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Entry Nr. 017 Chicaba

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Text of Account:

English translation –

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“[Exemplary Life of the Venerable Mother Sor Teresa Juliana de Santo Domingo]

Chapter I

Authors of the lives and deeds of heroes exert little effort and face even less difficulty finding out parents, country, family members, and other relatives of their subjects. But in the present case, our pen does not flow so easily. The unknown character of her native land and the remoteness of that region make information about her scarce. Had it not been for Mother Teresa herself, who supplied these details, they would have remained completely concealed from us.

After the passing of those who brought her in the ship, as well as the Marquis of Mancera and his wife, all their servants and the rest of their family, Teresa's land of origin and parents would have been forgotten. Only the color of her face would be left to trace her back to her native land. She was born in Guinea in 1676, according to the closest estimate. We do not know the day this fortunate creature saw the light of life. We know, though, that she was chosen among thousands by the Powerful Hand and for the glory of Divine Providence.

Guinea is one of the most extensive and vast provinces contained in the huge confines of Africa. It is divided into several kingdoms, each one governing itself independently. The Lower Mina off the Gold Coast [*La Mina Baja del Oro*] is among the most important ones. That was where this happy girl was born to a most illustrious family. Her parents were reigning princes. Their scepter ruled all that land in peaceful dominion. Time erased her father's name from her memory. She only remembered the shape of his body and the features of his face: *My father was-- she says in the account [relación] this venerable woman made of her origins-- a man of large and broad body, and with very thick eyebrows.** Her mother was called Abar and was as important as her father in lineage and nobility. The venerable mother had three brothers, all of them older than she: one was called Juachipiter, Ensú was the second, Joachin, the third one. They all preceded this outstanding woman in birth. When she was born, they called her Chicaba in their language. This princess was born to be a joy to her parents and brothers and a consolation to the entire kingdom. Either because she was a girl or because she was the youngest, all care was lavished on her as if she were a precious jewel.

All the inhabitants of *Guinea* are of a dark, black color, as we frequently observe of those who come to our countries or read from histories of the greatest authority. Because such is the color with which wise nature painted all those from that region, parents and brothers and the girl herself could not help being adorned in the same fashion. However dark was their complexion, even darker was their situation. In their

* Editors: Quotations reflect direct speech of Chicaba.

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blindness, they worshipped the morning star. They did not use temples for their worship and sacrifices. Instead, as soon as they saw the star, they came out of their houses very early to adore it. What a superfluous vigil that was, because in the very act of seeking out the light, they remained in thicker and denser darkness. During their feast days, the people accompanied the king and queen and all their family. Following the customary ritual of their barbarous ceremonies, they bent their knees in humble recognition and sang praises to the star. These rites lasted until the zeal of the *Capuchin* missionaries, entering these lands not long ago, succeeded in planting the banner of the True Faith and banishing the shadows of idolatry.

[Unable to accept the morning star as the creator of everything, Chicaba started on a personal search that took the form of contemplative walks in the meadows outside her palace. The people acknowledge her as a divine gift and a healer.]

, , , She went out one morning like any other with a reduced retinue of some female servants. Enjoying themselves for a while across the field, they left Chicaba alone. Suddenly she found herself assaulted by a barbarous army sent by an enemy of her nation and her father. They took her prisoner in order to tear her apart. The maids, anguished and seeing from afar the danger into which their lady had fallen, burst into the city shouting. They reached the palace in a confused melee; and with cries of alarm, they announced the peril. The father, as courageous as he was prompt to action, left for the field just in time, and his vassals, who had come at the call of the maids' voices, took courage with his presence. With valiant arms, they shatter and rout the barbarous enemies. After recovering her father's most precious treasure, they brought her back to him in celebration. They congratulated one another for having achieved this triumph because, though they had taken great risks, the girl's life assured their solace

Chapter IV

... One day, distancing herself from them [her retinue] a good while, [Chicaba] arrived at a fountain of crystal waters. Completely taken by it, as was her custom, she saw what she saw, for she alone knew about it. What she said happened, happened; and she could not avoid it. I will tell about it in the very words that one of her spiritual

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directors used to testify about it. 'In one of these pauses'-- he talks about how far Teresa walked to reach the object of her burning desire-- 'they baptized her as she stood by the fountain, and they gave her the name of Teresa, which later on she was given again, when she was baptized in Sao Tomé.' Her spiritual director says no more. Who administered the sacrament, he does not say, nor does he explain. Any learned person will have no doubt that this happened indeed. An angel must have done it because, at that time, there was no one in the entire kingdom yet who could have baptized her. After this incident Teresa returned more reassured, with more knowledge of the God for whom she was looking. However, as she was yet a child, this knowledge does not seem to have impressed itself enough on her to quench her long-felt desire. She did not stop going about the same business and continued looking for the One Whom she still did not know, even though she had Him within her. This God, so hidden to her, wished to show some clear sign that He was the one she sighed for with loving pain. He appeared to her as a tender Child in the arms of his Holy Mother. Teresa, stunned by the sight of such an uncanny vision, remained motionless in sweet contemplation, her eyes fixed on the Lady and Her Child, who was as peaceful as He was beautiful. Therefore, Teresa could understand better who He was. He had dangling from His hands a ribbon, as bright as it was pretty. He touched Teresa's head with it softly; and when she tried to take it, the Child withdrew His hand with grace, so that she could not reach it. The Child repeated this action a few times; and Teresa [repeated] her gesture to grab it, but she could never touch it. This mystical and miraculous game lasted for a while, after which, the Lady and Her Son cast their benign eyes on the girl and disappeared from her sight. In spite of her young age, Teresa was left with all sorts of thoughts stirring in her imagination: the beauty of the Lady, the grace and sweetness of Her Son, the whiteness of their faces, when all she had ever seen were dark-- these things became powerful incentives for her

quick and alert understanding, despite her youth. She wanted to find out once and for all who this God was who was hiding under cover. When the marvel ended, she went back with her people. She did not reveal any part of the wonder to anyone. A few days later, she gave her brother alone some information, although vague, to calm his envy.

Chapter VI

... With the confidence and security of knowing that his orders and rules regarding the custody of his daughter would be observed to the letter, Teresa's father went off with his sons to take possession of his newly amassed provinces. Her mother was equally alert to enforce and execute the monarch's decree, because it was of utmost importance to obey it and thus ensure her daughter's security. Like a new Argos, she would not allow Chicaba to leave her company. But what is human purpose in the face of divine decision? This loving vigilance and care lasted four days. The same love was the occasion for a lapse, which her mother would lament for a long time with

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inconsolable tears. Stealing herself away from her mother's watch-how she did so only God knows-- and fooling the vigilance of the guards, Teresa was able to leave the house. Once out, she hurried toward her beloved meadow, where she hoped to see by the fountain the Lady with the white Child who had captured her affection so completely. When she could not find the compass that attracted her love, she was overtaken by her passion and continued walking far away from her household and court. Unable to find her way back and unaware of what was at the end of such a long road, suffering in the heat of the sun and fatigued after such travail, she sat down under the shade of a tree.

Protected by the shadow from the sun's fierce heat, she wiped the perspiration from her face. Finding relief and rest, Teresa, although a child and in such desert solitude, remained unafraid, completely without fear. Doing what was appropriate for her years, she took the beautiful and precious bracelets [manillas] off her wrists and started playing with them. She was as calm and serene as if she were in her own house

... We left Teresa resting under a tree, when a Spanish vessel appeared on the shore. Suddenly a gallant young man grabbed her by the arm with the jewels she was wearing. He took her closer to the seashore, and those on the ship noticed her but did not see the man who was leading her. He was invisible to their eyes. One of them jumped overboard and carried her to the ship. The vessel took to the high seas without tending to any other concern or business. Teresa was frightened to see that they were taking her far from her land. With tears in her eyes and frightened to see herself among strange people, she was on the brink of death. Sadness and distress suffocated her, together with thirst. She moaned helplessly, and all the crew tried everything they could to quiet her. But the tears were caused more from her overwhelming thirst than from any other concerns, although so many of these gave her grief. Yet no one could calm her because they did not know what she wanted. By chance, she saw a glass of water, and thrusting herself toward it quickly, she was able finally to quench her thirst. [Chicaba] had restored herself to life, feeling refreshed and more at ease, when [the crew] began to comfort her, and little by little she started to recover from her fright, but not from the anguish of yearning to

return to her land and to the company of her dear parents. It distressed her not to know how to swim because she thought that with this ability and skill, even though a small child, she might liberate herself from such painful slavery. Seeing herself denied this remedy, she reasoned childishly to herself, as she later explained: *'The vessel is sailing farther away against the current. If I jump into the water, it will take me to my land, because its waves go in that direction.'* As she finished her thought, she tried to put it into action. But as she was about to execute it, a Lady appeared to her whose majesty and grandeur made it clear that she was the same one she had seen on the happy occasion of the fountain back in her motherland. The Lady dried her tears with peaceful calm, and she also calmed her distress with her caresses. With this she completely freed Teresa from the affection for her motherland that she nurtured in her bosom and that had almost brought her to a most lamentable drowning.

[She is baptized in São Tomé. From there she is taken to Spain. The devil in the form of blackbirds attacks her ship. She arrives in Cadiz and lives in Seville for some time. Finally she is presented to King Carlos II of Spain, who in turn gives her to the Marquis and Marchioness of Mancera.]

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... One afternoon the marchioness sent all the maidservants, including her little black girl, out for a walk, a decent and licit diversion. They obeyed the mistress' orders, and they went to the site of the Buen Retiro. They planned to entertain themselves among its variety of beautiful fountains, gardens, and pools. As the sun was setting, they all approached the big pool and climbed onto its ledge. Some were standing on it, and others were sitting, and all were distracted by the soft noise of the waters, when they saw a man who looked by all the external signs to be the Marquis' mayordomo. He approached them; and they did not think anything of it, because they saw him as a member of the household. Without a word, he went near Teresa, who was standing on the ledge unaware of his presence. The false mayordomo kicked Teresa into the water. They were all taken by surprise by such an unusual action in an individual they all considered a fellow member of the household. They were astonished at Teresa's danger and were paralyzed because they did not know how to handle the disaster. They remained confused for a long while. It was long enough for the water to have taken Teresa's life, were she not sheltered by Divine protection. She said that under the waves she was as contented as she had been in the little meadow back in her homeland. Once her companions recovered from the surprise and confusion, they started to discuss among themselves a solution; but they could not find any means to help her and they turned toward home in sorrow and tears. At the same time, Teresa was playing under the water with pleasure and contentment. A few steps away before leaving the Buen Retiro, they found a gallant and well-disposed young man. They informed him of the reason for their tears, and he obliged them to take him to the site. He recognized the place where Teresa had fallen in. The young man made no more effort than to stand by the shore, when the water placed Teresa reverently into his hands. She appeared happy, gay, and joyful as if she had never fallen into the water, and her clothes were not wet. He returned her to her fellow servants. They were so busy with their joy at seeing their dear Teresa restored to them that they neglected to ask who the young man was, just as in their fright, they had forgotten to find out what had happened to the one they believed to have been the mayordomo or where he had gone.

[After spending her youth in the house of the Marquis and Marchioness of Mancera, Teresa receives her freedom and enters a convent in Salamanca, after several failed attempts in other places due to her skin color.]

Chapter XIX

... The nuns conferred among each other about the matter. Most of them had realized how opportune it would be for the convent to have such a special gem, more for

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her virtue and righteous life than for any other benefits. They were almost resolved to admit her. A lady belonging to the highest nobility in Spain heard the news of what was going on. She had renounced her high birth and lived as a poor nun in the same convent. She had given up everything, yet she could not give up her own pride, so she barred Teresa's admission. Her vain pretext was that the postulant was black. 'A black woman!' she said, 'In my convent! Not in my day. This house was not founded for blacks. So, ladies, stop the talking because I will do everything within my power to stop this from happening.' And because she was a lady of such high standing and superior nobility, all the others had to be silent and agree. Teresa was excluded for being black. The same person who barred her admission later lamented her mistake. A few years after this event, she heard news of the heroic virtue that shone from Teresa. The lady was remorseful that her vain pride had made her reject Teresa for being black. She envied the nuns in La Penitencia for their fortune and good sense, as she explained repeatedly....

[Teresa gains admission as a tertiary in the convent of La Penitencia of Salamaca.]

Chapter XXII

... Once the ceremony came to an end, the bishop left. He was astonished at the piety shown by Teresa when he gave her the habit. All present, including his family, were no less astonished by the black woman's devotion. She had achieved her desired admission and gained her happiness, and this felicitous ceremony came to an end. Now we have Teresa in the harbor to which she had directed her sail for so long. Now we have seen how happily and joyfully the nuns received her at the door. But another community, invisible to those present yet noticeable to the black woman, received her with pleasure at the door of enclosure. As she entered the convent, Teresa noticed two choirs of nuns on each side. Together with the living ones, they were four. She looked at them carefully. At first, she could not believe her eyes. She thought that maybe her eyes were confused and she was seeing double. The four lines proceeded toward the choir. Paying closer attention now, Teresa noticed that two of them were more conspicuous than the others. Her soul was not disturbed; and in the midst of great calm and peace, looking at each of their faces and expressions, she felt an indescribable joy. She saw them behave with the modesty and composure that was appropriate to the ritual they were enacting and the life they led. But in these two rows every detail stood out much more than in the others. She saw cordiality without affectation, external composure devoid of the least atom of hypocrisy, and a joy in their faces that was

markedly different from the rest because they were already in possession of that joy that will never disappear. The others' joy was mixed with many other things that could serve as obstacles to true happiness. The two extra lines of nuns that Teresa saw were those who had led virtuous lives in the convent and had found eternal rest in the Lord.

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These nuns, following a special command from God, came to receive her at the door in visible form and shape, and they accompanied her to the sacred ceremony of investiture. We owe this information to Teresa herself. Indeed, she told those still alive about the faces and particular features of those nuns who had already died before she had even entered the convent. Taking this incident into account, we have enough evidence to venerate her and not to question Heaven's secrets.

[Teresa helps poor women pay their dowries.]

Chapter XXXIV

... This is what happened to a nun, who after her postulant year found herself as short of money as she was rich and abundant in her desire to secure the harbor of religious life through the three vows. She was very upset because neither she nor the others knew who could get her out of the predicament. Their only remedy would be to hope that the passage of time would play to her advantage. From the beginning, Teresa had covered all the expenses for the novice to be admitted. Trusting Divine Providence and putting all her hope in God, she proceeded with all the preparations necessary for the ceremony of religious profession. She went to kill two hens for next day's feast and said in good humor,

'We are already on the eve, and you are so tepid?'

The nun answered, 'And what do we gain by killing the hens if the ceremony will not take place tomorrow because I lack the dowry. Where is it going to come from?'

To which Teresa said again, 'Madam, you go and kill the hens; tomorrow the novice will profess without fail.'

The nun had a hard time believing this. But her lack of faith served to show how much God was pleased by Teresa's hope. The next morning without fail, a person like many others who sought Teresa came to visit her. Liberal and pious, this person gave the convent all that was necessary for the novice's dowry, so before the end of the day the hens were served up, because that same day the nun made her profession. In this way and through a miracle, Divine Omnipotence showed how much He cherished the hope of His beloved spouse.

Chapter XXXV

... Her soul was eager to keep divine grace within itself as well as within the souls of all rational creatures. With that end, she promptly asked her Celestial Divine Spouse how to achieve this. She heard the following response: '*I felt-she says-- inside my heart that everyone should love Him very much.*' And Teresa loved Him very, very much. Indeed, with all her heart, strength,

and senses; and that is why she progressed so much in charity. *'I do not know--the Venerable one goes on-- what it is to love God, or how to please Him; but it seems to me that He likes an attentive heart to be truthful in everything. The heart should be attached only to those things that pertain to His Glory, casting*

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away from itself all worldly things and creature comforts. The heart should look at the Creator alone, as the Lord is the only thing the heart can call its own. Soul life, and heart must spare nothing for His Majesty. I am well aware that I know this, but it still needs to be done.' That is how it seemed to you, Teresa, but you did not hesitate for a moment to do what you felt and knew. If you think that you did not do enough, what then was all that eagerness of 'I love you, I love you, I love you,' which on occasion burst from your chest, shaken uncontrollably by that very love? People heard it. If you did not know how to love, why were you so jealous when your spouse was absent?

Fine love has a certain element of jealousy that is both a faithful proclaimer of how active this volcano is and serves as a harbinger of the most intense affection. In chapter XXIX, we saw the Divine Lover a bit jealous of our venerable one when the Majesty of Christ reprimanded her for that slight lapse of admitting to her cell the priests who had said Mass at the convent. This was a clear sign that He loved her because He was very jealous. Teresa's love for her Master wanted to take credit for its elevated nature by also being a little jealous. After one of her Master's absences, this jealousy made her exclaim spontaneously the following verses. The lack of artifice in them could well have been the ploy of a love expressing itself without restraint:

Oh, Jesus, where are you gone?
 I cannot stand a moment
 without seeing you.
 Oh, Jesus of my soul,
 where are you gone?
 It seems you are not coming back
 and you are lost.
 Oh, Jesus, what shall I say?
 If you go out with other women,
 what shall I do?
 I will wail, I will cry
 till I see God,
 and if not, if not,
 I will die of love.
 And because I am so lonely
 I say
 that you have not come.
 And if you are with someone else,
 I have seen it before:
 Martha and Mary,
 you have loved them.
 O Jesus, where shall I find you?

I feel giddy
 when I have you.
 Good-bye, good-bye, love,

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good-bye, Lord,
 good-bye, heart,
 no mote, no more,
 no more.

These verses are evidence that love makes the lover intolerant. Teresa's love complains impatiently about her Spouse's tardiness and that another soul detains Him. On the other hand, they express how well Teresa carried out the office of love when she laments, 'I am well aware that I know this, but it needs yet to be done.'

The impulse of divine love burning in this happy soul's breast was so fierce that the heaviness of her body could not contain the agility of her spirit. Her spirit lifted her up in rapture more than once, raising her off the ground. People saw her in this state only a few times because she hid herself and kept it as secret as she could. Once, however, they were able to see her without her noticing them. Impelled by her love, she was completely transported in her Celestial Divine Master, her face was resplendent, her cell was bathed in light, and she enjoyed her royal favors in solitude. She stitched this fine love to her breast and heart so securely that she felt deeply what His Supreme Majesty allowed no other pen but hers to tell. No one but she could express even the slightest trace of what she felt: *'In this pain-- she speaks of an extraordinary pain that she felt in her heart-- I come to understand that the Lord is inside my heart always. Therefore, if I get upset, or I am not in conformity with Him, this pain goes away. So it is very painful when my heart is serene and calm. It becomes burning when my love rises excessively to the point of wishing to fulfill all my duties and obligations. But I am not saying it right, because it is not excessive, because it is reasonable. I am burning, I feel I am searing, I would shout aloud, but I scream inside myself.'*

And you shouted out too, oh fortunate soul, because you could not contain yourself. Is this the same person who knew love but did not practice it? Is this the same woman who accused herself of knowing how to love but not loving enough? Oh my God, and how tender You ate with those who seek and love You. Let Teresa finish the explanation of the event: *'The pain I feel in my heart is so great,'* she says, *'that inside I feel as if it is covered in sweat. I do not know how to explain myself except in this manner. His Majesty will help Your Reverence understand everything I would like to say but cannot in this short explanation.'* So her pen wrote, but here is also where mine recoils from the fear of being seared by so much fire and flame, though I would be the happier. Those who are learned may reflect on this marvel, that although Church history records similar cases, hers is nonetheless magnificent. God performs these works to teach us."

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