

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 1

READ: Story of A Soul (St. Therese of the Child Jesus) Introduction and Prologue

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts: (continued)

I can't use the excuse that St. Therese was too "great" for me to imitate. She didn't do anything extraordinary, but rather did ordinary things extraordinarily well, that is, with great love.

St. Therese said that if God found a soul smaller and weaker than hers, he would surely be pleased to grant it still greater favors. I can't excuse myself out of weakness then, can I?

St. Therese said this would happen provided I abandon myself with total confidence to God's infinite Mercy. I don't need to have confidence in myself then, but in God! The weaker I am, the more he will be glorified in stooping to help me.

Therese says that our Lord's love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul that *resists his grace in nothing*, as in the most excellent (gifted) soul. I must become better attuned to the movements of grace in my soul.

God has granted me particular graces and gifts, and it is not a lack of humility to realize this. I need to sing the mercies of the Lord each day.

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

1. How is the writing of her autobiography, Story of a Soul, an essential part of St. Therese's "mission"? In other words, what *was* that mission?

2. Why did Therese call her "way", that is, her kind of approach to God, the *little way*? In other words, what is its essence?

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 1

- 3. Which popes publicly endorsed her “little way”, and why?**

- 4. When did Therese die, and at what age? How soon afterwards was her book published?**

- 5. What are some of the New Testament passages which refer to spiritual childhood?**

- 6. Upon which Old Testament passages did St. Therese build her teaching?**

- 7. For whom were the three sections of the autobiography written? For what reasons?**

- 8. What was Therese’s birth name? Where was she born?**

- 9. How did Providence provide in a special way for little Therese to be born to her parents, Louis and Zelig Martin?**

- 10. How was the poem which was brought in honor of Therese’s birth rather prophetic?**

- 11. What broke up the family’s general happiness, and caused them to depart to Lisieux?**

- 12. How does the last paragraph in the Introduction apply to us personally? What is the main condition for a soul to receive great favors of grace?**

- 13. What factors in the Martin family atmosphere must have had a profound influence on St. Therese and the other children?**

- 14. Is the edition you are now reading faithful to the original manuscripts? Is it also faithful to the first edition of 1898? Why is this better than the 1957 edition?**

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 2

READ: Story of a Soul. Chapters one and two

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts:

Even as a child, Therese refrained from complaining when someone took what belonged to her, and when she was accused unjustly. The next time this happens to me, how will I react? I should pray now for the grace to act likewise when the occasion arises.

Therese was careful at age nine to discern the motive for her desire to enter Carmel, finding it was for God alone. Do I examine my motives that carefully when I decide to undertake something which seems good on the surface?

Therese sensed that it is normally best to keep hidden in our hearts the graces and gifts God gives to us. Do I speak needlessly to others of his favors? How easily vanity enters in!

God made Therese feel that true glory is that which will last forever, and to reach it, it is not necessary to perform striking works, but to hide oneself and practice hidden virtue. Has this truth penetrated my mind? How well do I hide my little sacrifices?

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

1. What virtue is demonstrated by St. Therese's "singing the mercies of the Lord"?
2. Does perfection consist in being a "little soul" or a "great soul"? In just what does it consist?
3. To what did Therese refer when speaking of how God's mercy worked in her life?

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 2

- 4. What was the first significant period which Therese distinguishes in her life?**
- 5. What character traits are notable in Therese in this period?**
- 6. What was Therese's disposition and attitude toward life in this period?**
- 7. What was Therese's immediate reaction to her mother's death?**
- 8. Who was her second mother, and how did this come about?**
- 9. How did Therese's devotional life during this period prepare her for her vocation and the great graces which she later received?**
- 10. What virtue did Therese demonstrate in her relationship with Pauline?**
- 11. What was Therese's relationship with her father?**
- 12. What mystical premonition did she receive concerning her father's trial?**
- 13. Who was Therese's constant companion in her childhood?**
- 14. What was her attitude toward her first and subsequent confessions?**
- 15. How did Pauline demonstrate to Therese how all souls in Heaven are completely happy, although not all have equal glory?**
- 16. What balanced out the painful loss of her mother, giving her strength for future trials?**

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 3

READ: Story of a Soul Chapters three and four

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts:

Therese saw early that the only true good is to love God with all one's heart, and to be poor in spirit. How attached am I to the things of the world?

Therese said she had a bold confidence in becoming a great saint because she didn't count on her own non-existent merits, but on trust in Him who is Virtue and Holiness. Do I feel this same bold confidence? Do I ask God to make me a saint, or do I hold back because I think I can't be that good?

Therese found that mental prayer was a simple thing - being alone with God and "thinking" with him. Am I spending enough time in solitude, conversing with my Lord? Or do I waste time when we could be together by pursuing idle conversations and amusements?

How carefully Therese prepared for her first communion! Do I prepare adequately for my own communions with the Lord, and for other important spiritual events in my life, such as clothing, promises, etc.? What about for the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

- 1. What caused Therese's unhappiness during her five years at school?**
- 2. How did Celine's first communion affect Therese?**
- 3. What were some early signs of her contemplative vocation?**

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(continued) **STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 3**

4. When did Therese first discuss her future vocation with the Prioress of Carmel?

5 After her illness, what caused Therese much grief for a long time?

6. To what did Therese later attribute her illness?

7. How was her cure effected? What trial was connected with the grace of this cure?

8. How did Therese receive her religious name?

9. What inspired her to offer herself to Jesus as his “little flower”?

10 What did God reveal to her about her destiny as she read about Joan of Arc?

11. How did the imagery of flowers enter into her preparation for her First Communion?

12. How did Therese describe the change effected in her relationship to Jesus?

13. In what prayer did she express her great desire of suffering?

14. When was she affected with scruples and for how long? Was her confessor aware of it?

15. How did Therese show her love for Mary at a tender age?

16. What consolation from Heaven did she receive after Marie left home for the Carmel?

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 4
READ: Story of a Soul Chapters five and six

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts:

Therese said that she felt it was not possible for a heart given over to the affection of creatures to be intimately united with God. How do I stand in this regard? Is my love for others a pure, unselfish love which seeks nothing for myself, or do I seek my joy and satisfaction from others rather than from God alone? (This does not mean I cannot find joy in them, but that I do not actively seek it there.)

Therese found great consolation in her newfound relationship to her brothers and sisters in Heaven. Do I remember to speak to my family members who have gone before me? Do I ask for their prayers and express my unity with them, desiring to join them someday?

When a little school friend gave Therese the cold shoulder, she continued to pray for her and to love her. God gave her, she said, a heart which was so faithful that once it had loved purely, it loved always. God will surely grant me a heart like hers if I desire it sufficiently.

As a child Therese had a headache almost every day, but didn't complain (except on one memorable occasion!) Am I in the habit of complaining about my little miseries, or do I try to suffer them in silent patience?

Therese suffered great aridity in her prayer life, but rejoiced in it. Do I desire the consolations of God more than the God of consolations? How do I react when prayer is dry and "unfulfilling"?

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

1. Until the "grace of Christmas", what was Therese's main fault?
2. How old was she when this grace was received? Of what did it consist?

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(continued) **STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 4**

- 3. How did God prove to Therese that her ardent desire to save sinners would be granted?**
- 4. How did Therese feel later on about her time spent in study and learning?**
- 5. Which book did Therese learn by heart? Have you read it, too?**
- 6. What special graces did the Lord grant to Celine and Therese at this time?**
- 7. Who was Therese's guide?**
- 8. Who was the first to encourage Therese in her early desire to enter Carmel? Who were those most opposed to the idea?**
- 9. For whom do we in Carmel have a special vocation to pray?**
- 10. In Paris Therese paid homage to Our Lady under which title? What virtue did she beg her to guard?**
- 11. What was Therese's interior response to the great beauty she saw on her pilgrimage?**
- 12. What were some of the most interesting places she visited?**
- 13. Which pope did Therese approach for permission to enter Carmel at age 15? What was his response to her?**
- 14. How did Therese express her desire to give her will completely to Jesus?**
- 15. How long did she have to wait before finally entering Carmel?**

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 5

READ: Story of a Soul Chapters seven and eight

REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts:

St. Therese was grateful for the severity with which she was treated upon entering Carmel. What virtues can I gain from the same sweet acceptance of the hurts and affronts in my life?

Therese desired to be counted as nothing, and unknown, but God exalted her. How many times have I resented being overlooked, ignored or disparaged?

Have I ever had to wait for something special in my life? Did I react as Therese did, by better preparing myself, or with protests and resentment?

Am I learning, as Therese did, to draw profit from *everything that happens*?

**What would it mean to me to offer myself as a holocaust to Divine Love? (or to Merciful Love)
How would it affect my attitudes?**

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

- 1. What illusions did Therese have concerning life in the Carmel?**
- 2. What great consolation did she receive upon making a general confession?**
- 3. What was Mother Marie Gonzague's treatment of Therese?**

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(continued) STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 5

4. Whom did Therese consider to be her spiritual director? Why?
5. Why was she attracted to the Holy Face of Jesus?
6. What were the saintly qualities Therese described in her aging father?
9. What special consolations did Therese receive at her Clothing?
10. What happened to Louis Martin one month after her Clothing?
11. What did St. Therese say became her “daily bread” at Carmel?
12. How did Therese react to having to wait eight more months until her Profession?
13. What did she learn about striving for perfection?
14. What great temptation did she experience on the eve of her Profession?
15. How did this change on the next day? What did Therese ask for?
16. What did her tears on this day make her realize?
17. How did she feel about Mother Genevieve? Who was she?
18. Did Therese have mystical dreams?
19. What was her attitude concerning the fact that she generally did not experience consolation at Communion time?

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 5

20. What experience launched her “full sail” upon the waves of confidence and love?

21. What did Therese say “gives birth to souls”? Citing which scripture?

22. What lesson did Therese learn from the flowers in her life?

23. How did she connect her father’s holy martyrdom with Celine’s entrance?

24. After this, what was the sole attraction for Therese?

25. How did she experience the presence of Jesus within herself?

26. In what special way did she offer her soul to God?

27. What effect did she experience from this formal offering?

Make three personal resolutions in connection with the material you read in this lesson, and write them here in a brief form:

1.

2.

3.

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 6

READ: STORY OF A SOUL Chapters nine and ten

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts:

St. Therese's heart was filled with great desires *for* holiness and for God's glory... and mine?

With what has it been filled today?

Have I understood, like Therese, that love is everything, and as St. John of the Cross says, that at the end of my life I will be examined in love? To what extent has this influenced my life today?

What little "flowers" of self-denial and sacrifice have I offered to Jesus today?

When I fail in virtue, what is my attitude? Do I, like Therese, humbly ask pardon, and trust that the good Lord will lift me higher?

Do I accept criticism and harsh treatment in the same humble spirit as Therese did?

Have I learned to suffer with joy and peace, rather than with sadness? If not, why?

How well do I bear with the faults and weaknesses of others?

How unpossessive am I of the things which belong to me? (even those which I need)

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

1. At the time Therese wrote this souvenir of her retreat for Marie, what was she experiencing in the way of consolations? What was her attitude?

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 6

- 2. What did Therese say that Jesus expects of us rather than great actions?**
- 3. What did Therese's mystical dream about Venerable Anne of Jesus reveal?**
- 4. How did she know that this was a mystical gift, not proceeding from herself?**
- 5. What vocations did Therese feel within herself?**
- 6. What was her vocational revelation, and where did she find it?**
- 7. What gave Therese boldness to offer herself as victim of the Love of Jesus?**
- 8. What did Therese ask of all the saints in Heaven?**
- 9. With what kind of works would Therese prove her love?**
- 10. Using the imagery of the 'little bird' what would her attitude be toward any failures in her vocation of love?**
- 11. What kind of "legion" did Therese ask Jesus to choose?**
- 12. What was her attitude toward the severity and humiliations provided by the prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague?**
- 13. What did Therese hope for regarding the length of her life?**
- 14. What was the difference between her suffering in childhood and later on?**
- 15. What was Therese's "trial of faith"? How long was it to last?**

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 6

16. How did she act during this time of trial? How did she combat it?

17. What did Therese say about disappointments?

18. What did she have to say about the freedom which comes with obedience?

19. What did she learn that charity consists of? (in regard to love of neighbor)

20. What did Therese use as a last resort in time of temptation?

Make three personal resolutions in connection with the material you read in this lesson, and write them here in a brief form:

1.

2.

3.

STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 7

READ; Story of a Soul Chapter eleven, epilogue and appendices
REFLECT: Spend a few minutes with each of the following thoughts:

When Therese was interrupted in her writing during her last illness, she took care to appear happy, and “especially to be so”. How do I react when others interrupt what I am doing?

Therese did not stay away from the sisters who were always asking for help, nor did she expect help from them in return at some future date. Is this true of me also?

If I suffer a trial of faith as Therese did, am I resolved to walk through the darkness bravely, changing nothing of my behavior, except for the better?

How obedient am I to those who are in authority over me? Do I really understand that God expresses his will for me by this means?

If someone else takes credit for something good that I have said or done, does this disturb me? Or do I, like Therese, believe that the good I do is from the Holy Spirit, and therefore the property of all?

Have I been able to detach myself from the need for human consolations, as Therese did? Or am I always looking for the nearest shoulder to cry on, or someone to help alleviate my loneliness?

When others make distracting noises or do other things which annoy me, do I react like Therese, or do I miss this opportunity to die to myself and to offer another “flower” to Jesus?

St. Therese asked the Lord to remain in her as in a tabernacle when she was unable to receive him in Holy Communion as often as she would have liked. Is my desire to receive my Lord increasing? If not, have I asked him to give me this desire? How often do I visit him in the tabernacle? Do I make spiritual communions when receiving is not possible?

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STORY OF A SOUL LESSON 7

To what extent does Therese's letter which she carried on the day of her Profession express my own desires? What is holding me back from such aspirations?

Which parts of the Act of Oblation to Merciful Love could I adopt as my own?

REPLY: Answer these questions as briefly as you can:

- 1. How did St. Therese, as a postulant, become detached from human consolations?**
- 2. What cost her most dearly in her dealings with the novices under her care?**
- 3. How did Therese describe what prayer was for her?**
- 4. What are some of the ways she practiced love of neighbor?**
- 5. What guidelines did Therese use in undertaking a work?**
- 6. How did Therese hope to spend her heaven?**
- 7. What was her attitude toward her imperfections? And her virtues?**
- 8. What were her inner and outer dispositions during her great suffering?**
- 9. How did Therese hope to die, and how did she actually die?**
- 10. What attribute of God was the focal point of St. Therese's act of oblation?**