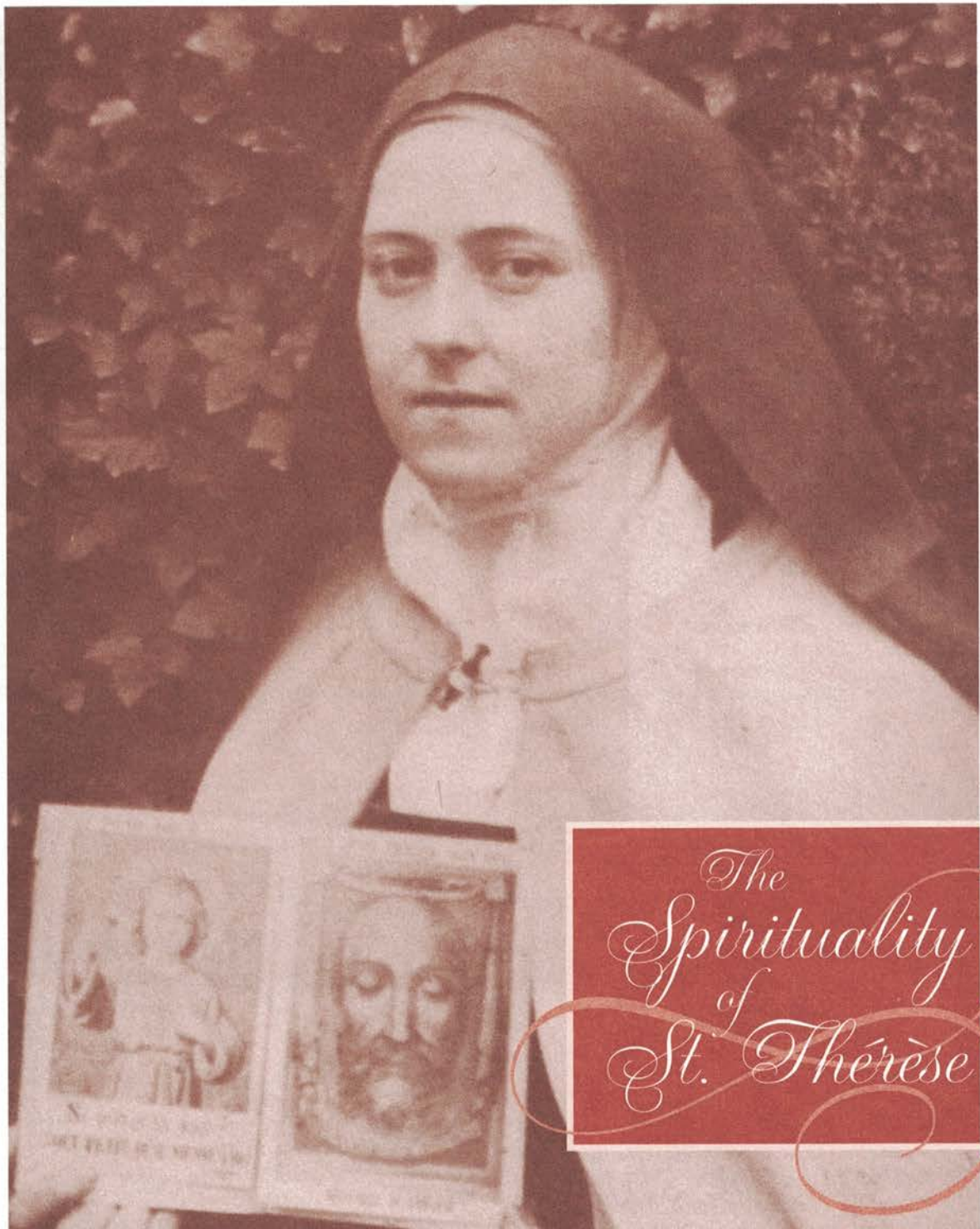


# CARMEL CLARION

MARCH — APRIL 2008 VOLUME XXIV NO. 2



*The  
Spirituality  
of  
St. Thérèse*

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MARCH—APRIL 2008 VOLUME XXIV NO. 2

*Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.*

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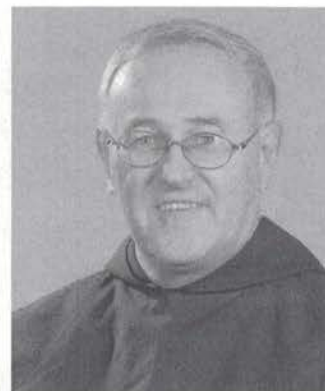
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# Editorial

On January 31st Fr. John Sullivan, prior of the Washington DC monastery was elected Provincial of our Province. Fr. John was born May 27, 1942 in Brooklyn, N.Y. He made his profession in the Order on August 15, 1961. He studied philosophy at Holy Hill, WI and theology in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood in Rome on April 21, 1968. He did post-graduate work at the Teresianum International College, Rome, 1964-1969, earning an S.T.L. Degree in Theology in 1969. Fr. John has held a great variety of administrative and ministerial positions within the Province and Order. He has also been Chairman of the Institute of Carmelite Studies and Publisher and Editor of ICS Publications. He has written extensively on Carmelite spirituality, especially on St. Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross). Fr. John will assume his duties at our Provincial Chapter in May, 2008.



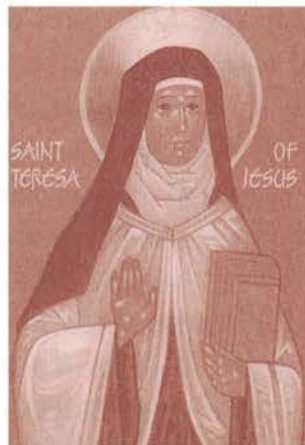
*Fr. John Sullivan*

A Provincial Chapter is held every three years to consider the state of the Province and to plan for the next three. It also drafts new legislation and adopts policies. Our Provincial Chapter, as was said above, is this May. As this is such an important event for all of us we ask you to add the prayer of the Chapter to your community meetings:

Father, through the intercession of St. Teresa, our Mother,  
fill us with your spirit of wisdom and courage  
so that we may strive always to begin anew  
and go from good to better.

Make us true friends of your Son,  
and strong foundations stones  
for those who will come after us.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.



Please note that in the 'Reminders' section on the back cover of this issue is a form for you to use in notifying the Main Office of the results of your community elections.

The preliminary work for the 2009 OCDS Congress is finished. We have received the permission of Archbishop O'Brien of Baltimore to hold the Congress in his diocese. The Core committee after much research and discussion chose the Westin/Sheraton in Baltimore near BWI airport. The dates of the Congress will be July 16-20, 2009. Please mark your calendars. More information will be forthcoming in the next couple of months.

Fr. Regis, O.C.D.

# Thérèse, Listening to the Word

Roberto Fornara, OCD



*Imitation of Christ by  
Thomas à Kempis*

“Had I been a priest I would have studied Hebrew and Greek to be able to read the Word of God in the same human language in which God deigned to express it.” (CSG 80; MSG 107-08)

**B**y confiding the above ideal to Celine, Thérèse introduces us to her love for the Word of God. She longed to deepen her knowledge of it, even though she had to do without the many tools today’s readers have at their disposal. For Thérèse—and also Celine as they shared their secrets—Scripture represented Carmel’s “greatest treasure.” She quoted it often in her writings with an originality that was the fruit of reading and meditation, not of what she heard from preachers. She often opened it at random—in a prayerful mood—looking for an answer to her doubts or questions. It served as the foundation of her prayer and the privileged means of her encounter with God.

## Thérèse Discovers the Bible

Only gradually did Thérèse arrive at the discovery of Scripture as the privileged fount of her spiritual life. Along the way she had read much that helped form her, such as *The Imitation of Christ*, a decisive influence in her spiritual growth, or the works of St. John of the Cross. All her readings led her to a realization that only the Word of God—the Gospels in particular—could provide her with the nourishment she needed.

When seventeen and eighteen years old, already living in Carmel, she found primarily in St. John of the Cross one who could stir the fire within her and be her companion on her journey. At the same time he introduced her to meditation on the Bible and an understanding of some of its passages, above all from the Old Testament. Sacred Scripture became her only sure reference point, her soul’s basic need: “But it is especially the Gospels that sustain me during my hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul. I am constantly discovering in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings” (A 83v; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 179).

She was continually searching the Scriptures. She drew on them for her prayer. She became so familiar with the Word of God that while speaking with her sisters she frequently quoted from the Bible. Sister Marie of the Trinity said that her conversations resembled commentaries on Scripture (cf. PO I, 462). She knew differ-

ent passages by heart and always carried about a copy of the four Gospels. In a letter to Pere Roulland she speaks of “the book of the Gospels which never leaves me” (LT 193).

Nonetheless, it wasn't easy in the kind of environment in which Thérèse lived for her to approach and deepen her understanding of the Word of God. Today we can count on a wide range of translations, resources, and publications that did not exist at the end of the last century. For preaching and the spiritual life, Scripture was not the center and axis about which everything else revolved. Thérèse's love and passion for the Bible, then, is something extraordinary.

Before entering Carmel, the young Martin girl shows no signs of any direct turn to Scripture. Although the Guérin family possessed at least two copies of the Bible, it was improbable because of her age that she had access to it. A first contact with the Word of God, even though sporadic, was made possible through reflection on Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year*. Her familiarity with biblical texts also grew through the various edifying works she read during this period: lives of saints, lives of Jesus, catechisms, and *The Imitation of Christ* itself.

Without permission from the prioress, it was impossible in the monastery—at least for the youngest sisters—to consult the complete Bible reserved in the library. Another Bible (in Le Maistre de Sacy's translation) was accessible at the entrance to the choir. The fact that Thérèse made use of it is evident in her writings. In addition, every nun had *The Christian Manual* for her use, which included, besides the ordinary parts of the Mass and the main Hours of the Divine Office, the psalter, the New Testament, and *The Imitation of Christ*. From September 1894, Thérèse was able to use a new source, although a limited one. Her sister Celine on entering Carmel was allowed to bring with her a little notebook in which she had copied out different passages from the Old Testament. According to Celine's testimony, after she had entered Carmel and taken the name Sister Genèvieve, “Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus made use of this little notebook with enthusiasm and was unable to let it go, so Marie of the Eucharist began to make a copy for her.” Likewise, the liturgical life of her community enabled the young Carmelite to draw abundant riches from the Word. Her personal readings and those done in community contributed as well to the help she received along this path. In a special way St. John of the Cross inspired her with a love for the *Song of Songs*, on which she would have liked to write a commentary.

### Her Teaching on How to Read the Bible

Writing to Celine on July 7, 1894, Thérèse underscored these words of Jesus: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make in him our abode” (Jn 14:23). She comments: “To keep the **word** of Jesus, that is the sole condition of our happiness, the proof of our love for Him. But what, then, is this word?... It seems to me that the **word** of Jesus is **Himself** . . . He, Jesus, the **Word**, the **Word of God**” (LT 165).



*The Martin family faithfully followed the readings of the Liturgical Year.*



*In reading the Bible, then, she did not seek to satisfy a curiosity to learn something new about her relationship with God; rather, the reading allowed her to recognize the truth that she was already living and experiencing.*

The Word of Jesus is Jesus himself. This is the key to understanding Thérèse's reading of the Bible. In harmony with the patristic reading, Thérèse searched on every page for Christ's countenance. Her reading of the Word of God had no other purpose than to foster an encounter with him, to establish a personal contact with him.

In the last days of her life, while concluding the third manuscript of her autobiography, she still had this to say: "Since Jesus has reascended into heaven, I can follow Him only in the traces He has left; but how luminous these traces are! how perfumed! I have only to cast a glance in the Gospels and immediately I breathe in the perfumes of Jesus' life, and I

know on which side to run. I don't hasten to the first place but to the last; rather than advance like the Pharisee, I repeat, filled with confidence, the publican's humble prayer. Most of all I imitate the conduct of Magdalene; her astonishing or rather her loving audacity" (C 36v; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 259).

Attentive listening to the Gospel was therefore a search for Jesus, for an encounter with him, and Scripture was the means that made this encounter possible. But for Thérèse her contact with the Word did not represent merely the first encounter with Jesus, a discovery of him; rather, it was a confirmation, a verification of what she was already living. In moments of difficulty, crisis, or trial, as also in moments of growth and new discovery, the Bible became her point of reference because it represented a confirmation of what the Master had already taught her in the depths of her soul. In reading the Bible, then, she did not seek to satisfy a curiosity to learn something new about her relationship with God; rather, the reading allowed her to recognize the truth that she was already living and experiencing. Often, the Word of God came out and met her first, to direct, console, and confirm her. The encounter with Jesus as Word of the Father permitted her to say in regard to all that was going on in her life: "It's true, it's so, I am sure!"

God had already revealed himself to her; he had taken up his abode in her. Recourse to the Word simply permitted her to listen better to an inner voice of which she was already aware. There was no separation or split between daily life on the one hand and the life of prayer and meditation on the Word of God on the other. Everything was brought back into unity, thanks to this inner Presence. Thérèse knew that the kingdom of God was within her (Lk 17:2) as the Presence who led and enlightened her. She in fact confessed: "I find just when I need them certain lights that I had not seen until then, and it isn't most frequently during my hours of prayer that these are most abundant but rather in the midst of my daily occupations" (A 83v; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 179).

It was this sense of the presence of Jesus and his Spirit within that guided her to the discovery and understanding of the Scriptures, a discovery that was not the fruit of human effort and conquest, but a gratuitous gift revealed to little ones, which increases without our being aware of it: "I have frequently noticed that Jesus doesn't want me to lay up provisions; He nourishes me at each moment with a totally new food; I find it within me without my knowing how it is there" (A 76r; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 165).

She comprehended the Bible in the measure that she lived it, letting herself become like Christ. We are always dealing with a personal experience of Scripture. It is the Word "for her, " for the moment in which she is living, for the problems she is being called on to confront. The severe judgment Hans Urs von Balthasar made when he branded Thérèse's reading of Scripture as subjectivist seems overstated: "Thérèse had read the Scriptures most ardently and even knew sections by heart; but it was almost exclusively in the light of her own life and her personal mission that she allowed them to affect her. No matter how strange it may sound it is true that Thérèse never acquired a genuine contemplation of the Scriptures.... In authentic contemplation the Word of God has to be heard as it is, and not as I would like to hear it, or I imagine it is in relation to me" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity* [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992], 92-93). If it is true that Thérèse did not have the tools for deepening her study of the Bible, it is just as true that her approach to the Word of God was not that of one who listened for what "she would like to hear." Rather, her humble and constant desire was to encounter Christ, intuiting that this encounter involved and transformed one's whole life.

The poem "Why I Love You, Mary" (PN 54), composed a few months before her death, shows, for example, that her view of the Blessed Virgin was much more "objective" and grounded in the Gospels than that of so many preachers of her time, all of whom were prone to exaggerated rhetoric in recounting the privileges and special graces of Mary, expounding on her life with flowery and disagreeably sweet and useless details. Basing herself on the biblical data, Thérèse was instead all taken up with Mary's poverty, simplicity, and journey in faith. Indeed, despite her personal limitations and those of her times, Thérèse was a master in the spiritual reading of the Word of God.

### ***The Song of Songs: A Way of Encounter***

Although it was natural that Thérèse's attention turned chiefly to the Gospel texts, the important biblical foundation for her doctrine and spirituality was more the result of her frequent recourse to the Old Testament. As for the books of the Old Testament, she frequently quoted



Statue known as the "Virgin of the Smile" on account of Thérèse's miraculous cure.

from the psalter, which she had continually at hand thanks to liturgical prayer and books of meditation. The reader is nonetheless surprised that the second most often quoted Old Testament book in Thérèse's writings is the *Song of Songs*. The quotations do not refer simply to this or that passage of the book; they are taken from all the chapters, an evident sign that Thérèse read and meditated at length on the entire work. A help to her in this regard were the different passages of the book transcribed in Celine's notebook, but before having this notebook, Thérèse had already drawn abundantly from the Song of Songs, as shown in her letters written before Celine's entrance to Carmel. Thérèse's references to the Song of Songs illustrate well her approach to Scripture and her way of making it a privileged vehicle for encountering God.

## In Remembrance

**Janette Nedzynski, OCDS**, Jeanette of Mary of Mt. Carmel, began eternal life on August 3, 2007. She was a member of the Community of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity in Rome, NY and made her Vows on February 10, 2001.

**Louise White, OCDS**, Sr. Mary Teresa of the Child Jesus, began eternal life on October 10, 2007. She made her Definitive Promise on October 15, 2002 and was a member of Our Lady of Hope Community in Sarasota, FL.

**Valentine Rogers, OCDS**, Valentine of the Holy Spirit, began eternal life on January 29, 2008. She made her Definitive Promise on May 10, 1987 and was a member of the St. Joseph's Community in Washington, DC.

**Antonia Sipos, OCDS**, began eternal life on February 18, 2008. She made her Vows in 1998 and was a member of the Our Lady of the Paraclete Community in Detroit, MI.

**Eleanor Thayer, OCDS**, began eternal life on February 24, 2008. She was a member of the Community of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Sun City, FL and made her Definitive Promise on April 29, 1995.

**Araminta McCusker, OCDS**, began eternal life on March 3, 2008 at the age of 85. She was a member of Holy Spirit Community in Richmond, VA and made her Definitive Promise on July 10, 1993.

The Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Therese of the Child Jesus Community in Barrington, RI recently lost three members. **Lillian Lonergan, OCDS**, began eternal life on December 7, 2007. She made her Definitive Promise on June 29, 1944. **Alice Zaborski, OCDS**, began eternal life on January 29, 2008 and made her Definitive Promise in January 1994. **Helen Atkins, OCDS**, began eternal life on February 29, 2008 and was Definitively Professed on November 22, 1992.



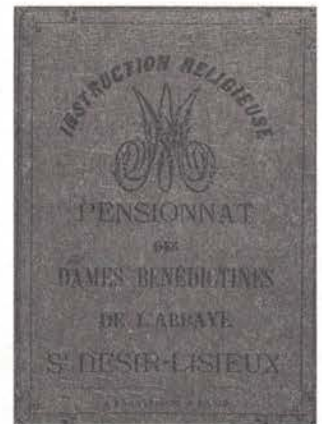
A faithful disciple of St. John of the Cross, Thérèse lived the life of prayer as a spousal encounter with the Beloved. It was probably from the Spanish mystic that she derived her love for the *Song of Songs* as the expression and fount of this way of union. Her quotations from the biblical poem scattered, above all, throughout her correspondence are directed toward describing God's jealous love for his creature. She wrote to her sister Leonie in May 1894: "You are very much blessed, dear little Sister, that Jesus is so jealous of your heart. He is saying to you as to the spouse of the *Canticle*: 'You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, by one of your eyes and by one strand of your hair fluttering on your neck' (LT 164; cf. *Song* 4:9).

His invitation continually reechoes within the soul that has set out in search of her Beloved, moved by an increasing desire to find him. This call is an expression of infinitely greater love and desire. "Open to me, my sister, my beloved, for my face is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of night;" this she writes to Celine (LT 108), borrowing the words of the *Song of Songs* (5:2). The Beloved is he who stands at the door and continually invites us to open, impatient to share moments of communion (*Song* 2:10-13; 8:1 in LT 158).

The way of union is not without difficulty. It is again the *Song of Songs* that awakened Thérèse to this reality. Sometimes the Spouse hides and for a long time does not allow us to perceive his voice and enjoy his presence. He communicates himself only by "looking through the lattices." This is the expression Thérèse took from the *Song of Songs* 2:9 to describe her situation to Mother Agnes of Jesus (LT 230). Speaking of her trial of aridity, Thérèse found inspiration again in a passage from the *Song of Songs*, "which expresses perfectly what a soul is when plunged into aridity and how nothing delights or consoles it. 'I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, to look if the vineyard had flourished, and if the pomegranates had budded.... I no longer knew where I was... my soul was all troubled because of the chariots of Aminadab'" (*Song* 6:11-12; LT 165).

In the same letter she also uses the words from the *Song of Songs* 7:1 ("Return, return, my Sulamitess; return, return, that **we may look** at you!") to indicate the condition of the soul that feels the Lord's merciful and benevolent gaze directed toward it despite the experience it has of its own poverty: "What a call is that of the Spouse! And we were no longer daring even to **look at ourselves** so much did we consider ourselves without any splendor and adornment; and Jesus calls us." The *Song of Songs*, as with all of Scripture, was for Thérèse a way leading to an encounter with God. The Word read and pondered does nothing else than repeat unceasingly the mystery of a belonging that arises from the initiative of God's love: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.... Because you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you... fear not, for I am with you" (*Is* 43:1, 4-5). And because of this Thérèse can apply the words of *Ezekiel* 16:8-13 to herself and her own experience:

Passing by me, Jesus saw that the time had come for me to be **loved**,  
He entered into a covenant with me and I became **His own**. He



Celine Martin's catechism of perseverance.

spread his mantle over me, he washed me with precious perfumes, He re clothed me in embroidered robes, He gave me priceless necklaces and ornaments. He nourished me with purest flour, with honey and oil in **abundance**. Then I became beautiful in His eyes and He made me a mighty queen. (A 47r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 101ff.)

Each one of the words resonated in her, took flesh in her life. Thérèse's final comment in this regard is eloquent: "Yes, Jesus did all this for me. I could take each word and prove it was realized in me" (ibid.).

The way mapped out by the Word of God is not, just something private and personal. The young bride of Christ draws the whole church along with her. Commenting on the verse "Draw me, and we shall run," she writes: "I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by **the odor of your ointments** she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You" (C 34r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 254).

### **The Biblical Basis of the "Little Way"**

In reading God's Word, Thérèse drew out the cues and confirmations necessary for her spiritual life; her "little way" has a profoundly biblical flavor about it. Certainly, we cannot say that Thérèse of Lisieux elaborated a systematic theological doctrine derived from Scripture, but her writings allow the knowledge she drew from continual meditation on the Word of God to shine through. From the themes

Thérèse assimilated to a greater degree, let us reflect especially on humility and poverty, the mercy of God, and the spirituality of abandonment.

### **Awareness of Our Own Poverty**

One of the recurring biblical texts in Thérèse's writings is Jesus' prayer of praise to the Father: "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will" (Lk 10:21). Thérèse read and meditated also on the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. (I Cor 1:26-29)



*Painting Thérèse modeled after a similar picture in her cell. She added her trademark of a lily.*

The fundamental discovery that guided Thérèse on her journey was this very awareness of her own poverty. We do not draw near to God through our own efforts and merits, but by accepting and offering him our own nothingness. Thérèse included herself among the ranks of the *anawim*, the “poor of Yahweh,” who constituted the faithful remnant in the course of Israel’s history, culminating in Mary, the daughter of Sion who recognized and sang of her own nothingness before God. “What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him?” sang the author of Psalm 8 with amazement. And Mary was the one who magnified and exulted in the Lord because he had “looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness” (cf. Lk 1:48). The Greek term *tapeinosis*, which is translated as lowliness or humility, means precisely “poverty, extreme misery, indigence.” Mary recognized before God her own nothingness. Everything she had was a gift of grace, and she is “full of grace” (cf. Lk 1:28).

In her spirituality Thérèse uproots the pharisaical temptation to lay claim to merits before God, serenely accepting this poverty found in lowliness. She writes to Marie Guérin in July 1890:

You give me the impression of a little country girl to whom a powerful king should come and ask her to marry him, and she would not dare to accept under the pretext that she is not rich enough and schooled enough in the ways of the court, without realizing that her royal fiance is aware of her poverty and weakness much better than she is herself ... Neither ought you desire to see the fruit gathered from your efforts.

And going on to speak of herself, she adds:

You are mistaken, my darling, if you believe that your little Thérèse walks always with fervor on the road to virtue. She is weak and very weak, and everyday she has a new experience of this weakness, but, Marie, Jesus is pleased to teach her, as He did St. Paul, the science of rejoicing in her infirmities [cf. 2 Cor 12:5]. This is a great grace, and I beg Jesus to teach it to you, for peace and quiet of heart are to be found there only. When we see ourselves as so miserable, then we no longer wish to consider ourselves, and we look only on the unique Beloved!” (LT 109).

### Experience of God’s Mercy

The awareness of her own poverty was not for Thérèse a source of discouragement; it kept pace with the discovery of God’s merciful love. At the beatification process, Sister Genèviève related that Thérèse of the Child Jesus examined the Scriptures so as “to know the character of God” (PO I, 275). God revealed himself to her precisely as love and mercy. Quoting from Psalm 118, which celebrates the Lord “because his mercy endures forever,” Thérèse concluded that mercy is the fundamental and proper attribute of God. “Through it,” she writes, “I contemplate and adore the other di-



*A favorite picture, “The Heart of Christ in the bosom of the Trinity”*



*Holy card entitled "God's Smile". Thérèse was aware of having been 'preserved' from certain weaknesses by a very special grace from the Lord.*

vine perfections" (A 83v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 180). In tune with the Old Testament, she comprehended that the justice of God coincides with his mercy. Precisely because he is just does the Lord show tenderness and pity toward his children, according to the expressions of Psalm 103: "He crowns you with mercy and compassion.... He secures justice and the rights of all the oppressed.... He is compassionate and filled with gentleness, slow to punish, and abundant in mercy.... As a father has tenderness for his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust" (vv. 4, 6, 8, 13-14; cf. *LI* 226). Perhaps recalling Paul's expressions in the Christological hymn of Philippians (2:6-11), Thérèse welcomed the gift of this mercy above all in Jesus, going so far as to accuse the Son of God of foolishness for renouncing the prerogatives of his divine nature out of love for us, and for going in search of lost humanity (cf. *LI* 169).

Among the Old Testament images that struck her, two had particular significance. The first was that of the shepherd in Isaiah 40:11, who "shall gather the lambs with his arm, and shall take them up in his bosom." The other was the word of comfort of *Isaiah* 66:12-13: "As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they will caress you." Commenting on these texts, Thérèse writes with complete amazement: "After having listened to words such as these, dear godmother, there is nothing to do but to be silent and to weep with gratitude and love" (B 1r-v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p.187).

In addition to the parable of the prodigal son, the Gospel icon of divine mercy, there is for Thérèse the sinner who welcomes Jesus' forgiveness and shows him her own gratitude and love with gestures of affection and tenderness (cf. Lk 7:36-50). Thérèse imitated her and felt close to her because "**her heart** has understood the abysses of love and mercy of **the Heart of Jesus**" (*LI* 247).

For Thérèse, the experience of God's mercy also entailed gratuitousness. It is significant that the autobiographical manuscripts begin by quoting the passage from Mark's Gospel on the call of the twelve: "And going up a mountain, he called to him men of his **own choosing**, and they came to him" (Mk 3:13). Thérèse comments: "This is the mystery of my vocation, my whole life, and especially the mystery of the privileges Jesus showered upon my soul. He does not call those who are worthy but those whom He **pleases**" (A 2r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 13). Examining the Word of God more closely, Thérèse discovered the mystery of this eternal, free design of the Father who "chose us before the foundation of the world...predestining us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ... for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). Our life does not depend on our own strength or will but on God and his merciful love, "or as St. Paul says:

*(continued on page 15)*

(continued from page 10)

God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will show pity to whom he will show pity. So then there is question not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy" (A 2r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 13; cf. Rom 9:15-16).

Thérèse discovered and penetrated deeply into this reality until she realized that every path along which the Lord had led her was steeped in mercy (cf. A 71r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 152). If she had never committed any mortal sins, she knew she owed it to the providence of God who, by removing from her path the occasions for falling, "forgave me **in advance** by preventing me from falling." Thérèse knew that she had been "preserved...only through God's mercy" (cf. A 38v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 83). She was saved by him "who has not sent His Word to save the **just**, but **sinners**. He wants me to love Him because He **has forgiven** me not much but **ALL**" (A 39r SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 84).

### Confidence, Abandonment, and Hope

Sister Genèvieve testified that Thérèse had been fond of a picture depicting a child seated on Jesus' knee reaching up to kiss him. This was the constant attitude of Thérèse. The awareness of her own littleness and poverty and the experience of the divine mercy flowed of necessity into the trusting abandonment of a child who feels secure in the arms of its father or mother: "Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to this Divine Furnace, and this road is the **surrender** of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms" (B 1r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 187). If she did not quote from it explicitly, Thérèse did make the trusting expression of Psalm 131 her own: "O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; I busy not myself with great things, nor with things too sublime for me. Nay, rather, I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child on its mother's lap, so is my soul within me."



*Holy Card Thérèse treasured for here is a child who dared approach the Lord confidently.*

Thérèse's writings take as their point of departure two wisdom texts. The first is from *Proverbs* 9:4: "Let whoever is a little one come to me"; the other is from *Wisdom* 6:7: "To the one who is little, mercy will be shown." These texts, together with those quoted from *Isaiab* (40 and 66), were copied down in Celine's little notebook that Thérèse always had for her use. The entire doctrine of spiritual childhood is founded on these simple quotations. We are not dealing then with a theological elaboration based on the most celebrated Gospel texts treating of spiritual childhood (cf. Mt 11:25-27; Mk 9:35-37; 10:13-16). The two passages from *Proverbs* and *Wisdom*, moreover, are chosen at random. Thérèse does not show concern for their literal meaning or the context in which they appear, but recognizes in these



The "Rose Child Jesus". One of Thérèse's assignments in Carmel was to decorate this statue with flowers.

passages that speak of littleness a reflection of the experience that is developing within her, thanks to a life of prayer.

Nonetheless, if this appropriation of some biblical texts seems a bit risky, we should remember that, after all, she is translating some fundamental theological affirmations of the New Testament into a language entirely her own. When St. Paul speaks of our filial adoption, he is describing a condition that is given to the Christian as a pure gift of God. "When the fullness of time had come," he writes to the *Galatians*, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption" (Gal 4:4-5). The interior presence of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee and fount of the dynamism of this filial life: "As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, Abba, Father! So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God" (Gal 4:6-7).

Thérèse lived the practical consequences of this filial condition from day to day. The Pauline dynamism of Christian morality (being a child of God through grace) finds in the "little way" its logical and concrete application. Her self-discovery as a daughter of God leads her to the perception of her vital dependence on God and to the path of confidence and abandonment. It is the way of theological hope. It is the poverty of spirit that for Jesus is the first of the beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3). In the same context, the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus teaches his disciples to call God "Father" in their prayer (cf. Mt 6:9). The Holy Spirit present within shapes us ever more into children of God. Thérèse confessed that a slow and meditative recitation of the Our Father recollects and helped nourish her soul. Through prayer and intimacy with God she was fashioned into a daughter after the image of the Son, who lived in her. Little Thérèse, hardly eleven years old, often repeated the words of St. Paul to the Galatians (Gal 2:20), and one of the first times she approached the Eucharist she applied them to herself (A 36r; *SOS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p, 79).

The way of confident abandonment—culminating in her *Offering to Merciful Love* made in June 1895—is the surest proof of all that Thérèse lived out as a daughter in the Son. The life of faith, for Thérèse as for "the poor" and "the humble" of Scripture, consists simply in placing one's trust in the One who is worthy of it. To abandon oneself is to believe absolutely in God's love for us, and that only this love can save:

Knowing that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.... I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. (Gal 2:16, 20)

When the young nun was entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the novices (a charge that was hers until her death), she felt the burden of it deeply, but did not despair or trust exclusively in her own strength. She simply trusted, aware also of her own limitations, knowing that “all these other things will be given besides” (Cf. Mt 6:33). She thus had the experience of a Presence dwelling in her, acting and speaking in her. Often she realized that she was saying words that were not coming from her. Once she intuited some deep suffering in the heart of a novice: “Her astonishment was so great that it even took hold of me, and for an instant I was seized with a supernatural fright. I was really sure I didn’t have the gift of reading souls, and this surprised me all the more because I had been so right. I felt that God was very close, and that, without realizing it, I had spoken words, as does a child, which came not from me but from Him” (C 26r).

### **The New Commandment**

A final topic demanding consideration is Thérèse’s practice of charity. In this case, too, the Saint comprehended the importance and significance of “meditating on Jesus’ words” and testimony (cf. C 12r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 220). Among the biblical texts important for Thérèse, chapters 12 and 13 of the apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians merit a special place. The apostle Paul helped her discover in charity both the essence of her vocation and her place within the church. The whole of *Manuscript C* can be considered a detailed commentary on the theme of charity; not an exegetical commentary on various passages—Thérèse did not have the intention or the adequate preparation to do so—but an attempt to make the commandment proposed to every Christian concrete within the context of a religious community.

Jesus’ command in John (13:34) captured Thérèse’s attention: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” Her attention fell on the comparison so new and demanding: Jesus asks us to love one another as he loved us. For Thérèse this represented what was new about the commandment. It meant that the Lord did not give her an external law, but asked her to allow him to be and love in her:

...it is no longer a question of loving one’s neighbor as oneself but of loving him as He, Jesus, has loved him, and will love him to the consummation of the ages. Ah! Lord, I know you don’t command the impossible.... You know very well that never would I be able to love my Sisters as You love them, unless You, O my Jesus, loved them in me.... Oh! how I love this new commandment since it gives me the assurance that Your Will is to love in me all those You command me to love!” (C 12v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 220-21)

The prophet Jeremiah foretold the new covenant in these same terms: “I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.... All shall know me... for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:33-34). And

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---

the new covenant is realized in the gift of the Spirit, this divine presence within that forgives human beings, renders them children and enables them to love with God's very own love "because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Without explicit theological investigation, Thérèse penetrated the Pauline doctrine of justification, underlining not only the negative aspect of pardon and liberation but above all the positive aspect. She comprehended that God himself gives us gratuitously what he asks us to do through this commandment.

The greatest love is "to lay down one's life for one's friends" (On 15:13). For Thérèse this meant, in the concrete circumstances of her monastic experience, translating her desire for martyrdom into daily life, in a struggle against every imperfection, in forbearance, and in reciprocal esteem and acceptance of others (cf. C 12r). Charity ought to become total availability, openness toward everyone without distinction, the capacity to take initiative and the first step. The new commandment is a call to give your cloak (cf. Lk 6:29): "To give up one's cloak is, it seems to me, renouncing one's ultimate rights; it is considering oneself as the servant and the slave of others. When one has left his cloak, it is much easier to walk, to run" (C 16v).

Among the aspects of charity presented in the Gospels, Thérèse is particularly attentive to its gratuitousness:

## ANNUAL SUMMER SEMINAR ON CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

*Theme for Year 2008*

# Carmel: A School for Desire

June 22-28, 2008

Center for Spirituality at Saint Mary's College  
Notre Dame, IN

### PRESENTERS

Daniel Chowning, OCD  
Constance FitzGerald, OCD  
Patrick McMahon, O.Carm

Kevin Culligan, OCD  
Mary Frohlich, RSCJ  
Vilma Seelaus, OCD

Keith Egan, T.O. Carm  
Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD  
John Welch, O. Carm

### COSTS

\$ 40 Non-refundable registration Fee  
\$200 Tuition  
\$150 Single Room in Regina Hall (apartment housing with air conditioning  
additional \$75 for the week)  
\$150 Board: Includes Sunday dinner through Saturday lunch  
\$540 Total

**Registration** – Send a non-refundable \$40 fee made payable to **Saint Mary's College** with registration form to:

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Saint Mary's College  
Notre Dame, IN 46556-5001

Phone: 574-284-4636  
Fax: 574-284-4855  
E-mail: Angela Strotman

astrotma@saintmarys.edu



For if you love those who love you...if you do good to those who do good to you...if you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you?... But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. (Lk 6:32-35)

This gratuitousness is the distinctive sign of the presence of God's love in us, the basic characteristic of the children of God. Consequently, this was the invitation that represented the logical conclusion to Thérèse's experience: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). That mercy in which Thérèse felt herself enfolded and saved became a living presence that transformed her, urged her on, and sent her forth continually to be a sign and witness. For Thérèse it was a prerequisite of charity to in fact shine forth rather than remain hidden:

But I understood above all that charity must not remain hidden in the bottom of the heart. Jesus has said: 'No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket, but upon the lampstand, so as to give light to ALL in the house.' It seems to me that this lamp represents charity which must enlighten and rejoice not only those who are dearest to us but 'ALL who are in the house' without distinction. (C 12r; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 220; cf. Mt. 5:14-16)

Under the guidance of the Word, encountering the living Christ who loved within her, Thérèse had the vocation—as does every Christian and even more every contemplative—to shine forth, to be light. The surroundings in which she lived were not important. What was important was to be light! If the Word of God is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path (Ps 119), it is so in the measure that we allow ourselves to be illumined and warmed. The Word of God cannot be transmitted in a cold, detached manner. Our hands must be burned by this gift, as one of Bernanos's characters asserts. The Word is called to become, as it was for Jeremiah, "like a burning fire, imprisoned in my bones," on account of which he admits "I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jer 20:9). In Thérèse's teaching this is how to approach the Word of God: not as an object of study, but as a conversion encounter in love.

---

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## Question of the Month

**Question:** What should be done when a person, for whatever reason, has to extend the time between Temporary Promise and Definitive Promise.?

Remember that the Temporary Promise is made for a specific time, usually three years. When this time expires and the person or the community has decided to extend the time of Temporary Promise, usually a year, the Temporary Promise has to be renewed for that time.

# Thérèse's Sisters in Carmel



*Sister Marie of the Angels*  
(1845–1924)



*Sister St. Stanislaus of the Sacred Hearts* (1824–1914)

Jeanne-Julie de Chaumontel was born in Montpincon (Calvados), France on February 2, 1845. A lively spitfire, her brothers nicknamed her “Lady Tempest.” She entered the Lisieux Carmel in 1860, despite the pained disapproval of her parents. She was Subprioress for three terms and in charge of the novitiate from October 1886 to February 1893, and from 1897 to 1899. She was forty-three years old when Thérèse Martin entered Carmel.

Thérèse said regarding her: “Our Novice Mistress was really a saint, the finished product of the first Carmelites. I was with her all day long since she taught me to work. Her kindness to me was limitless and still my soul did not expand under her direction” (A 70v: *SOS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 151). The reality was that, guessing the worth of this young girl, Sister Marie of the Angels made it her duty to deliver interminable spiritual talks to her while they were doing the laundry together. Thérèse would have preferred silence but she put up as best she could with the pious chatter and questioning of her novice mistress. One day, not knowing how to respond, the postulant threw her arms around her and hugged her! This communication block lasted for two years. Then, little by little, the tension relaxed, giving way to a confident dialogue. Sister Marie of the Angels died on November 24, 1924, several months before the canonization of her former novice.

Marie-Rosalie Gueret, born May 4, 1824; entered Carmel on April 6, 1845, being, therefore, one of the first Carmelites of the Lisieux foundation. Thérèse helped her in the sacristy from 1891 to 1893. At the time of the influenza epidemic, Sister St. Stanislaus, “first sacristan,” fell gravely ill, so Thérèse replaced her in the sacristy as best she could. When the epidemic was over, Sister St. Stanislaus found herself the oldest member of the community. Sister Marie of the Angels described her as “the accomplished type of the perfect religious. Declining in years but still young at heart, her inexhaustible goodness and heroic devotion produced a sprightliness in her that edified the youngest, while being for all the most beautiful example of abnegation and charity” (CG II72). On February 1896 she became first infirmarian. (She served in several offices: bursar, sacristan, infirmarian.) In the spring of 1897, she delegated her powers of infirmarian to “Céline,” so that she might take care of Thérèse.

As a patient, Thérèse was touched by the delicate attentions of Sister St. Stanislaus: “She bandages wounds with so much gentleness! I see her choose with care the finest linens and apply them with a hand of velvet!” The infirmarian, for her part, admired the patience of her sick one: “Never a complaint!” Sister St. Stanislaus survived Thérèse by seventeen years, dying on May 23, 1914.

# Called To Love: The Vocation of Thérèse and of the Church

Sue Pacey

I read *Story of a Soul* when I was sixteen, and it changed my life. Soon afterwards, I converted to the Catholic faith and Thérèse has accompanied me ever since. What was it about her that influenced me so deeply? Her simple, yet sincere faith attracted me initially, as did her intimate love for Jesus; and her love for those she met and lived with each day also appealed to me. In this article, I would like to think more about her deep love for Jesus.

## Vocation of Love

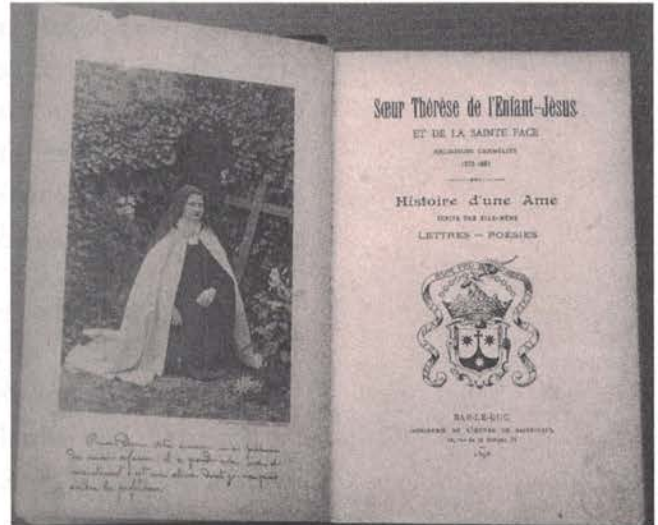
Thérèse lived in close union with Jesus throughout her life. On the lintel of her door in Carmel, she engraved the words, 'Jesus is my only love!' — an expression of her vocation, her science of love, the only science she ever desired. She also wrote:

I understood that love comprised all vocations that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places...in a word, that it was eternal! 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! (SOS, p.194) I

This marks the birth of her 'vocation of love'; it is, we can say, her official declaration of her vocation. She wanted only Jesus. Conrad De Meester has described her as a 'theologian of love', and she lived this theology throughout her life. Her love was holistic, self-sacrificing, humble, hidden and, above all, based on Jesus' teaching. In John's gospel we read: 'Greater love than this no one has, than to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15:13). Thérèse did just that. She radiated a life of love: love for Jesus in particular, which extended to all those with whom she came in contact, even people she found difficult to love. This ability to love was partly due to Thérèse's early life within an intensely loving family, which helped form the building blocks of love that empowered her to respond to Jesus' call to love all those she met.

## The Divine Teacher

Jesus alone fulfilled Thérèse's immense desires. She responded, in a unique and selfless way, to the teaching of his new commandment, to 'love one another as I



*Thérèse's autobiography first published September 30, 1898, with a printing of 2,000 copies.*

have loved you' (Jn 13:34). Thérèse lived out this commandment on a monumental basis, and she never refused an opportunity to express this love. She wrote:

Oh! how I love this new commandment since it gives me the assurance that Your Will is to love in me all those You command me to love! Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters. (SOS, p.221)

This ability to love even the most difficult of people within her community expressed the remarkable depth of her love for Jesus. She wrote a letter to him, which she carried on her during her profession, highlighting the extravagant lover she became. In it, she wrote:

may You, Jesus, be everything!... I ask You for nothing but peace, and also love, infinite love without any limits other than Yourself; love which is no longer I but You, my Jesus. (SOS, p.275)



*Photograph of Thérèse as a teen.*

Thérèse's intimate relationship with Jesus developed because of her perpetual search for 'truth', and she recognized this 'truth' in Jesus. To Mother Marie de Gonzague, her superior in Carmel, she said on the very day of her death: 'I never sought anything but the truth' (LC, p.205).<sup>2</sup> This 'truth' led Thérèse to recognize Jesus' unconditional love, and she successfully managed to mirror this same 'truth' and love throughout her life.

### **Divine Love**

Jesus and Thérèse were fused together, forming a union very early on in her life. This initial union occurred after she made her first communion. She later wrote:

Ah! how sweet was that first kiss of Jesus! It was a kiss of love; I felt that I was loved, and I said: 'I love You, and I give myself to You forever!' There were no demands made, no struggles, no sacrifices; for a long time now Jesus and poor little Thérèse looked at and understood each other. That day, it was no longer simply a look, it was a fusion; they were no longer two... (SOS, p.77)

Thérèse is speaking here from the center of her soul. This was without doubt a mystical moment. This 'fusion' of her soul with Christ was where she glimpsed the summit of Mount Carmel depicted by John of the Cross, and the 'inner room' described by Teresa of Avila. Yet Thérèse was a mere child, only eleven years old.

Her yearning to belong to Jesus echoed within this fusion. It was from this union that she found the divine strength of Jesus within the heart of love.

Thérèse's love for Jesus was not a selfish, possessive love. The intensity of her love addressed her desire to 'save souls', so that others could be united to him as she was. This selfless love is evident on the day of her final profession. She wrote later: 'What graces I begged for on that day! I wanted to deliver all the souls from purgatory and convert all sinners' (SOS, p.167). On that day, too, a second and deeper spiritual union between Jesus and Thérèse came to fruition within her marriage to him at her final profession – a marriage she had longed for throughout her life:

My union with Jesus was affected not in the midst of thunder and lightning, that is, in extraordinary graces, but in the bosom of a light breeze similar to the one our Father St. Elijah heard on the Mount... I offered myself to Jesus in order to accomplish His will perfectly in me... (SOS, pp.166-7)

This union with Jesus produced a deep inner peace and confidence in her soul. They are an expression of her intense and vibrant love that was as alive and active as it still is today.

### Confidence in Love

While Thérèse was at school, she once noticed how her sister Celine showed particular affection towards one of her teachers. Thérèse wanted to do the same. However, she failed to develop such affection, partly because she was shy and reserved, and partly because the Lord protected her from such an experience. Thérèse eventually came to realize the folly of such a relationship, and she commented:

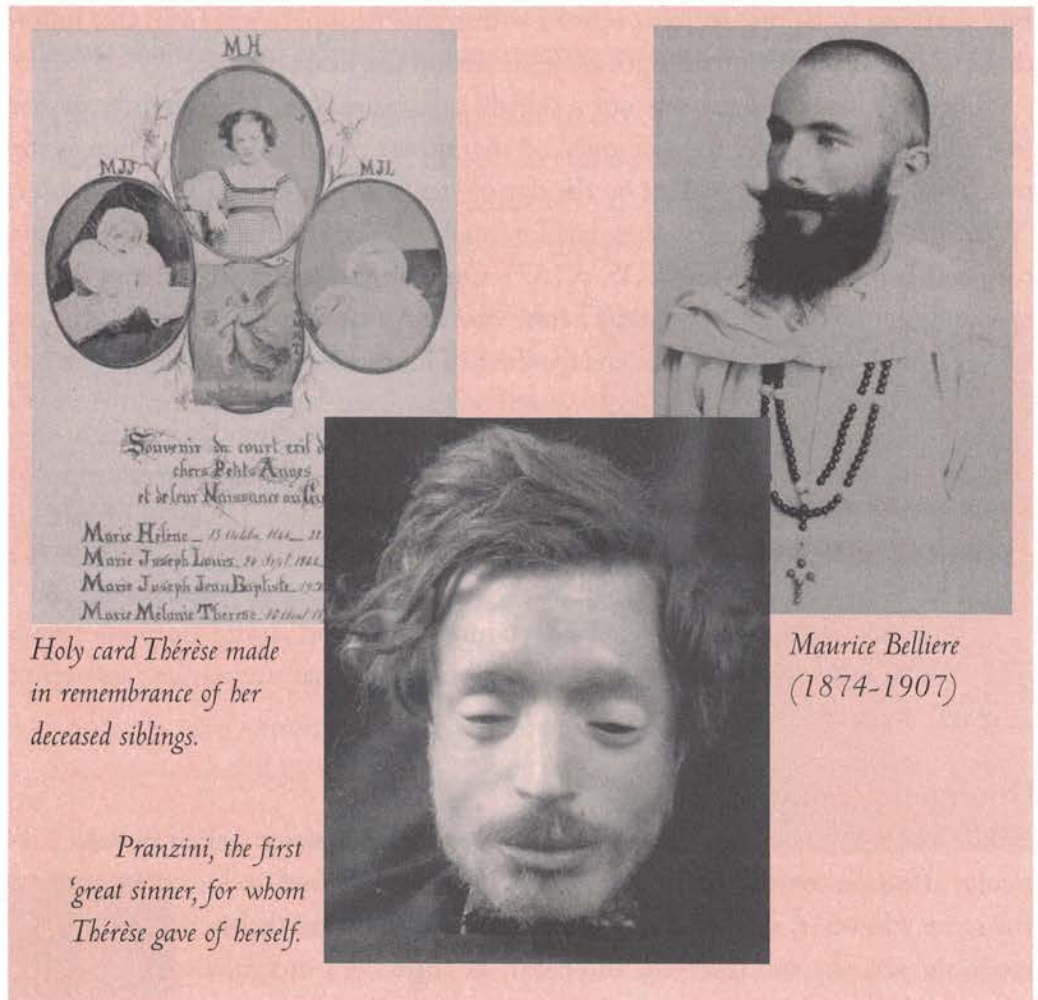
I know that without Him, I could have fallen as low as St. Mary Magdalene... I know that 'he to whom less is forgiven, LOVES less'... He wants me to love Him because He has forgiven me not much but ALL. (SOS, pp.83-4)

This statement, I believe, highlights the confidence Thérèse had in Jesus' love for her, and it also shows her love for him. She did not doubt his love, and she trusted wholeheartedly that Jesus would protect her from the traps into which she could so easily have fallen during her life. Yet at the same time, she understood how much Jesus would forgive her if she did fall into grave sin. Thérèse affirmed the presence of God by embracing the world with love.

The writings of Thérèse bring us to the heart of the gospel, where Jesus teaches us to love one another. Thérèse loved God passionately and intensely. Her understanding of Jesus' love for each



*A picture Sr. Genevieve gave Thérèse on the day of her profession.*



*Holy card Thérèse made in remembrance of her deceased siblings.*

*Maurice Belliere (1874-1907)*

*Pranzini, the first 'great sinner, for whom Thérèse gave of herself.*

one of us is simple and comprehensive. She believed that God loves us, simply because God is love; and she therefore saw that he cannot help loving us. She interpreted this to mean that Jesus does not love us because of our track record. On the contrary, his love brings us to life, as it did Thérèse.

### **Jesus, the 'Thief'**

There is a moving conversation between Thérèse and Mother Agnes – her elder sister Pauline – where the latter describes Jesus as 'the Thief'. John of the Cross had described the experience of 'dying of love', and this was what Thérèse echoed in this conversation. By this time, Thérèse was very close to death. Mother Agnes asked her: 'Are you afraid of death now that you see it so close?' Thérèse answered her: 'Ah, less and less.' Then came the question: 'Do you fear the Thief? This time He's at the door.' And Thérèse gave this reply: 'No, He's not at the door; He's inside! But what are you saying, little Mother! Do I fear the Thief! How can I fear one whom I love so much!' (LC, p.76).

Thérèse loved Jesus intimately, to the very last breath of her earthly life. She loved him through those she met each day. She loved him through her silence and through her pain, both physical and emotional. She loved him with her sense of

humor, her poetry, her singing, her laughter and her tears. She loved him through her parents Zélie and Louis, through her sisters Marie, Pauline, Leonie and Céline.

She loved Jesus through her four deceased brothers and sisters. She loved him through the missionaries she wrote to, through the prisoner she prayed for, and many others. Her confidence in Jesus' love for her is expressed in her own words as she lay dying:

Yes, I feel it; even though I had on my conscience all the sins that can be committed, I would go, my heart broken with sorrow, and throw myself into Jesus' arms, for I know how much He loves the prodigal child who returns to Him... I go to Him with confidence and love... (SOS, p.259)

### The Attraction of Love

For, love was the personification of Jesus, the hidden face of God. She projected this love at every opportunity. Jesus formed her in the way of spiritual childhood. He helped her in her journey toward spiritual perfection. She was not concerned about her reward in heaven but about loving. One day, not long before Thérèse died, Celine was reading to her in the infirmary about the happiness of heaven. But she interrupted her sister, saying: 'That's not what attracts me...' 'What then?' asked Céline. And Thérèse replied: 'Oh! it's Love! To love, to be loved, and to...make Love loved' (cf. LC, p.217).

The life of Thérèse is an example of the gospels in action, which makes her a great spiritual guide for us in the twenty-first century. Her union with Jesus points the way for us as we travel through life. Her love provides us with a series of stepping stones to union with Jesus. All she did was trust Jesus implicitly. Like Thérèse, we need to hold onto this power of love, and to live it in its reality. Her teaching and example of Christian love have influenced the Second Vatican Council, as well as the church we know and love today.

1. SOS = *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996.

2. LC = *St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations*, Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1977.

Mount Carmel January - March 2007

## News from the Northeast Region



OCDS members from outside the Northeast can register for this upcoming retreat if there is room available:

**May 3, 2008** District 3 retreat:

*Day of Recollection* – given by Fr. Matthias Montgomery, O.C.D. at the Good New Center in Utica, NY. Contact Pat Brazo, 1393 Mechlenburg Rd. Ithica, NY 14850-389; 607-272-0821; [ebrazo@acmenet.net](mailto:ebrazo@acmenet.net)

# Reminders

## 2008 Election Results

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of OCDS Community or Recognized Group)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Meeting Location as it appears on OCDS Roster)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Meeting Time, e.g., 2nd Sunday of each month)

NAME

EMAIL

President: \_\_\_\_\_

Councilors: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Formation Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Please complete the information above and send it to:

OCDS Main Office, 2131 Lincoln Rd NE, Washington, DC 20002-1101.

A new Community Roster will be prepared and returned to the President and appropriate Provincial Delegate.

### OCDS NEWSLETTER

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