



THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025

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



Text 6:
The treatise on charity
(Ms. C, 11v – 14r)

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

**Text 6:
The treatise on charity (Ms. C, 11v – 14r)**

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.

Preliminary remark: the treatise on charity in Manuscript C extends from folios 11v to 20r. We suggest that you read it in its entirety, particularly to note Therese's principal battles for charity. Only the beginning of that passage is given below.

MANUSCRIPT C, 11v – 14r

This year, dear Mother, God has given me the grace to understand what charity is; I understood it before, it is true, but in an imperfect way. I had never fathomed the meaning of these words of Jesus: “The second commandment is LIKE the first: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” I applied myself especially to loving God, and it is in loving Him that I understood my love was not to be expressed only in words, for: “It is not those who say: ‘Lord, Lord!’ who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven.” Jesus has revealed this will several times or I should say on almost every page of His Gospel. But at the Last Supper, when He knew the hearts of His disciples were burning with a more ardent love for Him who had just given Himself to them in the unspeakable mystery of His Eucharist, this sweet Savior wished to give them a new commandment. He said to them with inexpressible tenderness: “A new commandment I give you that you love one another: THAT AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another?”

How did Jesus love His disciples and why did He love them? Ah! it was not their natural qualities that could have attracted Him, since there was between Him and them an infinite distance. He was knowledge, Eternal Wisdom, while they were poor ignorant fishermen filled with earthly thoughts. And still Jesus called them his friends, His brothers. He desires to see them reign with Him in the kingdom of His Father, and to open that kingdom to them He wills to die on the cross, for He said: “Greater love than this no man has than that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Dear Mother, when meditating upon these words of Jesus, I understood how imperfect was my love for my Sisters. I saw I didn’t love them as God loves them. Ah! I understand

now that perfect charity consists in bearing with the faults of others, in not being surprised at their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice. But I understood above all that charity must not remain hidden in the bottom of the heart. Jesus has said: "No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket, but upon the lampstand, so as to give light to ALL in the house." It seems to me that this lamp represents charity which must enlighten and rejoice not only those who are dearest to us but "ALL who are in the house" without distinction.

When the Lord commanded His people to love their neighbor as themselves, He had not as yet come upon the earth. Knowing the extent to which each one loved himself, He was not able to ask of His creatures a greater love than this for one's neighbor. But when Jesus gave His Apostles a new commandment, HIS OWN COMMANDMENT, as He calls it later on, it is no longer a question of loving one's neighbor as oneself but of loving him as He, Jesus, has loved him, and will love him the consummation of the ages.

Ah! Lord, I know you don't command the impossible. You know better than I do my weakness and imperfection; You know very well that never would I be able to love my Sisters as You love them, unless You, O my Jesus, loved them in me. It is because You wanted to give me this grace that You made Your new commandment. Oh! how I love this new commandment, since it gives me the assurance that Your Will is to love in me all those You command me to love!

Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters. When I wish to increase this love in me, and when especially the devil tries to place before the eyes of my soul the faults of such and such a Sister who is less attractive to me, I hasten to search out her virtues, her good intentions; I tell myself that even if I did see her fall once, she could

easily have won a great number of victories which she is hiding through humility, and that even what appears to me as a fault can very easily be an act of virtue because of her intention. I have no trouble in convincing myself of this truth because of a little experience I had which showed me we must never judge.

During recreation the portress rang twice; the large workman's gate had to be opened to bring in some trees for the crib. Recreation was not too gay because you were not there, dear Mother, and I thought that if they sent me to serve as third party I would be happy; at exactly that moment Mother Subprioress told me to go and serve in this capacity, or else the Sister who was at my side. Immediately I began to untie our apron but slowly in order that my companion untie hers before me, for I thought of giving her the pleasure of serving as third party. The Sister who was replacing the Procuratrix was looking at us, and seeing me get up last, she said: "Ah! I thought as much, that you were not going to gain this pearl for your crown, you were going too slowly."

Certainly, the whole community believed I had acted through selfishness, and I cannot say how much good such a small thing did to my soul, making me indulgent toward the weaknesses of others. This incident prevents me from being vain when I am judged favorably because I say to myself: Since one can take my little acts of virtue for imperfections, one can also be mistaken in taking for virtue what is nothing but imperfection. Then I say with St. Paul: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by any human tribunal, but neither do I judge myself. He who judges me is THE LORD." In order that this judgment be favorable or rather that I be not judged at all, I want to be charitable in my thoughts toward others at all times, for Jesus has said: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged."

Mother, when reading what I have just written, you could believe that the practice of charity is not difficult for me. It is true; for several months now I no longer have to struggle

to practice this beautiful virtue. I don't mean by this that I no longer have any faults; ah! I am too imperfect for that. But I mean that I don't have any trouble in rising when I have fallen, because in a certain combat I won a great victory; and the heavenly militia now comes to my aid since it cannot bear seeing me defeated after having seen me victorious in the glorious battle I am going to try to describe.

There is in the Community a Sister who has the faculty of displeasing me in everything, in her ways, her words, her character, everything seems very disagreeable to me. And still, she is a holy religious who must be very pleasing to God. Not wishing to give in to the natural antipathy I was experiencing, I told myself that charity must not consist in feelings but in works; then I set myself to doing for this Sister what I would do for the person I loved the most. Each time I met her I prayed to God for her, offering Him all her virtues and merits. I felt this was pleasing to Jesus, for there is no artist who doesn't love to receive praise for his works, and Jesus, the Artist of souls, is happy when we don't stop at the exterior, but, penetrating into the inner sanctuary where He chooses to dwell, we admire its beauty. I wasn't content simply with praying very much for this Sister who gave me so many struggles, but I took care to render her all the services possible, and when I was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile, and with changing the subject of the conversation, for the Imitation says: "It is better to leave each one in his own opinion than to enter into arguments."

Frequently, when I was at recreation (I mean during the work periods) and had occasion to work with this Sister, I used to run away like a deserter whenever my struggles became too violent. As she was absolutely unaware of my feelings for her, never did she suspect the motives for my conduct and she remained convinced that her character was very

pleasing to me. One day at recreation she asked in almost these words: "Would you tell me, Sister Therese of the Child Jesus, what attracts you so much toward me; every time you look at me, I see you smile?" Ah! what attracted me was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes sweet what is most bitter. I answered that I was smiling because I was happy to see her (it is understood that I did not add that this was from a spiritual standpoint).

Introduction to the text:

'As I have loved you, you also love one another' (Ms. C, 11v): Therese was determined to speak of charity in her last Manuscript, and these words of Christ are the driving force of this great exegesis of charity.

'Bearing with the faults of others . . .' (Ms. C, 12r): Therese gives a sort of summary of the thoughts she is going to develop on life in community.

'To all who are in the house' (Ms. C, 12r): for the second time, Therese underlines 'all', to make her point. It was one of Therese's major discoveries at this time.

'I know you don't command the impossible' (Ms. C, 12v): as is her practice, Therese uses each biblical quotation as a step to climb higher, to gain a rebound. She cannot love like Jesus, if it is not Jesus who loves in her.

'I hasten to search out her virtues' (Ms. C, 12v): Therese tore from one of her calendars this thought of Teresa of Jesus in one of her letters. 'Let us never deliberately stop to think about the faults of others when they come to mind. Instead of stopping there, let us immediately consider the good that there is in these persons.'

'Taking for virtue what is nothing but imperfection' (Ms. C, 13v): as she does frequently, Therese immediately turns her argument around, to avoid any hypocrisy or complacency.

‘No longer have to struggle to practice this beautiful virtue’ (Ms. C, 13v): by subtle means, Therese shows clearly the very hard struggles she has experienced in her ‘glorious war’.

‘A Sister who has the faculty of displeasing me’ (Ms. C, 13v: this is the famous portrait of Sister Therese of Saint Augustine. It is still rather surprising that Therese was bold enough to write this story in her notebook, and that this Sister, Therese of Saint Augustine, did not know the identity of this companion of whom she herself spoke naively. Therese described her in kindly terms as a ‘lily in a pot’, doubtless because of her inflexibility, and a forced kind of modesty. According to Celine, Therese was particularly irritated by this Sister’s opportunism and her capacity to get caught up in daily life.

For community discussion:

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. On who and on what does Therese use as her support for practicing fraternal charity throughout this passage? Note the order in which she names these supports. What about us? What are our supports?
2. Notice the concrete examples of charity that she gives. What is the primary one among these? Is this priority also ours?
3. How does she manage to show the significance of what charity is?
4. What are the different roles of Jesus on her path towards charity?



THERESIAN ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025



DISCALCED CARMELITES

General Curia of the Teresian Carmel

www.discalcedcarmelite.com