

St. Thérèse of Lisieux
Daughter of Sts. Zélie & Louis Martin



Tadgh Tierney ocd

Canticle To The Holy Face

Dear Jesus! 'tis Thy Holy Face
Is here the start that guides my way;
They countenance, so full of grace,
Is heaven on earth, for me, today.
And love finds holy charms for me
In Thy sweet eyes with tear-drops wet;
Through mine own tears I smile at Thee,
And in Thy griefs my pains forget.
How gladly would I live unknown,
Thus to console Thy aching heart.
Thy veiled beauty, it is shown
To those who live from earth apart.
I long to fly to Thee alone!

St. Thérèse

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Introduction

In putting together this booklet on St Thérèse of Lisieux I felt I had a problem. There has never been another saint whose life has been so thoroughly studied, talked about and analysed. The problem for me was not what to put in but what to leave out.

How do we explain the ongoing power of Thérèse of Lisieux? In 1997 the Church and the Carmelite Order celebrated the Centenary of Thérèse's death. They combined this with marking the conferring on her of the title *Doctor of the Church*. She was only the third woman to be so honoured in the history of the Church after St. Teresa of Avila and St Catherine of Siena. This means her message has been given a universal relevance for Catholic people today.

Dying at the age of 24, Thérèse is *forever young* and has all the appeal of a superstar today. We need not be diffident about this - the Lord uses attractive human qualities to draw people to faith. Thérèse became a kind of spiritual sweetheart to the Allied Forces in World War 1 and there are plenty of contemporary testimonies from serving soldiers at the Front to back that up. It's true that her photographic images were touched up to make her look like a glamorous Hollywood film star with all the superficiality that entails – as with the legends of the silver screen. But in any case blonde haired Thérèse was spiritually and physically attractive and didn't need her photos touched up to prove it.

“Saints never grow old, they never become figures of the past, men and women of *yesterday*. On the contrary, they are always men and women of the future, witnesses of the world to come.”

So spoke the late Pope John Paul II, now a saint himself. Precisely because of her youth young people can readily identify with her. This also helps to offset an inevitable impression young people pick up in regard to the church - namely that it is largely made up of elderly people - aging Pope, aging bishops, aging priests and aging congregations. Thérèse however never knew what it was like to have a middle-aged mentality. She didn't know what it was like to be old or to feel old, though she was not spared the painful breakup of her young body. Everything she stands for represents the dreams, idealism, the innocence and the hopes of youth. This in itself guarantees the freshness of her message as well as its perennial appeal.

Tadgh Tierney ocd, Morley, March 2020

Origin of Story of a Soul

At the request of her Prioress who was in fact her elder sister Pauline, now become Mother Agnes, Thérèse wrote an account of her childhood and her short span of nine years in the Carmelite Convent of Lisieux. She included in the manuscripts an account of her teaching which became known as the '*Little Way*,' a way of confidence and trust and of total surrender to God's merciful love. When this was published after her death in 1897 it was read by thousands of people and eventually translated into over sixty languages.¹

The idea for the story of her short life was conceived one winter evening in 1895 when three of the Martin sisters, Pauline, Marie and Thérèse were chatting together at recreation and Thérèse was regaling them with stories of her childhood of which she had vivid memories. Marie remarked how good it would be to have these stories in writing. Thérèse didn't seem to take the idea too seriously, so Pauline decided to put some pressure on her saying "I order you to write down all your childhood memories."²

The English speaking public first made Thérèse's acquaintance through the work of Canon Thomas N. Taylor, pastor of Carfin in Glasgow. This was a comprehensive volume containing, in addition to the Autobiography, a rather long

¹ *The Story of a Soul*. Thomas N. Taylor, Burns Oates and Washbourne, London, 1912. Taylor erected a famous Lourdes Grotto in Carfin and controversially placed a statue of Thérèse nearby.

² *Story of a Soul*, translated by John Clarke ocd, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1976, p.xi.

Epilogue - 'A Victim of Divine Love' preserving some of her last words. This was followed by Counsels and Reminiscences. The latter included some of her last conversations also, as well as her advice to the novices under her charge. There followed a selection of her Letters, Prayers, Days of Grace and Poems. Thérèse herself called her memoirs, "The Story of the Springtime of a Little White Flower." And the name "Little Flower" stuck.

Readers appetites were whetted and they realised that this was only a fraction of Thérèse's output so the clamour went up for more. This demand was met in due course when critical editions of Thérèse were published by the Carmel of Lisieux. Initially Pauline together with her sisters Marie and Céline determined how much material should be released. Thérèse herself had entrusted the editing of her writings to Pauline and the latter took her responsibly extremely seriously. As well as correcting the usual typos and errors of her youngest sister, Pauline made more major alterations to the text as well as photo shopping the existing images of Thérèse and her family. It was only after the deaths of the sisters that the original work of Thérèse could be fully revealed.

The first part of Thérèse's story then is contained in Manuscript A addressed to her sister Mother Agnes (Pauline)It was completed on January 20, 1896, exactly a year later. It is made up of the first eight chapters of *Story of a Soul*.

The second part of Story of a Soul, known as Manuscript B, was addressed to her sister Marie known as Sr Marie of the Sacred Heart. Marie made her request to Thérèse on the

occasion of her last retreat, September 1896. She specifically asked her sister to give her an account of her “little doctrine.” This document, the shortest of the three, though written while Thérèse was gravely ill, contains some of her finest lines. In the *Story of a Soul* it comprises Chapter 9 and is headed, “My Vocation is Love.”

Mother Marie de Gonzague

As regards the third part of this classic of the spiritual life, the motivation for writing it is less straightforward. In the meantime, the formidable Mother Marie de Gonzague had been returned as Prioress of the Lisieux Carmel.¹ Pauline wished to have more of Thérèse’s reflections and she set about achieving her aim with great diplomacy. She played to the Prioress’s vanity knowing that the Manuscript would be dedicated to Mother Gonzague and suggesting it would make her life easier by providing material for the customary circular issued to all Carmelite convents after a sister’s death. This worked like a dream and Thérèse was once more ordered to take up her pen. The result was Manuscript C, comprising the final Chapters 10 and 11 of *Story of a Soul*. These chapters describe Thérèse’s stark experience of darkness before her death. Towards the end of Manuscript C. Thérèse’s weakness was such that she had to resort to using a pencil. Her account ends abruptly with the

¹ In 1876 Mother Gonzague undertook the building of a second wing to the Carmel which included the Infirmary and the room where Thérèse later died. She also installed the Calvary in the quadrangle, the backdrop of many of Thérèse’s photos. She also built the Oratory of the Sacred Heart with the fourth cloister.

words: "It is not because God, in His anticipating Mercy, has preserved my soul from mortal sin that I go before Him with confidence and love...."¹ This was July 1897, about three months before her death. On July 17, the day after the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Thérèse uttered the famous words: "I want to spend my heaven doing good upon earth."² " And again she wrote , "I will send down a shower of roses." These words stand out in St. Thérèse refurbished chapel in the rebuilt St. Mary`s Cathedral in Perth.

*Her Last Conversations.*³

The volume known as "Last Conversations" begins on April 6, 1897, a few months before the end of *Story of a Soul*. The "Conversations" are quite extensive, demonstrating the sisters conviction that every word garnered from Thérèse would be treasured by the faithful in ears to come. It is very much a sequel to *Story of a Soul*. The book then is a record of the final conversations Thérèse had with her sisters, especially during those last critical months July to September.

The vast majority of Thérèse`s conversations are contained in the "Yellow Notebook" of Mother Agnes.⁴ The second and third parts relate conversations Thérèse had with

¹ *Story of a Soul*, p.259.

² St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Her Last Conversations*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C,1977, p. 294. This is a shorter edition of the original French text which is much more extensive.

⁴ These were published under the title *Novissima Verba* (Last Words) by M.H. Gill and Son, Ltd. Dublin, 1953.

her other two sisters, Marie and Céline respectively.¹ There are additional conversations at the end with her cousin Sr Marie Guérin and various other sisters including Pauline (Mother Agnes), Marie and Céline.

One of the first snippets in *Her Last Conversations* had for theme the need to be non-judgemental. This anecdote was also recorded in *Story of a Soul*, where she talks about it in the context of the Lord's commandment to love one another. On one occasion when the sisters were working together, another sister came in looking for help with an outside chore. Thérèse realised that her companion would like to do this job, so Thérèse started to take off her apron quite slowly to give her companion a head start. But the eagle eyed sister noticed this and said: "Sr Marie will have this pearl for her crown – you were too slow."! Thérèse of course only smiled.

In her prayer life Thérèse manifested that easy familiarity and intimacy with the Lord that St. John of the Cross speaks about. For instance when she comes across a scriptural phrase like this one: "My reward is with me, to render to each one according to his works," she turns this on its head and says: Well, then. He will reward me according to his own works! Somewhat in the same vein as the great French Carmelite who came after her, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, Thérèse remarked: "After all, it's the same to me whether I live or die. I really don't see what I'll have after death that I don't possess in this

¹ Céline's recollections were later published under the title, "A memoir of my sister, St. Thérèse.

life. I shall see God, true; but as far as being in his presence, I am totally there here on earth.”

As we know Thérèse never experienced the kind of extraordinary graces and ecstasies we associate with great saints like her Founders Teresa and John of the Cross. This fact has only endeared her to the little people that she reached out to. Special favours like the one I will now mention are notable for being the exception. Her description of this grace has many parallels in St Teresa and St. John In Chapter 8 of *Story of a Soul* addressed to her sister Mother Agnes, Thérèse talks about the great day of her Profession or her wedding as she preferred to call it. Then on June 9, 1895 she was inspired to make her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. Pauline explains:

(I asked her to explain what happened when she made her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. First she said):"Little Mother, I told you this when it took place, but you paid no attention to me." (This was true; I'd given her the impression that I placed no importance what she was saying)."Well, I was beginning the Way of the Cross; suddenly, I was seized with such a violent love for God that I can't explain it except by saying it felt as though I were totally plunged into fire. Oh! What fire and what sweetness at one and the same time! I was on fire with love, and I felt that one minute more, one second more, and I wouldn't be able to sustain this ardor without dying. I understood, then, what the saints were saying about these states which they

experienced so often. As for me, I experienced it only once and for one single instant, falling back immediately into my habitual state of dryness."

(*And later on*): "At the age of fourteen, I also experienced transports of love. Ah! how I loved God! But it wasn't at all as it was after my Oblation to Love; it wasn't a real flame that was burning me."

Thérèse's Act of Oblation glows red hot as we read it today. Among other ardent paragraphs we read – and she underlines some of it: "In order to live in one single act of perfect love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul , and thus I may become a *martyr* of Your *Love*, O my God."¹

Thérèse carried the text of this Oblation on her heart until her death. Only two people were aware of it – Pauline and Céline. It has now been extensively spread around the Catholic world.

¹ Story of a Soul. pp, 276-277 (Also end of this booklet.)

Prayer in St. Thérèse.

In the final chapter of *Story of a Soul*, we come across Thérèse's famous definition of prayer. Now that it has been incorporated into the Catechism of the Catholic Church, you could say her definition has supplanted all others. Here it is:

“For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.”¹

We should keep this description in mind when we sit down to pray. Like so many other of her classic contributions to a new or *little way* to God, Thérèse's insight here was sparked by an experience in her community. There was just one Novice in the Lisieux convent during Lent at that particular time. This was Sr. Marie of the Trinity, and Thérèse was in charge of her. Marie had a fervent dream in which she was sharing with her sister a stanza of Thérèse's poem *To Live by Love*. Her aim was to enable her sister to become less worldly. In her dream it seemed to work, so next morning she consulted Thérèse about it. She wondered if she could write to her sister after Lent and inform her of the dream. Thérèse replied that it might be a good idea, but she would have to ask the Prioress for permission first. Mother Gonzague's response was short and to the point: “It is not through letters that

¹ *Story of a Soul*, p.242.

Carmelites must save souls but through *prayer*.”¹ Thérèse felt that this response of Mother Prioress was inspired, so she told Marie that they must knuckle down and pray hard for this intention and without any intervening letter, they had the right response by the end of Lent. Thérèse saw this as a real miracle. In telling the story of her life regarding this incident, she reflected:

How great is the power of *Prayer*! One could call it a Queen who has at each instant free access to the King and who is able to obtain whatever she asks. To be heard it is not necessary to read from a book some beautiful formula composed for the occasion. If this were the case, alas, I would have to be pitied!²

What she meant was that she had no inclination to search out beautiful prayers in books – they only did her head in! The following thought is Thérèse’s lead into the lovely definition of prayer above. She writes: “.....I say very simply to God, what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me.” Having said this we do have a slim volume of prayers composed by Thérèse, but these were only drafted for special occasions, like sisters anniversaries or those in honour of the saints. Her great Oblation to Merciful Love, printed at the end of this booklet, is included in the said collection.

¹ Ibid., p. 241,

² Ibid., p.242

St. Thérèse was a member of an Order dedicated to prayer. The objective was that each one should so live in the presence of God that it became one's default state. By cultivating the presence of God in this way, following the tradition of the Carmelite Order and the teaching of St. Teresa on friendship with God or Jesus, the individual could reach the summit of the spiritual Mount Carmel. Another way of looking at it is to visualise the relationship with God as parallel to a loving marital relationship. Thérèse had the model of her parents' love to guide her in this. Just as a happy marriage begins with the couple falling in love with one another, so it is with the prayer relationship with God. Under the leading of the Spirit, the person falls in love with God and from there on it unfolds, according to St. John of the Cross, along the lines of human friendship. There follows a premature honeymoon period in which the *pray-er* is deliriously happy. Prayer is a pleasure and the spiritual landscape is dotted with Spring flowers. But this can't last, not because the Lord wishes to be hard on his dedicated lover, but because, as in human relationships leading to marriage, the couple must negotiate various obstacles if the relationship is to grow and survive. Chief among the problems in the growing relationship is the realisation that the lovers are not just a prince and princess residing in some kind of Neverland, but two human beings with separate tastes and sensibilities. They need to come back to reality. Similarly the devout person suddenly finds that an air of dryness and aridity sets in and they seem to be getting nowhere. The honeymoon period has ended. However if the praying person can get over this trial, further development follows. A growing intimacy

with the Lord ensues. In Thérèse's words above, prayer is "a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy." In human relationships this stage is marked by an easy familiarity among the lovers. They have got to know one another and can now let down their guard. They no longer have to pretend. As we see in Thérèse's letters and recorded conversations, prayer can now revolve around sweet nothings, a kind of spiritual pillow talk. The aim is the same as before, to enable the devout person to live each day with an habitual awareness of the Lord being present to her or him. Just as with a married couple, temporary separation on business trips or away on daily work, doesn't affect the quality of the relationship. Prayer has now become the air we breathe.

Thérèse found also that when she couldn't always sustain her union with the Lord at the level of glowing relationship, she simply resorted to reciting the Our Father or Hail Mary very slowly. (Because of her weakened health and primitive conditions in the Carmel – no heating in the convent even during a freezing Winter, except for one common room, Thérèse tended to nod off during her meditation or thanksgiving times after mass.) This bothered her for a while but eventually, true to her conviction of her spiritual childhood, she woke up after snoozing and continued on as usual with acts of love for Jesus. Many people will be pleased to learn that Thérèse couldn't concentrate while saying the rosary and she also was convinced the Queen of heaven, but because she was her *Mother*, would excuse her also on that score.

The following poem might be one response among many to growing intimacy with the Lord in prayer.

Encounter

Lord, in silence alone with you in the night
my whole self is drawn to you
on waves of delicate delight.
It is then a silent cry of joy escapes my heart
to mingle with the sounds and harmonies of love.
If our hearts didn't resist this divine inflow,
the torrent might threaten to engulf and drown us
in too much sweetness.

There's a beautiful insect in creation that dies in
the embrace of its love, and here we feel this
too could be our fate. How glorious is your touch,
Divine Lord, that makes us tremble and shake with joy
like leaves caught in a storm!
As we yield our hearts to you, Lord, they break free from
restraining fetters, to enter the magnetic field of your
love.

As our fingers begin to loosen their grip on alien things,
they clutch at your outreaching hands.
How well we then realise that once our hands are interlocked
And our arms extended, the way lies open to your embrace.
The heart then travels like wildfire
In search of the divine heart,
borne along like the positive charge
That carries the electric current to its object.

In that object the heart begins to rest and wonder;
feeling the powerful merging forces
of divinity within itself,
displaying for it the manifold aspects of love.
The sweet unitive force of this love then welds
the glowing objects together with tender strokes
and endearing smiles.
The lovers are then washed in streams of running laughter
and bathed in tears of effervescent joy and gladness.

The Little Way.

Perhaps no single phrase is so associated with St. Thérèse as that of *Little Way*. In French the phrase is *Petite Voie*. One might say that *petite* was by far Thérèse's favourite adjective. It occurs almost *ad nauseum* in her recorded writings and conversations. It would be difficult to find a complete sentence in Thérèse that doesn't include the term *little*. It should be said too that her sisters also made generous use of the word. Indeed it was her sister Marie who put the word in her mouth, asking her to explain *her little doctrine*. *Petite* is a feminine word and is often used to describe a small or dainty woman. It's widely used in this sense in English also.

The Preface for the Feast of St. Thérèse gives us a nice summary of her little way:

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. You reveal the secrets of your kingdom to those who become like little

children. Among them you chose Saint Thérèse, hidden in Christ, to proclaim the good news of your merciful love. Your Holy spirit moved her to make her life a loving oblation of prayer and self-denial for the salvation of humankind through Christ and his Church.

The *Little Way* goes hand in hand with *Spiritual Childhood* which is synonymous with it. Thérèse, as we know meditated constantly on the gospels and she would be familiar with the scriptural foundation for her teaching. We find it in the synoptics, especially Matthew who writes: "He called a child and, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"¹ Among other places we find Thérèse's thoughts on her *Little Way* in Ms. C written for the Prioress Mother Gonzague:

You know, Mother, I have always wanted to be a saint. Alas! I have always noticed that when I compared myself to the saints, there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and the obscure grain of sand trampled underfoot by the passers-by. Instead of becoming discouraged, I said to myself: God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to

¹ Mt:18.3-5

heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new. We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched, then, in the Scriptures for some sign of this elevator, the object of my desires, and I read these words coming from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: "Whoever is a LITTLE ONE, let him come to me." And so I succeeded. I felt I had found the elevator which must raise me to heaven, it is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.

So Thérèse herself didn't quote the gospel text, but rather turned to the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom and the Prophet Isaiah for confirmation of her insights. From Wisdom she quoted a similar thought: "For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown,"¹ Needless to say she loved this text from Isaiah: "As one whom his mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they will caress you."² She even pictured herself and Céline sitting on the Lord's knees. The memory of her and Céline taking up a similar position on Papa's knees as children helped this metaphor along.

¹ Wisdom:6.7.

² Isaiah: 66.12-13.

Her dream involving Ven. Anne signalled Thérèse being carried forward on a great surfing wave of love. She tells Marie that she will now address herself to her Beloved to express her ardent desires. The English poet Richard Crashaw addressed Teresa of Avila in these words: “O thou undaunted daughter of desires.” He could have said the same about Thérèse. So now she turns to a new page in her Letter to Marie, dating it September 8, 1896, and putting in parenthesis *To my dear Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart*. And she begins: “O Jesus my Beloved, who could express the tenderness and sweetness with which You are guiding my soul!”¹ From here on her words catch fire and remind us of the Living Flame of Love of her mentor St. John of the Cross. One vocation will not now suffice for Thérèse. It was not enough for her to be a Carmelite, to be the Spouse of Jesus and Mother of souls – she wishes to embrace all vocations. She also counted on being the warrior, the Priest, the Apostle, the Doctor, the Martyr. These boundless desires consumed Thérèse and she set about finding an answer. Then in her own words:

During my meditation, my desires caused me a veritable martyrdom, and I opened the Epistles of St. Paul to find some kind of answer. Chapters 12 and 13 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians fell under my eyes. I read there, in the first of these chapters, that all cannot be apostles, prophets, doctors, etc., that the Church is composed of different members, and that the eye cannot be the hand at one and the same time. The answer was clear, but it did

¹ Story of a Soul, p. 190.

not fulfill my desires and gave me no peace. But just as Mary Magdalene found what she was seeking by always stooping down and looking into the empty tomb, so I, abasing myself to the very depths of my nothingness, raised myself so high that I was able to attain my end. Without becoming discouraged, I continued my reading, and this sentence consoled me: "Yet strive after THE BETTER GIFTS, and I point out to you a yet more excellent way." And the Apostle explains how all the most PERFECT gifts are nothing without LOVE. That Charity is the EXCELLENT WAY that leads most surely to God. I finally had rest. Considering the mystical body of the Church, I had not recognized myself in any of the members described by St. Paul, or rather I desired to see myself in them all. charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES Then, in the excess of my

delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love my vocation, at last I have found it .MY VOCATION IS LOVE!¹

Here we have reached the burning heart of Thérèse of Lisieux. Here we encounter one whose desires were deeper than the ocean and wider than the universe It only remained for the victim to be utterly consumed, during the final year of her life, in the fire of God's love.

After Thérèse's death Céline gave a spirited defence of her sister's *Little Way* in the serious business of the Church's beatification process. She tells us:

The promoter of the faith warned me, however: "once you begin to speak of a special *way*, the Cause is infallibly doomed; innumerable cases on record bear abundant witness to that." "That is indeed too bad," I replied, "but a fear of hindering the beatification of Sister Thérèse could never deter me from stressing the only important point that interests me – that her *Little Way* might be raised with her, so to speak, to the honors of the altar."²

We can only admire Céline for calling the bluff of the promoter of the faith.

¹ Ibid., pp. 193-194.

² Her Last Conversations, p.212.

People who influenced Thérèse - Venerable Anne of Jesus

Although one could hardly say that someone who only cropped up in a dream was a person who influenced her; still the dream was so potent in its effects that we need include Ven Anne of Jesus in that category. The dream made such an impression on her that she comes back to it in her :last conversations with her sisters, though she had already dealt with it in *Story of a Soul*. Thérèse already had had several dreams which she considered significant. But in in May 1897 Thérèse was feeling a little troubled about whether or not God loved her. She even wished for a consoling dream like others who experienced them.

Then one night Thérèse herself had a dream that the Founder of Carmel in France, Venerable Anne of Jesus, appeared to her and consoled her greatly.¹ This dream came at a significant time in her life and it launched her on an even more intense wave of love for Jesus. Anne de Lobera was born in Spain in 1545. It appears Anne didn't speak until she was seven years of age, so it was assumed she suffered from some disability or other. But in answer to the earnest prayers of her devout mother this obstacle was removed.

Eventually when she grew up Anne joined St. Teresa's Carmelite Reform and became an indispensable helper to Teresa. She was also greatly esteemed by St. John of the Cross,

¹Her Last Conversations, p.49. *Story of a Soul*, p.190.

who dedicated his great *Spiritual Cantic* to her. At the request of Cardinal Berulle and his cousin Barbe Acarie (now Blessed Mary of the Incarnation), she came to Paris with five other sisters and introduced the Carmelite nuns to France. She went on to do the same in Belgium, and founded three Carmelite communities in each country. The surprising thing was that prior to her dream Thérèse candidly admits she was quite indifferent to the great Foundress. I will let Thérèse herself take her story. The dream occurred in May, Mary's month:

You asked me, dear Sister, to write to you my dream and "my little doctrine" as you call it... Suddenly without seeing how they had entered, I saw three Carmelites dressed in their mantles and long veils....In the depths of my heart I cried out: O how happy I would be if I could see the face of one of these Carmelites!" Then, as though my prayer were heard by her, the tallest of the saints advanced towards me; the tallest Carmelite raised her veil or rather she raised it and covered me with it. Without the least hesitation, I recognized Venerable Anne of Jesus, Foundress of Carmel in France. Her face was beautiful but with an immaterial beauty. I cannot express the joy of my soul since these things are experienced but cannot be put into words.¹

The memory of this *sweet dream* remained vivid for Thérèse. In her dream also she had asked if she would soon be called home to heaven and she was assured it would be soon.

¹ Story of a Soul, p. 189.

She further asked if the Lord was satisfied with her efforts and again was assured by Anne that he was *content, very content*. Thérèse saw this dream as a prelude to the greatest graces God was to bestow upon her.

During the last few months of her life Thérèse often pondered her imminent death, but this was not in any morose way, rather she saw it as the call of the Bridegroom. In this connection she referred to Jesus saying in the gospel that he would come like a thief in the night. Thérèse fastened on to this image and rather than call out ‘stop thief’ she determined to aid and abet him. The thief motif would crop up quite often in the last conversations.

On July 17, the day after the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Thérèse made her famous statement:

I feel I am about to enter into my rest. But I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love him. If God answers my desires, my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth. This isn’t impossible, since from the bosom of the beatific vision, the angels watch over us.¹

¹ Her Last Conversations, p.102.

*Ven. Marie Thérèse Dubouché ,Sr. Mary of
St. Peter, St. Julian Eymard and Ven
Hermann Cohen*

Apart from the members of her family - parents, siblings, especially her sister Pauline, who influenced her greatly in her formative years - there were others also who played important parts in her development. Although Mother Genéviève was not the founding Prioress – that was Mother Elizabeth -but rather Subprioress and mistress of novices, she made a great impression on Thérèse who mentions her quite a lot in the *Story of a Soul*. She had in fact succeeded Mother Elizabeth as Prioress early on, as Elizabeth had died many years before Thérèse entered. Genéviève was in fact regarded as the real foundress of the convent.

Thérèse revered Mother Geneviève as a living saint though she knew Geneviève for only a short period after she entered the Carmel of Lisieux. She tells us that on the day of her Profession she approached Mother Geneviève for spiritual advice. The elderly nun had two other visitors so Thérèse decided to withdraw. But Geneviève called her back: “ Wait, my little child, I’m going to say just a little word to you; every time you come you ask for a spiritual bouquet. Well. today, I will give you one - remember, my child, *Our God is a God of peace.*”¹ Thérèse felt that the mother had been inspired to say this to her as it brought her renewed peace after a period of

¹ Story of a Soul. p.169. Ven. Anne was one of St. Teresa’s most trusted helpers in Spain.

extreme sadness. Indeed Geneviève herself had been through the same trial herself as a young novice before her Profession. Thérèse admired Geneviève's no nonsense mysticism and resolved to imitate her in this. Later on Thérèse attended her deathbed and felt deep joy at the moment of her passing. She tells us she quietly gathered a last tear from the saint on a piece of linen and kept it as a relic. Soon after the sister's death. Thérèse had a dream in which she saw some of the nuns being given mementoes by Geneviève and when she thought there was nothing left for her she heard the deceased say: "To you I give my heart."¹

Theodelinde Dubouché, St. Julian Eymard and Hermann Cohen were active in Paris in the middle of the 19th century spreading devotion to the Eucharist. They were friends early on and had planned to foster devotion to the Eucharist. Dubouché eventually founded a congregation of women Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament. Julian Eymard, a former Marist, founded the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Hermann Cohen promoted this devotion as a Carmelite. An account of Ven. Marie Thérèse's life, (formerly Theodelinde) was published in English in 1938 carries the subtitle *A Forerunner of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*. A strong component of reparation was built into both the Holy Face devotion and that of Eucharistic Adoration. Dubouché had painted an image of the Holy Face displayed in the Carmelite chapel. She was a fervent person and much devoted to the passion of Christ. In 1846, during Holy Week, some relics of the passion were on display in Notre

¹ Ibid., p.171. ¹

Dame Cathedral, and Dubouché attended mass there. After Communion she was haunted by the thought “*The Blessed Sacrament is more than all.*” She became more drawn to the Eucharist and felt “bound to the tabernacle.” Around this time she discovered Carmel and wished to join.

On July 8, 1848, a Carmelite nun, Sister Mary of St. Peter died with a saintly reputation in the convent at Tours. The work of reparation played a big part in her spirituality.

In 1847 Mother Geneviève was influenced by news she received from the Carmel of Tours regarding Sr Mary of St Peter, a member of the Carmel there. Mary was a visionary who talked about Jesus urging on her a work of Reparation for the sins of blasphemy and profanation of Sundays in France. In 1844 she had a vision in which Jesus told her: “*Those who will contemplate the wounds on My Face here on earth, shall contemplate it radiant in heaven.*” Mother Genéviève promoted this devotion to the Holy Face as portrayed in the traditional picture of Veronica’s Veil. Thérèse and her sisters acknowledged that they inherited their devotion to the Holy Face from Mary of St. Peter as transmitted by their founder Sister Geneviève.

Thérèse would take up this devotion later. Thérèse’s sister Celine (Sr. Geneviève) painted a well known picture of the Holy Face from the first photos taken of the Shroud of Turin by Secondo Pia. Thérèse never saw an image of the Shroud of Turin.

Sr Mary's visions influenced many people. Mother Geneviève hung a picture of Veronica's Veil in Lisieux Carmel. Thérèse herself only mentions Reparation twice in her writings, but she did offer herself as a victim to Merciful Love. Celine's painting of ¹the Face of Jesus on the Shroud of Turin received wide circulation after Thérèse's death. The photo of the Holy Face on the shroud had been sent to Celine by her uncle Isidore Guerin.

Thérèse took for her religious titles, *Of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face*. One commentator rightly reads a lot of significance into these. The first, he thinks reflects the innocence and playfulness of childhood while the second points to the harsh realities of life with its suffering and sorrow.

Thérèse's daily suffering from tuberculosis increased during the month of August 1897. On August 6 the convent picture of the Holy Face was displayed in her room. Thérèse remarked: "how much good that Holy Face has done me in my life! When I was composing my canticle *Vivre d'amour*, it helped me to do it with great ease." Later she continued "These words of Isaias: 'Who has believed our report. There is no beauty in him, no comeliness, etc.,' have made the whole foundation of my devotion to the Holy Face, or, to express it better, the foundation of all my piety. I, too, have desired to be

¹ Mother Geneviève had interceded with the clerical Superior of the Carmel to allow Thérèse to enter at an early age. But to no avail. However she had been uncomfortable with what she considered Thérèse's boundless spiritual ambition, and urged Mother Agnes to restrain her somewhat.

without beauty, alone in treading the winepresss, unknown to everyone.”¹

During this month of August Pauline drew attention to a rather weird circumstance in a Carmelite convent. One of the community, Sr. St, John of the Cross used come into Thérèse’s sick room, stand at the foot of the bed and just laugh! This is certainly a surprising detail and what is more surprising - nothing was done to stop her. Thérèse felt this behaviour keenly and consoled herself by thinking of Jesus hanging on the cross and being mocked by his enemies.

¹ Her Last Conversations, pp. 134-135.

People influenced by Thérèse

Long have I known that angel soul
That led my steps to Carmel's goal ;
I live the life she lived; I know
And love the cross she bore below,
I take her place and for my share
The cup of gall still standing there-
On me there blows the icy air
That chilled her soul when raised in prayer.
I, too, from earthly joys have flown

To give my love to Christ alone,
That thus untrammelled I might fly
In spirit to the realms on high.
Yet all that I renounced I hold ;
Our Lord repays a hundredfold
For thorns gives roses ;though I wait
On earth, I stand by heaven's gate-
SISTER ISABEL OF THE SACRED HEART.

Mother Isabel of the Sacred Heart.

The appeal of Thérèse of Lisieux has drawn into her orbit both saints and sinners. I will deal with the saints first and then the sinners. On the side of the angels we have Mother Isabel, next the Servant of God Dorothy Day and then St. Teresa of Calcutta. On the other side we list criminal Henri Pranzini and *renegade* Carmelite priest Hyacinthe Loyson.

An account of Isabel's life was written by Thérèse's sister Pauline who was Prioress in Lisieux for many years.

Like Thérèse she expressed herself poetically, and some of her poems had Thérèse as subject.

Yvonne Daurelle, in religion Mother Isabel of the Sacred Heart, entered the Carmel of Lisieux after Thérèse's death. At a timely moment the Life of the "Little Flower" fell, providentially, into Yvonne's hands, and it made her realise that God called her to walk by the way of love. Attracted by the "Little Flower" and the lessons of her life, Yvonne decided to enter the Carmelite Order at Lisieux. At the end of 1901, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus came to her aid. Yvonne cried as she read her life and resolved on taking her as her guide and model, offering herself as she had done, as a holocaust to all-merciful Love, and declaring with her: "I too have found my vocation, my vocation is love!"

Again she wrote.

Saint John of the Cross best taught me this doctrine of detachment which was that of our little Thérèse. He helped me in every way to understand her and clearly proved to me that divine union can only be obtained by faith and self-denial. He also gave me a love for the common way and made me distrust what was singular, for which a mistaken interpretation of Saint Thérèse's words had given me an attraction. But it was she who revealed to me what intense love His creatures can feel for the good God and made me long to possess such love myself.

Isabel compiled a large volume of favours from Thérèse called *Shower of Roses*...

Dorothy Day

We now turn to the example of Dorothy Day, the extraordinary American woman who co-founded the Catholic Workers Movement with the Frenchman Peter Maurin, and who all her life was passionately dedicated to social justice in and for our world and its people. She would name Thérèse a Patron of her Movement. She was a peace activist and was arrested several times as well as being imprisoned on one occasion. It should be noted too that St. Teresa of Calcutta, who took her religious name from Thérèse, was a great admirer of Dorothy Day and they met on more than one occasion. Mother Teresa conferred on her an honour which no one outside her own congregation had ever received. The Cause of Dorothy Day has now been introduced by the church and if successful, she would make one of the most *real* saints that you could possibly imagine. She overcame an initial aversion to Thérèse's story, to become an ardent advocate instead. This happened when a priest gave her a copy of the *Story of a Soul*, and she tells us, "I dutifully read (it) and I found it colourless, monotonous, too small in fact for my notice." She was not impressed by the examples Thérèse gave of her heroic virtues – eating what was put before you, (the desperately poor didn't even have that opportunity), enduring extremes of cold or heat, putting up with the society of mediocre souls and enduring a splash of dirty water in the laundry. This was supposed to be mortification, a word whose root means *death*. Other saints had been stretched on the rack, were burnt to death or some starved themselves in the desert. But from that unpromising start

Dorothy gradually came to see the power of Thérèse's message and she became one of her keenest advocates. She became intrigued by this thought; "Yet it was the *worker*, the common man who first spread her fame by word of mouth. It was the masses who first proclaimed her a saint. It was the *people*. Writing of Thérèse she points to the Little Way as the way to respond to the suffering and tragedy around us. She ties Thérèse's desire to increase love in the world with acts of protest, picketing, singing out - the importance of even one person's actions and collaborating with others who affirm life. Here it seemed Thérèse had taken over her own particular pitch, her social work on behalf of the *people*! Dorothy Day wrote only one biography – and it was called *Thérèse*.

For Dorothy, becoming a saint wasn't merely a matter of personal salvation. Her vision was that the work of social transformation requires saints. Dorothy writes: "Sanctity alone will meet the crisis of the day. Nothing else matters. One can feed the poor, shelter the homeless, comfort the afflicted, but if you have not charity, the Love of God, Sanctity, it is worthless"(Archives: Notebook, November 1951).

Dorothy didn't just read about the Little Way and then decide to adopt it as a spiritual practice or attitude from among other spiritual methods or outlooks. Rather she discovered the Little Way within her experience of Catholic Worker life. Year upon year of serving meals, making beds, cleaning, and conversing with destitute, outcast people provided Dorothy with "schooling" in the Little Way. Added to this daily routine were her writing and publishing the Catholic Worker

newspaper, speaking around the country, praying, fasting, protesting, and enduring jail on behalf of peace and justice. Simply put, the Little Way was active love, the "harsh and dreadful love" that Dorothy often spoke about... As Dorothy expressed it, "We want to grow in love but do not know how. Love is a science, a knowledge, and we lack it."¹ (Day, *Thérèse*, p. vii).

The Little Way of Thérèse became Dorothy's way as well, the way to make saints and to transform the world. Day picked this up from Thérèse, after being unimpressed with her initially.

Family Life

James Allaire makes this important observation on the family life of the Zélie and Louis Martin and their children.

I have laid great emphasis on the homelife of St. Therese, because of its great importance today. The need to foster the family, the good life of the community of the family, as a beginning in restoring all things in Christ, is a theme of the book I am writing."²

Dorothy deeply appreciated the loving parents and extended family of Thérèse who helped each other in times of sickness and grief. She admired the parents who

¹ I am indebted to James Allaire for material on Dorothy Day,

² Day, Archives: Letter, April 16, 1956.

prayed with their children. This was a family that valued hard work, that cared for the poor in their home and in direct works of mercy each week, that rejoiced when their children chose to enter religious life (all five daughters eventually became religious), that enjoyed holidays and pilgrimages together.

This family's "natural happiness" was the milieu for raising saints. These parents created the kind of home "where it would be easier to be good." "When I pray to St. Thérèse," Dorothy wrote, "I like to remind her of her own natural happiness as a child. It helped to make her what she was and so I do not hesitate to call upon her to ask for temporal favors, a happy home, so that families may thrive and produce saints"¹

St Teresa of Calcutta

The life, work and now perhaps we should say the death of Mother Teresa of Calcutta has had a major impact on the Church and indeed the modern world. Her death in 1987 was overshadowed by that of Princess Diana a few days beforehand. How are we to explain it? It seems as if she might have wished it this way - that she go quietly. Critics might not agree – many of them held that Mother Teresa was adept at manipulating the media.

¹ Day, Archives: Notebook, November 1951.¹

However we look at it, St. Teresa of Calcutta, like Thérèse was a phenomenon. As we look back at her from this distance her life is a mystery of grace – to use a hackneyed expression. In a sense we have still not reached the end of her story. Her canonisation, like that of her namesake may lead to further insights – and will glorify God to a greater extent. We don't look to Teresa for any deep theological insights - Her faith and spirituality seemed normal and certainly unquestioning.

For example, one of Teresa's best known quotes was this; "You know people worry all the time about innocent children being killed in wars, and they try to prevent this. But what hope is there in stopping it when mothers kill their own children." This is not a popular position to take in today's society. Teresa obviously would not deviate in the slightest way from the Church's official teaching.

In 2007 Mother Teresa again made some headlines. It was the occasion of the publication of an account of her life written mostly with material from her own letters. It was called *Come be my light*. The subtitle went like this *The revealing private writings of the Nobel Prize winner*. Inside the front cover a copy of a very candid letter from a spiritual point of view, written in Mother Teresa's tiny handwriting. On the next page, all by itself, was another quote from her; "If ever I become a saint I will surely be one of darkness. I will continually be absent from Heaven to light the light of those in darkness on earth." This sentence was well chosen, I think.

It piqued the curiosity of journalists and others. It was taken from a letter to her director Fr. Neuner SJ, written in 1962.

In a way it was these kind of thoughts that underlined for me the close affinity, Mother Teresa has with Carmelite spirituality and specifically with St. Thérèse and St. John of the Cross. After all John is associated in most people's minds with *The Dark Night of the Soul*. The affinity with Thérèse didn't consist just in her name. Her message suggests of two points:

1. The dark night of St. John of the Cross, especially as experienced by Thérèse, and
2. The point she made of being absent from heaven to enlighten those in darkness on earth, a thought we also associate with Thérèse

In fact these two points seem to be her *Mission Statement* according to Fr. Brian Kolodiejczuk, MC, the writer of the author of the book, *Come be my Light*. This invitation, she understood to have been personally addressed to her by Jesus. It seems clear then that during her life, Mother Teresa experienced the mystical darkness as described by St. John of the Cross. It took the form, at least in one aspect, of an intense longing and thirst for God, which, from her point of view, God appeared to repulse. For John of the Cross this is the worst kind of suffering.

Finally we might reflect that there is this whole theme of *darkness* which dominated, with few exceptions, more than half of Teresa's long life, and therefore more than half of the

book This trial would tend to identify her with the thirst of Jesus on the Cross and she comes back to this thought again and again.

St Raphael Kalinowski, The dawn of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

Polish Carmelite Saint, Raphael Kalinowski who died in 1907 just ten years after Thérèse's death, translated her *Story of a Soul* into Polish only five years after her death! But there are exceptions to everything. When the *Story of a Soul* was sent out to the convents – it was customary to circulate an account of a diseased sister – three Carmels rejected it. One Prioress said: 'The thought that this *Ms* is now free for everyone to read, distresses me beyond words'! How wrong can you be?

Anna Kalstein, Prioress of the Carmel in Łobzów, Poland, inspired as she was like so many others by Thérèse's "Story of a Soul", wished to publish a Polish translation. She was one of those prioresses who anticipated the enormous impact Thérèse's story would make, and how it would lead to a renewal of vocations to the Order which in fact it did. But Kalinowski objected because he was not happy with the quality of the translation on offer. He told her: "I advise you to refrain from publishing the translation of *La vie d'une âme*." (Story of a Soul) Kalinowski himself was the best person to improve the translation of Thérèse but couldn't even think about it at the time - he was completely engrossed in publishing the convent chronicles of Lviv and Warsaw, before publishing the biography of Mother Marchocka. Furthermore he thought the

Polish translation failed to capture the flavour of the French original. Now in a letter to Lisieux he refers to “one of those roses that the *little sister* never ceases to scatter on earth.”¹ In this letter he indicates the need to correct the mistakes in the Polish translation. Being so fluent in French himself he was afraid Thérèse’s unique story might be sold short.

On October 9, 1902 he wrote to Mother Agnes, (Thérèse’s sister) who was now Prioress in Lisieux:

Discalced Carmelites.

Wadowice, October 9, 1902..

The inscription at the top of the book indicates my duty to repair a fault committed by me against your little saint, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Two or three years ago, when I looked over the manuscript of the Polish translation of the life of this little flower of Carmel, I made the observation that the language of our country does not conform to the style of the original, and reading it only causes unease.² This might place limitations on the apostolate of this chosen one of God.

He goes on with great good humour:

She had to take me to court, and on the other hand, not only did she take action but she took aim directly at me. For about a week my whole soul was tossed about by

1. ¹ Ibid., p. 340.

2. ¹ Ibid., p. 340.

² Kalinowski, writing in French, uses the strong word *dégoût*, ‘disgust’.

the waves of a stormy sea of interior pains, and not knowing where to find shelter, my eyes fell on the French edition of the life of the vengeful sister! Armed with the sign of the Cross I open the book and find the place where the fire in her heart unites with the burning heart of Jesus in *Vivre d'amour*.¹ Suddenly the storm dies down, calm returns and something indescribable floods my whole being and changes me completely. This poem became an ark of salvation for me. The dear sister gave me confidence. I therefore conclude that the promises: “I will spend my heaven in doing good on earth. *And*: After my death I will send down a shower of roses”, is literally fulfilled.

Br. Rafael of St. Joseph, Discalced Carmelite.²

This letter demonstrates that Kalinowski was one of the first Carmelites to recognize the importance of St. Thérèse's message.

The Prioress of Łobzów, Anna Kalstein, was also rewarded. For ten years the convent had no novices. In the original small house there was no room for them. But the first novice joined after the completion of the translation of the “Story of a Soul”, and the second came after it was published. These were seen as two lovely roses sent down from heaven by Thérèse of the Child Jesus for the Carmel in Poland, where she

¹ *To live by Love*.

² Jean-Baptiste Bouchaud OCD, p. 341.

was loved so much. Thérèse was beginning to take, not only France and Poland, but the whole world by storm.

Henri Pranzini, "my first child."

In August 1887 Thérèse was to learn that a notorious criminal, Henri Pranzini was due to face the guillotine on August 31. Thérèse's attention was drawn to him. She set herself to pray earnestly for his conversion and began to storm heaven for that purpose. It was reported that he remained impenitent for the crime of murder for which he was found guilty.

She writes:

I felt in the depths of my heart certain that our desires would be granted, but to obtain courage to pray for sinners I told God I was sure He would pardon the poor, unfortunate Pranzini; that I'd believe this even if he went to his death without any signs of repentance or without having gone to confession. I was absolutely confident in the mercy of Jesus. But I was begging Him for a "sign" of repentance simply for my own consolation.

My prayer was answered to the letter! In spite of Papa's prohibition that we read no papers, I didn't think I was disobeying when reading the passages pertaining to Pranzini. The day after his execution I found the newspaper "La Croix." I opened it quickly and what did I see? Ah! my tears betrayed my emotion and I was obliged

to hide. Pranzini had not gone to confession. He had mounted the scaffold and was preparing to place his head in the formidable opening, when suddenly, seized by an inspiration, he turned, took hold of the crucifix the priest was holding out to him and kissed the sacred wounds three times! Then his soul went to receive the merciful sentence of Him who declares that in heaven there will be more joy over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance! ¹

This was Thérèse's great opening to the apostolate and she dubbed Pranzini her *first child*.

Thérèse's life blossoms.

Chapter 5 of *Story of a Soul* addressed to her sister Pauline is entitled, "After the grace of Christmas." This refers to an incident in her early teenage years which she grandly calls her *conversion*. Thérèse had been an introverted, sensitive and tearful child since she lost her mother Zélie at the age of four and a half. On December 25, 1886 after returning from midnight mass the family prepared to enact an annual ritual that had Thérèse at centre stage – namely opening her Christmas presents to peals of laughter. As she was going upstairs to take off her hat Thérèse overheard her adored Papa comment: "Well. Fortunately this will be the last year." The words cut her to the heart. Céline was quick to notice and advised Thérèse not to come down immediately. But the sensitive child felt a new found freedom well up in her heart; In her own words: "But

¹ Story of a Soul, Ch. 5. p. 100.

Thérèse was no longer the same, Jesus had changed her heart.... Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever.” Soon afterwards at mass Thérèse noticed a picture of the crucifixion slipping out of her prayer book. It depicted the blood pouring from one of his hands. This made a deep impression on her and she resolved to gather up the precious blood and pour it on sinners. This combined with the cry of Jesus *I thirst* kindled her zeal.

As well as responding to the Church’s mission of reclaiming sinners as in the case of Pranzini, Thérèse experienced in herself a great desire for knowledge. She channelled this desire especially into a study of history and science which she pursued on her own. Thérèse however was wary of this expansion of her mind, reminding herself of the reservations the author of the *Imitation of Christ* had expressed on the subject of knowledge.

As an example of Thérèse’s love of the beauty of nature and the created world I would like to quote a passage from this part of her Autobiography. She and Céline became spiritual sisters in spite of the four year age difference:

How sweet were the conversations we held each evening in the belvedere! With enraptured gaze we beheld the white moon rising quietly behind the tall trees, the silvery rays it was casting upon sleeping nature, the bright stars twinkling in the deep skies, the light breath of the evening breeze making the snowy clouds float easily along; all this raised our souls to heaven, that beautiful

heaven whose "obverse side" alone we were able to contemplate.¹

Soon after this passage we have Thérèse musing on the grace of Eucharist. Then she makes a remark that caught the attention of the higher ups in the Church. This is in the context of the infrequency of Holy Communion by the faithful in her day. She writes: "It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes to us each day from heaven; it's to find another heaven, infinitely more dear to Him than the first: the heaven of our soul, made to His image, the living temple of the adorable Trinity!"

Call of Carmel

As Thérèse's confidence and sense of freedom developed, she felt it was time to address the question of her vocation to Carmel. She realised that Céline might have first call in this because of her age. But she also realised that Céline wished to give way to her younger sister in spite of the sacrifice involved. Her next problem was how to broach the subject to her beloved father who would also miss her greatly. She decided to do so on the feast of Pentecost. At a tearful exchange in the garden of Les Buissonnetts, her father plucked a little white flower by its roots from a crevice nearby and gave it to his daughter. She preserved it as a relic for the rest of her life, suggesting that it was the story of her own life, especially when the roots came away from the flower with time. This told her that after being transplanted to Carmel's garden, the next plantation would be

¹ Story of a Soul, p. 103.

heaven. In spite of parental permission the way ahead was by no means cleared. It involved the bold step later in the year during her pilgrimage to Rome of raising the matter with Pope Leo XIII. That story is very well known.

Hyacinthe Loyson.

A second example of Thérèse's zeal for the conversion of sinners can be found in the example of Hyacinthe Loyson. He was a Carmelite priest who joined the Order in 1860. He was a charismatic preacher, perhaps the most famous in France in his time. Loyson left the Order (where he had been superior of the Paris Carmelite house) and the Roman Catholic Church just before Vatican I. He entered into a civil marriage with an American lady named Emily Butterfield, the widow of a man called Merriman. He founded a "Catholic Gallican church" in Paris in 1879 complete with a liturgy he himself had composed or adapted. Carmelite colleague in France, Hermann Cohen, like Thérèse later in the century, was deeply concerned about Loyson's salvation and wrote a poignant letter to him on September 27, 1869, from his solitude in Tarasteix, near Lourdes.

There was crusade of prayer for Loyson's conversion which intensified after their marriage and especially among the members of the Order. Thérèse herself, Herman Cohen, and outside the Order the visionary of Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous, as well as many others, personally offered their prayers and penance for his conversion. They were united with those who had come to know the former Carmelite, now a Protestant preacher.

One of the people linked to the crusade of prayer with unlimited confidence in the infinite mercy of the Lord Jesus to save him, was Thérèse of Lisieux. Half a century later, in 1927, she was declared Patroness of the Missions. Since her entry, aged fifteen, into the Carmel of Lisieux in 1888, until the end of her life, Loyson was always in her prayers. She appears to have been destined to pray with confidence and without limit for the conversion of publicly known major criminals and sinners.

Thérèse would call Loyson “our brother.” Her sister Céline, while still in the world, united with her in heartfelt prayer and love to the Good Shepherd to bring the lost sheep back to the fold. Right at the end of her life Thérèse offered her final Holy Communion for him. This occurred on August 19, 1897, feast of St. Hyacinth. St. Thérèse had made Loyson’s salvation a priority in her prayer for most of her brief religious life. She made him the subject of a letter to her sister Céline as early as July 8, 1891. His preaching in Normandy at this time was reported in the press and Thérèse writes:

Is it surprising that we are so favored, we whose only desire is to save a soul that seems to be lost forever?
...the details interested me very much, while making my heart beat very fast...but I shall give you some other details that are not any more consoling. The unfortunate prodigal went to Coutances where he started over again the conferences given at Caen. It appears he intends to travel throughout France in this way Céline....and with

all this, it seems that *remorse* is gnawing at him. He goes into the churches with a huge Crucifix, and he seems to be making great acts of adoration....His wife follows him everywhere.”¹

Then Thérèse continues her letter to Céline, rather judgmentally. “He is really culpable, more culpable than any other sinner was who was converted.” Then she urges Céline to renewed prayers for his conversion, referring to him as “our brother.” This reaction of Thérèse demonstrates to us that even the greatest saints are people of their own time, place and culture. Nowadays we would not want to pre-empt the judgement of God, which is the only judgement that matters. The Prioress had obviously allowed Thérèse to access the above details from local newspapers at the time. Still Thérèse was probably given pause on her sweeping judgement on Loyson, as she had underlined the following comment from him. “If the Church were to prove me wrong, *I will gladly acknowledge my error and take my place once again humbly in Christian unity.*”²,

In January 1911, the Carmel of Lisieux sent Loyson a copy of the "Story of a Soul and Poems" of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The following February 5, Loyson wrote a letter to the Prioress, thanking her for the "beautiful volume, encompassing the “Life and poetry of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, religious of the Carmel of

¹ Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Vol 11, p.728.

² Ibid., p.730.

Lisieux," that she had sent him.¹ Replying to this letter, on February 9, Sr. Genéviève (Céline) said she would continue to exchange letters with the ex-Carmelite. Indeed, on July 18 of the same year, 1911, she sent excerpts from the process of the Cause for Beatification of the Carmelite, begun two years earlier, in 1909.

Loyson`s last four years in Paris (1909-1912)

After the death of his wife, Emily Merriman, on December 3, 1909, Loyson came to live with his family – his son Paul and wife Laura. Next day, December 4, he felt very tired and kept to his bed. Fatigue degenerated into a general weakening in health, and finally to serious disease. Since late January 1912, could not get out of bed; January 29 was the last day he wrote a note in his diary. So on Thursday, February 8, at 5 in the morning, Hyacinthe lifted his hand to his chest, searching for the crucifix that he always carried with him. Laura put it between his fingers. He kissed it, sighing "My Sweet Jesus!" these were his last words. His life was ebbing away. Attended by his son Paul, Laura and Ms. Saint-Germain he died on Friday February 9 at 11 in the morning.

¹ Part of his reply stated, "I was touched, very much touched by many of the things I read in this book." Lest we be too quick to rush to judgment ourselves, we could do well to remember this line from Loyson's reply to Céline: "I have been mistaken more than once in my life, but I am convinced that what God condemns in man is not error when this is sincere, but selfishness, pride, and hatred." (See, *Letters of St. Thérèse*, Vol.11, p. 730).

Loyson`s biographer, A. Houtin,¹ comments: “Many people have rightly seen in that sigh and that kiss of love for Jesus on the cross, a "sign" of his final conversion, grace granted by the Lord, in answer to the crusade of prayer, offered by many people, including the Patroness of the Missions, St. Thérèse.”

¹ H. Outin also published in 1895 *Maxims and Spiritual Advice of Our Blessed Father John of the Cross*. Thérèse kept this Vol. together with the *Spiritual Canticle* by her sick bed.

Thérèse and John of the Cross.

Thérèse assimilated the teaching of St. John of the Cross, the Carmelite poet of God's love. It seems clear from St. Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* that she is a kind of hidden communicator of St. John of the Cross. Thérèse never met a Carmelite friars or benefited from their spiritual direction during her lifetime. But she did read John closely. Her sister Céline had drawn up an extensive anthology of texts from John and Thérèse referred to this constantly. It is also possible that we owe to Thérèse the spike in John's popularity among spiritual commentators since her death.

In a sense Thérèse sugar coats some of John's hard sayings, that is, those that have on occasion put many people off. Perhaps then when we dip into Thérèse's doctrine we are indirectly exposed to John's great vision – looking at it through the benign filter Thérèse supplies.

I can no longer ask for anything with fervor except the accomplishment of God's will in my soul without any creature being able to set obstacles in the way. I can speak these words of the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross:

In the inner wine cellar.
I drank of my Beloved,
and when I went abroad
Through all this valley
I no longer knew anything,
And lost the herd which I was following.

Now I occupy my soul
And all my energy in His service;
I no longer tend the herd,
Nor have I any other work
Now that my every act is LOVE.¹

Again:

How sweet is the way of love, dear Mother. True, one can fall or commit infidelities, but, knowing how to draw profit from everything, love quickly consumes everything that can be displeasing to Jesus; it leaves nothing but a humble and profound peace in the depths of the heart.²

This was the prophetic antidote to the Jansenism that poisoned the church for centuries.

(The aristocratic Mother Gonzague, who on the whole has had a bad press, still she had plenty of insight and common sense, was approached by one of the sisters who had been terrified by a retreat giver who told her she had one foot in hell and if she wasn't careful both feet would be there. Mother Gonzague just smiled and said, 'Don't be concerned, child, I already have both feet there.')

The many quotations from John of the Cross in Thérèse's writings demonstrate that she was inspired by him to put the emphasis on love in her whole relationship with God. In case we are in any doubt about this, we have only to continue

¹ Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, p.413.

² Story of a Soul, p.179.

reading her *Autobiography*: “Ah! how many lights have I not drawn from the Works of our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross! At the ages of seventeen and eighteen I had no other spiritual nourishment;”¹

Prompted then by the beautiful Spiritual Canticle of John of the Cross, Thérèse meditated often on the biblical book on which it is based, the *Song of Songs*. She comments at length on this verse of the 'Song',

"Draw me, we shall run after you in the odour of your ointments."²

In the traditional allegorical interpretation of the Song, Thérèse referred this to Christ who attracted her. Then she remarks tellingly that since Jesus has risen and ascended into heaven she has only to turn to the Gospels to breathe in his fragrance.

Towards the end of August 1897, Thérèse had this to say regarding John's teaching: “Ah! it's incredible how all my hopes have been fulfilled. When I used to read St. John of the Cross, I begged God to work out in me what he wrote, that is, the same thing as though I were to live to be old; to consume me rapidly in Love, and I have been answered!”³

These thoughts of Thérèse occurred in the wake of her own religious Profession as a Carmelite on September 8 1890. This event she referred to as her ‘wedding’: “The beautiful day

¹ Story of a Soul, p.179.

² Song of Songs.1:3

³ Last Conversations. p.177.

of my wedding finally arrived,” she wrote. She had no doubt but that she could visualise Jesus as her true spouse. ⁱA few weeks after her profession her cousin Jeanne Guerin got married. Jeanne had told Thérèse all about her preparations for her happy day and this stimulated Thérèse to emulate Jeanne in the delicate attentions she would pay to her spouse Jesus. She even amused herself by drafting an Invitation Card, based on Jeanne's wedding invitation. Hers was a “Letter of Invitation to the Wedding of Thérèse Martin to God's Son Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

That Thérèse should think in these terms is entirely consistent with what she would have drawn from the teaching of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa regarding the mutual love between Christ and the individual person.

Due to her serious illness and chronic pain the thought of death was obviously never far from Thérèse's mind in her last months. On July 27 she quoted to her sister Pauline this verse from *The Living Flame* of John of the Cross:

Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter. I've always applied these words to the death of love that I desire. Love will not wear out the veil of my life; it will tear it suddenly. With what longing and with what consolation I have always quoted these words of St. John of the Cross: it is of the highest importance that the soul practice love very much in order that, being consumed

rapidly, she may be scarcely restrained here on earth, but promptly reach the vision of her God face to face.¹

She repeated the same thought five weeks later. It had also been the subject of one of her poems: *To live by Love*.

I want to sing on leaving this world:
“I’m dying of Love!
Flame of Love, consume me unceasingly
.....
Divine Jesus, make my dream come true:
To die of Love!²

Thérèse in fact wished to live and die of love as two of her poems suggest.

Carmelite Hermann Cohen, with the permission of the Prior, composed some motets during his time at the eremitical house in Tarasteix, near Lourdes which he founded. The Collection was entitled, *Thabor*. He had to do so without any instrumental resources which were not available there. One of these motets on a Eucharistic theme was entitled:

A Little Flower at the door of the Tabernacle.

Between two cold barriers there grew a little plant
Which brightened the tedium of the prisoner
who cultivated it with love.

¹ Her Last Conversations, p.113

² John and Thérèse, *Guy Gaucher*, p.132.

And in exchange for his care
he saw the humble plant
Emit with all its energy the fragrance
Of its flowers.

These hymns composed by Cohen were very popular in France for many years and would certainly have been known in Carmelite convents. The idea of Jesus being a 'prisoner of love' in the tabernacle would have appealed greatly to Therese's romantic nature. There are secular love songs with this title. Indeed one of her poems treats explicitly of this theme:

A speck of dust (not more) I've made
My place - from which I do not stir -
The sanctuary's holy shade,
So close there to love's prisoner.

Here again Thérèse was able to find backing for the prisoner theme in her loved John of the Cross, and she finds it in this beautiful passage:.

The power and the tenacity of love is great, for love captures and binds God himself. Happy is the loving soul, since she possesses God for her prisoner, and he is surrendered to all her desires. God is such that those who act with love and friendship toward him will make him do all they desire, but if they act otherwise there is no speaking to him or power with him, even though they go to extremes.¹

¹ Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, p.534.

John is effectively saying – just think of the happiness the true lover of God enjoys, having turned the tables on him; the soul now holds God prisoner after having been his prisoner itself for so long.

Night of Faith.

We need to take notice of the dense spiritual darkness which Thérèse experienced in the final year of her short life. Her childhood faith in heaven would be battered by gathering storms on the horizon. A book called 'God's Gentle warrior' by Thomas Nevin written in 2006, makes this challenging statement: "Another fact is that she died without belief in heaven, the terminus of the Christian faith. She also died without hope of getting there." Well of course, I might add, if there is no heaven there is no hope of getting there. It looks as if neither of Thérèse's parents ever had to suffer a trial of faith of that kind and neither do the majority of Christians. St John of the Cross had covered this area in his classic book *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Thérèse herself doesn't describe her darkness as baldly as Nevin suggests, but I would have to admit she comes pretty close. In Ms. C she addressed Mother Marie de Gonzague in these words.:

My dear Mother...I must appear to you as someone filled with consolation and one for whom the veil of faith is torn aside; and yet it is no longer a veil for me. It is a wall that reaches right up to the heavens and covers the starry firmament. When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for it is simply what I want to believe. It is true that at times a very

small ray of the sun comes to illumine my darkness, and then the trial ceases for an instant, but afterwards the memory of this ray, instead of causing me joy, makes my darkness even more dense.¹

And she underlines the last words.

In Book 2 of *The Dark Night*, John of the Cross had written:

This night is a painful disturbance involving many fears, imaginings, and struggles within a man. Due to the apprehension and feeling of his miseries, he suspects that all is lost and that his blessings are gone forever, the sorrow and moaning of his spirit is so deep that it turns into vehement spiritual roars and clamouring, and sometimes he pronounces them vocally and dissolves into tears (if he has the strength and power to do so); although such relief is less frequent.²

This trial of faith was to last for Thérèse from Easter 1896 until her death in September 1897. She compared the trial to a thick impenetrable fog that came down suddenly and obscured the contours of her spiritual landscape. Thérèse pictured herself sitting down at the table of sinners and unbelievers, and atheists, feeding on their diet of dry bread. She imagined her table companions taunting her: “You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the eternal possession of the Creator of

¹ Story of a Soul, p.214.

² Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, p.348.

all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness.¹

Thérèse compared these depressing thoughts with the sunny sentiments expressed in her poems written around the same time; she explained this as simply stating what she wanted to -believe. To underline the severity of this trial we should notice that Thérèse warned her sister Pauline not to leave a poisonous medicine within her reach. She knew that due to the intensity of her pain, it would provide a temptation for her. Indeed, she admitted, were it not for her faith, she would not have hesitated for a moment to swallow it. However she insists that even in such a scenario she would not take such a drastic step unless her mind became unhinged. What a response Thérèse gives in our own day to those who champion assisted dying.

¹ Story of a Soul, p.213. Thérèse was related by marriage to atheist René Tostan, a fact that added impetus to her prayer for unbelievers.

Mary the mother of Jesus

In her devotion to Mary the mother of the Lord, Thérèse proved herself a faithful member of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and a true spiritual daughter of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Before that of course, she would have been encouraged in this as in other matters, to follow the good example set by her family.

Thérèse has numerous references to Mary in her writings. One of her best known remarks is this: “We know very well that the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but at the same time she is more Mother than Queen.”¹ Thérèse often expressed the wish to have been a priest and that for various reasons. On the occasion of this remark it was in the context of how she would have preached on Mary had she been a priest. Her sermon would have been a model of balance and common sense, in contrast to exaggerations she had come across. One of these suggested that as a three year old, Mary had offered herself to God in the Temple. She also was not happy with the suggestion that after Simeon’s prophecy the thought of a sword piercing her heart remained with her constantly. Thérèse would not buy into these ideas. She says: “For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to please me and do me any good, I must see her real life, not her imagined life. She would have highlighted the simplicity of Mary’s life in Nazareth. She took issue with priests who presented Mary as unapproachable and remote, whereas they should have emphasised that she had to live by

¹ Her Last Conversations, p.161

faith like ourselves. This, she thought, can be easily shown from the gospel – “They did not understand the words he spoke to them. And that other no less mysterious statement: ‘His father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.’ In contrast to what she had heard, Thérèse could not imagine a mother wanting to outshine her children by a factor of five. Thérèse expressed these thoughts in conversation with her sister Pauline. At the end of this conversation Thérèse drew attention to her poem: *Why I love you Mary* This was a long poem of 25 stanzas in which Thérèse carefully enumerates every mention of Mary in the gospels, expressing the same sentiments as above. Here is a typical stanza which was in fact Thérèse’s last poem :

Mother full of grace, I know that in Nazareth
You lived in poverty, wanting nothing more.
No rapture, miracle, or ecstasy
Embellish your life, O Queen of the Elect!...
The number of little ones on earth is truly great.
They can raise their eyes to you without trembling.
It’s by the ordinary way, incomparable Mother,
That you like to walk to guide them to Heaven.¹

When reflecting on Thérèse’s love for the Virgin Mother we need to recall the incident which she describes as her miraculous cure which she attributed to the smile of the Virgin. By Easter 1883 at the age of ten Thérèse had been displaying symptoms of a serious malady which brought her to death’s

¹www.poetseers.org, Accessed March 10, 2020.

door. Her father and sisters were fearful for her life and sanity. The Martin family treasure, the statue of Mary, had been placed near Thérèse's sick bed. We listen to Thérèse herself on what happened in regard to the Virgin's smile:

Finding no help on earth, poor little Thérèse had also turned towards the Mother of the Lord and prayed with all her heart that she take pity on her. All of a sudden the Blessed Virgin appeared beautiful to me, so beautiful that never had I seen anything so attractive; her face was suffused with an ineffable benevolence and tenderness, but what penetrated to the very depths of my soul was the "ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin." At that instant, all my pains disappeared, and two large tears glistened on my eyelashes, and flowed down my cheeks silently, but they were tears of unmixed joy. Ah! I thought, the Blessed Virgin smiled at me, how happy I am, but never will I tell anyone for my happiness would then disappear.

Thérèse's fears were well founded and when the secret got out it became a source of real torment for her for the next five years. It was only after Thérèse's visit to the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris during her trip to Rome, that she finally found peace. This experience of healing from the mother of the Lord carved itself into Thérèse's soul and she remained forever grateful.

During her last illness leading to her death, the awareness of Mary's presence and protection were never far from Thérèse's heart and lips. In the collection entitled *The Prayers*

of *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*.¹ The first and last prayer in the collection is addressed to Mary – the last being on the anniversary of her Profession, September 8, 1897. She died on the last day of the month.

Here is another stanza from Thérèse's popular companion poem, *My Song of today*, with opening line: "Oh. Why I love thee Jesus."

O sweetest Star of heaven! O Virgin, spotless, blest,
Shining with Jesus' light, guiding to Him my way!
O Mother! 'neath thy veil let my tired spirit rest,
For this brief passing day!²

Thérèse and priests.

Chapter 11 of *Story of a Soul*, addressed to her Prioress Mother Marie Gonzague, is entitled: "Those whom you have given me." By these she means the novices in the convent and the spiritual brothers entrusted to her prayers. At the beginning of her religious life as was the custom, Thérèse was asked her reason for becoming a Carmelite. Her answer was "I have come to save souls and especially to pray for priests." She saw that by praying for one priest, she could benefit thousands of people to whom that priest might minister.

Needless to say Thérèse had an idealised image of a priest prior to her pilgrimage to Rome when she spent a month long

¹ The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, ICS Publications, Washington, DC, 1997.

² Ibid,

train journey cheek by jowl with 75 priests. This is how she explains her eye opening in *Story of a Soul*:

The second thing I learnt had to do with Priests. Up to this time I had not understood the chief aim of the Carmelite Reform. To pray for sinners delighted me; to pray for Priests, whose souls seemed pure as crystal, that indeed astonished me. But in Italy I realised my vocation, and even so long a journey was a small price to pay for such valuable knowledge. During that month I met with many holy Priests, and yet I saw that even though the sublime dignity of Priesthood raises them higher than the Angels, they are still but weak and imperfect men. And so if holy Priests, whom Our Lord in the Gospel calls the salt of the earth, have need of our prayers, what must we think of the lukewarm? Has not Our Lord said: "If the salt lose its savour wherewith shall it be salted?" Oh, dear Mother, how beautiful is our vocation! We Carmelites are called to preserve "the salt of the earth." We offer our prayers and sacrifices for the apostles of the Lord; we ourselves ought to be their apostles, while they, by word and example, are preaching the Gospel to our brethren. Have we not a glorious mission to fulfill? But I must say no more, for I feel that on this subject my pen would run on for ever.¹

This passage of course was written long after the pilgrimage to Rome. On July 14, 1889, she had written to Céline: "Oh *Céline* let us be apostles ... let us save especially

¹ Storyofasoul.com, accessed March 10, 2020

the souls of priests; these souls should be more transparent than crystal ... Alas, how many bad priests, priests who are not holy enough. ... Let us pray, let us suffer for them, and, on the last day, Jesus will be grateful. We shall give Him souls! Céline, do you understand the cry of my soul?"¹

Thérèse followed this up in a second letter to her sister on October 15:

“Ah! Céline, I feel that Jesus is asking both of us to quench His thirst by giving Him souls, the souls of priests especially. I feel that Jesus wills that I say this to you, for our mission is to forget ourselves and to reduce ourselves to nothing. ... We are so insignificant ... and yet Jesus wills that the salvation of souls depends on the sacrifices of our love. He is begging souls from us!"²

Then on the eve of New Year of 1889 she wrote: “Céline, if you wish, let us convert souls; this year, we must form many priests who love Jesus! And who handle Him with the same tenderness with which Mary handled Him.”³

We can only imagine how deeply concerned Thérèse would be in our day and how she would embark on a crusade of prayer and penance to repair and heal the evils so many priests have perpetrated on innocent children.

¹ Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, Vol.; 1, p.578,

² Ibid., p. 589.

³ Ibid., p.602

Two spiritual brothers, Maurice Bellière and Adolphe Roulland.

Flowing on from the above, we need to look at how Thérèse carried out in practice her care for two future priests *who had been given to her.*

Zélie Martin lost four children in infancy, two of whom were boys. It had been the earnest prayer of the family to have a son a missionary priest but this was not to be. Great was Thérèse's joy when she ended up with two spiritual brothers destined to become missionary priests. The first of these was seminarian Maurice Bellière who wrote to Lisieux Carmel requesting that one of the sisters be asked to accompany him in prayer in his future priestly apostolate. Mother Agnes asked her sister to take up this request which she was glad to do. Some time later there was a similar request from another seminarian, Adolphe Roulland, also a future missionary. Thérèse comments:

It was our Holy Mother St. Teresa who sent me my first little brother as a feast-day gift in 1895. I was in the laundry, very much occupied by my work, when Mother Agnes of Jesus took me aside and read a letter she had just received. was from a young seminarian, inspired, he said, by St. Teresa of Avila. He was asking for a Sister who would devote herself especially to the salvation of his soul and aid him through her prayers and sacrifices when he was a missionary so that he could save many souls. He promised to remember the one who would become his

sister at the Holy Sacrifice each day after he was ordained. Mother Agnes of Jesus told me she wanted me to become the sister of this future missionary. Mother, it would be impossible for me to express my happiness. My desire, answered in this unexpected way, gave birth in my heart to a joy which I can describe only as that of a child.

Thérèse carried on a touching correspondence with these two for the rest of her life. She never met Maurice Bellière and she only met Adolphe Roulland once in the Carmel on the day of his first mass. After addressing them formally as *Abbé* in her early letters, Thérèse then used more familiar language addressing them as *Little Brother*. Thérèse composed a beautiful prayer for Bellière which she recited for him every day. Here is part of the prayer.

You know, Lord, that my only ambition is to make you known and loved. Now my desire will be realised. I can only pray and suffer, but the soul to whom you unite me by the sweet bonds of charity, will go and fight in the plain to win hearts for you, while on the mountain of Carmel, I will pray that you give him victory.¹

In exchange, Thérèse asked Bellière to recite the following prayer for her every day.

Merciful Father, in the name of our gentle Jesus, the Blessed Virgin and the saints, I beg you to enkindle my

¹ The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1997, pp. 78-79.

sister with Your Spirit of Love, and to grant her the grace of making You loved very much.¹

When Mother Gonzague was Prioress, she allowed Thérèse to send Bellière one of her poems, entitled '*Vivre d'Amour, To Live by Love*'.² Later she was able to send him several more. Here is a relevant stanza from the above poem/hymn:

To live of love, O Master dearest, best!
It is to beg Thee light Thy holiest fires
Within the soul of each anointed priest,
Till he shall feel the Seraphim's desires;
It is to beg Thee guard Thy Church, O Christ!
For this I plead with Thee by night, by day;
And give myself, in sacrifice unpriced,
With love alway!"³⁴

Belliére's life ended sadly humanly speaking. After some years in Africa as a member of the White Fathers he developed mental illness. It was reported that he had been bitten by a lethal tse-tse fly. A bite causes sleeping sickness among other things. This might explain why Maurice abandoned his mission and returned to France without permission. He was sanctioned by his superiors and ordered to return. However his health would not permit this. He was sent to a mental home in Belgium but

¹ Letters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Vol 11, p.1058.

² This was the poem that so impressed Carmelite Saint – Raphael Kalinowski.

⁴ catholicspiritualdirection.org. Accessed March 11, 2020

didn't stay long. Eventually he left the White Fathers and returned to his native Normandy where he deteriorated rapidly. A priest friend arranged to have him sent to the Bon Saveur mental home in Caen. By coincidence this was the place Thérèse's father Louis had spent three years in a similar state. Bellière died there on July 14, 1907 at the age of 34. We can be sure Thérèse's prayers followed him from heaven as her love never failed.

Adolphe Roulland joined the Paris Foreign Mission and ministered at Sutchuen in China. He was a more capable person than Bellière and was requested as a seminary professor, a post which he didn't take up. He returned to France in 1909. He testified at the Process for Thérèse's beatification: This is one of his answers:

At rest in God's will. – Her acceptance of God's will was so great that only there did she find rest, and the way to perfection. She said on 1st November 1896: "May God's will be done! In it alone is rest to be found; outside this lovable will we would do nothing either for Jesus or for souls". And on 19th March 1897: "I am not at all worried about the future; I am sure God will do His will, it is the only grace I desire"¹ - Lastly on 9th May 1897: "At times, when I am reading certain spiritual treatises in which perfection is shown through a thousand obstacles, surrounded by a crowd of illusions, my poor little mind quickly tires; I close the learned book that is breaking my

¹ Letters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Vol 11, p.1069.

head and drying up my heart, and I take up Holy Scripture. Then all seems luminous to me; a single word uncovers for my soul infinite horizons, perfection seems simple to me, I see it is sufficient to recognize one's nothingness and to abandon oneself as a child into God's arms" -¹

Fr. Roulland died in 1934.

As Thérèse reflected back on this apostolate of praying for priests and especially for her *two brothers*, she was reminded of a verse from the Song of Songs: "Draw me, we will run after you in the odour of your ointments."² It occurred to her that she would not be running alone, but that all those she cared for would be running in her wake. This led her further to reflect on the Priestly Prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, where Jesus draws all those the Father has given him into his prayer. Thérèse goes on to quote the whole priestly prayer from John Chapter 17, one of the longest of her quotations from the scriptures. She is only following the example of John of the Cross who quotes most of Chapter 17 in his *Spiritual Canticle*. Thérèse doesn't leave it at that but continues to be captivated by the phrase "Draw me..." In a lovely passage she writes:

What is it then to ask to be "Drawn" if not to be united in an intimate way to the object which captivates our heart? If fire and iron had the use of reason, and if the latter said to the other: "Draw me," would it not prove that it desires to be identified with the fire in such a way that the fire penetrate and drink it up with its burning substance and

¹ Ibid.

² Song of Songs 1:2.

seem to become one with it? Dear Mother, this is my prayer. I ask Jesus to draw me into the flames of His love, to unite me so closely to Him that He live and act in me. I feel that the more the fire of love burns within my heart, the more I shall say: "Draw me," the more also the souls who will approach me (poor little piece of iron, useless if I withdraw from the divine furnace), the more these souls will run swiftly in the odor of the ointments of their Beloved, for a soul that is burning with love cannot remain inactive. No doubt, she will remain at Jesus' feet as did Mary Magdalene, and she will listen to His sweet and burning words. Appearing to do nothing, she will give much more than Martha who torments herself with many things and wants her sister to imitate her. Is it not Martha's works that Jesus finds fault with.¹

¹ Story of a Soul, pp. 257-258.

Thérèse and the Scriptures.

Gospel scenes

Even a passing acquaintance with St. Thérèse shows us how deeply she engaged with the Scriptures, especially the Gospels. In this she was following the Carmelite Rule which urged its members “to meditate day and night on the law of the Lord.” The gospel came alive for her in day to day experience. A touching episode in the company of her sister Pauline, illustrates this point. The two were together in the garden when Thérèse noticed a white hen sheltering her brood under her wings from where some chicks were peeping out. This scene reduced Thérèse to tears. “I cried when I thought how God used this image in order to teach us His tenderness towards us. All through my life, this is what He has done for me! He has hidden me totally under His wings!”¹ Matthew describes this scene in the context of the Lord weeping over Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks about her, and you were not willing,”²

Thérèse got back to the scriptures before Vatican Two urged us to do so. She refers to the *Song of Songs* several times in her writings including her letters. The most revealing statement she made comes in a remark to one of her novices:

¹ Story of a Soul ,p.60.

² Mt, 23:37.

"If I had the time I would like to comment on the Song of Songs; in this book I have discovered such profound things about the union of the soul with the Beloved." Her interest in this would certainly be due to the *Spiritual Cantic* of St. John of the Cross. She expressed the wish to be a priest so that she could study Hebrew and Greek to enable her to read Holy Scripture in their original languages. Here however we might observe that her motivation for doing so was culturally tied to her time, in the sense that she thought the Bible was dictated by God. This doesn't allow for the part played by the individual author of any given book of Scripture, labouring under the limitations of purely human language in a particular place and time.

The thoughts of Thérèse in regard to the *Song of Songs* occurred in the wake of her own religious Profession as a Carmelite on September 8 1890.

Due to her serious illness and chronic pain obviously the thought of death was not far from Thérèse's mind in her last months. She frequently referred to Jesus in his own self-description as the one who would come like a thief in the night. On July 27 she quoted to her sister Pauline this verse from *The Living Flame* of John of the Cross: "Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter." I've always applied these words to the death of love that I desire. Love will not wear out the veil of my life; it will tear it suddenly. With what longing and with what consolation I have always quoted these words of St. John of the Cross: it is of the highest importance that the soul practice love very much in order that, being consumed rapidly,

she may be scarcely restrained here on earth, but promptly reach the vision of her God face to face.”¹

In addressing her Prioress Mother Gonzague in Chapter 10 of *Story of a Soul*, Thérèse turns to a vital subject for community life – mutual charity, and spends almost half the chapter discussing it:

This year dear Mother, God has given me the grace, to understand what charity is; I understood it before, it is true, but in an imperfect way. I had never fathomed the meaning of these words of Jesus: "The second commandment is LIKE the first: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I applied myself especially to loving God, and it is in loving Him that I understood my love was not to be expressed only in words, for: "It is not those who say: 'Lord, Lord!' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven." Jesus has revealed this will several times or I should say on almost every page of His Gospel. But at the Last Supper, when He knew the hearts of His disciples were burning with a more ardent love for Him who had just given Himself to them in the unspeakable mystery of His Eucharist, this sweet Savior wished to give them a new commandment. He said to them with inexpressible tenderness: "A new commandment I give you that you love one another: THAT AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

¹ Her Last Conversations, p.113

By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."¹

There follows a delightful discussion of this thorny subject, laced with typical Theresian humour. Thérèse confesses herself entirely inadequate to carrying out the commandment of Jesus, to love others as he loved them. Because the motives other people may have for a particular course of action is unknown to her, she wants to give her neighbour the benefit of the doubt on every occasion. I have already drawn attention to the incident involving one of her community when discussing her last conversations in Ch. 1. This sister had implied that Thérèse had been behaving selfishly, when in fact she was only giving way to the other sister. The lesson Thérèse learned was this:

This incident prevents me from being vain when I am judged favourably because I say to myself: Since one can take my little acts of virtue for imperfections, one can also be mistaken in taking for virtue what is nothing but imperfection. Then I say with St. Paul: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's day, but neither do I judge myself. He that judges me is THE LORD." In order that this judgment be favorable or rather that I be not judged at all, I want to be charitable in my

¹ Story of a Soul, p.219.

thoughts towards others at all times, for Jesus has said: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged."¹

Thérèse next gives another amusing example of how her ideal of loving her neighbour worked out in practice. Like every other human being Thérèse had her likes and dislikes when it came to the people among whom one's lot is cast. One of her sisters absolutely got on her nerves from every aspect. What was she to do? Instead of snapping at her over something she would give her a megawatt smile. Of course when treated like that your companion will begin to wonder what is so attractive about me that I have this effect on people? Finally this crotchety sister couldn't help but wonder in what the secret of her charm lay. "Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus," she said "what attracts you so much towards me; every time you look at me, I see you smile." We don't know what reply Thérèse gave - obviously she couldn't tell her she was doing it for God!

At an earlier stage on her way of perfection, Thérèse didn't trust her hot temper to enable her to take the most perfect line. On such occasions she resorted to what she called "flight" or "desertion." These stories most have certainly regaled her family, Marie, Pauline and Céline when she told them at recreation.

Way back during her novitiate Thérèse was sacristan and it was her job to return the keys to the Prioress's room. One particular morning when Mother Gonzague was indisposed,

¹ Story of a Soul, p.222

Thérèse was quietly returning the keys and glad of the chance to see her Prioress. On the way there she was ambushed by another sister who tried to take the keys from her. However Thérèse stood on her dignity and said it was her *duty* to return the keys. The troublesome sister weighed in and tried to prevent Thérèse from entering the room. The almighty clatter they caused woke the Prioress and Thérèse's opponent launched into an attack on her more or less saying Thérèse was impossible, what can be done with her, etc,etc." This was too much for Thérèse so she had the bright idea to turn and run. But this was not before hearing – in Thérèse's amusing allusion – the sister ranting on along the lines of the invective of Camillus against the city of Rome.

Thérèse shows herself to be a keen psychologist in analysing different situations that emerge. For instance when someone asks you for the loan of something, you expect to be asked nicely and if this is not forthcoming, you're tempted to find a thousand reasons to withhold it. In the end you might hint at how tactless they are and make it plain you're doing them a favour.

Writing all this near the end of her life, Thérèse was reminded of the extent of sisterly charity she received from them. They were prepared to go the extra mile when it came to seeing to her needs. While praising them for their charity, Thérèse couldn't refrain from mischievous comments even here. It was the haymaking season in the convent paddock and the sisters were in and out of her sickroom with hayforks over their shoulders. One of them remarked how difficult it must

have been for her writing all day. At least she thought, we're providing a distraction. How right you are, Thérèse mused under her breath, I haven't written much and if you go on like that distracting me I won't be able to write anything!

Here again Thérèse would measure what she thought of as her imperfect responses to the ideal Jesus puts before us in the gospel.

Offering of myself as a Victim of Holocaust to God's Merciful Love

O My God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to Love you and make you Loved, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory. I desire to accomplish your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory you have prepared for me in your kingdom. I desire, in a word, to be a Saint, but I feel my helplessness and I beg you, O my God! to be yourself my Sanctity!

Since You loved me so much as to give me your only Son as my Savior and my Spouse, the infinite treasures of his merits are mine. I offer them to you with gladness, begging you to look on me only through the Face of Jesus and in his Heart burning with Love.

I offer you, too, all the merits of the Saints (in Heaven and on earth), their acts of Love, and those of the Holy Angels. Finally, I offer you, O Blessed Trinity! the Love and merits of the Blessed Virgin, my dear Mother. It is to her I abandon my offering, begging her to present it to you. Her Divine Son, my Beloved Spouse, told us in the days of his mortal life: Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you! I am certain, then, that you will grant my desires; I know, O my God! That the more you want to give, the more you make us desire. I feel in my heart immense desires and it is with confidence I ask you to come and take possession of my soul. Ah! O cannot receive Holy Communion as often as I desire, but, Lord, are you not All-Powerful? Remain in me as in a tabernacle and never separate yourself from your little host.....

I want to console you for the ingratitude of the wicked, and I beg of you to take away my freedom to displease you. If through weakness I sometimes fall, may your Divine Glance cleanse my soul immediately, consuming all my imperfections like the fire that transforms everything into itself.....

I thank you, O my God! for all the graces you have granted me, especially the grace of making me pass through the crucible of suffering. It is with joy I shall contemplate You on the last day carrying the scepter of your Cross. Since you deigned to give me a share in this very precious Cross, I hope in Heaven to resemble you and to see shining in my glorified body the sacred stigmata of Your Passion...

After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the Fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for Heaven. I want to work for your Love alone with the one purpose of pleasing you, consoling your Sacred Heart, and saving souls who will love you eternally.

In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works.

All our justice is stained in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own Justice and to receive from your Love the eternal possession of Yourself. I want no other Throne, no other Crown but You, my Beloved!.....

Time is nothing in your eyes, and a single day is like a thousand years; you can, then, in one instant prepare me to appear before you...

In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I offer myself as a victim of holocaust to your merciful love, asking you to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of infinite tenderness shut up within you to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a Martyr of your Love, O my God!...

May this martyrdom, after having prepared me to appear
before you, finally cause me to die and may my soul take its
flight without any delay into the eternal embrace of Your
Merciful Love...

I want, O my Beloved, at each beat of my heart to renew this
offering to you an infinite number of times, until the shadows
having disappeared I may be able to tell you of my Love in an
Eternal Face to Face!...

*Marie, Françoise, Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy
Face unworthy Carmelite religious*

Important Dates in the Life of St. Thérèse

Birth	January 2, 1873
Baptism	January 4, 1873
Death of her Mother, Zélie Guérin	August 28, 1877
Pauline, her sister, enters Carmel	October 2, 1882
Our Lady's Smile; Thérèse Healing	May 13, 1883
First Communion	May 8, 1884
Confirmation	June 14, 1884
Christmas Conversion	December 25, 1886
Audience with Pope Leo XIII	November 20, 1887
Entry into Carmel	April 9, 1888
Thérèse takes the habit	January 10, 1889
Profession of Vows	September 8, 1890
Death of her Father, Louis Martin	July 29, 1894
Thérèse enters the infirmary	July 8, 1897
Her Death, Entry into Heaven	September 30, 1897
Her autobiography "Story of a Soul" is published	September 30, 1898
Cause of Beatification Introduced at Rome	June 10, 1914
Beatification	April 29, 1923
Canonization	May 17, 1925
Declared Doctor of the Church	October 19, 1997

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Thérèse writes to her friends.

Here is an extract from one of Thérèse's letters to a "spiritual brother" Adolphe Roulland, who was preparing to be a missionary in China. We see here what a free, loving and caring person she was, as is apparent in all her letters.

"If I wanted to copy all the passages that touched me most, it would take too long. I conclude, but first I have one more request to make. When you have a moment free I should be very glad if you would write me the principal dates of your life, thus I could unite myself especially with you to thank the good God for the graces He has given you. Goodbye, Brother . . . distance can never separate our souls, even death will only make our union closer. If I go to Heaven soon, I shall ask Jesus' permission to visit you in Su-Chuen, and we shall continue our apostolate together. Meanwhile I shall always be united to you by prayer, and I ask our Lord never to let me be joyful when you are suffering. I would even wish that my Brother should always have joys and I trials, but perhaps that is selfish ! but no, because my only weapon is love and suffering, and you have the sword of the word and of apostolic labours. Goodbye once more, Brother, deign to bless her whom Jesus has given you for a Sister,

Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face,

rel. carm. ind.





St. Thérèse of Lisieux

How do we explain the ongoing power of Thérèse of Lisieux? In 1997 the Church and the Carmelite Order celebrated the Centenary of Thérèse's death. They combined it with marking the conferring on her of the title Doctor of the Church. She was only the third woman to be so honoured in the history of the Church, the other two were St. Teresa of Avila and St Catherine of Siena. This means her message has been given a universal relevance for Catholic people today.

Introduction

'Thérèse will be the Doctor of mystical understanding for the 21st century.'

Br Ephraim

'Thérèse received from the language of John of the Cross, a style of life, a doctrine, a double portion of his, spirit which to being a perfect spiritual daughter. Thérèse is going to transmit to the general public of our era the essential message of John of the Cross and its exigency which is that of love.

André Bord.

'The Church presents to us these Doctors of the science of love. They are St. Teresa of Avila, the spiritual mother; St John of the Cross the Mystical Doctor; St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, their daughter, the greatest teacher of spiritual life in modern times, one of the greatest of all times. *Blessed Marie-Eugène Grialou.*