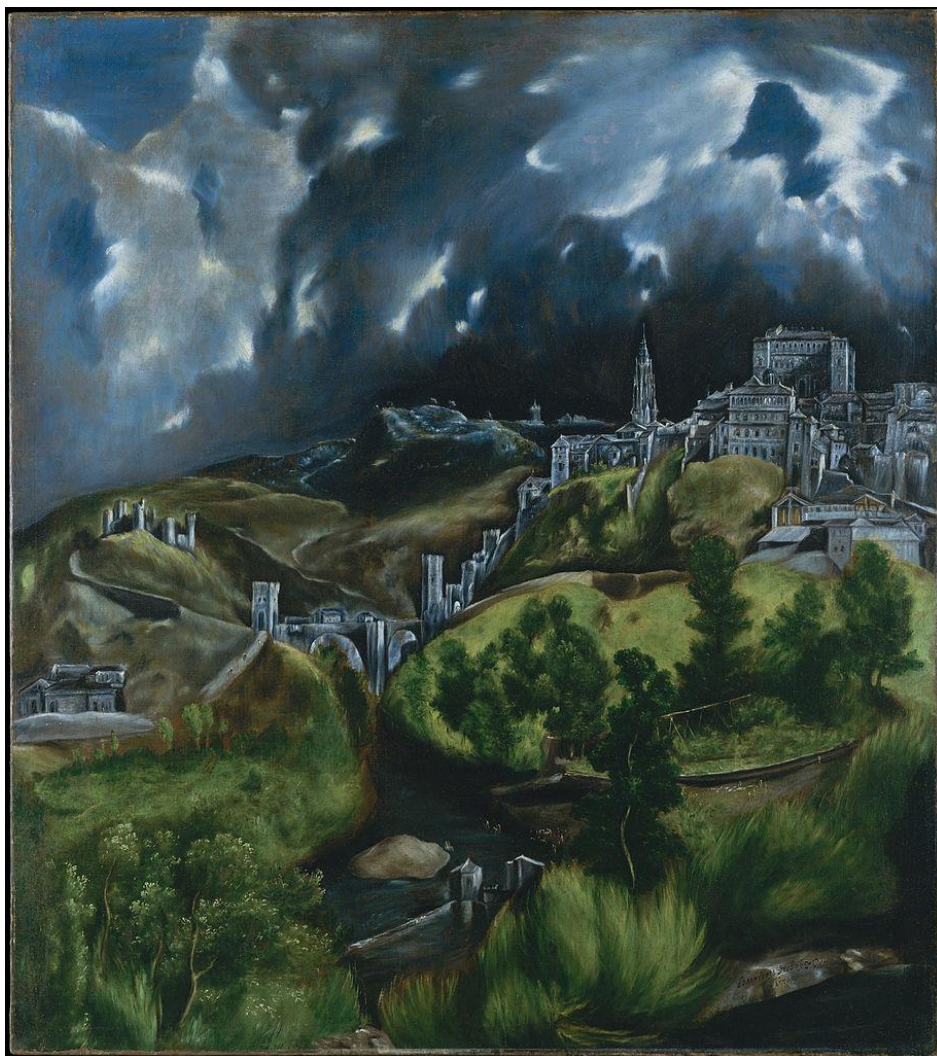


## John of the Cross (1542 – 1591). 14<sup>th</sup> December

Juan de Yepes was brought up, along with his disabled brother, by his widowed mother, who scraped a living as a silk weaver. His considerable intelligence led to his being educated, first at a Jesuit College, then, after he had entered the Carmelite order in 1563, at the University of Salamanca. He was ordained in 1567. Finding the Carmelites too relaxed, he was considering joining the Carthusians, but was persuaded by Teresa of Avila to become a founding member for the male Order of Discalced Carmelites to parallel the female Order which she had been establishing. He began with a house at Duruelo, then moved to the University of Alcala as Rector. However simmering tensions between the Reformed wing of the Order and the "Calced" (shoe wearing, as distinct from the Discalced – sandal wearing) members led to John being thrown into prison in Toledo by his own brother monks. The place in which he was confined can be seen in the middle right of el Greco's dramatic painting of the city of Toledo (c 1600).



Here, under abominable conditions for 9 months – half starved, filthy and regularly beaten – he composed some of his finest poetry – limpidly simple evocations of mystical experiences of God. He managed to escape, and, the Discalced having been established as a separate unit, continued to teach, to write, and to give pastoral care to Teresa's nuns. However, he attracted the jealousy of the Vicar-General (the head of the Order) who deprived him of all offices and banished him to a remote province. While the poems are beautiful works of art, the books of commentaries he wrote on them are solid theological treatises –and have been influential ever since.

The painter of this image (1656), possibly his fellow Spaniard, Zurbaran, captures something of his very ordinary appearance, but also something of the intensity of his faith and inner life.



A drawing done by John of Christ on the Cross, from about 1550, has survived – one of his occupations in the early days of the Foundation was to carve simple crucifixes out of wood.



This little drawing inspired the now extremely famous painting by Salvador Dali, which is known as "Christ of St John of the Cross" (1951)

