



**THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025**

**Reading of the writings of Theresse of the Child Jesus
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025
2023: Manuscript A**



Study guide 3:
The grace of Christmas
(Ms A, 44r-45v)

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Proposal for the Community meeting:

1. Reading of the text.
2. One of the participants, who has already prepared his contribution, presents the text with the help of the reading schedule (and other supports, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be good if the community meeting was preceded by a personal reading and meditation on the text of Therese.

MANUSCRIPT A, 44r-45v

(ICS English translation pp. 93 – 99)

When Marie entered Carmel, I was still very scrupulous. No longer able to confide in her I turned toward heaven. I addressed myself to the four angels who had preceded me there, for I thought that these innocent souls, having never known troubles or fear, would have pity on their poor little sister who was suffering on earth. I spoke to them with the simplicity of a child, pointing out that being the youngest of the family, I was always the most loved, the most covered with my sisters' tender cares, that if they had remained on earth they, too, would have given me proofs of their affection. Their departure for heaven did not appear to me as a reason for forgetting me; on the contrary, finding themselves in a position to draw from the divine treasures, they had to take *peace* for me from these treasures and thus show me that in heaven they still knew how to love! The answer was not long in coming, for soon peace came to inundate my soul with its delightful waves, and I knew then that if I was loved on earth, I was also loved in heaven. Since that moment, my devotion for my little brothers and sisters has grown and I love to hold dialogues with them frequently, to speak with them about the sadness of our exile, about my desire to join them soon in the Fatherland!

Although God showered His graces upon me, it wasn't because I merited them because I was still very imperfect. I had a great desire, it is true, to practice [44v^o] virtue, but I went about it in a strange way. Being the youngest in the family, I wasn't accustomed to doing

things for myself. Céline tidied up the room in which we slept, and I myself didn't do any housework whatsoever. After Marie's entrance into Carmel, it sometimes happened that I tried to make up the bed to please God, or else in the evening, when Céline was away, I'd bring in her plants. But as I already said, it was for *God alone* I was doing these things and should not have expected any *thanks* from creatures. Alas, it was just the opposite. If Céline was unfortunate enough not to seem happy or surprised because of these little services, I became unhappy and proved it by my tears.

I was really unbearable because of my extreme touchiness; if I happened to cause anyone I loved some little trouble, even unwittingly, instead of forgetting about it and not *crying*, which made matters worse, I *cried* like a Magdalene and then when I began to cheer up, I'd begin *to cry again for having cried*. All arguments were useless; I was quite unable to correct this terrible fault. I really don't know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel when I was still in the *swaddling clothes of a child!* God would have to work a little miracle to make me *grow up* in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day. On that luminous *night* which sheds such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle, *little* Child of only one hour, changed the *night* of my soul into rays of light. On that night when He made Himself subject to *weakness* and suffering for love of me, He made me *strong* and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory, beginning, so to speak, *"to run as a giant!"*

[45r^o] The source of my tears was dried up and has since reopened rarely and with great difficulty. This justified what was often said to me: “You cry so much during your childhood, you’ll no longer have tears to shed later on!”

It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion. We had come back from Midnight Mass where I had the happiness of receiving the *strong* and *powerful* God. Upon arriving at Les Buissonnets, I used to love to take my shoes from the chimney corner and examine the presents in them; this old custom had given us so much joy in our youth that Céline wanted to continue treating me as a baby since I was the youngest in the family. Papa had always loved to see my happiness and listen to my cries of delight as I drew each surprise from the *magic shoes*, and my dear King’s gaiety increased my own happiness very much. However, Jesus desired to show me that I was to give up the defects of my childhood and so He withdrew its innocent pleasures. He permitted Papa, tired out after the Midnight Mass, to experience annoyance when seeing my shoes at the fireplace, and that he speak those words which pierced my heart: “Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!” I was going upstairs, at the time, to remove my hat, and Céline, knowing how sensitive I was and seeing the tears already glistening in my eyes, wanted to cry too, for she loved me very much and understood my grief. She said, “Oh, Thérèse, don’t go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now!” But Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rap-

idly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had the happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Céline believed it was all a *dream*! Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever!

[45v^o] On that *night of light* began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven. The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant, contenting himself with my *good will* which was never lacking. I could say to Him like His apostles: "Master, I fished all night and caught nothing." More merciful to me than He was to His disciples, Jesus *took the net Himself*, cast it, and drew it in filled with fish. He made me a fisher of *souls*. I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire I hadn't felt so intensely before.

I felt *charity* enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I've been happy!

Introduction to the text:

Therese of Lisieux turned fourteen shortly after this event she recounted. At Christmas, she experienced a full recovery from a hypersensitivity that had wounded her life since the death of her mother when Therese was aged four-and-a-half. Her temperament changed: she became shy, a little withdrawn. Hypersensitive, she cried for nothing and then cried again because she had cried! Nine years later, she evoked this foundational event that we often call «the grace of Christmas».

The «four little angels» are Helene, born October 10, 1864, died February 22, 1870; Joseph-Luis, born September 20, 1866, died February 14, 1867; Joseph-Jean-Baptiste, born December 19, 1867, died August 24, 1868 and Melanie-Therese, born August 16, 1870 and died October 8, 1870.

«Bientôt» [*soon or speedily*] (Ms A, 44r): a favorite word for the impatient Therese (218 times in her writings). Already in 1895, Therese thought she was going to die soon; in February 1895, in her poem «*Vivre d'Amour*» [Living on Love] (Poem 17), she wrote: «For I sense my exile is about to end!....».

«My extreme sensitivity» (Ms A, 44v): this childlike sensitivity was to remain underlying throughout Therese's life, judging by the number of uses of the words *crying* or *tears*.

«The delights of the Holy Trinity» (Ms A, 44v) [ICS p. 97]: the word *delights* is a strong word for Teresa to designate the happiness of God, the happiness he gives and the happiness he feels.

«To run as a giant» (Ms A, 44v): Therese also used the expression in a letter to Celine on 25th of April, 1893 (Letter 241).

«Jesus had changed her heart!» (Ms A, 45r) [ICS p.98]: Celine confirmed in the Process: «I witnessed this sudden change and thought I was in the middle of a dream, when, for the first time, I saw her completely master a pain that would have previously left her desolate, she was cheering up my father with a lovely grace. This change was decisive; after that, never again was she dominated by the shocks of her sensitivity».

«To work for the conversion of sinners» (Ms A, 45v): Celine went on to declare in the Process: «This transformation was not limited to the mastery of herself, but it was seen, at the same time, that her soul flourished and was exercised in the practices of zeal and charity. She dreamed of the salvation of souls and worked ardently and generously for the conversion of sinners».

For the community dialogue:

1. *What does the text say?* Understanding the content and primary meaning of Therese's text.
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Grasping the relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual...) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me / us?* Making relevant and applying the text to personal and community life.

The purpose of doing things in this manner is to allow Therese to speak to us, to question us, to encourage us, and to welcome her to shed light upon and confirm our personal and community journey. The questions proposed are therefore only indicative and can possibly accompany personal meditation and community sharing.

Questions:

1. Therese, when faced with her scrupulous illness, prays to her brothers and sisters who died in infancy. We can wonder about our relationship with all those who have gone before us. How do we live this communion of saints, pray for them and pray to them?
2. In what sense does this represent a conversion for Therese? Can we share any conversion experienced during our own spiritual journey?
3. To deepen the study of this conversion, we can list the effects of Therese's experience. What essential fruit emerges in her relationship with Christ, fruit that will not cease to deepen afterwards? (See in particular the Offering to Merciful Love, the parable of the little bird, the discovery of the elevator...). We can also read in parallel letter 201, where Therese offers again her interpretation of the Christmas grace to Father Roulland.
4. How does this testimony of Teresa invite us to live out our own relationship with Jesus?



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