

Parish Lenten Retreat

“Deus ibi est” “God is There”

Where Charity and Love are, God is There.

Ubi Caritas et Amore, Deus ibi est.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux – Week 4

Biography

Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon, France, on January 2, 1873, to a pious, middle class French family of merchants. Her father, Louis, and mother, Marie-Azelie have both been deemed Blessed by the Church and all four of her sisters became nuns. Thérèse’s mother died when she was four years old and they moved to Lisieux, Normandy, France. Cured from an illness at age eight Thérèse began a life of faith. She lived her childhood pampered in a loving home.

Highly emotional and overly sensitive, Thérèse was the center of her own world. One Christmas when she was 14 years old, Thérèse was preparing to descend the stairs in her home to enjoy the elaborate Christmas present presentation prepared for her each year. In the way of most families, the Martins were exhausted from their Christmas preparations except for the youngest child, Thérèse. She overheard her father whisper to her sisters, “Well, thank goodness this is the last year this is going to happen!” Thérèse was shocked and began to cry, but suddenly the pain of her father’s words opened her heart. She finally saw the needs of her father and sisters in a new light. She realized that they had been sacrificing for her all along while she was only focused on herself. Thérèse felt Jesus stir her with love and compassion for her family members. Thérèse was transformed by this experience, wiped the tears from her face, put on her most lovely smile, descended the stairs and had a joyful Christmas celebration. She began to give of herself with enthusiasm and made a commitment to be a source of love for all people. Suddenly, Thérèse became other directed. This early experience formed her for the rest of her life and she was able to declare that her true vocation in life was “the vocation to love” in “little ways.”

While still a teenager, Thérèse decided to enter religious life as a Carmelite nun. However, Thérèse was too young. Headstrong and determined, Thérèse petitioned a local Bishop who told her to wait. She was not satisfied with this answer and convinced her father to take her to Rome. While at a general audience with Pope Leo XIII she broke free from the audience, rushed up to the Pope and told him of her plight. With a smile the Pope told her that if God wanted her to be a sister, it would happen in God’s time. Thérèse was carried from the Pope’s presence by two guards. She entered the Carmel early anyway which was a blessing considering that she died from tuberculosis at age 24. Thérèse’s illness and tremendous physical suffering challenged her commitment to be a loving person and at times interfered with her ability to pray. In her struggles she discovered God’s love in a deeper way and found the strength to love her neighbor. Thérèse was particularly supportive to missionaries in China through her letters and prayers.

Quoting Thérèse and Her Pseudonym “The Little Flower”

“But this love of mine, how to show it? Love needs to be proved by action. Well, even a little child can scatter flowers, to scent the throne-room with their fragrance; even a little child can sing, in its shrill treble, the great canticle of Love. That shall be my life, to scatter flowers—to miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word, always doing the tiniest things right, and doing it for love.”

On her painful deathbed, Thérèse said, “I shall spend my eternity doing good on earth.” Popular devotion believes that when Thérèse blesses our prayer roses are given or seen. *(over)*

Praying With Thérèse of Lisieux
By Joseph F. Schmidt, FSC

In 1925 Pius X responded to the enormous outpouring of popular veneration by declaring Thérèse a saint and “a master of the spiritual life.” Subsequent popes proclaimed her Patroness of The Missions and with Joan of Arc, Patroness of France. The widespread veneration of Thérèse is amazing because . . . she did no apostolic work, founded no religious community, and engaged in no missionary activity.

Personality

Thérèse’s capacity to accept others and be at ease even with difficult people proved to be a bond to the community (the Carmelite Sisters). Her assuming nature and simplicity were disarming and her sense of humor became a source of delight. She had a gift for story telling and good natured mimicry. The radiance of joy permeated Thérèse’s personality and eclipsed manifestations of her physical and spiritual suffering. After her death, the nuns at Carmel were surprised to learn of her almost constant physical and spiritual trials. Through all her physical pain and spiritual desolation, Thérèse remained determined and cheerful, confident in and sustained the belief that God dwelled within her. At a deep level in her soul she found a well of inner freedom and joy.

Love For Other People—“Vocation To Love”

Thérèse had an affectionate nature, nurtured by the love of her family. Community life in the Carmel brought her face to face with her own antipathies and taught her to care for other people despite their adverse feelings. Love for other people meant fostering and doing freely, without compulsion, the best good for them in the circumstances in which she found herself. As Thérèse matured she learned to respond and love . . . and saw the good in other people and could empathize with their difficulties having accepted her own inadequacies and weaknesses.

Thérèse For Today

Thérèse is the saint of the “Little Way,” the way of spiritual childhood. She characterized her way is like being a little child who is lifted up by God for the daily events of life. As she reflected on her life, Thérèse recognized that God led her, with all her inadequacies and littleness, to holiness. She assures us that God can do the same for us.

Quoting Thérèse

“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

“You know well enough that our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love at which we do them.”

“I find, to my great delight, that when you love (God) the capacities of your heart are enlarged, so that your feelings towards those who are dear to you are infinitely more tender than they would have been, if you had devoted yourself to a selfish kind of love which remains barren.”