

Reading the writings of Therese of the Child Jesus
Teresian Anniversaries 2023-2025
2025: Prayers and other writings

Text 7:
To Father Belliere, 18th July 1897 (Letter 258)

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.

To Father Belliere, 18th July 1897 (Letter 258)

JMJT

July 18, 1897

Jesus +

My poor and dear little Brother,

Your pain touches me deeply, but see how good Jesus is. He allows me to write to you again to try to console you and this will probably not be the last time. This gentle Savior hears your complaints and your prayers, that is why He still leaves me on earth. Do not believe that I am distressed by it, oh! no, my dear little brother, on the contrary, because I see in this behavior of Jesus how much He loves you!...

I doubtless explained myself very badly in my last little note, since you tell me, my dear little brother, "not to ask you for this joy that I feel at the approach of happiness". Ah! if for a few moments you could read my soul, how surprised you would be! The thought of heavenly happiness not only causes me no joy, but I sometimes wonder how it will be possible for me to be happy without suffering. Jesus, no doubt, will change my nature, otherwise I would regret the suffering and the valley of tears. I never asked

the good Lord to die young, that would have seemed cowardly to me, but He from my childhood deigned to give me the intimate persuasion that my journey here below would be short. It is therefore the very thought of accomplishing the will of the Lord that makes all my joy.

O my little brother, how I wish I could pour the balm of consolation into your heart! I can only borrow the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, He cannot be offended by them since I am his little wife and consequently his possessions are mine. I therefore say to you, like He did to those close to him: "I am going to my Father, but because I have spoken to you in this way, your heart is filled with sadness, yet I am telling you the truth: it is in your interest that I go away. You are sad now, but I will see you again, and your heart will be happy and no one will take that joy away from you."

Yes, I'm sure of it, after my entry into life, my dear little brother's sadness will change into a peaceful joy that no creature can take from him. I feel it, we must go to Heaven by the same way, that of suffering united to love. When I will be at the port I will teach you, dear little brother of my soul, how you will have to navigate the

stormy seas of the world with the abandon and the love of a child who knows that his Father cherishes him and cannot leave him. alone in the hour of danger. Ah! that I would like you to understand the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus, what He expects of you. In your letter of the 14th you made my heart tremble gently, I understood more than ever to what extent your soul is sister to mine since it is called to rise towards God by the elevator of love and not to climb the steep staircase of fear... I am in no way surprised that the practice of familiarity with Jesus seems to you a little difficult to achieve; we cannot get there in a day, but I am sure of it, I will help you much more to walk this delicious way when I am delivered from my mortal envelope, and soon like St Augustine you will say: "Love is the weight that pulls me down."

I would like to try to make you understand by a very simple comparison how much Jesus loves even imperfect souls who entrust themselves to Him: I suppose that a father has two mischievous and disobedient children, and that coming to punish them he sees one who trembles and goes away from him in terror, yet having in his heart the feeling that he deserves to be punished; and that his brother, on the contrary, throws himself into the father's arms saying that he regrets having hurt him, that he loves him and that, to prove it, he will be good from now on ; then this child asks his father to punish him with a kiss, I do not believe that the heart of the happy father can resist the filial confidence of his child whose sincerity and love he knows. He is not unaware, however, that his son will fall back into the same faults more than once, but he is ready to forgive him always, if his son still seizes his heart... I am not telling you anything about the first child,

my dear little brother, you must understand if his father can love him so much and treat him with the same indulgence as the other...

But why talk to you about the life of trust and love? I explain myself so badly that I have to wait for Heaven to talk to you about this happy life. What I wanted to do today was console you. Ah! how happy I would be if you welcomed my death as Mother Agnes of Jesus did. You are probably unaware that she is twice my sister and that it was she who served as my mother in my childhood, our good Mother was very afraid that her sensitive nature and her great affection for me would make my departure very bitter to her; the opposite happened; she speaks of my death as of a celebration and it is a great consolation for me; I beg you, my dear little brother, try like her to persuade yourself that instead of losing me you will find me, and that I will never leave you again. Ask the same grace for the Mother whom you love and whom I love even more than you love her, since she is my visible Jesus. I would gladly give you what you ask for if I had not taken a vow of poverty, but because of it I cannot even have an image, it is our Mother alone who can satisfy you and I know that she will satisfy your desires. Precisely, in view of my approaching death, a sister photographed me for the feast of our Mother. The novices exclaimed when they saw me that I was looking a bit serious, it seems that I am usually more smiling, but believe, my little brother, that if my photograph does not smile at you, my soul will not stop smiling at you when she will be near you. Farewell my dear and very beloved brother, believe that I will be your true little sister for all eternity.

Th. of the Child Jesus, rel. carm. ind.

Introduction to the text :

Father Maurice Belliere was born on 10th June 1874 in Normandy. In his youth he had to overcome many trials, and, as he himself says, «passed through many storms». He believed that he was to live the rest of his life with the awareness of having wasted his best years. When called up to military service and conscious of his

own frailty, he feared the worst for his priestly vocation. Bowed down under the weight of his sinful past and doubtful of his capacity to hold out, he wrote a letter to the Carmel at Lisieux, imploring them, as he said, to «entrust to the prayer of one of your sisters the salvation of my soul, and to obtain for me the grace to remain faithful to the vocation that I have received from God». Therese was chosen for this undertaking. Maurice, who was in his second year of theology

at the diocesan seminary, thus received the lifeline thrown to him by Therese. That is how a spiritual friendship began. Maurice and Therese never met, but they were deeply united by their fate. Their correspondence, which began two years before Therese's death, amounts to 21 letters. Maurice wanted to be a missionary, and was accepted by the Society of Missionaries of Africa, the White Fathers. His vocation generated a missionary desire in Therese also.

Their friendship was formed around their common ideal, a common desire for the love, simplicity and cordiality of Christ. He became for her the brother she had never had, and she became for him the sister he needed. Therese was already seriously ill: the tuberculosis from which she was suffering was already at an advanced stage and there was no longer any cure available. In spite of this, she

wrote magnificent letters to her hesitant 'little brother' to encourage him in his vocation. From her very first letter, she reminded him of the law that would dominate his future, namely the temptations and trials that inevitably accompany every apostle. He would have to learn to accept them.

Therese realised very quickly that priests were men, who were both frail and weak. But, as she writes: «No human frailty can be an obstacle to preaching the Gospel, as long as the flame of love burns in the heart of the Church». Later, Maurice was to reread these letters on several occasions and even made a collection of his chosen passages, while studying at Carthage. Later again, in Malawi, when he was ill and rather discouraged, he will have certainly found in their message the remedy for his despair.

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:

This is one of Therese's last letters to Father Belliere who was very much distressed by the prospect of Therese's approaching death.

1. In what frame of mind does she invite him to live with perseverance?
2. How does she invite us to live suffering? Notice how she links here for the first time love, suffering and abandonment.
3. Here Therese the symbol of the elevator, developed in Manuscript C some weeks earlier. What does this symbol evoke for us in the context of this letter?
4. How does Therese invite us to behave when we become conscious of our faults, whatever they are? What is the fundamental attitude to cultivate without fail towards God?
5. How does she picture her relationship with us after her physical death? What is our relationship with our deceased brothers and sisters? With Therese today?