

“O My God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to love You and make You loved, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory. I desire to accomplish Your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory You have prepared for me in Your kingdom. I desire, in a word, to be a saint, but I feel my helplessness, and I beg You, O my God! to be yourself my Sanctity!”

— St. Thérèse

Lessons From the Garden

Disappointment

Thérèse longed to go to the missions, but her health did not permit fulfillment of that dream. Instead she spiritually “adopted” a missionary priest and prayed so earnestly for the missions that in 1927 she, who never left her native France, was named co-patron of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier.

When our dreams do not come to fruition, let us follow Thérèse’s example and turn our disappointment into prayer and sacrifice.



THÉRÈSE ON HER DEATHBED

Aridity in prayer

Thérèse did not experience great ecstasy during her formal prayer. In fact, she once said, “Try as I will, I cannot meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary. I just cannot fix my mind on them.” Nevertheless, she persisted, even when she seemed to get little out of it.

Sometimes we find prayer difficult. Like Thérèse, we can continue to pray, saying with the Little Flower, “often when I cry to heaven for help it is when I feel most abandoned. But then I turn to God and His saints and thank them nevertheless.”

“In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in Your own justice and to receive from Your love the eternal possession of yourself. I want no other throne, no other crown but You, my Beloved!”

— St. Thérèse

PATIENCE UNDER TRIAL

Not a patient person by nature, Thérèse learned to control her words and actions. When another nun splashed dirty laundry water on her, she never complained. When another clacked her Rosary beads incessantly during prayer, she simply offered it up and prayed for her. She accepted the most worn habit and the least appetizing food without comment or complaint.

No matter our state in life, we will always find ways to exercise patience and charity. May we use Thérèse as our example of using little things to great perfection.

PRAYERS

“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.”

— St. Thérèse

Act of Faith

“O Powerful Warrior, become my protector. Support me with your victorious arm and I will not dread the power of the enemies. With your help, I will fight until the evening of my life. Then you will present me to Jesus and from His hand, I will receive the palm that you will have helped me pick.”

— St. Thérèse

Five-Day Novena to St. Thérèse

Before her death, St. Thérèse said, “I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth,” adding, “it will be like a shower of roses ... and you will find many consolations.”

St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, please pick me a rose from the heavenly garden and send it to me with a message of love. Ask God to grant me the favor I implore. And tell Him I will love Him daily more and more.

Pray five Hail Marys, five Our Fathers, and five Glory Be’s.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Story of a Soul (St. Thérèse’s spiritual autobiography, available from various publishers)

The Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and Those Who Knew Her: General Correspondence, Vols. 1 and 2; *The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*; *The Prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*; *Last Conversations* (ICS Publications)

The Secret of the Little Flower, by Henri Ghéon (<http://www.cin.org/slf.html>)

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message, by Bernard Bro (Ignatius Press)

Praying in the Presence of Our Lord with St. Thérèse of Lisieux, by Monica Dodds (Our Sunday Visitor)

Thérèse: The Story of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (movie; <http://www.theresemovie.com>)

These materials and more can be found at www.osv.com. Please visit this web site for further information.

Also see
www.osv.com
for additional Catholic resources
or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet.

Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

ISBN: 1-59276-134-8 • Inventory Number: P185

By **Woodeene Koenig-Bricker**

Copyright © 2004 by Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

St. Thérèse



For Review Only. Copyright Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

“Sufferings gladly borne for others
convert more people than sermons.”

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

HER LIFE

A very real, young French woman, Marie-Françoise Thérèse Martin, is now known to all the world as St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower.

Thérèse was born on January 2, 1873, in Alençon, France, to the devout, middle-class family of Louis Martin, a watchmaker, and Zélie Martin, a lacemaker. The youngest of nine children, she was particularly treasured because four of her siblings had died at young ages.

When Thérèse was four, her mother died of breast cancer and Thérèse attached herself to her sister Pauline, who became a sort of second mother.

Pauline entered the Carmel (the Carmelite convent) when Thérèse was about ten, leaving her feeling abandoned once again.

Thérèse's First Communion, at age eleven, was a highlight of her life. She called it a "kiss of love." But her childhood was dealt another loss when her sister Marie also entered the Carmel. From that point on, Thérèse, convinced that life on earth was a time of suffering and separations, focused increasingly on her inner life. Soon she was convinced that she, like her sisters, had a vocation to the Carmelite order.

One not-so-small problem stood in her way: the Rule of Carmel permitted those sixteen and older to enter by special dispensation, but her bishop refused admittance until she was twenty-one. In any case, she was only fifteen.

Thérèse's father arranged a pilgrimage to Rome that included an audience with Pope Leo XIII. When it came time to kiss the Pope's ring, she instead grabbed his hand and asked, "Most Holy Father, ... permit me to enter the Carmel at the age of fifteen." The Pope told her to follow normal procedures, saying, "Go ... you will enter if God wills it."

Permission for early admittance eventually came, but only after Thérèse left the matter in God's hands. At Easter time 1888, she joined her sisters at the Lisieux convent.

For the next nine years, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Name lived an uneventful life. She did laundry, prayed, attended Mass, participated in recreation, and lived exactly as did other Carmelites. Little did her fellow nuns know that she was refining her soul in the furnace of continual self-denial in little things — such as offering up the annoying clacking sound another sister made during prayer and eating only the poorest of foods.

In April 1896, Thérèse began coughing blood from what would later be diagnosed as tuberculosis. Her health began a precipitous decline.



Thérèse portraying St. Joan of Arc in a convent play

By June 1897, she was finishing her spiritual biography, written at the urging of her sister Pauline and the prioress, from a wheelchair. By July, she was hemorrhaging badly, and by mid-August she could no longer even receive Communion because of constant vomiting.

"If I did not simply suffer from one moment to another, it would be impossible for me to be patient; but I look only at the present moment, forget the past; and I take good care not to forestall the future. When we yield to discouragement or despair, it is usually because we give too much thought to the past and to the future."

— St. Thérèse

Thérèse's physical condition was made more difficult by her spiritual trials. Of those days, she said, "God allowed my soul to be enveloped in complete darkness." Still, she forced herself to remain cheerful as she resolutely faced death, even comforting her sisters in their sorrow. On September 30, 1897, after enduring hours of choking, she asked if death was near. Told that it was, but that it might be a few more hours, she said, "Very well, I do not wish to suffer less." Then, looking at the crucified Christ on the cross, she said, "Oh, I love Him. My God ... I love You," and she died. She was twenty-four.

At Thérèse's canonization ceremony, only twenty-seven years after her death, all four Martin sisters joined more than sixty thousand others in recognizing the eternal sanctity of the Little Flower.

Doctor of the Church

Certain great writers have been named "Doctors of the Church" because the doctrine they proclaimed conforms to revealed truth and sheds new light on the mysteries of the faith. Many men have been given this title, but only three women have received it: Sts. Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, and on October 19, 1997, St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

When announcing her new title, Pope John Paul II said that Thérèse "is the youngest of all the 'Doctors of the Church,' but her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity, and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound, that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters.... The way she took to reach this ideal of life is not that of the great undertakings reserved for the few, but on the contrary, a way within everyone's reach, the "little way," a path of trust and total self-abandonment to the Lord's grace."

THE "LITTLE WAY"

St. Thérèse has become known throughout the world for her "little way." As she herself said, "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."

She used the most humble, hidden, and ordinary actions of daily life as the way of perfecting her spiritual life. For Thérèse, doing the laundry, chopping the vegetables for soup, coming promptly when called, keeping a cheerful face no matter how she was feeling — these were the straight roads to heaven.

"Let us go forward in peace, our eyes upon heaven, the only one goal of our labors."

— St. Thérèse



Eight-year-old Thérèse (right) with her sister Céline