

## Thérèse: A Motive for Hope

Anastasio Cardinal Ballestrero, OCD

The connection between personal story and mercy is one of the most remarkable aspects of the life of St. Therese of Lisieux. She is conscious of this herself. She proclaims it with absolute conviction. And she convinces us by her reflections, in which the outpouring of divine mercy abounds and where we discover a transparent humanity, delightful and exemplary, fully open to the divine gift. We find the family remembrances, the early vocation, the response to her Carmelite call, the encounter in Carmel with teachers like Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross. We find a ray of light illumining the life of the community, to the advantage above all of the new recruits. And after her precious death we find the quick and rapid outpouring of interest within the church, like an authentic miracle, leaving all those amazed who know how to see and understand the logic and consistency of God, who is essentially the Lord of mercy.

By the very fact of her unremitting proclamation of the mercy of God, Therese of the Child Jesus is a motive for hope, a hope that is not only her personal treasure but also a gift she gives to all those who know and listen to her.

To the one who listens to Therese of the Child Jesus, the fatherhood of God becomes not just a mystery to be believed but an experience to be lived forever. She is the daughter who recollects herself in the Father's heart and abandons herself to the embrace of God's paternal love, so mercifully great and supremely generous.

This declaration of God's fatherhood, this proclamation of the Saviour's mercy that Therese lives, is not the dubious gratification of an infantile affectivity—but a courageously consistent thrust toward the mystery that transcends her, that overwhelms her, that renders her a "victim," brimming over at the same time with supreme blessedness and glory.

In this sense the experience of Thérèse of the Child Jesus is an authentic gospel event. That Gospel that the Saint carried on her heart, that Gospel on which she was nourished almost exclusively, is truly the Word of God, truly the mystery of Christ, Son of the Father, Spouse of virgins, Saviour of the world, incarnation of Trinitarian love.

The message of Thérèse of the Child Jesus proclaims all this, and so can be interpreted as a new evangelisation in which the substance of the Gospel comes alive through interior experience, contemplative prayer, filial and fraternal love, and the generosity of a charity that becomes heroic and oblatinal.

To this Lord Jesus, to whom she offers herself, Thérèse leads souls who follow her by means of the simplicity of the Gospel; hers is not a spiritual infantilism but an adherence to the word of the Lord: "Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

These words from the Gospel are the synthesis of a life, a spiritual experience, an evangelical doctrine, and they are also, we can say, the vocation of a creature who after

having lived all of this in heroic fidelity on earth is now proclaiming it wonderfully from the glory of heaven. Everything that is described here can become living, transparent, and invaluable to us by approaching the Saint, listening to the message, and following the way that leads to salvation.

From Conrad de Meester (ed.) *Saint Therese of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teaching* Washington: ICS Publications, 1997. Available from [www.icspublications.org](http://www.icspublications.org) USD\$44.95

## Thérèse Today

Bishop Guy Gaucher, OCD

The mystery remains: how did a young Carmelite nun, dying unknown in a little French provincial town, manage to conquer the world?

But it is a fact. Is there, throughout the church's 2000 year history of holiness, a more brilliant course or a more intense "storm of glory" (Pius XI)? And we are only a century removed from her obscure death, as she suffered the pangs of tuberculosis and the night of faith. We are still far from measuring the impact of Thérèse's life and doctrine on the church and world. No serious study has yet been done on her posthumous life.

Certainly the church has honoured her with an astonishing number of titles. She has been named patron of the universal missions (1927), secondary patron of France (1944), patron of all novitiates, and protector of Russia (1932), Mexico (1929), The French Mission (1941), the Catholic Worker Movement (1929), and so on. Popes Saint Pius X and Pius XI respectively named her "the greatest saint of modern times" and "a word of God for the world." Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pius XII, called her "the greatest wonder-worker of modern times" (1938). We could prolong the list indefinitely, and on a worldwide scale.

What is important today, a century after her "entrance into life," is to note the constant impact of her life and spiritual message. At the close of this century in which scepticism and hidden despair have invaded all levels of society, in which the hopes raised by totalitarian ideologies have misfired, in which the world of technology no longer leaves room for simple humanity, the crisis of hope has come to full term.

The church's saints re-emerge as masters of meaning, hope, and love, for "the saints virtually never grow old... they never fall under 'prescription.' They continually remain witnesses of the youth of the Church. They never become characters of the past, men and women of 'yesterday.' On the contrary: they are always men and women of tomorrow, men of the evangelical future of man and of the Church, witnesses 'of the future world.' " It is no coincidence that the first pope to come on pilgrimage to Lisieux, John Paul II, spoke these words in the basilica's square. They fit this young Norman girl perfectly.

We notice, at Lisieux and elsewhere, that Therese's word and prayer frees wounded people, unchains drug-addicted or despairing youth, and constantly raises up

priestly, religious, and lay vocations. She goes in search of distant people, insinuates herself into the most unlikely situations, plays an ecumenical role, attracts Muslims, and touches even strangers to the faith, sometimes through a simple look at her real face that photography has made available to us. More than fifty apostolic congregations have named themselves after Saint Therese and claim her as their patroness. In France, the fast rising new communities are often rooted in the spirituality of this young saint, for whom weakness was a springboard to sanctity in ordinary life. Thérèse continues to gather around herself both the great intellectuals and the poor of every land. Since 1932, many theologians and spiritual writers have seen that the doctrine of Saint Thérèse has universal application. More than 600 bishops and a vast number of lay people asked Pope Pius XI to declare her a Doctor of the Church. No woman up to that time had ever received this honour, and the pope refused to cross the line. But Pope Paul VI did in 1970 when he proclaimed two women as Doctors of the Church: Saints Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. The way is now open. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux herself wrote: 'Ah! in spite of my littleness I would like to enlighten souls as did the Prophets and the Doctors. I have the vocation of the Apostle' (*Story of a Soul*, B 3r) and "I feel the vocation of ... THE DOCTOR" (B 2v).

God always granted her desires, and will grant this one when and how he wishes. The essential point remains that her life and her message, marked by her times but prophetically surpassing them (she announces what will be the great themes of Vatican II), are the most effective antidote to contemporary despair. One day she may be the "Doctor of Hope." Certainly she is an important saint for the twenty-first century, "turned toward the future and a witness of the future world."

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, she desired to be Love in the heart of the church. She is, and no one can rob her of that place, because "It is Jesus who has given it to her" (cf. B 3v).

*Postscript.* After this piece was written (in 1996) Pope John Paul II added to the many honours that Bishop Gaucher lists, that Therese be named as the third female Doctor of the Church in October 1997.

From Conrad de Meester (ed.) *Saint Therese of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teaching* Washington: ICS Publications, 1997. Available from [www.icspublications.org](http://www.icspublications.org) USD\$44.95

## Chronology

1873

Thursday, January 2: Therese born in Alençon

Saturday, January 4: Thérèse baptised in Notre-Dame Church

Saturday, March 15 or Sunday, March 16: Thérèse sent to wet nurse in Semallé.

1874 - one year old

Thursday, April 2: Thérèse returns to Alençon.

[www.therese2002.com](http://www.therese2002.com)

1875 - two years old

Monday, March 29: Train trip with her mother to Le Mans, to see Thérèse's Visitandine aunt. At age of two: "I too will be a religious" (A 6r).

1877 - four years old

Saturday, February 24: Death of Therese's Visitandine aunt.

Friday to Wednesday, June 18-23: Zélie Martin's pilgrimage to Lourdes, with Marie, Pauline, and Léonie, seeking a cure.

Wednesday, August 28: Death of Zélie Martin at 12:30 AM.

Thursday, November 15: Family moves to Les Buissonnets in Lisieux.

1878 - five years old

Monday to Tuesday, June 17 to July 2: Louis Martin in Paris with Marie and Pauline to see the Exposition. Thérèse stays with the Guérins.

Thursday, August 8: At Trouville, Thérèse sees the ocean for the first time.

1880 - seven years old

At the beginning of the year or end of preceding year: Therese makes first confession.

1882 - nine years old

Monday, October 2: Pauline, her "second Mama," enters the Carmel of Lisieux.

1883 - ten years old

Sunday, April 8: Death of Thérèse's paternal grandmother.

Sunday, May 13 (Pentecost): Therese cured suddenly by the Blessed Virgin's smile.

Monday to Thursday, August 20-30: Vacation in Alençon.

1884 - eleven years old

Thursday, May 8: Thérèse's First Communion, at the Abbey. Pauline's profession at the Lisieux Carmel.

Saturday, June 14: Thérèse confirmed by Bishop Hugonin at the Abbey.

August: Vacation in Saint-Ouen-le-Pin.

1885 - twelve years old

Sunday to Friday, May 3-10: Vacation by the sea in Deauville.

July: Vacation in Saint-Ouen-le-Pin.

Saturday, August 22 to Saturday, October 10 (IM: M. Martin's trip to Constantinople (seven weeks).

1886 - thirteen years old

February or March: Thérèse leaves Abbey school for good.

Beginning of October: Trip with her father and sisters to Alençon.

Friday, October 15: Marie enters Carmel of Lisieux.

Saturday, December 25 (Christmas): grace of "conversion."

1887 - fourteen years old

Sunday, May 29 (Pentecost): Thérèse receives her father's permission to enter Carmel.

Monday to Sunday, June 20-26: Vacation in Trouville.

Summer: "conversations in the Belvedere" with Celine.

Prayer for the conversion of Pranzini.

Monday, October 31: Thérèse visits Bishop Hugonin in Bayeux.

Friday, November 4 to Friday, December 2: Therese on pilgrimage to Paris, Switzerland, Italy, and Rome.

1888 - fifteen years old

Monday, April 9 (Annunciation): Thérèse enters Lisieux Carmel.

Saturday to Tuesday, June 23-27: M. Martin runs away to Le Havre.

1889 - sixteen years old

Thursday, January 10: Thérèse clothed in habit.

Tuesday, February 12: M. Martin confined to mental asylum in Caen.

1890 - seventeen years old

Monday, September 8 (Birth of Mary): Thérèse's final profession of vows.

Wednesday, December 25 (Christmas): Lease on Les Buissonnets ends.

1891 - eighteen years old

Monday, November 24: Third centenary of the death of St. John of the Cross.

Saturday, December 5: Death of Mother Geneviève, foundress of the Lisieux Carmel.

1892 - nineteen years old

Saturday to Thursday, January 2-7: Influenza epidemic takes lives of three nuns in the Lisieux Carmel.

Tuesday, May 10: After three years at Caen, Louis Martin returns to Lisieux an invalid, in the care of the Guérins.

Thursday, May 12: Louis Martin's last visit to his Carmelite daughters. His final words to them: "In heaven!"

1893 - twenty years old

Monday, February 20: Sister Agnes elected prioress.

September: Thérèse obtains permission to remain in novitiate.

1894 - twenty-one years old

January: Thérèse's writes her first theatrical work, on Joan of Arc, for the prioress's feast on January 21.

Sunday, May 27: Louis Martin's paralysis and extreme unction.

Saturday, June 16: Marie of the Trinity enters Carmel.

Friday, July 29: Louis Martin dies at Saint-Sébastien-de Morsent, at La Musse.

Friday, September 14: Céline enters Lisieux Carmel.

1895 - twenty-two years old

During the year: Thérèse writes Manuscript A.

Sunday, June 9 (Trinity Sunday): Thérèse makes her *Offering to Merciful Love*.

[www.therese2002.com](http://www.therese2002.com)

Thursday, August 15: Thérèse's cousin Marie Guérin enters the Lisieux Carmel.

Thursday, October 17: Mother Agnes asks Thérèse to pray for Maurice Bellière, her first "spiritual brother."

1896 - twenty-three years old

Monday, February 24: Profession of Sister Celine, Thérèse's sister.

Saturday, March 21: Difficult election of Marie de Gonzague as prioress. Thérèse is confirmed in her office as assistant novice mistress.

Friday, April 3 (Good Friday): First hemoptysis, repeated in the evening.

Sunday, April 5 (Easter): Beginning of Thérèse's "trial of faith," which continues until her death.

Saturday, May 30: Mother Marie de Gonzague assigns Thérèse a second "spiritual brother," Adolphe Roulland.

Tuesday, September 8: Thérèse begins Manuscript B.

Saturday, November 21: Novena made for Thérèse's cure, in hopes that she can eventually depart for a Carmel in Indochina; final relapse.

1897 - twenty-four years old

Beginning of April: Thérèse falls seriously ill at the end of Lent.

Tuesday, April 6: Mother Agnes begins recording Thérèse's *Last Conversations*.

Monday, April 19: Léo Taxil reveals his Diana Vaughan hoax, which Thérèse believed for a long time.

Thursday, June 3: Thérèse begins Manuscript C.

Thursday, July 8: Thérèse is transferred to the monastery infirmary~

Friday, July 30: Thérèse experiences continued hemoptyses and feelings of suffocation. At 6 PM she receives viaticum and extreme unction.

Thursday, September 30: Thérèse dies at about 7:20 PM. Her final words are "My God, I love you."

Monday, October 4: Thérèse buried in the Lisieux cemetery.

After her death

1898, September 30: 2,000 copies of *Story of a Soul* printed. A new edition was necessary each year thereafter.

1910: Beatification process opened.

1923, April 29: Thérèse beatified by Pius XI

1925, May 17: Thérèse canonized by Pius XI in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

1927, December 14: Pius XI declares St. Thérèse co-patroness of the missions with St. Francis Xavier.

1980, June 2: John Paul II's pilgrimage to Lisieux.

1997, September 30: First centenary of Thérèse's death.

## A Day in Carmel

Geneviève Devergnies, OCD

What made up the schedule of a Carmelite day in the Lisieux Carmel, at the time of little Sister Thérèse?"

Apart from a slight alteration in the summer horarium

(Easter to September 14) and the winter horarium (September 14 to Easter), the ordinary day was almost always the same. The following is a copy of the daily schedule, according to Sister Genevieve's notes.

4:45 A.M. Rising  
 5:00 Mental Prayer  
 6:00 Little Hours of Office (*Prime, Terce, Sext, None*)  
 7:00 Mass & Thanksgiving (Sunday: 8:00AM)  
 8:00 Breakfast: soup (*nothing on fast days*)  
 Work  
 9:50 Examination of Conscience  
 10:00 Meal  
 11:00 Recreation (*dishwashing for Sisters assigned, for about thirty minutes*)  
 12:00 Silence (*siesta, free time*)  
 1:00 P.M. Work  
 2:00 Vespers  
 2:30 Spiritual Reading (*or meeting of the novices in the novitiate*)  
 3:00 Work  
 5:00 Mental Prayer  
 6:00 Supper  
 6:45 Recreation (*dishwashing*)  
 7:40 Compline  
 8:00 Silence (*free time as at noon*)  
 9:00 Matins and Lauds (*length: an hour and a quarter; an hour and forty minutes on feast days*)  
 Examination of Conscience (*ten minutes*)  
 Reading of meditation points for next day's prayer  
 10:30-11:00 Retire

During the winter schedule (beginning September 14), everything in the morning schedule started an hour later, recreation included. Since there was no siesta in winter, the afternoon schedule remained the same as in summer.

The time was thus divided into six and a half hours of prayer (two hours of mental prayer and four and a half hours for Mass and the recitation of the Office in choir); a half hour of spiritual reading; about five hours of work; two hours of community recreation; forty-five and thirty minutes for meals in common (eaten in silence but accompanied by reading at the lectern); an hour of free time before Matins ("grand silence"); six hours of sleep in summer (with an additional hour of siesta) and seven continuous hours in winter.

## The Diet in Carmel

Here are some details concerning the diet in the Lisieux Carmel in Thérèse's day. The Rule of Carmel prescribed perpetual abstinence from meat, but authorized eating meat in cases of sickness or infirmity. Bread was the basic element of the diet, which also included a lot of milk and starches. The meals were served as follows:

### a) Summer diet, without fasting

— After Mass (around 8 AM) : thick soup, eaten standing at one's place in front of the table.

— Midday meal (10 AM, actually): fish or eggs, vegetables (generous serving), dessert (cheese or fruit); the portions were dished out in advance on earthenware plates.  
 — In the evening (at 6 PM): soup, a vegetable, dessert.

Nothing between meals, but Sisters had permission to take a drink of water at 3 PM and after Matins. Some Sisters found this regime, of two morning meals two hours apart, more painful than the fast.

### b) Fast of the Order (Sept 14-Easter)

— Nothing in the morning.  
 — Main meal at 11:00 AM: soup and the rest as usual.  
 — Collation at 6:00 P.m.: bread weighed out (average of seven ounces, around 215g), butter or cheese, fruit, sometimes jam. No broth or soup: nothing hot.

### c) Ecclesiastical Fast (Lent, Forty Hours, and Vigils)

— Nothing in the morning.  
 — Main meal at 11:30 AM: same as during the fast of the Order, but eggs and all milk products entirely excluded from the diet; the food boiled or prepared with oil.  
 — Collation at 6:00 PM: six ounces of bread, no jam, fresh or dried fruit (apples, figs, nuts, etc.).

Therese did not fast before her twenty-first birthday (January 1894), but she was bound by the law of abstinence from meat, unless dispensed because of illness.

From Conrad de Meester (ed.) *Saint Therese of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teaching*, Washington: ICS Publications, 1997. Available from [www.icspublications.org](http://www.icspublications.org)  
 USD\$44.95