



**THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025**

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



Text 7:
The Power of Prayer
(Ms. C, 24v-26r)

**Reading the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
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**Text 7:
The Power of Prayer (Ms. C, 24v-26r)**

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.

MANUSCRIPT C, 24v-26r

It was during Lent, and I was occupied then with the one and only novice who was here and whose angel I was. She came looking for me one morning, her face radiant with joy, and said: "Ah! if you only knew what I dreamt last night. I was with my sister and wanted to detach her from all the vanities she loves so much. To do this I was explaining this stanza of Vivre d'Amour ["Living on Love"]:

Loving you, Jesus, is such a fruitful loss!...

All my perfumes are yours forever.

"I had a feeling that my words penetrated her soul and I was carried away with joy. This morning when I awoke I thought that God perhaps willed that I give Him this soul. May I write to her after Lent to tell her about my dream and tell her that Jesus wants her entirely for Himself?"

Without giving it much thought, I told her she could try to do this, but first she must ask permission from Mother Prioress. As Lent was still far from coming to a close, you were very much surprised, dear Mother, at the request which appeared too premature; and certainly inspired by God, you answered it was not through letters that Carmelites must save souls but through prayer.

When I learned of your decision, I understood at once it was that of Jesus, and I said to Sister Marie of the Trinity: "We must get to work; let's pray very much. What a joy if we are answered at the end of Lent!" Oh! infinite mercy of the Lord, who really wants to answer the prayer of His little children. At the end of Lent one more soul was consecrated to Jesus. It was a real miracle, a miracle obtained by the fervor of a humble novice!

How great is the power of Prayer! One could call it a Queen who has at each instant free access to the King and who is able to obtain whatever she asks. To be heard it is not necessary to read from a book some beautiful formula composed for the occasion. If this were the case, alas, I would have to be pitied! Outside the Divine Office, which I am very unworthy to recite, I do not have the courage

to force myself to search out beautiful prayers in books. There are so many of them it really gives me a headache! and each prayer is more beautiful than the others. I cannot recite them all and not knowing which to choose, I do like children who do not know how to read, I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me. For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.

However, I would not want you to believe, dear Mother, that I recite without devotion the prayers said in common in the choir or the hermitages. On the contrary, I love very much these prayers in common, for Jesus has promised to be in the midst of those who gather together in His name. I feel then that the fervor of my Sisters makes up for my lack of fervor; but when alone (I am ashamed to admit it) the recitation of the rosary is more difficult for me than the wearing of an instrument of penance. I feel I have said this so poorly! I force myself in vain to meditate on the mysteries of the rosary; I don't succeed in fixing my mind on them. For a long time I was desolate about this lack of devotion that astonished me, for I love the Blessed Virgin so much that it should be easy for me to recite in her honor prayers which are so pleasing to her. Now I am less desolate; I think that the Queen of heaven, since she is my MOTHER, must see my good will and she is satisfied with it.

Sometimes when my mind is in such a great aridity that it is impossible to draw forth one single thought to unite me with God, I very slowly recite an "Our Father" and then the angelic salutation; then these prayers give me great delight; they nourish my soul much more than if I had recited them precipitately a hundred times.

The Blessed Virgin shows me she is not displeased with me, for she never fails to protect me as soon as I invoke her. If some disturbance overtakes me, some embarrassment, I turn very quickly to her and as the most tender of Mothers she always takes care of my interests. How many times, when speaking to the novices, has it happened that I invoked her and felt the benefits of her motherly protection!

Introduction to the text:

‘The one and only novice’ (Ms. C, 24v): this refers to Sister Marie of the Trinity. In fact, there were a total of 4 young novices (Sister Martha of Jesus, who should have moved on from the novitiate in 1894 but who had stayed there through her affection for Therese; Sister Marie-Madeleine of the Holy Sacrament; Sister Genevieve of Saint Teresa (her biological sister, Celine); and Sister Marie of the Trinity).

It should be understood that: ‘On 21 March 1896, Mother Marie de Gonzague was reelected Prioress, and decided to combine that office with that of Novice Mistress. Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus advised her to take as much help as possible from Sister Therese of the Child Jesus, she who had so perfectly fulfilled the mission entrusted to her for the past three years. Mother Marie de Gonzague adopted this position with ease and, in practice, left the entire direction of the novitiate to Sister Therese of the Child Jesus, who was thus the Novice Mistress, without having the official title, until her death on 30 September 1897.

So it was not until having thus replaced Mother Marie de Gonzague at the novitiate – in other words, from March 1896 – that she brought the novices together every day after Vespers, from two-thirty to three o’clock (according to the custom of that time).

She did not give a conference as such. Her teaching was in no way systematic. She would read or have them read passages from the Rule, the Constitutions or the Guide, gave explanations or clarifications that she thought important, or answered their questions. Then she would correct any of their failings, if any, and talk familiarly with them about whatever interested them at that moment, whether concerning spirituality or ongoing work.’ (Advice and memories of a novice, collected by Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face).

‘An aspiration of the heart, a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy’ (Ms. C, 25r): Therese is wary of beautiful prayers that are recited as beautiful phrases, without meditation or understanding. One is almost liable to forget that this serene Novice Mistress is also a young woman who is sick and prey to the most painful suffering.

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. Reread Ms. A, 45v-46v (Text 4 from last year), as a precursor of this passage in Ms. C. What evolutions do you see?
2. Therese stresses the communal nature of this prayer: shared intention, mediation of the Prioress, the lasting commitment in common of Therese and her novice . . . Do we choose specifically to live the prayer of request in this way with others. Are there obstacles to doing this?
3. 'For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.' What is inspired in us by Therese's testimony on prayer?
4. In light of Therese's account, how are we supported by communal prayer, such as the Divine Office, the Eucharist, silent prayer, collective vocal prayer?



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