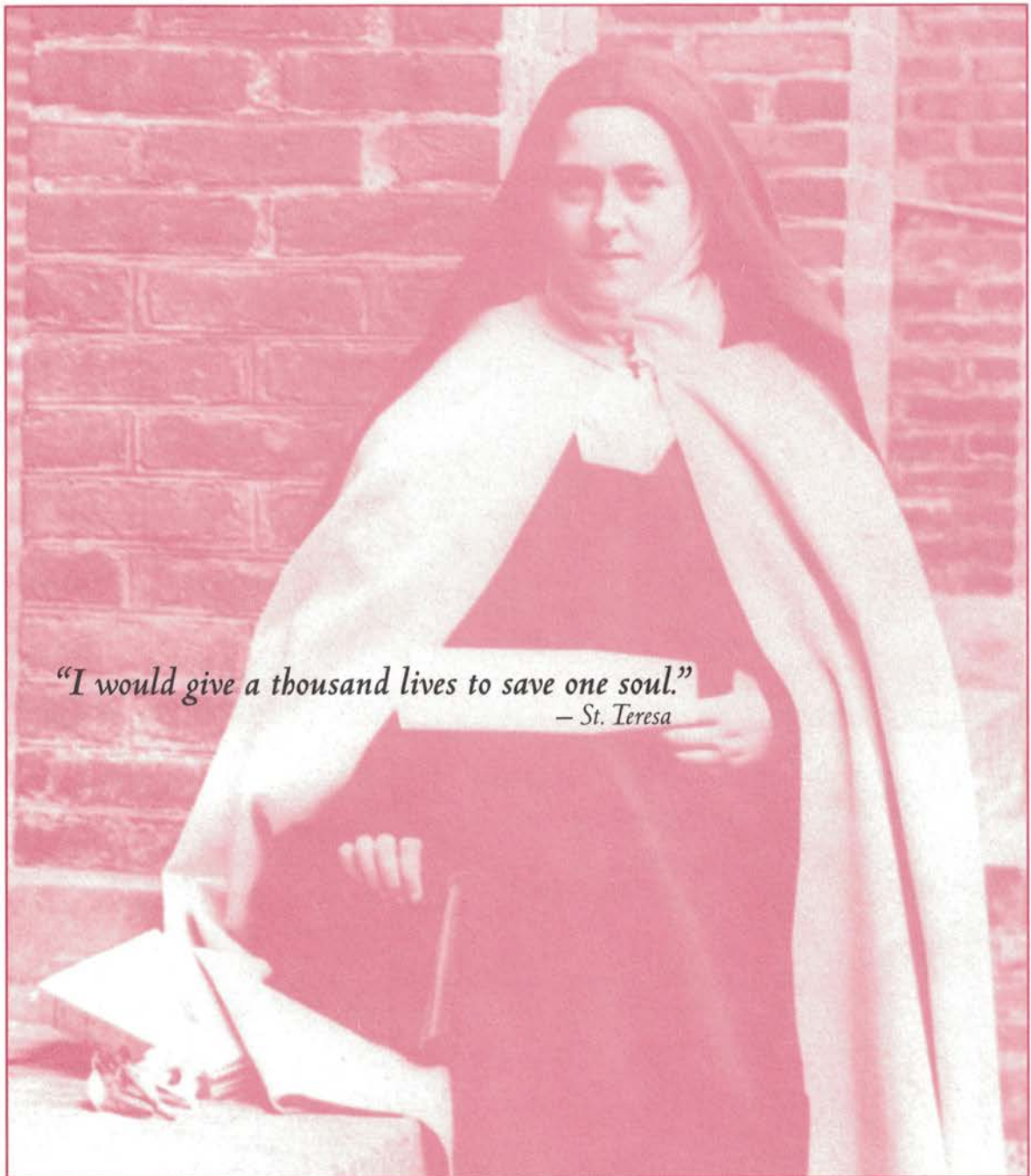


# CARMEL CLARION

JULY–AUGUST 2008 VOLUME XXIV NO. 4



*"I would give a thousand lives to save one soul."*  
— St. Teresa

# CARMEL CLARION

JULY — AUGUST 2008 VOLUME XXIV NO. 4

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

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# Editorial

This issue of the *Clarion* focuses on St. Thérèse's faith. Fr. Emmanuel gives us an in-depth study of Thérèse's journey into the darkness of faith. Using her writings, he shows how as she approached the end of her life, God not only tested her through her intense physical suffering, but even more so, through her faith. Sometimes I think, because of some of her pictures and holy cards, we think she was a sweet little girl favored by God, picked from the garden of life at an early age. However the opposite is the truth. She was a mature woman, with a core of steel, tested and proved in the crucible of suffering. As she approached her last days she was not supported by thoughts about heaven and a life of bliss in the arms of her Jesus. No, she was assailed by temptations attacking her faith, the very foundation of her entire Christian life. Fr. Emmanuel takes us through the final months in Thérèse's life showing just how heroic and strong the "Little Flower" really was.



Fr. Alvarez's "The Two 'Teresas' Mother and Daughter" explores how the two saints are alike and how they differ within their families, within Carmel and within the Church. I think you will find this article fascinating, especially since it was written in 1997 before she was recognized as a Doctor of the Church.

We also continue the biographies of two more of the Sisters of Lisieux Carmel; Sr. Febronie, who Thérèse said had great insight into her soul, and Sr. Teresa of Jesus, who was eccentric and often tried Thérèse's patience.

On July 13, 2008 Cardinal Saraiva Martins announced that Louis and Zélie Martin, the parents of St. Thérèse, would be beatified on Mission Sunday, October 19, 2008 at the Cathedral of Lisieux. This news comes days after Benedict XVI recognized a miracle attributed to the intercession of Louis and Zélie Martin. It involved the healing of Pietro Schiliro of Monza, Italy. Pietro was born in 2002 with a fatal lung malformation. Italian Carmelite Fr. Antonio Sangalli suggested the child's parents pray a novena to Thérèse's parents to receive strength to endure their suffering. However, Pietro's mother decided to do a novena to ask for her son's cure. When Pietro regained his health, he and his parents went on pilgrimage to Lisieux to thank the Martins. This is a great moment in the life, not only of the Order but also in the Church. It brings home the truth that sanctity is not limited to the clergy or religious, but extends to every life style in the Church, just as Vatican II proclaimed.



Our 2009 OCDS Congress preparation is well under way as you can see on pg. 13. I ask you all to pray that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit our work continues to move forward.

Finally, I also ask you to pray for Mary Teresa Sullivan, the mother of our new Provincial, John Sullivan. She recently passed away after a long illness.

In Carmel,

Fr. Regis

# Thérèse in the Night of Faith

Emmanuel Renault, OCD

Scripture, therefore, speaks of “trials” as a necessary passage to life and as an indispensable condition for proving the quality of our faith (I Pt 1:7), for manifesting the truth (I Cor 11:19), and for exercising humility (I Cor 10:12-13). But trials can become “temptations” when Satan exploits them (cf. Acts 5:3; I Cor 7:5; I Thes 3:5). God is not the author of temptations, but permits them as so many tests imposed on us, that we might penetrate into the divine mystery through the mystery of the cross.

These are the “trial-temptations” that Thérèse had to undergo, particularly at the end of her life, by suffering simultaneously a double confrontation with death: a physical death that was steadily destroying her young body, and a spiritual death that was threatening the life of her soul.



## Profile of Her Trial

In June 1897, three months before her death, Thérèse declared: “During those very joyful days of the Easter season, Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys” (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 211).

It must be noted that this awareness of a group of souls without faith was not given to her as an illumination of the spirit intended to open up new perspectives for stirring her apostolic zeal. Such had been the case for Saint Teresa of Avila when a visit from a Franciscan returning from Mexico, Father Maldonado, had inflamed her with zeal at the news of “millions of souls that were being lost there for want of Christian instruction” (*Foundations* I, 7).

Thérèse was not unaware of the fact that there were “impious people without faith,” since a niece of her aunt Madame Guerin, Marguerite Maudelonde, had married a well-known atheist, Monsieur Tostain, Deputy of the President of the Republic in Lisieux. But in her faith, which was “so alive and clear,” Thérèse believed “that they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions when they denied the existence of heaven” because, for her, heaven was so evident that it was impossible for an upright and sincere mind not to acknowledge it: “The thought of heaven made up all my happiness” (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 211).

And now suddenly she was given, not an exterior, but an inner, experiential knowledge of this world of souls without faith, by finding herself plunged into it:



"[God] permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment" (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 211). It was not that she shared the sentiments of these atheists and renegades, since it was only reluctantly that she found herself in their company and that Jesus "made her feel," only *feel*, that there truly are souls who find themselves in these darkneses of the spirit. The awareness of this drama of unbelievers would go on deepening in the heart of Thérèse, week after week and month after month, for her "trial was not to last a few days or a few weeks." When writing these words, she did not know that her trial would indeed last exactly sixteen months and twenty-five days, namely, until the hour of her death!

It was not simply a trial of a moral, affective, or psychological order, that is to say, of a passing crisis such as many Christians experience in our day, but truly a trial of a theological order, imposed by God to purify her faith of whatever was "too natural," as she herself will recognize. It was meant to take away, she says, "everything that could be a natural satisfaction in her desire for heaven" (C 7v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214).

For Thérèse, as for every Christian, the motivations of faith are not all supernatural; there are, more or less and almost always, some natural elements mixed in that take away some of its purity, its strength, and therefore its capacity for "seizing" God as he is, whence arise those necessary purifications that Saint John of the Cross has so masterfully described in the *Ascent and Dark Night*.

But the Lord, in his pedagogy full of wisdom and mercy, only imposes these purifications on those who consent to them, and does it only after a long and patient preparation. That is what Thérèse understood when she wrote: "He did not send me this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it," adding, "A little earlier I believe it would have plunged me into a state of discouragement" (C 7v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214). Notice that she does not say "of doubt" but only "of discouragement"!

That is because her "faith, living and clear" was already so firmly established that she would not have risked sinking into unbelief. Nevertheless, according to God's designs for her, she must undergo an ultimate purification like gold in the furnace (cf. I Cor 1:1213), as Mary the Mother of God herself was purified.

For this reason we must affirm that, if her trial of faith arose suddenly like a tempest on calm waters, or a violent storm in a blue sky, it was preceded by some warning signs, just as her first hemoptysis (i.e., expectoration of blood) on the night of April 2 or 3, 1896, was preceded by numerous sore throats and chest pains. It is evidently not by mere chance that the manifestation of her tuberculosis practically coincided with her entry into the night of her doubts (the following night of April 5)! It was as if her physical sufferings, which were going to increase to the point of being altogether unbearable, were supposed to accompany and double her spiritual sufferings right up to the moment of her death, in order to lead her, through heroic patience, to an attitude of faith totally stripped of every trace of "natural satisfaction."

(continued on page 14)



# The Two “Teresas,” Mother and Daughter

Tomás Alvarez, O.C.D.

**M**ore than once the question has been raised whether Teresa and Thérèse resemble each other in anything more than their name and vocation to Carmel. It's a banal question at first sight, as though formulated not about two persons and their history but about pictures of them. We do in fact have the portrait of Teresa done in Seville by Fray Juan de la Miseria and the photos of Thérèse taken with Celine's camera. As a matter of fact, the Teresa of sixty-one long years poorly painted by the lay brother, and the Thérèse of twenty-three years, in a somewhat ecstatic pose before a nineteenth-century camera, do not look alike in any other respect than their habit and name.



*“There are some, Lord, who serve you better than I, but that there should be some who love you more or more ardently desire your glory, I will never abide!”*

*St. Teresa*

Nonetheless, the question is not as superficial as it seems. In what is essential we are all alike. Yet it is in what is essential that we are most different, that is, in the secret and profound nucleus that decides our personality and makes us unique and unrepeatable. Proceeding from this center is the radial lines with which God shapes the existential mission and salvation history of each individual.

Viewed from this theological perspective, the persons and stories of Teresa and Thérèse converge in the deepest part of their being and mission. Both, impelled by a mysterious inner spring, wrote their own stories, discovered and bore witness to the passing of God through their lives, and presented them as a lower staff accompaniment to the song of God's mercies. An autobiography is the first book that each wrote. And the two are alike in giving their life stories the force of prophecy: not a simple narrative of their own human adventure, but a prophetic word with a strong message as an aid to any reading or rereading of our own lives.

## Within Their Families

The two families do not run along parallel lines. Thérèse's home was set in beautiful Normandy, and Teresa's on the harsh plateau of Castile. Yet between the two we find an ample interweaving of coincidences and contrasts. The two were very much loved in their homes. Without any lack of affection in their infancy, they both had to undergo the bitter experience of the death of a mother: Thérèse lost hers when still a very little girl; Teresa lost her mother at age fourteen. The figure of their fathers then increased to the point of becoming transfigured. For Teresa, Don Alonso is the image of the perfect man. With Thérèse, Louis Martin is the

reflection of God's countenance. Going against the prevailing ascetical tendencies and certain pseudo-mystical conceptions about flight from the world, both Madre Teresa and her Carmelite daughter of Lisieux maintain deep family connections throughout their religious lives. Both come from large families. Teresa of Avila has nine brothers; Thérèse of Lisieux, two. But Thérèse never knew her brothers because they had died before she was born. Teresa is present as all of hers leave their homeland to make their way to the West Indies. Left at their father's side were only his daughters, as was the case in the home at Alençon and Lisieux.

There is still another pair of coincidences in these pictures of home life. On the maternal level, the two orphans find refuge in the motherly care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the paternal level, however, the shadows of war come close to them: Teresa is born at the time her father returns from the war in Navarre. Thérèse is born when M. Martin suffered at home from the extended shadow of the Franco-German War. Teresa and Thérèse inherit, if not a warrior spirit, certainly a vigorous frame of mind, a fortitude that will accompany them in life. Recalling some typical instructions of the Saint from Avila, Thérèse writes: "Saint Teresa, who said to her daughters, 'I want you to be women in nothing, but that in everything you may equal strong men,' would not have wanted to acknowledge me as her child if the Lord had not clothed me in His divine strength, if He had not Himself armed me for war" (LT 201).

### Within Carmel

For Teresa and Thérèse Carmel is the souls family. Here one is not dealing with coincidences, affinities, or approximate comparisons, as with family ties of blood. In the soul's family everything is transferred to profound levels of another order and magnitude.

By different paths, the vocational choice of Carmel was for both the outcome of an intimate little drama. Uprooted from the paternal hearth, they were planted anew in the hearth of the spirit, with all the accompanying human poignancy. For the Saint of Avila it will be the community life of the Incarnation that defines and decides her sense of her religious vocation. On the other hand, the Saint of Lisieux enters Carmel already with clear ideas and a well-defined choice. To clarify these and arrive at her positions, it helped Thérèse to approach the one who was to become her Holy Mother Teresa. Before entering Carmel, Thérèse undertook a thorough reading of a biography of Teresa.

A cluster of features that characterize Teresa's personality left their mark on Thérèse, who quickly incorporated them into her own human and spiritual makeup. It should be sufficient to enumerate them.

— First of all, high ideals. "Lofty thoughts," urged Madre Teresa. "I have always had great desires," she writes. Thérèse had written in her private notes: "The desire to practice virtue in a heroic degree in imitation of the saints, or to long for martyrdom, is not presumption" (cf. Life I3, 4).



— Disposition to give one's life for others, as Christ did. Among her private notes, Thérèse also preserved this thought of her Holy Mother: "I would have given a thousand lives to save one soul" (Way, I, 2). Teresa repeated this with all kinds of nuances and variations and also by Thérèse. Another saying of Teresa's left its mark on Thérèse: "What does it matter to me to remain until the end of the world in purgatory if through my prayers I save a single soul?" (Quoted from the Way, 3, 6, in a letter to P. Roulland [LT 221]).

— An intense apostolic sense of contemplative vocation. "You know that a Carmelite who would not be an apostle would separate herself from the goal of her vocation and would cease to be a daughter of the Seraphic Saint Teresa" (LT 198). And how happily she endorsed this ideal at the end of her life: "I shall not be sorry for having worked solely for the salvation of souls. How happy I was to learn that our holy Mother, St. Teresa, thought the same way" (DE 4.6.1; HLC 56).

— Feeling of love. The Saint of Avila had insisted greatly on not confusing love with the feelings of love. Thérèse reflects deeply along these lines: "How well I understand Our Lord's words to St. Teresa, our holy Mother: 'Do you know, my daughter, who are the ones who really love me? It's those who recognize that everything that can't be referred to me is a lie'" (DE 22.6; HLC 67).

— To be friends of the Crucified. Thérèse recalls at various times one of the little stories about Teresa: "St. Teresa was very right in saying to Our Lord, who was loading her with crosses when she was undertaking great works for Him: 'Ah! Lord, I am not surprised that You have so few friends; You treat them so badly!'" (LT 178).

— The guidepost of the contemplative ideal: God alone! In her private notes Thérèse transcribed in its entirety Teresa's poem "Let nothing trouble you..., God alone suffices."

On a deeper level, in narrating their own lives Teresa and Thérèse sum them up in a doxological key, as a hymn to God's mercies. Both of

them center all their longings for sanctity on the bridal love of Christ, appropriating for them the nuptial symbolism of the Song of Songs, and they become enamored of Christ's Gospel. They both have a refined sense of the church. Thérèse herself testifies to this convergence of spirit: "Finally, I want to be a daughter of the Church as our holy Mother St. Teresa was" (C 33v; SOS, 3rd ed., p, 253). As a result she thinks that she who was her Holy Mother "sent me my first little [missionary] brother" (C 31v; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 251).

## Within the Church

In the closing pages of her *Story of a Soul*, tacitly comparing her ecclesial mission with that of her holy patroness, Thérèse writes: "O Mother, how different are the ways through which the Lord leads souls! In the life of the saints, we find many of



*Just like St. Teresa before her, on July 14th 1895 Thérèse would say: "I was burning with love and I felt that one minute, one second more, and I would not be able to bear this ardour without dying."*



them who didn't want to leave anything of themselves behind after their death, not the smallest souvenir, not the least bit of writing. On the contrary, there are others, like our holy Mother St. Teresa, who have enriched the church with their lofty revelations, having no fears of revealing the secrets of the King in order that they may make Him more loved and known by souls. Which of these two types of saints is more pleasing to God? It seems to me, Mother, they are equally pleasing to Him, since all of them followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and since the Lord has said: "Tell the just man ALL is well." Yes, all is well when one seeks only the will of Jesus" (C 2v; SOS, 3rd ed., p. 207).

Thérèse had no foreknowledge—or perhaps she did—that her mission in the church was going to take paths similar, almost parallel, to those of her Holy Mother. For she also had been called mysteriously to "reveal the secrets of the King." Like the Mater Spiritualium (Mother of Spiritual Seekers), she too had been called to exercise a teaching mission of incomparable universality.

Certainly, we can never underscore the difference enough. Teresa and Thérèse embody two statements irreducible to a common denominator. And this, precisely because their ideologies are born of two human experiences profoundly diverse, within two irreducible cultural and ecclesial contexts.

The distances are shortened—according to the passage Thérèse just quoted—in the unique "movement of the Holy Spirit," which echoes the Pauline text: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit" (I Cor 12:4). Both Teresa's and Thérèse's gift for teaching have their point of origin in the Spirit who enlivens the autobiographical narrative of them both. The two began by writing their own autobiographies. To grasp the profound meaning of life as it is lived is, as it were, the wellspring of their doctrinal message and ecclesial service. This is so not only because they manage to understand and expound their existence in a kind of micro-salvation-history account but also because through it they proclaim to the reader the Gospel of Jesus.

## Question of the Month

**Question:** How do we know which forms are the latest?

In preparing the new forms, which all Communities are expected to use, each form was given an alphabetic designation and 2008 date in the lower left corner. This clearly distinguishes them from the many versions that have been floating around for years. Old ones must be discarded. Previous presidents were sent a hardcopy set. They may also be downloaded from our web-site at: [www.ocdswashprov.org](http://www.ocdswashprov.org). Please note we overlooked a form to notify the Order about a deceased member. It has been added to the web-site.

This explains, perhaps, the great impact produced by the writings of the two Carmelites. These writings have spread rapidly even beyond ecclesial frontiers and Western cultural boundaries. The works of both are translated and read in countless languages. They remain fresh and timely, going against the grain of cultural-religious changes and the breaks in continuity characteristic of the last decades. Although so many authors fade away through the lapse of any number of ideologies and messages, the writings and teachings of these two saints continue in their dialogue with readers and cultures both inside and outside the Church, in concert with the demands of the new evangelization.

This undoubtedly is the basic motive in joining Teresa and Thérèse in the fulfillment of an identical service in the Church, that of their doctorate: the saint of Avila already proclaimed a doctor, the “first woman doctor of the Church;” the saint of Lisieux waiting to be the next one proclaimed a doctor. [Editor’s note: This article was published in 1997. Pope John Paul II proclaimed Saint Thérèse a Doctor of the Church on October 19, 1997.]

## Retreat News



Upcoming retreats which may still have space available:

**September 19-21 2008: “Carmelite Life as Path to the Experience of God”** by Fr. Anthony Haglof, OCD at the Seton Retreat Center in Emmitsburg, MD. Contact: Lynn Aminzadeh at 301-840-0686 or [lynnamin@msn.com](mailto:lynnamin@msn.com).

**September 26-28 2008 District 6: “Foundations for Spiritual Life”** by Fr. Paul Fohlin, OCD at the Franciscan Guest House, St. Anthony’s Monastery in Kennebunk, ME. Contact: Corinne Roberts at 978-887-3020 or [corinnemry@aol.com](mailto:corinnemry@aol.com).

**September 26-28 2008: “The Breath of the Soul: Examination of Prayer in the Discalced Carmelite Tradition”** by Fr. Ralph-Elias Haddix, OCD at Mary, Mother of the Church Benedictine Abbey in Richmond, VA. Contact: Debbie Wilson after 6:00pm at 434-823-2154

**October 17-19 2008: “The Nature of Becoming Holy, from the Human to the Divine”** by Fr. Ralph-Elias Haddix, OCD at the Seton Retreat Center in Emmitsburg, MD. Contact: Mary Valenti at 410-893-6691 or [mary.valenti@comcast.net](mailto:mary.valenti@comcast.net).



# Therese's Sisters in Carmel

## Sister Febronie of the Holy Childhood (1819-1892)

Born in Paris in November, 1819, Marie-Julie Malville lost her mother at the age of five. Her father, a tailor, remarried and moved to Lisieux. Mother Geneviève welcomed her to Carmel on January 15, 1842. Sister Febronie was over sixty-eight years old when Thérèse entered Carmel and was subprioress at the time. Unfortunately, before pictures of her were taken, she was a victim of the influenza epidemic and died on January 4, 1892. The subprioress saw very clearly into the soul of the new postulant, as the following dialogue testifies. Thérèse herself, who found it difficult to open up to her novice mistress, relates it: "One day a kindly, older sister understood what I was feeling. She said laughingly during recreation: "My daughter, it seems to me you don't have much to tell your Superiors." "Why do you say that, Mother?" "Because your soul is extremely simple; but when you are perfect, you will be even more simple. The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes." (A 71r; SOS, 151). As subprioress, Sister Febronie saw to the observance of the Rule of Carmel, being herself a model of silence and recollection. She felt that Thérèse exalted the Lord's mercy a little too much to the detriment of the divine justice. While discussing this together one day, Thérèse retorted: "You want God's justice? You will have God's justice. The soul receives exactly what it expects from God."

## Sister Teresa of Jesus (1839-1918)

Leonie-Anastasia Jezewska was born on August 6, 1839 and entered Carmel on May 6, 1873. We know nothing about her except what we glean from one of Thérèse's letters dated September 3, 1890. In it, Thérèse, who is in the middle of her profession retreat, asks Sister Agnes of Jesus if she has to do the pictures that this Sister has just requested her to paint (LT II4). She often tried Thérèse's patience by asking her to carry out various art projects for her. "Because this poor sister was rather eccentric, she used to ask for subjects that were very grotesque—really bizarre and in poor taste" (C 567). In June 1897, Thérèse used her brushes for the last time to paint two little pieces for her. Sister Teresa of Jesus had very poor eyesight, although "she loved to make Sacred Heart scapulars and had a cheerful and friendly personality" (cf. CSG II74). She died on October 31, 1918.



*Sister Teresa of Jesus  
(1839-1918)*



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<b>ST TERESA OF AVILA</b>		
109-K	Teresa of Avila and the Trinity	Michael Dodd OCD
111-S	Fix Your Eyes on Christ: Teresa of Avila's Way of Prayer	Daniel Chowning OCD
116-E	Founding Communities of Prayer: Advice from Teresa of Avila	John Welch O Carm
123-AA	Praying the Our Father with Teresa of Avila	Steven Payne OCD
121-X	St. Teresa of Avila and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Dennis Read OCD
120-P	Teresa of Avila, Mary, and the Reform of Carmel	Emmanuel Sullivan OCD
147-BF	From the Wadi to San Jose: Teresa's Renewal of Contemplative Prayer	Keith Egan TO Carm
189-AI	Teresa of Avila: Meditations on the Song of Songs	Kevin Culligan OCD
160	Martha & Mary Working Together: Teresa's Meditation on Song of Songs	Kevin Culligan OCD
<b>ST JOHN OF THE CROSS</b>		
101-I	St. John of the Cross: The Person, His Times, His Writings	Michael Dodd OCD
102-U	Freedom to Love: The Role of Negation in St. John of the Cross	Daniel Chowning OCD
103-M	Jesus Christ in the Writings of St. John of the Cross	Regis Jordan OCD
104-AB	St. John of the Cross for Carpenters: Ordinary Way/Dark Night of Faith	Dennis Read OCD
105-AD	The Dark Night of the Spirit: The Healing of the Soul	Kevin Culligan OCD
106-Y	Spiritual Direction in the Letters of St. John of the Cross	Kevin Culligan OCD
107-H	Mary and the Holy Spirit in St. John of the Cross	Emmanuel Sullivan OCD
114-A	St. John of the Cross on Love and Kenosis in Prayer	Kevin Culligan OCD
126-F	St. John of the Cross: The Dark Nights	Regis Jordan OCD
132-AV	The Holy Spirit: The Bond of Friendship in John of the Cross	Kieran Kavanaugh OCD
146-BE	The Dark Night as Liberation of the True Self	Keith Egan TO Carm
148-BG	St. John of the Cross Through the Eyes of Edith Stein	Keith Egan TO Carm
162	Eros and the Song of Songs in John of the Cross	Keith Egan TO Carm
163	Dark Passage to Prophecy	Constance FitzGerald OCD
200	St. John of the Cross: DIGITAL LIBRARY @ \$29.95	
<b>ST THERESE OF LISIEUX</b>		
115-AR	Empathy: Key to St. Thérèse's Little Way	John Sullivan OCD
124-W	St. Thérèse: God's Merciful Love	Daniel Chowning OCD
130-AU	The Revolution of Therese	Kieran Kavanaugh OCD
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133-AW	The Little Way	Kieran Kavanaugh OCD
134-T	St. Thérèse: Her Influence on Contemporary Theology and Spirituality	Dennis Read OCD
135-Q	St. Thérèse and the Mission of the Church	Michael Dodd OCD
137-AX	St. Thérèse: Doctor of the Church	Keith Egan TO Carm
138-D	St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Your Personal History as a Narrative of Hope	Sr Margaret Dorgan DCM
139-AC	This Child: Words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, With Reflections/Prayers/Chant/Song	
140-AY	The Discovery of Merciful Love	Keith Egan TO Carm
144-BC	St. Thérèse and Priesthood	Mary Frohich RSCJ
154	Reflections on the Doctorate of St. Therese	Steven Payne OCD
152	Therese: Mission Saigon and Beyond	Constance FitzGerald OCD
153	Therese: Child, Girl, Woman	Wilma Seelaus OCD
164	Story of a Soul: A New Arrangement of the Texts	Kieran Kavanaugh OCD
165	Dark Fire: The Prayer of St. Therese	Daniel Chowning OCD
<b>BLESSED ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY</b>		
108-V	The Message of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity	Steven Payne OCD
122-Z	Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity: Mary in her Interior Life	Emmanuel Sullivan OCD
127-AJ	Elizabeth of the Trinity: Life in the Trinity	Sr Margaret Dorgan DCM
171-G	The Apocalyptic Dimension in Elizabeth of the Trinity: Eternity	Sr Margaret Dorgan DCM
181-AN	The Prayer of Elizabeth of the Trinity	Daniel Chowning OCD
194-BN	Elizabeth of the Trinity and Baptismal Spirituality	Daniel Chowning OCD
193-AK	Elizabeth of the Trinity and Silence	Kieran Kavanaugh OCD
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## 2009 Congress Update

Our first planning challenge was to identify a location which could accommodate many different needs: a central location for traveling from the Northeast, Mid-West and Florida Regions; and a flexible location where hundreds of local Secular Carmelites would have the choice of staying at the hotel and enjoying the 3-day Congress experience, or commuting on a daily basis. Lastly, given the high cost of transportation, we also want to offer an opportunity of making the most of this expense by providing the same Congress hotel rate either three days before and/or three days after the event. This gives attendees the option of visiting a wide variety of sites in the Baltimore/Washington, DC area using the light-rail, train or metro systems.

The 2009 Congress will begin Thursday evening with the Liturgy for the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, followed by a welcome reception. The Congress Registration Fee of \$325 (before February 28, 2009) and \$350 thereafter; includes breakfast and lunch on both Friday and Saturday, Banquet Saturday night, and breakfast Sunday morning. In addition, after the Congress daytime sessions on Friday, one may relax and enjoy the hotel facilities, or consider an evening exploring Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Checkout time is noon on Sunday after Mass.



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*Let us embrace the challenges faced by each and every OCDS community -  
United in zeal, prayer and action, we know that our Lord and Lady will bless and guide us.*



(continued from page 3)

## The Darkness

“How strange and incomprehensible it is!” (LC 72). This exclamation of the Saint warns us from the outset that we cannot pretend to understand perfectly the nature and the diverse forms of the trial of faith in a soul. They remain a mystery even for the soul itself.

The life of faith is a reality both simple and complex. Simple in its movement stretched out toward God. Complex in the elements of which it is composed: the interior and exterior world of the person. When the temptation of doubt arises in a soul, faith is attacked at its roots, and this radical calling into question has its repercussions in all of life, and all the more strongly in cases where the tree of faith has spread its roots and branches more deeply into all existence. It is not surprising that these temptations, since they follow the movement of life, appear to develop without any logical order. Not surprising either is the impression of incoherence and difficulty for those suffering through them, who are trying to understand and to make others understand what they are going through. “This spiritual trial... is impossible to understand,” insists Thérèse (DE 21/26.5.10; LC 48). So it is with prudence and modesty that we will attempt to describe and then to analyze the personal combat the Saint lived through.

In *Manuscript C*, composed in June 1897, three months before her death, Thérèse uses a comparison to try to explain her state: “I imagine I was born in a country that is covered in thick fog. I never had the experience of contemplating the joyful appearance of nature flooded and transformed by the brilliance of the sun” (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 212). This is sound theological doctrine, proposed in simple terms. Faith is already by itself a night for the intellect, which cannot have evidence of divine realities. They, “these marvels” of which we have heard people speak, are not “an invented story” but “a reality, for the King of the Fatherland of the bright sun actually came and lived for thirty-three years in the land of darkness” (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 212). Thus the inherent obscurity of faith is enlightened by a certitude comparable to a “bright torch” (C 6r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 212). Saint Peter spoke of a “lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Pt 1:19). The trial consists then of this night of faith being transformed into total night: the temptations against faith have the effect of hiding the little flame or obscuring its light by the thick veil of doubts: “Then suddenly the fog which surrounds me becomes more dense; it penetrates my soul and envelops it” explains Thérèse (C 6v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213).

In a letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, the Saint had described the same phenomenon by comparing herself to a “little bird assailed by the storm.” “It seems it should believe in the existence of no other thing except the clouds surrounding it,” but “it knows that beyond the clouds its bright Sun still shines on” (B 5r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 198).

Faith is still there, but the soul has ceased to perceive its “Invisible Light” (B 5r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 198) and no longer has “the joy of faith” (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). She



Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (her oldest sister)



has the impression of having entered into a deeper night, another night. It is striking to see how much Thérèse has insisted on the depths of this new obscurity. She speaks of "thick darkness," of a "dark tunnel" (C 5v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 211); it is not a question any longer of a "veil, but of a wall which reaches right up to the heavens" (C 7v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214).

In the notes collected by her sisters during her illness, we will find the same characteristic reference: "The heavens are so black that I see no break in the clouds" (LC, 51). Thérèse speaks of a "black hole...where one can see nothing... Ah! What darkness!" (LC 173). The poems she composed from April 1896 to June 1897 speak clearly: "Without support yet with support, / Living without Light, in darkness" (Poetry, 30); "My Jesus smiles at me when I sigh to Him. / Then I no longer feel my trial of faith" (Poetry, 32), "When in my heart the storm arises" (Poetry, 36).

The confidences that stand out as landmarks in *the Last Conversations* show us that Thérèse will undergo this trial until she breathes her last. She notes, however: "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" (C 7v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214), only to return a moment later, doubled in intensity.

These lulls in the storm are due to the momentary disappearance of the tyranny of her doubts: "It seems to be suspended" (LC 62). At other times they are due to her sudden perception of God's tenderness, as in her chance encounter in the garden with a hen sheltering her chicks under her wings (LC, 60); a dream in which Mother Anne of Jesus reassures her of the importance of her "little way" (cf. B 2r-v, SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 190-191); and the tender care with which she is surrounded: "It's like a ray, or rather a flash of lightning in the midst of darkness" (LC 106). She had fleeting moments of joy: praying to the Holy Virgin (LC 41), listening to Sister Teresa of St. Augustine tell of the dream in which she saw Thérèse behind a "heavy black door" or hearing "music in the distance" (LC, 95).

But these brief consolations never brought back the interior sweetness that she had formerly known. For instance, weeping with gratitude over a sheaf of wild flowers that a Sister had brought to her for the anniversary of her profession, Thérèse clearly states: "It's all God's tenderness towards me; exteriorly, I am loaded with gifts; interiorly, I am always in my trial" (LC 186).

Another note: if this trial had basically no let-up, it did vary in intensity. Apparently it grew progressively more intense until it reached at times a maximum force: "I'm admiring the material heavens; the other is closed against me more and more" (LC, 141). We note two crucial moments in particular: the night of August 15 to August 16, 1897, during which Thérèse's own sisters, very upset, feared that she would succumb to her temptations and prayed explicitly for her in this regard; and also, during the final hours of her life, when Thérèse exclaims: "It's the agony, really, without any mixture of consolation" (LC 204).

One imagines that the feelings the Saint experienced at the outset of her trial were those of astonishment and surprise. She did not expect it. It happened so "sud-



denly" (C 6v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). Feelings of strangeness, of its incomprehensibility to herself and others, and then of solitude: "God alone can understand me" (LC 87). Feelings of discouragement (LC 132), of anguish (LC 157). Seated at "a table filled with bitterness," she eats "the bread of sorrow" and suffers an unspeakable inner torment (cf. C 6r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 212).

### Temptations

If we now seek to question her on the exact nature of her "spiritual trial," we hear her respond that it consisted mainly of "thoughts," of doubts against faith (LC 140, 145). We must assuredly include those "extravagant thoughts" (LC 57) about which she gives no explanation. Although Thérèse shows a great reserve, she does give us some examples of those suggestions looming up from the darkness: "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 all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog that 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" (C 6v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). She probably was more explicit still with her confessor, Abbe Youf, who answered her: "Don't dwell on these, it's very dangerous" (LC 58).

We cannot compare one soul with another, especially in the area of faith where each individual journeys toward God by ways proper to him or her. The points about which the voice from the darkness provokes doubt are certainly those closest to Thérèse's heart, those in which she had, so to speak, invested her entire confidence. Otherwise, the suspicions of doubt would not have been able to gnaw at her. It would be interesting to confirm how well the themes evoked here, in brief, correspond to Thérèse's privileged universe: light, the "fatherland," perfumes, eternal possession of God, creation and its marvels, earthly "exile" and its sadness.

"Advance, advance," the voice whispers to her. The entire Theresian dynamism of life conceived as a march and even a "race" toward God is here taken up again with cynicism in an invitation to joy, to the false joy of a proud heart that does not want to hope in anything and is satisfied with nothingness: "Rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness." In this diabolical counsel, we also note a parody on Thérèse's habitual way of being, which knew how to transform her failures, her disappointments, and her pains into victories through the humble and cheerful acceptance of God's will.

All things considered, the main thrust of the temptation was aimed at destroying completely the profound movement of the "little way" by renouncing the unconditional trust that is its foundation. Thérèse understood this by remarking that the accursed voice was "mocking her." We should probably rather speak here of cynicism, of malicious irony. Elsewhere the Saint will compare these suggestions to "ugly serpents...hissing in my ears" (LC 62).



Mother Agnes gives the following account:

One evening, in the infirmary, she was drawn to confide her troubles to me more than she usually did. She had not yet opened up in this way on this subject. Up until then, I had known of her trial of faith only vaguely: "If you only knew what frightful thoughts obsess me! Pray very much for me in order that I do not listen to the devil that wants to persuade me about so many lies. It's the reasoning of the worst materialists which is imposed upon my mind: Later, unceasingly making new advances, science will explain everything naturally; we shall have the absolute reason for everything that exists and that still remains a problem, because there remain very many things to be discovered, etc... I want to do good after my death, but I will not be able to do so! It will be as it was for Mother Genevieve: We expected to see her work miracles, and complete silence fell over her tomb." (LC 257-258)

Here we perceive that Thérèse was not so cut off from the world that she was completely unaware of the discussions raised about scientific progress in her day. This temptation took aim at the Saint's conviction that here below, it is impossible to arrive at "seeing" the truth about everything (LC 146). Not that she denied science unlimited power in the discovery of the secrets of the universe, but she repudiated the notion that this progress must dispense with faith. It is this insinuation that Thérèse rejects both as a lie and as violence perpetrated against her freedom: These "frightful thoughts" are in fact presented to her in an obsessive manner, through persuasion, under the form of a reasoning that "is imposed" on her mind.

Another negation, attempting to touch her to the heart, is that her desire to do good on earth after her death would be in vain. As proof, the "saintly" Mother Geneviève, foundress of the Lisieux Carmel, did not give any sign of her being in heaven: complete silence at her tomb! What good, then, all these sacrifices, her entire youth lost for a generous plan that is only a dream! To pretend to come back to help others, what an illusion!

Mother Agnes reports another confidence of Thérèse about the contents of her thoughts against faith: "Last evening, I was seized with a veritable anguish and my darkness increased. I do not know what accursed voice said to me: Are you sure of being loved by God? Did he come and tell you? It is not the opinion of creatures that will justify you before him". This temptation did not have the mocking tone of the first but, like the others, touched a sensitive point with Thérèse: God's love for her. In the same vein, Pere Godefroy Madelaine, who heard the Saint's confession in June 1896, testifies: "Her soul was passing through a spiritual crisis in which she believed that she was damned" (Apost. Process, 595).

According to this confessor, what was thrown into question for Thérèse was God's love, to the point where she felt herself rejected by him and "damned." But damnation presupposes an afterlife, an eternity of pain concurrent with an eternity of blessedness!



*Mother Agnes of Jesus  
(her sister Pauline)*



That means she still believed in the existence of heaven. Yet according to *Manuscript C* this is precisely what Thérèse was tempted to deny. What awaits her is the “night of nothingness” (C 6v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). If after death there is nothing, there will no longer be a heaven or a hell. How then to reconcile these contradictory statements?

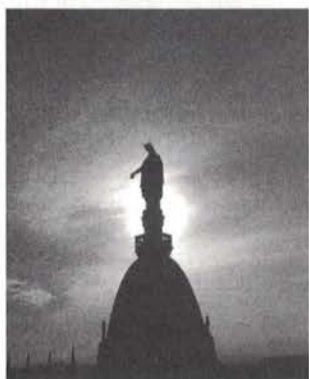
We should note that the testimonies of Pere Madelaine and Mother Agnes refer to times before the writing of *Manuscript C* (June 1897), in which the Saint explains what she means. We have already noted that Thérèse’s trial of faith has evolved progressively while growing in intensity. We have an example of it here. With time, the temptation becomes more radical. In July 1897, she will say: “It’s upon heaven that everything bears” (LC 72). What exactly does heaven mean for her? It seems it is essentially eternal blessedness, life with God. But doesn’t that include the very existence of God? Certain considerations lead us to believe that she did not suffer doubts about God’s existence, but only about life after death.

In brief, God would exist, but would not be concerned about human beings! “But if my suffering was really unknown to You, which is impossible...” (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214). This may appear illogical. How can she affirm that it is impossible? One day she said to Mother Agnes: “It’s impossible for me to confide to you everything about the anguish I’m suffering; I would be afraid of offending the good God by expressing such thoughts in words. I who love him so much! But all this is incoherent”. The incoherence of her inner state appears in a deposition of Sister Teresa of St. Augustine at the Diocesan Process: “If you only knew, she said to me, “in what darkness I am plunged. I do not believe in eternal life. It seems to me that after this mortal life, there is nothing anymore: Everything has disappeared for me; nothing remains for me but love”.

“Nothing remains for me but love!” Can God’s love subsist without faith? How can a house remain standing when it no longer has any foundations? Yet it is all but certain that in this torment, Thérèse’s love for God has undergone no eclipse. That provokes her astonishment: “Must one love God and the Blessed Virgin so much and have these thoughts!” (LC 145). She had to have been seeking an explanation for this phenomenon, since she proposes this response, found while reading a commentary on the *Imitation*: “Our Lord enjoyed all the delights of the Trinity when He was in the garden of Olives, and still His agony was none the less cruel. It’s a mystery, but I assure you that I understand something about it by what I’m experiencing myself” (LC 75).

Was she aware that she had there the proof of the firmness and vitality of her faith? If it is true, as Mgr. Combes says, that “Thérèse’s charity saved her faith,” we can also reverse the proposition and say that Thérèse’s faith saved her charity! It is her “living faith” in its existential unity that resisted the assaults of doubt. Perhaps it is fitting to say simply that we find ourselves in the presence of an aspect of the mystical character of every trial of faith, and in particular of the mystery of the Theresian soul.

The term “combat,” used by Thérèse, defines well her reactions under the assaults of doubt. Not content with undergoing the torment passively, she struggled valiantly, adopting one after the other, or simultaneously, four “systems” of defense: resistance without concession, the “flight” tactic, affirmation of her faith, and abandonment to God.





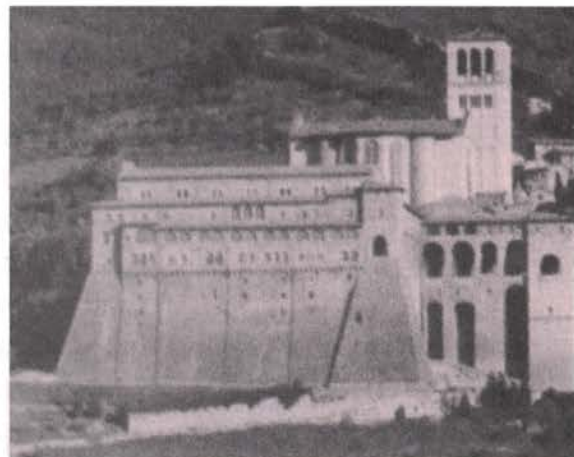
## Resistance without Concession

The image that spontaneously comes to mind when evoking the attitude of Thérèse during her night of doubts is that of a solidly defended fortress. It is first suggested to us by the military vocabulary that she uses so freely—soldier, war, arms, etc. (and we note this especially from the end of 1896 onward)—but most of all by the strength of soul that she manifests throughout this entire formidable trial. We could speak of an immovable fortress, set on a rock. Nothing will prevent her “from remaining there.... No, she will not change her place” (cf. B 5r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 198).

Her steadfastness does not falter. At most, she one day reveals the violence of the attacks she is undergoing by letting rise to her lips, despite herself, the obsessive suspicion with which “the enemy” is tormenting her, saying to Sister Agnes: “If there was no eternal life.... but there is one perhaps... and it's even certain!” (LC 184). This is not a breach in her fortified wall, because she repudiates this insidious “perhaps” as soon as it slips out. She does not want to concede anything to her “adversary,” not the smallest particle of truth received and held in faith. She resists with all the strength that is in her. One morning after a particularly distressful night she discloses: “I repelled many temptations” (LC 135).

Thérèse's resistance without concession appears all the more admirable since her trial of faith was long and violent and had come upon her so suddenly. She had not known that slow invasion of twilight in which the truths of faith are dimmed little by little, finally giving place to nightfall without the person being aware of it, as happened to the philosopher Renan. It was impossible that such a thing could happen unexpectedly to Thérèse: impossible because of her vigilance and the vigor of her faith. “I am like the watchman observing the enemy from the highest turret of a strong castle” (C 23r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 239). Besides the trials of faith of which we have spoken, the numerous sufferings she had to face throughout the course of her life, especially her father's illness, trained her in spiritual combat and strengthened her more and more in her faith in God and in an unflinching trust in him.

True, Thérèse had the advantage of an exceptional faith milieu, but to be strengthened, to acquire the vigor and maturity we see in her, to remain “living and clear” (C 5r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 211), how could her faith not have had to combat those endless temptations to doubt and unbelief, to which every life, even the most protected, is subject? She who “never sought anything but the truth” (LC 205) did not fail to encounter certain difficulties of which her observations of the world around her, her personal reflections on the teaching she had received, and her own discoveries had made her aware. It does seem that she discerned certain problems. For instance, she regrets that she herself cannot throw light on translations of Scripture that she judges to be defective (LC 132). We know how avidly she sought information about the faith throughout her life, even before the catechism lessons of Abbe Domin who used to call her “his little doctor” (A 37v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 81). Abbe Arminjon's book brought her a deep knowledge of “the mysteries of the



*“I am like the watchman observing the enemy from the highest turret of a strong castle”*

future life" (A 47r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 102). But it was the Gospel above all that she never grew tired of assimilating.

This solid and substantial formation, exempt from mere curiosities or intellectual subtleties, constituted the living treasure that she defended with an uncompromising vigilance. The jealously guarded integrity of her faith corresponded to the totality of her commitment in faith. Thérèse had staked everything on God. Her faith, constantly fostered, became an integral part of her entire being and her very substance, and had acquired the vigor of a healthy organism, very alive and in full flower. Not surprising, then, that it gives the impression of an impregnable citadel. Its deep rooting in Christ and its vigilance gave to her faith that stability of the house built on rock of which the Gospel speaks (cf. Mt 7:24-27).

### Flight Tactic

A second "system" that Thérèse adopts in order to cope with her temptations against faith is that of flight. "At each new occasion of combat, when my enemy provokes me, I conduct myself bravely. Knowing it is cowardly to enter into a duel, I turn my back on my adversaries without deigning to look them in the face" (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213).



*"...I turn my back on my adversaries without deigning to look them in the face"*

Why is it cowardice to fight in a duel? Ought it not to be, on the contrary, an act of courage to risk one's life? To understand Thérèse's thinking, we must put ourselves directly in her place. To accept the challenge to a duel, that is, to agree to take into consideration the doubts against faith, is to enter into the "enemy's" game, to recognize the validity of his reasonings, perhaps even to secretly satisfy "a death wish" that sometimes pushes individuals, sorely tried, to end their difficulties, through suicide. To fight a duel is already to surrender to offend God; it is already to deny God by refusing to, give him one's total trust. Finally, to agree to fight a duel is cowardice because it is to betray God and to flee from' the true combat that is far more grueling, since it affords nothing to nature and demands an unconditional gift of self. Is not the true combat that of Jacob wrestling with the angel? Thus Thérèse, at "every new occasion," resolutely determines to flee the compromise and inevitable surrender proposed to her. She wisely chooses "not to expose myself to combat when there was certain defeat facing me" (C 15r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 224). In other words, she refuses to dwell on "these thoughts" (LC 145): that the "accursed voice" whispers to her; she "turns her back on them without deigning to look them in the face," realizing that it is not only useless but likewise "very dangerous" to examine them close up, or to discuss them in order to assess their validity. "Don't worry, I'm not going to break my 'little' head by torturing myself" (LC 58).

We can imagine that she had already used this "flight tactic" to protect herself from getting caught off guard by the imperceptible attacks on the integrity of her faith presented by seemingly harmless but insidious "ifs" and "perhaps." That did not keep her from passionately desiring to know more about her faith, she who never "sought anything but the truth." Her sure supernatural instinct, however, made her avoid the snares of in-



tellectual research for its own sake, which is more captivated by its own progress than by the truth. With Thérèse there was neither rashness nor bravado; she did not go out to meet the enemy, it was the enemy who came to “provoke” her. It would not have entered her head to feign her difficulties or to play a mental game, because she had a horror for “pretense” (LC 77, 92). “Ah! I am not pretending,” she exclaims, “it’s very true that I don’t see a thing” (LC 150).

It is also noteworthy that her temptations never strayed into grounds external to the essence of the faith itself, such as incomplete information about revealed facts, distorted teaching, or a general calling of everything into question because of the situation of the church or society, or again because of particular cases of scandal. For a long time, her sense of faith had made her discern and grasp its substance. That is why, unable to use indirect means, her adversary challenges her directly on the essential. Thérèse knows that temptation is not a sin, that a difficulty, in order to be transformed into doubt, must pass through a free and conscious consent, through a positive acceptance. “A thousand difficulties do not make a doubt,” Cardinal Newman used to say. The solicitude of the Saint not “to offend God” is such that she is even afraid to describe her inner torments: “I don’t want to write any longer about it; I fear I might blaspheme; I fear even that I have already said too much” (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). “I would be afraid by expressing such thoughts in words to offend the good God”.

We can see another reason for her silence and prudent reserve in her desire to spare those around her from the contagion of her doubt. Sister Geneviève will say at the Apostolic Process: “She spoke to nobody about it, for fear she would pass her own indescribable torment on to them”. She answered Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart in a vague manner and then changed the subject of the conversation: “I understood then that she did not want to tell me anything for fear that she would make me share her temptations”. To Pere Madelaine she will say: “I tried not to make anyone suffer from my pains”.

Finally, Thérèse was applying in this extreme case a principle that was part of her “little way”: “This does us so much good, and it gives us so much strength not to speak of our troubles” (LC 135). She refused to feel sorry for herself or to look for pity because she was totally detached from herself.

### Affirmation of Her Faith

Thérèse was not content with energetically resisting the assaults of the adversary, and she used her flight tactic only to counterattack once more, by deliberately affirming her faith in the truth that these “thoughts” were trying to lead her to deny. “At each new occasion of combat...I run toward my Jesus. I tell Him I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop to profess my faith in the existence of heaven” (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213).

Thérèse renews, as it were, the totality of her commitment to God and to Jesus, by making acts of faith, multiplied as often as necessary: “I believe I have made more acts of faith in this past year than all through my whole life” (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). After a night when her temptations had been more oppressive than ever, she exclaims: “Ah! how



*Sr. Geneviève (her sister Celine)*

many acts of faith I made! (LC 135). Speaking to Mother Agnes about her “dark thoughts,” she says: “I undergo them under duress but while undergoing them I never cease making acts of faith” (LC 258).

During her agony, when her sufferings were at their peak, while still thwarting her temptation, we hear her make this admirable cry of faith and love: “My God! my God! You who are so good! Oh, yes, You are good! I know it” (LC 205).

At other moments when she is under less pressure Thérèse makes numerous acts of faith, whether implicit—by serenely affirming “when I am in heaven...” (LC 68) or by telling God directly that she loves him (LC 119)—or by making the sign of the cross, which demands considerable effort on her part. She kisses her crucifix with great tenderness (cf. LC 129, 154). She even gets to the point of “singing very strongly in her heart: After death life is immortal!” (LC 150). She will insist on the reception of extreme unction (the sacrament of anointing the sick) and will manifest her joy in receiving it (LC 121). And with the same motive of exercising and strengthening her faith, she will be disappointed when Abbe Youf is unable, at one point, to come to hear her confession (LC 185). But her keenest suffering of all was to be deprived of the reception of the Eucharist from August 19 until her death, because of her inability to consume even the smallest particle of the host. And finally, she bears with her terrible physical sufferings and her “spiritual trial” in the thought, or rather the certitude, of working for the good of souls and also continuing this after her death: “I will come back” (LC 83).

Thérèse's reaction to her doubts is remarkable for its relevance and effectiveness. She knew that she could not have recourse to any outside assistance to help her to stand firm during this torment. Abbe Youf's response to her confidences, “Don't dwell on these, it is very dangerous,” she took with humor: “This is hardly consoling to hear” (LC 58). When one of the Sisters read some beautiful texts to her, thinking it would give her some comfort in her trial, she said straightforwardly: “It was as though you were singing!” (LC 106).

She understood that no explanation, no verification, no rational demonstration, no human proof could dispense her from the journey that only she could make: “obedience to the faith” (Rom 16:26) by renewing her total adherence to it, by resting solely on the Word of God. There was only one way of fortifying her faith, and that was by exercising it.

Far from deploring the uncomfortable situation required of every intellect to adhere to a truth for which we have no natural proof, Thérèse deliberately accepts the obscurity inherent in faith: “I've had a greater desire not to see God and the saints, and to remain in the night of faith, than others have desired to see and understand” (LC 146), or again: “It's only in heaven that we'll see the whole truth about everything. This is impossible on earth”. So “while not having the joy of the faith,” she strives “to carry out its works at least” (cf. C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213).

In this area, she is not able to rely on her feelings. She knows that they vary with circumstances and with our moods. Feelings, moreover, are inadequate for the encounter with God. In order to find him “in spirit and in truth,” we must surrender to him in the depths of our being. In other words, the soul, through a movement of its freedom, must want to believe. This is the source of Thérèse's strongly determined will to welcome the



gift of faith in the face of doubt's assaults: "I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE" (C 7v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 214), words that she underlined twice. Needless to point out here, she cannot be accused of "fideism."

Let us instead note two distinctive features of Theresian realism. In her combat, Thérèse does not equivocate. Her comeback each time is immediate: "At each new occasion of combat...I run towards my Jesus" (C 7r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 213). She is totally intent on this movement. Elsewhere, we see at work her capacity for making use of events and the smallest occasions for raising herself to God. She possesses the art of living in the present moment, by concentrating on it all the intensity of her being: "I'm suffering only for an instant. It's because we think of the past and the future that we become discouraged and fall into despair" (LC 155).

Finally, Thérèse escapes the accusation of pure voluntarism because the ultimate reason for her will to believe is nothing else but love. The revealing sign of this is the following reflection: "I'd become discouraged if I didn't have any faith! Or at least if I didn't love God!" (LC 132). In fact, we will discover there the secret of the indomitable energy Thérèse displayed in her combat against temptations. She struggled to keep a faith that she loved, because it had revealed love to her.

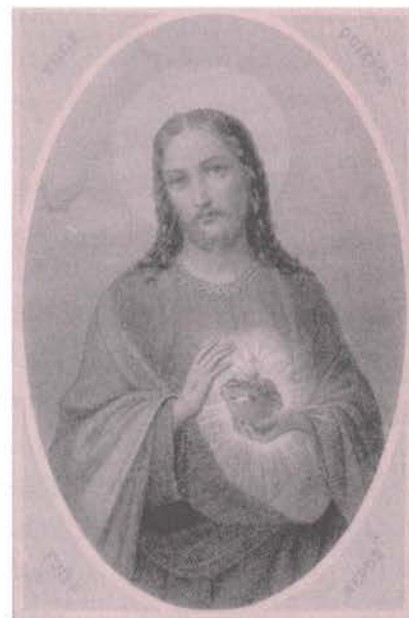
## Abandonment to God

Resistance, flight, acts of faith and love, Thérèse is convinced in the depths of her being that she could not do any of them without the help of grace. She knows that faith itself is a grace, but also that God's aid is indispensable for preserving faith: "I never cease to say to God: O my God, I beg You, preserve me from the misfortune of being unfaithful" (LC 140).

We have here a marvelous illustration of the "little way," which consists of remaining "little," that is to say, of not attributing any virtue to ourselves, of believing ourselves incapable of accomplishing by our own strength anything good whatsoever, but recognizing, on the contrary, our extreme weakness, and making use of it to look to God for everything: "I can depend on nothing, on no good works of my own in order to have confidence" (LC 137); "I never rely on my own ideas; I know how weak I am" (LC 46).

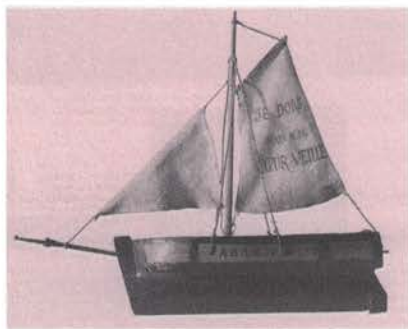
To the degree that we remain in this attitude of poverty, of humility of heart, we are not at risk of any danger. The trials that we must necessarily undergo are always measured out by God, who does not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength in the present moment: "God gives me exactly what I can bear" (LC 168); "If I can't breathe, God will give me the strength to bear it" (LC 115).

On the other hand, catastrophe is certain from the moment we believe ourselves capable of surmounting any difficulty on our own: "I understand very well why St. Peter fell. Poor Peter, he was relying upon himself instead of relying only upon God's strength. I conclude from this experience that if I said to myself: 'O my God, you know very well I love you too much to dwell upon one single thought against the faith,' my temptations would become more violent and I would certainly succumb to them" (LC 140).



*"At each new occasion of combat... I run towards my Jesus"*

If she stands fast, it is solely because God is sustaining her. But this help is not felt, it is given moment by moment and in such a secret way that Thérèse has rather the impression of being completely abandoned in her night, in her physical sufferings, in her anguish of soul. She eats “the bread of sorrow” at “this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating” (C 6r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 212). She experiences the feeling of God's absence as if she had fallen into unbelief. Without “the joy of faith” (C 7r), deprived of the supernatural joys of love formerly showered on her, she lives psychologically the dereliction of atheists. Heaven is totally closed to her. “Even the saints are abandoning me,” she sighs. Nothing her Sisters say or do to console her is able to alleviate this indescribable torment.



Celine's Christmas gift:  
ABANDON

This interior darkness seems to question not only her adherence to the faith, but likewise the vigor of her hope, under the form of doubt about God's fidelity to his promises. That the happiness of heaven appears illusory is one facet of the temptation, but no less formidable is the other side, which consists in doubting that God is interested in the soul, in thinking that he is abandoning it to itself in its own ridiculous efforts to reach the promised goal.

What is threatened more profoundly still, in Thérèse's trial of faith, is her most precious possession: her trust in Merciful Love. This was the heart of her “little way.” Thérèse had offered herself “as a victim of holocaust to God's Merciful Love” (cf. A 84r; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 180) and had received the pledge of divine acceptance in that “wound of love” (LC, 77) received shortly after (in June 1895) and by other signs. And now that reciprocity of total love seemed suddenly to cease. God withdrew into the silence of her double night. Thérèse understood that she must respond to the apparent abandonment of God by totally handing herself over, by a no less total abandonment into the hands of God: “God wills that I abandon myself like a very little child who is not disturbed by what others will do to him” (LC 65). This habitual disposition appears as a constant theme in her resolutions: “I abandon myself” (LC 63); “We must abandon ourselves” (e.g., LC 169).

It must be said that Thérèse arrived only gradually at this total abandonment to God: “This saying of Job: ‘Although he should kill me, I will trust in him,’ has fascinated me from my childhood. But it took me a long time before I was established in this degree of abandonment. Now I am there” (LC 77).

Such abandonment is not resignation but a definitive acceptance, without reservation, of God's will whatever it may be. It is a question therefore of the highest form of faith, of a naked faith stripped of any human motivation; above all, it is the purest form of a love that has reached its fullness and that expresses itself in a blind confidence in God's mercy in spite of everything that appears to contradict it. No, God is not abandoning her in the middle of her dark night, he cannot abandon her, and he has never abandoned her: “I love Him! He'll never abandon me” (LC 115). Thérèse repeated her certitude untiringly, and in doing this, she gave the most pertinent and most complete answer to her temptations against faith.

*“I love Him! He'll never  
abandon me”*



At no time does she give way to questioning the goodness of a God who permits her to suffer so. Instead of accusing him of indifference, or even of cruelty, as did Job, Thérèse finds a way of giving him thanks, of showing her gratitude to him for what she is going through. She makes this extraordinary exclamation: "Oh! how good God will have to be so that I can bear all I'm suffering" (LC 164). She knows that he is there, that it is he who is giving her the power to go so far in this "martyrdom," which is beautiful and the very "martyrdom of love" that she has so longed for. She understood that her perseverance in confidence was demonstrating her love and that God was expecting of her "further proofs...of my abandonment and love" (LC 87).

To a question about patience and about the saints who were present as observers in her combat, she responds: "They want to see... especially if I'm going to lose confidence...and how far I'm going to push my confidence" (LC 195). What motivates this total confidence are not her personal merits, nor an exemplary life, but rather the incomprehensible and infinite merciful love of God himself: "One could believe that it is because I haven't sinned that I have such great confidence in God. Really tell them, Mother, that if I had committed all possible crimes, I would always have the same confidence" (LC 89).

Is there need to say that Thérèse came out victorious from this long and unrelenting combat? To have proof, we need not have recourse to her influence and glory after her death. She gave us a preview of this happy outcome during the very time of her trial of faith, in her fierce resistance, her refusal to debate with her adversary, her acts of faith and love, and her unshakable confidence, as we have seen. But we have other signs from her that show she remained the mistress of operations and that in reality she was on top of the situation. Two characteristics of her conduct are particularly revealing: her joy and her peace, which are manifested in untold ways through her "playfulness," her puns, her jests, her calling up of songs from the past, her efforts to distract and amuse her Sisters. Certainly she suffered, and greatly, but as she writes to Mother Marie de Gonzague, "It is in joy and peace" (C 4v; SOS, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 210).

The *Last Conversations* are full of comments like the following: "My soul, in spite of this darkness, is in an astonishing peace" (LC 199). Astonishing indeed, considering the nature of the afflictions of body and soul that were crushing her. Joy and serenity radiated from her being to such a degree that her Sisters were struck by it and, sometimes forgetting that they were dealing with an extremely sick person, came to her to ask advice, to bother her with questions, or to be consoled. An astonishing peace, humanly speaking, because it had no other source than the grace present in the depths of Thérèse's heart. The result was that her last sigh, marking her triumph with a moment of ecstasy, appears as the completion of her ascent. It is understood, of course, that up to the last second she could fail, and Thérèse was well aware of this, she who mistrusted her weakness so much. But this failure was more than improbable, for, as they say, one dies as one has lived. Thérèse's death confirms her entire life, pausing on the final note that summarizes it entirely: "Oh! I love Him!... My God... I... love You!..." (LC, 230).

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#### Editor's note on Abbreviations

A, B, C: Thérèse's autobiographical manuscripts, ordinarily with indication of page number and recto (front) or verso (back) side (C 3v, for example, refers to the verso side of the third page of manuscript C.) This referencing system is incorporated into the ICS Publications third edition of SOS.  
LC: Last Conversations  
LT: Letters  
SOS: Story of a Soul

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## Reminders

Recently we have received a number of inquiries concerning those who are not attending Community meetings. There are two places in the Constitutions that address this situation:

- ¶ 51. The President ... coordinate(s) contacts with those members of the community who because of age, illness, distance or other reasons, are not able to attend meetings;...
- ¶ 56. Members of the Secular Order, who for reasons of distance, age, or illness cannot participate in the regular meetings of a community, remain members of the Secular Order ... are to be associated to a particular community. It is the responsibility of the President of the community to establish contact with those members and the responsibility of these members to maintain contact with the community.

Note in both places that it is the President's responsibility to establish contact with these members or ask another member of the Community to do so. These members should not be deleted from the Community Roster unless they ask to be removed, or after several attempts on the part of the Community to reach them proves futile.

It is well to remember that these are our brothers and sisters who are Definitively Promised to the Order and to your Community. We certainly don't want to give them the impression that the Order or your Community has abandoned them.