

Saint Teresa Jornet y Ibars
(Teresa of Jesus)

born 9 May 1843, Aytona, Catalonia, Spain
died 26 August 1897, Liria, Valencia, Spain

The patron saint of senior citizens and retired people was twenty-five years old when she decided to devote herself to the destitute elderly. This was not Teresa Jornet's original plan for her life.

She had been preparing to take final vows as a Poor Clare when the Spanish government suppressed all convents and Teresa was forced to return home, feeling God had rejected her. For several years, all Teresa could do was pray: "*Lord, what do you want me to do?*" She got her answer when she met Saturino López Novoa, a priest who was working with destitute old people. Teresa knew immediately that this was why God had called her away from the Poor Clares. She opened a shelter with Saturino and formed the community known today as the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Poor. There was never a shortage of elderly poor, and so Teresa expanded into nine other cities. In Valencia the first person the sisters welcomed was a ninety-nine-year-old quadriplegic. Teresa continued this work even while Spain was torn by revolution. When Valencia was bombed, almost everyone fled the city, but Teresa and the Little Sisters remained with their old ones. By the time Teresa died at the age of fifty-four, she had established more than one hundred shelters in Spain. Today the Little Sisters have more than two hundred houses in Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

Theresa's canonization process was begun in 1945 and she was declared a saint twenty-six years later. This unusually quick process testifies to the wide-spread reverence in which she was held. In 2004, Pope John Paul II blessed a statue of Teresa that has been placed in a niche at St. Peter's Basilica.

The Genius of Teresa Jornet y Ibars:

Teresa is remembered for her commitment to the destitute elderly and for her acceptance of the will of Providence.

Reflection:

"Stand up in the presence of the aged, and show respect for the old: thus shall you fear your God."

Leviticus 19.32