

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

**Text 8:**  
**Yellow Notebook, 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> August 1897**

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.

**Yellow Notebook, 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> August 1897**

*August 6*

4

... I cannot lean on anything, on any of my works to have confidence. Thus I would have liked to be able to say to myself: I am quit of all my offices of the dead. But this poverty was for me a real light, a real grace. I thought that I had never been able in my life to discharge a single one of my debts to the good God, but that it was for me a real wealth and a strength, if I wanted it. So I made this prayer: O my God, I beg you, discharge the debt that I contracted towards the souls of Purgatory, but do it in God, so that it would be infinitely better than if I had said my offices of the dead. And I remembered with great sweetness these words from the canticle of St John of the Cross: "Pay off all debts." I had always applied this to Love... I feel that this grace cannot come... It was too sweet! One experiences such great peace in being absolutely poor, in counting only on the good Lord.

8

I asked her in the evening during Matins what she meant by "remaining a little child before the good Lord." She replied:

It is to recognize one's nothingness, to expect everything from the good God, as a little child expects everything from his father; it is to worry

about nothing, to gain no fortune. Even among the poor, the child is given what he needs, but as soon as he grows up his father no longer wants to feed him and says to him: Work now, you can do enough for yourself.

It was in order not to hear this that I did not want to grow up, feeling incapable of earning my living, the eternal life of Heaven. So I always remained small, having no other occupation than that of picking flowers, the flowers of love and sacrifice, and offering them to the good Lord for his pleasure.

To be small is still not to attribute to oneself the virtues that one practises, believing oneself capable of something, but to recognize that the good Lord places this treasure in the hand of his little child so that he uses it when needed; but it is still God's treasure. Finally, it is not to be discouraged by one's faults, because children often fall, but they are too small to do themselves much harm.

*August 7*

4

Oh ! if I were unfaithful, if I committed even the slightest infidelity, I feel that I would pay for it with frightful troubles, and I could no longer accept death. So I keep saying to the good Lord: "O my God, please save me from the misfortune of being unfaithful."

What infidelity are you talking about?

Of a thought of pride maintained voluntarily. If I said to myself, for example: I have acquired such a virtue, I am certain of being able to practise it. Because then it would be relying on one's own strength, and when one is there, one risks falling into the abyss. But I will have the right, without offending God, to do little stupid things until my death, if I am humble, if I remain very small. Look at the little children: they keep breaking, tearing, falling, all the while loving their parents very, very much. When I fall like this, it makes me see my nothingness even more and I say to myself: What would I do, what would I become, if I relied on my own strength? !...

I understand very well that Saint Peter fell. This poor Saint Peter, he relied on himself instead of relying solely on the strength of God. I conclude that, if I said: "O my God, I love you too much, you know it well, to stop at a single thought against the faith"; my temptations would become more violent and I would certainly succumb to them.

I am quite sure that if Saint Peter had humbly said to Jesus: "Grant me, please, the strength to follow you until death", he would have had it immediately.

I am also certain that Our Lord said no more to his Apostles by his instructions and his sensitive presence than he told us to ourselves by the good inspirations of his grace. He could well have said to St. Peter: Ask me for the strength to accomplish what you want. But no, because he wanted to show him his weakness, and because, having to govern the whole Church which is full of sinners, he had to experience for himself what man can do without the help of God.

... Before his fall, Our Lord said to him: "When you have turned back, confirm your brothers". This meant: Persuade them by your own experience of the weakness of human forces.

*August 12*

3

Since the epi, I have had even lower feelings about myself. But how great is the new grace that I received this morning, when the priest began the Confiteor before giving me communion and all the sisters continued it. I saw there the good Jesus very close to giving himself to me, and this confession seemed to me such a necessary humiliation. "I confess to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to all the Saints that I have sinned greatly..." Oh! yes, I said to myself, we do well to ask forgiveness for me at this moment, from God, from all the Saints... I felt, like the publican, a great sinner. I found the good Lord so merciful! I found it so touching to address the entire Celestial Court, to obtain God's forgiveness through their intercession. Ah! I almost cried, and when the Holy Host was on my lips, I was very moved.

... How extraordinary it is to have experienced this at the Confiteor! I believe it is because of my present disposition; I feel so miserable! My confidence is not diminished, on the contrary, and the word "miserable" is not right, because I am rich in all the divine treasures; but it is precisely for this that I humble myself more. When I think of all the graces that the good Lord has given me, I hold myself back so as not to continually shed tears of gratitude.

... I believe that the tears I shed this morning were tears of perfect contrition. Ah! how impossible it is to give oneself such sentiments! It is the Holy Spirit who gives them, he "who blows where he wills."

## Introduction to the text :

In 1921-1924, when the process was nearing its end, Mother Agnes put together for herself, in a notebook bound in light brown verging on yellow, the most complete collection of Therese's words, and gave it this neutral title: *'Words collected during the last months of our little saint Therese'*. In 1927, she released to the public *'The last words of Therese: Novissima Verba. Last conversations of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, May-September 1897'*.

Let us return to the origin of this writing. In mid-1897, with her illness deteriorating, Therese's two sisters, Mother Agnes (Pauline) and Sister Genevieve (Celine) were acting as nurse aide and nurse's aide.

When Therese took up writing again at the beginning of June, working on Manuscript C, Mother Agnes for her part took the initiative of noting down her sister's words in pencil on loose sheets, and took advantage of the first days when her sister was busy with her manuscript to note down also the conversations she

had with her in April and May. She recounted to the Process: «During the last days of her life, I took notes each day on what I had witnessed of the details of her days, and especially the words she spoke.» Handing to the tribunal the collection of these words, she presented them as follows: «the textual words recorded by me from the very mouth of the servant of God and saved bit by bit in a notebook ; which seemed to her to be exhausting and paralysed her outpourings, but she let me do it in simplicity, still fearing to cause me trouble.» Sister Genevieve certified at the same Process the significance and precision of her sister's notes: «She would write at the very moment that Sister Therese of the Child Jesus

was speaking to those who approached her bed; she wrote the exact words, just as the dear little invalid was saying them.»

This text allows one to follow Therese in the last stage of her life: her great suffering, her spontaneity, her gaiety, her humour that was inseparable from a solid common sense and great depth, her great freedom and her total abandonment, in confidence and love, culminating in the last words: «My God. . . I love you!»

So it is not strictly one of Therese's writings, but it gives us information on the last months of Therese, and of her states of mind before entering into 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. Spiritual poverty is at the heart of Theresian spirituality. How does Therese characterise this poverty through these extracts of the Last Conversations?
2. Starting from Last Conversations 6/8/8, name the 3 dimensions that are inseparable from Theresian littleness.
3. Do we seek to let God's works shine through us and through others, including in our distress? Notice the importance for Therese of remaining a useless servant who does not attribute anything good or any good work to herself (cf Last Conversations 7/8/4 above).
4. How does Therese invite us to recognise our faults and our falls from grace (see also LT 191 and LT 261 2r)? How does she bear witness here to the permanent reality of the Divine Mercy and to the manner of accepting it in our lives?