to the poor school, where I was an attentive and diligent pupil. The governor of the hospital of Medina later took me into his service, and for seven years I worked with the poorest of the poor, while frequenting a Jesuit school.

I received the Carmelite habit in 1563. I was sent to Salamanca for the higher studies, and was ordained priest in 1567. After my ordination, I made the acquaintance of Teresa of Avila, who had come to Medina to found a convent of nuns. She asked me to assist her in the establishment of a monastery of friars carrying out the primitive Carmelite rule. I agreed. I helped her found monasteries around Spain and took an active part in their government.

At one stage, I was ordered by my provincial to return to the house of my profession in Medina. I refused, since I had the permission of the Apostolic delegate do continue with what I was doing. In December 1577, however, I was carried off to Toledo as a prisoner. Here I suffered close imprisonment for more than nine months. In the midst of my sufferings I was visited with heavenly consolations, and some of my poetry dates from that period. I escaped in August, 1578.

My poetry and my studies on the growth of the soul, especially The Spiritual Canticle and Dark Night of the Soul, are considered the summit of mystical Spanish literature and of Spanish literature in general.

I died in 1591, was canonized in 1726, and was promoted to Doctor of the Church in 1926.