



**THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025**

**Reading the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025
2024: Manuscripts B and C**



Text 2:
The Eagle and the little bird
(Ms. B, 4v-5v)

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**Text 2:
The Eagle and the little bird (Ms. B, 4v-5v)**

Suggestion for the community meeting:

1. Read the text together
2. One of those present, having prepared a contribution in advance, discusses the text using the commentary (and other aids, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be helpful to have made individual readings and reflections on Therese's text before the community meeting.

MANUSCRIPT B, 4v-5v

How can a soul as imperfect as mine aspire to the possession of the plenitude of Love? O Jesus, my first and only Friend, You whom I love UNIQUELY, explain this mystery to me! Why do You not reserve these great aspirations for great souls, for the Eagles that soar in the heights?

I look upon myself as a weak little bird, with only a light down as covering. I am not an eagle, but I have an eagle's EYES AND HEART. In spite of my extreme littleness I still dare to gaze upon the

Divine Sun, the Sun of Love, and my heart feels within it all the aspirations of an Eagle.

The little bird wills to fly toward the bright Sun that attracts its eye, imitating its brothers, the eagles, whom it sees climbing up toward the Divine Furnace of the Holy Trinity. But alas! the only thing it can do is raise its little wings; to fly is not within its little power! What then will become of it? Will it die of sorrow at seeing itself so weak? Oh no! the little bird will not even be troubled. With bold surrender, it wishes to remain gazing upon its Divine Sun. Nothing will frighten it, neither wind nor rain, and if dark clouds come and hide the Star of Love, the little bird will not change its place, because it knows that beyond the clouds its bright Sun still shines on and that its brightness is not eclipsed for a single instant.

At times the little bird's heart is assailed by the storm, and it seems it should believe in the existence of no other thing except the clouds surrounding it; this is the moment of perfect joy for the poor little weak creature. And what joy it experiences when remaining there just the same! and gazing at the Invisible Light which remains hidden from its faith!

O Jesus, up until the present moment I can understand Your love for the little bird because it has not strayed far from You. But I know and so do You that very often the imperfect little creature, while remaining in its place (that is, under the Sun's rays), allows itself to be somewhat distracted from its sole occupation. It picks up a piece of grain on the right or on the left; it chases after a little worm; then coming upon a little pool of water, it wets its feathers still hardly formed. It sees an attractive flower and its little mind is occupied with this flower. In a word, being unable to soar like the eagles, the poor little bird is taken up with the trifles of earth.

And yet, after all these misdeeds, instead of going and hiding away in a corner, to weep over its misery and to die of sorrow, the little bird turns toward its beloved Sun, presenting its wet wings to its beneficent rays. It cries like a swallow and in its sweet song it recounts in detail all its infidelities, thinking in the boldness of its full trust that it will acquire in even greater fullness the love of Him who came to call not the just but sinners. And even if the Adorable Star remains deaf to the plaintive chirping of the little creature, even if it remains hidden, well, the little one will remain wet, accepting its numbness from the cold and rejoicing in its suffering which it knows it deserves.

O Jesus, Your little bird is happy to be weak and little. What would become of it if it were big? Never would it have the boldness to appear in Your presence, to fall asleep in front of You. Yes, this is still one of the weaknesses of the little bird: when it wants to fix its gaze upon the Divine Sun, and when the clouds prevent it from seeing a single ray of that Sun, in spite of itself, its little eyes close, its little head is hidden beneath its wing, and the poor little thing falls asleep, believing all the time that it is fixing its gaze upon its Dear Star. When it awakens, it doesn't feel desolate; its little heart is at peace and it begins once again its work of love. It calls upon the angels and saints

who rise like eagles before the consuming Fire, and since this is the object of the little bird's desire the eagles take pity on it, protecting and defending it, and putting to flight at the same time the vultures who want to devour it.

These vultures are the demons whom the little bird doesn't fear, for it is not destined to be their prey but the prey of the Eagle whom it contemplates in the center of the Sun of Love.

O Divine Word! You are the Adored Eagle whom I love and who alone attracts me! Coming into this land of exile, You willed to suffer and to die in order to draw souls to the bosom of the Eternal Fire of the Blessed Trinity. Ascending once again to the Inaccessible Light, henceforth Your abode, You remain still in this "valley of tears," hidden beneath the appearances of a white host. Eternal Eagle, You desire to nourish me with Your divine substance and yet I am but a poor little thing who would return to nothingness if Your divine glance did not give me life from one moment to the next.

O Jesus, allow me in my boundless gratitude to say to You that Your love reaches unto folly. In the presence of this folly, how can You not desire that my heart leap toward You? How can my confidence, then, have any limits? Ah! the saints have committed their follies for You, and they have done great things because they are eagles.

Jesus, I am too little to perform great actions, and my own folly is this: to trust that Your Love will accept me as a victim. My folly consists in begging the eagles, my brothers, to obtain for me the favour of flying toward the Sun of Love with the Divine Eagle's own wings!

As long as You desire it, O my Beloved, Your little bird will remain without strength and without wings and will always stay with its gaze fixed upon You. It wants to be fascinated by

Your divine glance. It wants to become the prey of Your Love. One day I hope that You, the Adorable Eagle, will come to fetch me, Your little bird; and ascending with it to the Furnace of Love, You will plunge it for all eternity into the burning Abyss of this Love to which it has offered itself as victim.

O Jesus! why can't I tell all little souls how unspeakable is Your condescension? I feel that if You found a soul weaker and littler than mine, which is impossible, You would be pleased to grant it still greater favours, provided it abandoned itself with total confidence to Your Infinite Mercy. But why do I desire to communicate Your secrets of Love, O Jesus, for was it not You alone who taught them to me, and can You not reveal them to others? Yes, I know it, and I beg You to do it. I beg You to cast Your Divine Glance upon a great number of little souls.

I beg You to choose a legion of little Victims worthy of Your LOVE!

The very little Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face

Introduction to the text:

Therese is questioning herself anew: Is this love really in her heart? The parable of the little bird illuminates this dilemma experienced in the night of faith; faith remains the only path, and it is in faith that this crazy love is lived. So, the dark images, the storm, do not distress Therese; on the contrary, for her they are the cause of perfect joy; she draws her joy and happiness from her night. This first time of joy consists of being able to name the depth of the darkness in which she finds herself, of being able to have a completely lucid awareness of it. There is then the lasting reality of happiness, as the fruit of a will and an enduring patience.

‘The Eagles and the little bird’ (Ms. B, 4v): almost the entire end of manuscript B is devoted to the parable contrasting ‘the great souls, the Eagles’ with ‘the little souls’, represented by ‘the little bird’ (never in the plural).

The images of the eagle and the little bird doubtless come firstly from the book of the ‘Life’ (particularly in Chapter 20) of Saint Teresa of Jesus. We can also take note of the classification of the three kinds of prayer made by Father Lemonnier during a retreat at the Carmel of Lisieux in 1894; firstly, the Eagles, then the doves, then the baby chicks. We should not forget the Bible, particularly Deuteronomy 32:11, Exodus 19:4, as well as Isaiah 40:29-31.

‘Raise its little wings’ (Ms. B, 5r): an analogous expression to ‘lift one’s little foot’.

‘The invisible light’ (Ms. B, 5r): Therese has entered the night of faith, and the night will become more dense during the following winter (her last).

‘To doze in front of you’ (Ms. B, 5r): deprived of sleep by a rhythm of life that did not meet the needs of a young sister, Therese had very soon started dozing off during silent prayer. In 1893, she depicted herself, in a fresco painted in the Oratory, with the appearance of a sleeping angel.

‘As long as you desire it’ (Ms. B, 5v): The expression of Therese’s heroism, whose love did not want to hasten the time fixed by Jesus for their meeting.

‘To a great number of little souls’ (Ms. B, 5v): Here, Therese, who up to now had only been speaking in her own name, made her message universal.

For the community dialogue:

1. *What is the text saying?* Understanding the content and initial meaning of Therese's text
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Discern the present-day relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual. . .) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me/us?* Consider the personal and community relevance of the text.

The purpose of this process is to allow Therese to speak to us herself, to question and encourage us, and to open us up to her clarifying and confirming our own personal and community path. The questions suggested are only indicative, and could perhaps be used in individual meditation and community sharing.

Questions:

1. How should we name the stages passed by the little bird? What realities are there to undermine her confidence? What does she choose regardless?
2. Therese depends on self-abasing Love, on the prayer of others (the saints), and on her engagement in prayer for others. Can I testify to the link between these three dimensions in my own prayer-life? What does Therese ask for us?
3. Therese experiences here even more deeply both the experience of sinners and little ones, and the power of the Love that abases itself for all. What is the moving force for us of our missionary desires?



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