

## St. Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897) - Feast Day October 1



Dear parishioners,

October 1, is my birthday, but it is also the Feast Day of St. Therese, the “Little Flower.” She was nun who died completely unknown at the age of 24. When she died only about five people thought she was a saint. Not even all the nuns in her convent understood that she was a powerful saint. But before she died she was asked by her superiors to write about the story of her life. It was published as “Story of a Soul.” Soon it became a best seller and it was translated into many languages. One man said that he read it repeatedly: “Every time I read that book, I become a better man!” After she died, many miracles began to happen which fulfilled the prophesy that she had made: “I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.” And “I will send a shower of roses from heaven.” Despite the fact that she was an obscure nun, she became famous and was canonized within 25 years. Despite the fact that she had no degree in theology, she was declared a “Doctor of the Church” by Pope Saint John

Paul II in 1997. Despite the fact that St. Joan of Arc was already the patron saint of France, St. Therese was declared “co-patroness” of France. Despite the fact that during her life she was closed up in a cloistered convent, she prayed for priests and missionaries and became known all over the world for the miracles that she caused to happen in mission territories. Despite the fact that St. Francis Xavier was already the patron saint of Missionaries, St. Therese was declared the co-patroness of missionaries. Despite the fact that she died in her convent of tuberculosis, her desire to become a martyr was granted because of the physical pain and the spiritual dark night that she suffered in her final year. When her body was exhumed it was discovered that someone had placed a palm branch on her casket (a symbol of martyrdom.)

Certainly this “little flower” is stronger than she seemed to be and can help us to be strong men and good leaders in our families and in the church!

*Fr. Mark*

Therese Martin was born in 1873 in a wealthy family the north of France. Her father Louis had desired to be a priest and her mother Zélie had wanted to join a convent, but they were prevented from doing so by various circumstances. One day they passed each other while crossing a bridge and Zélie heard an interior voice which said: “This is the man I have prepared for you.” She turned and looked at the man who within three months became her husband! They created a home together which was very much like a convent. There was much prayer and very little contact with the outside world, except for one Catholic newspaper. But there was much love and joy. They raised five girls who each became nuns!

Therese was somewhat of a “spoiled child” when she was small. Her father loved her in a special way as her “little queen.” Her mother wrote about her in various letters, saying that she was “incredibly stubborn. When she has said ‘no’, nothing will make her change her mind. One could put her in the cellar for the whole day.” In another letter her mother wrote: “She flies into frightful tantrums; when things don’t go just right and according to her way of thinking, she rolls on the floor in desperation like one without any hope. There are times when it gets too much for her and she literally chokes. She’s a nervous child, but she is very good, very intelligent, and remembers everything.” Once when her sister Leonie was twelve years old she decided that she no longer needed her collection of toys and offered them to her younger sisters. But two-year-old Therese took the entire basket and said “I choose all.” Later St. Therese reflected that this would be her attitude throughout life: she would always confidently expect to obtain whatever she wanted, even to becoming a saint!

St. Therese wrote in her autobiography that she desired to become a saint but that she felt unable to do the great things that other saints did. So she discovered and embraced a “little way” of spiritual childhood which emphasized complete confidence in God. She knew that God loved those who were humble and small and this filled her with confidence. She became known as the “little flower” because she compared herself to a tiny daisy in the garden of God’s saints: “I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and



the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all the lowly flowers wished to be roses, nature would no longer be enamelled with lovely hues. And so it is in the world of souls, Our Lord's living garden... The splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent nor the daisy of its simple charm. If every tiny flower wanted to be a rose, spring would lose its loveliness."

Therese also remembered that in her childhood home there was a little elevator (dumb waiter) for bringing things to the upper floor of their home. She compared this to her little way of spiritual childhood: God would carry her up to heaven because she was too small and weak to raise herself.

When Therese was four years old her mother died. Then when she was nine her older sister Pauline, who was her "second mother" entered the Carmelite Monastery at Lisieux. These events contributed to her becoming extremely nervous and sensitive. Once she became very ill with a fever but was cured when she looked at a statue of Mary and saw the Blessed Virgin smile at her. Then when she was thirteen years old on Christmas Eve she experienced a "complete conversion" which freed her of her childhood sensitivity and immaturity.

Louis Martin bravely accepted God's will when each of his daughters decided to leave him and enter religious life. He encouraged his "little queen" when she announced her desire to enter Carmel. He even brought her on a pilgrimage to Rome so that she could ask the pope for a special permission to enter the convent at the young age of fifteen. At the end of his life Louis suffered several strokes and was hospitalized for several years. Louis and Zelie Martin were the first married couple to ever be canonized together (by Pope Francis in 2015)

St. Therese was given the name "Sister Therese of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face" when she entered the convent at Lisieux where she would spend the final nine years of her life. She was humble and obedient to every detail of the rule of the Carmelite Order. She practiced poverty and never complained. She did not feel the need to imitate the great saints who fasted for long periods and practiced extreme bodily penances for the sake of the salvation of souls. She practiced a "little way" of small and unseen penances and confident prayer. She did not complain that she had a lamp with a broken knob so that she had to lift the wick with her fingers. She resisted the temptation to go often to her sister Pauline (who was the Mother Superior of the convent). Once she felt so lonely that she had to hold onto a banister to prevent herself from going down the hall to speak to her sister. Once when she was washing clothes another sister inadvertently splashed dirty water on her face. Therese decided not to immediately wipe off the drops of dirty water. She offered this little sacrifice to Jesus and felt such interior sweetness that she resolved to go back as often as possible to that same spot in order to receive more of this "aspersion" and "precious treasures." Therese was content with austerity and accepted the life of sacrifice even when God chose to deprive her of spiritual consolations. Once she wrote: "I have no desire to go to Lourdes to have ecstasies." When she suffered the "dark night of the soul" and felt no special feelings during prayer, she would imagine that she was a little toy ball which belonged to the child Jesus: "...as a little ball of no value that he could throw on the ground, kick, pierce, leave in a corner, hold close to his heart, as he wished... (or he could) let the ball fall and go to sleep..."



St. Therese knew the secret of saving souls with simple trust in God. She said "To pick up a pin for love can convert a soul."

#### **Here are some other quotations of St. Therese of Lisieux:**

- "Keep your eyes fixed on heaven, the only goal of all our efforts."

- "Do not miss a single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word;

always doing the smallest good deed and doing it all for love."

- "A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul."

- "Do you realize that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you- for you alone? He burns with the desire to come into your heart... don't listen to the demon, laugh at him, and go without fear to receive the Jesus of peace and love..."

- "I know now that true charity consists in bearing all our neighbors' defects--not being surprised at their weakness, but edified at their smallest virtues."

- "We only have this life to live by faith."

