



Mosaic- Altar St Therese basilic of S. Teresa Avila - Rome

STE. THERESE, RADIATING GRATITUDE AND LOVE

(OCDS Congress, Ontario LA, June 2019)

Fr. Alzinir Francisco Debastiani OCD

Translation from Portuguese by Lucienne D. Perez OCDS

The experience and doctrine of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face (1873-1897), in addition to simplicity and transparency that attract all types of believers, have a profound originality.

The church officially recognized this by proclaiming her *Doctor of the Church* in 1997¹. At the same time her eminent doctrine is universal (cf. SDL 2.4.10.11.12). Her theological insight has been acknowledged by theologians and Popes alike (cf. SDL 10) and she prophetically anticipated themes which would eventually be developed by Vatican Council II².

To this day Saint Therese of Lisieux continues to radiate love for Jesus through her testimony and writings, her intercession and the presence of her relics going around the world. She is still attracting people to “love Jesus and make him loved”.

I will extract from the core of her message, *her little way*, the topics which I will develop as follows:

Initially, I will introduce *Christ, the source of Light* reflected in the Church and the Life of the saints. I will then show *some mediations* of this Light in Therese’s life. Next, we will see the main events which became opportunities for *growth and deepening of divine Love* in Therese’s life and which led her to discover *the little way*. Finally, I conclude by presenting some themes that could help us be irradiators of love and gratitude in the school of Therese.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *The Science Of Divine Love* (=SDL), October 19, 1997, n. 1.2.6.8.9. I quote the writings of Therese of Lisieux and of the Holy Face as they appear in *The Complete Works* (S. Paulo: Loyola 1997). MS A = Manuscript A; MS B= Manuscript B; MS C= Manuscript C; Lt = Letters; P= Poems; CA = Yellow Notebook; PR= Pious Recreations; P= Prayers.

² For example the universal call to holiness (LG cap. 5) and doctrine on the Virgin Mary (LG cap. 8).

1) “JESUS IS THE DIVINE SUN” (LT 134)

Having no light of its own but only reflecting the light of Christ, the Church has the mission to transmit this Light of Christ so as to continue being instrument to the Kingdom.

According to the New Testament, light belongs to and manifest the Kingdom of God since “God is light” (1John 1,5). Jesus speaks of himself as being the Light: “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life” (John 8, 12). Especially in the resurrection “the Son of God truly emerged as the light of the world. Now, by living with him and in him, we can live in the light”³.

The Light of Christ continues to reach us through preaching, through the testimony of the saints and the faithful and through the Liturgical life of the Church (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 1202), as well as through numerous social and religious works. When receiving Baptism, one is brought into the light of faith and pass from the darkness of sin to the light of a new life in Christ (cf Ephesians 2, 8-14, Hebrew 6,4). Consequently, may you shine as the light of a lamp set upon the lampstand illuminating everyone in the house “so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven” (Mathew 5, 14-16).

According to the 1st Letter of St. John, the communion of the disciple with God consists in walking in the truth of the Gospel, in brotherly love and communion with one and other being true disciples of Christ (cf 1 John 1, 4-5 2, 10-11)

The first Fathers of the Church use an interesting analogy to talk about the mystery of the Church: *mysterium lunae*, mystery of the moon.

As the moon does not have light of its own but reflects the light of the sun, so does the Church: Christ is its light. So says Saint Ambrose of Milan (340-397): “The Church shines not of its own light, but of that of Christ. It draws its splendor from the Sun of righteousness, so that it may say: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me’” (Gal 2:20)⁴. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, makes use of this

³ Bento XVI, *Verbum domini* 12 (=VD). Pope Francis documents: EG = *Evangelii gaudium*; GE = *Gaudete et exultate*.

⁴ St. Ambrose, *Hexameron*, IV,8,32, in <http://www.glisritti.it/antologia/entry/598> (accessed on January 29, de 2019); also S. Agostine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 10,3: CCL 38,42.

image of the Church as the mystery of the moon and John Paul II mentioned it in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*⁵.

Thanks to the spreading of the light of faith in Christ by means of the doctrine of the Church and of the testimony of holiness of so many men and women, frequently very near us⁶, we still can receive this Light of Christ today. “Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God” and testify the presence of the divine through human reality. (cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 48-49).

Accordingly, Therese of Lisieux can be compared to a ray from the light of Jesus. Due to her testimony and her doctrine she was officially proclaimed by the Church as *Doctor of the Science of Divine Love*.

“Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it”. (Ms A 3f).

Next, we will see how the light of Christ was transmitted into Therese’s life through some of these mediations.

2) THE MEDIATIONS OF THE LIGHT OF THE LOVE OF GOD IN THERESE’S LIFE

In the first place comes *her family*. Therese herself admits that she had a special family, surrounded by tenderness and love. Her parents cherished the practice of virtue and educated

⁵ “Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires to illuminate all men with His light, which shines forth in the face of the Church, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, (cf Mk. 16, 15) (LG1). Likewise at the beginning of this Millennium, at the end of the Great Jubilee, St. John Paul II went back to this analogy of the *mysterium lunae* to boost mission in the Church: “A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its “reflection”. This is the *mysterium lunae*, which was so much a part of the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church, who employed this image to show the Church’s dependence on Christ, the Sun whose light she reflects. It was a way of expressing what Christ himself said when he called himself the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12) and asked his disciples to be “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14) (NMI 54).

⁶ Cf. GE 6-9: next door holiness.

their daughters accordingly, even correcting their shortcomings when necessary (cf. Ms A 8f). They had adopted as family motto that of Saint Joan of Arc: "God first served"⁷.

Let us listen to Therese's reminiscence of her childhood in her family:

"Jesus in His love willed, perhaps, that I know the matchless Mother He had given me, but whom His hand hastened to crown in heaven.... God was pleased all through my life to surround me with love, and the first memories I have are stamped with smiles and the most tender caresses. But although He placed so much love near me, He also sent much love into my little heart, making it warm and affectionate. I loved mama and papa very much and showed my tenderness for them in a thousand ways, for I was very expressive". (Ms A 4v).

The *Positio* for the proclamation of Therese as Doctor of the Church sums up the religious education she received in her family as follows:

"Love for Jesus which will be the very reason of being, acting and thinking of Therese of Lisieux, her "one and only martyrdom" (PO 33,4), 'the only love' (PO 36) the only one she craves for (P 41,2), and which sets her on fire (P 47,7), is above all a family inheritance. Her parents transmitted it through Baptism received on January 4, 1873 in the Church of Our Lady of Alençon. It germinates and grows in the Martin's home filled with an exemplary Christian life, through family prayer, parish liturgy, daily catechism given by her mother, her father and her older sisters"⁸.

This love is rooted in the life of Therese by the sacrament of the Eucharist (received on May 8, 1884), which was a fusion of love between Jesus and herself (Ms A 35v). It is also developed by the catechism received at the Abbey of Notre Dame du Pré and by the reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation (a "feast" for Teresa: Cf. MSs A 17r) and solidly established by the sacrament of Confirmation ("the sacrament of Love": Ms A 36r)

⁷ Cf. Jean Clapier, *Luigi e Zelia Ms Artin; una santità per tutti i tempi*. (Angri(SA): Punto famiglia 2011) cap. 6. Her parents, St. Luis Martin e St. Zélia Guérin, were recently canonized by Pope Francis (October 18, 2015). Her sister, Leonia's cause for canonization has already been introduced.

⁸ Cf. Congregatio de causis Sanctorum, *Concessionis tituli doctoris ecclesiae universalis S. Teresia a Iesu Infante et a Sacro Vultu*, RoMs A 1997, 319

Christ's love deepens even more by the practice of prayer at a young age, when walking with her father, contemplating the Normandy fields or even when thinking about divine things, hidden behind her bed. She herself realizes this when she writes her autobiography: "I understand now that I was making mental prayer without knowing it and that God was already instructing me in secret." (Ms A 33v).

Therese learns the first vocal prayers from her Mother Zélia (Ms A 12f-v; 15v)⁹, who educates her daughters in virtue, with docility and firmness. When her mother died (August 28, 1877, at the age of 45), Pauline continued teaching her catechism and instructed Therese in the mysteries of the Christian life. To that effect also very important were the conversations with her father Louis, the reading of good books and the explanations that he gave to his daughters. Speaking of her father, she exalts his holiness, his goodness and his spirit of faith; while she mentions the walks they often took together and which ended up by a visit to the Blessed Sacrament (Ms A 14f), etc. Therese's testimony of her father's prayer is of great value: "It was enough to look at him to know how saints pray ..." (Ms A 18f). When she confides her vocation to him and asks his permission to enter Carmel, he speaks to her "just like a saint", (Ms A 50v, Cf. P 8). The Martin family is also greatly influenced by the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, spirituality which will accompany them in Carmel, as we see in the various references in her writings (Cf. Ms A 74v, 71v, Lt 89, RP 7, 1r).

Concluding this first mediation, we can truly say that Therese's family environment was and remained during her entire life an image of heaven.¹⁰

In addition to the testimony of faith received in the family, another source of light was the readings Therese made in her adolescence and youth. First, the *Imitation of Christ*. She read it continuously during adolescence (Ms A 47f), to the point of knowing almost all the chapters by heart. The *Imitation* confirms Therese in the detachment from the world, in abandonment in God and in the desire of heaven. In the same way, the Writings of St. Teresa of Jesus and especially those of St. John of the Cross will be other sources of spiritual life and spiritual food:

⁹ According to P. Piat, it was: "My God, I give you my heart: please accept it so that no other creature but you alone might possess it, my good Jesus". Quoted from *The Complete Works*, Ms A, note 54, p. 267.

¹⁰ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Sorelle nello spirito*, p. 99.

“Ah! how many lights have I not drawn from the works of our holy Father, St. John of the Cross! At the ages of seventeen and eighteen I had no other spiritual nourishment” (Ms A 83f).

Another person who had a major influence on Therese 's life was Mother Genoveva (cf Ms A 69f; 78f-79f). She is the last of the founding Sisters of the Carmel of Lisieux who was still alive when Therese enters the monastery. On the day of her entry as a postulant (April 9, 1888), Therese is impressed by the kindness in her eyes (cf. Ms A 69f). She considers it a very great grace to be able to live with “a saint made holy by the practice of the hidden virtues, the ordinary virtues”. The memory which Mother Genoveva left in Therese’s heart is a sacred one (Ms A 78f) and her “hope so filled with humility” leads Therese to trust in God’s goodness. Mother Genoveva dies on December 5, 1891, assisted by Therese who took the saint’s last tear and kept it as a relic (cf Ms A 79f).

Finally, the main source of enlightenment in the life and mission of Therese is the *Holy Scriptures*¹¹. In the Bible Therese finds nourishment for her spiritual life and sums it all up in her own life (Ms A83v). It is especially the Gospels that illuminate her, and it is where Jesus, the Doctor of Doctors, instructs her (cf. MS A83v). Jesus was her sole “Director” (Ms A, 71f; 74f etc.) and, in her words, she finds motivation to love and serve in humility: “I have only to cast a glance in the Gospels and immediately I breathe in the perfumes of Jesus’ life, and I know on which side to run” ...” (Ms C 36v; cf. Lt 15 Aug 1892 to Celine; etc.)¹².

The truth of the *Holy Scriptures* having been her guide, Therese walks and lives faithfully in its light: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. I am ready to carry out your orders; *nothing disturbs me...* (Ms C 4v). In her spiritual journey, at each new step she seeks in the Word of God the answer that underlies her longing for holiness (cf. Ms B).

¹¹ “In her writings there are more than a thousand biblical quotations: more than four hundred of the Old and more than six hundred of the New Testament” (SDL 9).

¹² John Paul II proclaiming her *doctor of the Science of Love*, stated that Therese “has made the Gospel shine appealingly in our time...” (SDL, 8) and that the “The primary source of her spiritual experience and her teaching is the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. She herself admits it, particularly stressing her passionate love for the Gospel (cf. Ms A, 83v). Therese writes: “I understand, and I know from experience that: “The kingdom of God is within you.” Jesus has no need of books or teachers to instruct souls; He is the Doctor of Doctors and teaches without the noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that He is within me at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what I must say and do. I find just when I need them certain lights that I had not seen until then, and it isn’t most frequently during my hours of prayer that these are most abundant but rather in the midst of my daily occupations. ...” (Ms A 83f).

With these mediations - and so many others that we could see, such as the confessors, the religious community, the Prioress, etc. -, Therese allows herself to be illuminated and progressively inflamed in the divine Love, as we will see next.

3) “... THE SWEET LIGHT OF LOVE THAT GAVE HER NEW WINGS” (Ms A 38V)

Having been educated by her family on good human and religious bases, Therese, after the "grace of Christmas" (1886), undertakes a "giant race" towards the conquest of charity. That Christmas night, night of light, makes her a fisher of souls as she feels *charity* enter into her heart, and the need “to forget herself to please others”. As a result, she knows happiness (cf. Ms A 45v).

Sometime after, looking at a picture of Christ on the Cross and hearing his cry: “I thirst!”, she feels a renewed zeal for the salvation of souls. Someone has to gather up Christ’s blood falling to the ground and has to spread it over humanity. Pranzini was her “first son” (Ms A 46v) and later on, she will include prayers for the priests, for when living closer to them during her pilgrimage to Italy, she noticed their human weaknesses and fragility (from November to December 1887 cf. Ms A 56r).

On the feast of the Holy Trinity of 1895 (June 9; Cf. Ms A 84v-f), Therese receives “*the grace to understand more than ever before how much Jesus desires to be loved*” (Ms A 84r). So she offers herself as a victim of holocaust to the Merciful Love. Since this Love¹³ is eternal, infinite and universal, Therese discovers that loving as Jesus loved means living it today (cf. P 5). This is possible thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit who sets her “*aflame with his fire*” (P. 17,2).

From this new understanding of love, unique and concrete consequences arise for Therese, who had never refused anything to God. The answer she will thus give in her life as a contemplative religious will be a search for greater fidelity to Love, living on Love (Ms B 4f and P 17).

¹³ Above all, the source of all love is the love revealed in the mystery of Love of the Triune God. At the summit, as the source and goal, is the merciful love of the three Divine Persons. “On the subject's part, is the experience of being the Father's adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit. At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbor, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his” (cf. SDL, 8).

In the last 18 months of her life, "without having the joy of faith", Therese seeks to carry out the works of faith illuminated by charity. Sympathizing with unbelievers and sinners, she is "happy not to enjoy this beautiful heaven on this earth so that He will open it for all eternity to poor unbelievers. (Ms C 7f). She lives under the light of Love that "is the act in which the will unites and participates in the joy and good of someone" (St. Francis of Sales).

Here is her moving testimony of compassion:

"Your child, however, O Lord, has understood Your divine light, and she begs pardon for her brothers. She is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You. Can she not say in her name and in the name of her brothers, "Have pity on us, O Lord, for we are poor sinners!" Oh! Lord, send us away justified. May all those who were not enlightened by the bright flame of faith one day see it shine. O Jesus! if it is needful that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul who loves You, then I desire to eat this bread of trial at this table until it pleases You to bring me into Your bright Kingdom. The only grace I ask of You is that I never offend You! (Ms C 6f).

The discovery of the new light in charity leads her to go beyond the walls of Carmel. As the light is placed on high to illuminate, it should radiate by illuminating all, without exception, to the ends of the earth (Ms C 12f)¹⁴. With such self-surrender, Therese "reached the highest degree of apostolic fecundity in the martyrdom of the spirit, in the tribulations of the darkness of the faith, heroically offered to bring the light of faith to so many brothers still submerged in darkness"¹⁵. In her poems she sings what she wants to believe, keeping on with her task and desire to love until she dies of Love! (Ms C 7f-v; cf. P 17).

By living heroically faith in Love, Therese's hope reaches the infinite and makes her struggle with the courage of a papal *zouavo*¹⁶. She knows that charity is eternal and that she does not die but

¹⁴ "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."

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Message For The World Missions Day, June 10, 1984*.

¹⁶ *Complete Works*, Ms B, note 40: "The *zouaves* of the Papal States were fighters of the faith; after the capture of Rome by the Piedmontese, they had returned to France to defend their homeland, under the banner of the Sacred Heart, and were crushed at Loigny on 12/2/1870, when two hundred and seven of them (out of three hundred)

enters into Life (Cf LT 244). And so, on the night of September 30, 1897, she dies pronouncing: "My God, I love You!". These last words of the Saint, said Benedict XVI, are the key to her whole doctrine, to her interpretation of the Gospel the act of love, expressed in her last breath was as it were the continuous breathing of her soul, the beating of her heart. The simple words "Jesus I love you", are at the heart of all her writings"¹⁷.

Therese's brief earthly existence was consumed as a holocaust of love. From this synthesis, we turn to the theme of gratitude, intimately united with love.

"All is Grace" (CA, June 5)

We can say that, first of all, Therese radiates around her a grateful acknowledgment to God and people for everything that happens to her. Being aware of having been loved in advance by God, gratitude grows in response to so many blessings received¹⁸.

Therese is naturally grateful to her family members (Ms A 19f), and she repays them with prayers and demonstrations of affection and gratitude (Ms A 29f). The Letters she writes to close relatives are full of expressions of gratitude and affection (Cf. Lt 84, 97, 123, 138, 196, etc.).

She is extremely grateful to God for preserving her from sin. She illustrates her gratitude through the example of a physician knowing there is a stone in his child's way, hastens ahead of him and removes it so his child will not get hurt. (Ms A 38v-39f) Such an awareness of God's preventive goodness arouses in her greater tenderness and love: "with what gratitude I sing the Mercies of the Lord!" (Ms A 40r); her heart "always overflows with gratitude" (Manuscript A, 43f, 73f, Letters 138, 139, 22, etc.) and makes her life a "hymn of thanksgiving" (Lt 107).

When she writes the story of her life in the *Story of a Soul*, she realizes with gratitude the progress that divine grace has made in her. "When I think of the past, my soul overflows with gratitude when I see the favors I received from heaven. They have made such a change in me that I don't recognize myself". (Ms A 43f cf. 46v). The same is true when her confessor declares that she had never committed a mortal sin (Ms A 70v).

died in the camp. battle. They were under the command of the general of Sonis from whom Therese borrowed the image of the grain of sand (cf. Manuscript C, 2v, nota 16 e CG, p. 1170)".

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, April 6, 2011.

¹⁸ Cf. Josef Pieper, *Sull'amore*. (Brescia: Morcelliana 2017³) 56.131.

Paradoxically, the sufferings which she and her family go through (the illness and hospitalization of her father in the psychiatric hospital of Caen, for example, Ms A 73v) make her love and thank God (Cf. Ms A 74f) for allowing her to take part in the sufferings of Jesus in order to save souls (Lt 85).

Gratitude is also a part of her definition of prayer “it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy” (Ms C 25r-26f). In the same way Teresa is grateful to the Virgin Mary for her presence in her life. She dedicates two poems to her: the "Song of Gratitude to Our Lady of Mount Carmel (P 7) and To Our Lady of Victories Queen of Virgins, Apostles, and Martyrs (P 35). She hopes that “in Heaven she’ll keep repeating “The song of my gratitude, /Lovable Queen of Carmel!”

In summary, for Therese, “gratitude is the overflowing of a heart full of divine love that recognizes all the good received in life itself and synthesized in the phrase *all is grace*”(CA 5.6.4)¹⁹. Love and gratitude are two sides of the same reality: the experience of the goodness and the gratuitous love of God, to which she corresponds and surrenders herself with confidence.

And so we come to the center of the doctrine of Therese of Lisieux, the '*little way*' which is the way of spiritual childhood. In it we find the synthesis of her doctrine and expression of universality; it is the Gospel way that can be followed by all (see SDL 2.6.10).

4) “... A LITTLE WAY, TOTALLY NEW...” (Ms C 2V)²⁰

In Manuscript C written in 1897, Therese narrates how she discovered the little way (Cf. Ms C 2v-3r). She insists and reaffirms her constant desire for holiness, wanting to become holy on her own; but she recognizes she is powerless ... She also knows that God does not give rise to unrealizable desires. In the Scriptures she discovers a new light in Prov. 9: 4 and Is 66: 12-13: God invites the little ones to come to Him.

¹⁹ *Complete Works*, Ms B, note 6, p. 289.

²⁰ Cf. Congregatio de causis Sanctorum, *Concessionis tituli doctoris ecclesiae universalis S. Teresia a Iesu Infante et a Sacro Vulto*, Roma 1997, p. 194-201.

In spite of her littleness, and her impotence, Therese understands in the light of these biblical texts that God will fill the distance that separates them. Like a mother who picks up her child and fondles her against her cheek, or as the elevator, symbol of Jesus (Ms C 2v-3f), who is the "elevator of love" (Lt. 258), which will raise her to heaven in His arms.

The fact is that Therese had experienced this impotence in different moments of her own life; and, providentially, she obtained the answer from God's salvific power. Let's now look at three great trials she went through.

The first one was at the age of 10. After the death of her mother, she develops a psychosomatic disease that finds no human explanation and almost leads her and her family to lose all hope of recovery. (MA 30f). Through the intermediation of the Holy Virgin Mary, on May 13, 1883 she is cured: "the little flower was going to be born again to life, and the luminous Ray that had warmed her again was not to stop its favors; the Ray did not act all at once, but sweetly and gently it raised the little flower and strengthened her "(MA 30v). The second salvific event was when she was 14 years old. She was freed from the "unbearable hypersensitivity" that made her suffer so much (MA 44v); it was one more little miracle after so many years of struggle: "God, with the grace of Christmas Conversion of 1886, was able in a very short time to extricate me from the very narrow circle in which I was turning without knowing how to come out " (MA 46v). The third was to realize that, despite her desire and struggle to be holy, she continued to be "weak and imperfect... after 7 years spent in religious life "(MA 32f).

And here the discovery of divine Mercy appears in her life. Mercy is a word absent from her vocabulary until the end of 1894. From then on it will be present in her writings and relay her whole life under the gaze of the Mercy of Jesus:

“The flower about to tell her story rejoices at having to publish the totally gratuitous gifts of Jesus. She knows that nothing in herself was capable of attracting the divine glances, and His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her” (Ms A 3v).

It is only from then on that Therese begins to put the work of her own sanctification into the hands of Jesus and is prepared to receive everything from his hands. She goes on "walking the path of love" and she learns to “draw profit from everything whether good or evil that she finds in herself" (Ms C 83f). At the same time, she slowly relinquishes herself in the hands of God; seeks

no longer to accumulate merits for heaven, but to hope and receive all of God. Here's how she writes to Celine:

“Merit does not consist in doing or in giving much, but rather in receiving, in loving much.... It is said, it is much sweeter to give than to receive, and it is true. But when Jesus wills to take for Himself the sweetness of giving, it would not be gracious to refuse. Let us allow Him to take and give all He wills. Perfection consists in doing His will... Oh, Céline how easy it is to please Jesus, to delight His Heart, one has only to love Him, without looking at one's self, without examining one's faults too much. Your Thérèse is not in the heights at this moment, but Jesus is teaching her to learn "to draw profit from everything, from the good and the bad she finds in herself. He is teaching her to play at the bank of love, or rather He plays for her and does not tell her how He goes about it, for that is His affair and not Therese's. What she must do is abandon herself, surrender herself, without keeping anything, not even the joy of knowing how much the bank is returning to her... my director, who is Jesus, teaches me not to count up my acts. He teaches me to do all through love, to refuse Him nothing, to be content when He gives me a chance of proving to Him that I love Him. But this is done in peace, in abandonment, it is Jesus who is doing all in me, and I am doing nothing” (LT 142).

Therese, escaping from Jansenism very present around her, discovers the *little way*. Let's look at it briefly.

In the *little way* three main virtues stand out and appear interconnected: *humility, faith in the Merciful Love and a loving trust in God*.

Humility for Therese of Lisieux, as for Saint Teresa of Avila, is synonymous of truth (see PR 8). Being humble implies recognizing the truth of one's own imperfection and impotence (cf. Ms C 2v). But at the same time it means recognizing the truth of the call to holiness and the truth of God, who is holy and merciful.

To this end it is necessary to believe and accept with conviction the Merciful Love of God; a paternal love, as revealed by Jesus. Therese knows that "God's Mercy will accompany her always" (Ms A 84v) and thus "through it she contemplates and adores the other divine perfections!!" (Ms A 83v).

As for in the case of a bridge two pillars sustain a platform, so humility and the acceptance of the merciful love of God form two pillars sustaining *the loving trust* in the divine Love. Therese knows that the very “nature of love is to humble oneself” (Ms A 2v) and lean toward the poor and the small, filling up the distance between them. "Ah! I really feel that what pleases God in my little soul; is that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in His mercy"(Lt 197).

Therese, who despite all her efforts and goodwill to attain holiness experiences her impotence, discovers a little way “very straight, very short, very new ” (MB, 2v), by which she confidently surrenders herself in the hands of the merciful God.

“Ah! if all weak and imperfect souls felt what the least of souls feels, that is, the soul of your little Thérèse, not one would despair of reaching the summit of the mount of love. Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simply surrender and gratitude” (Ms B 1v).

These three virtues, humility, faith in the Merciful Love and loving trust in God, are essential in the little way. At the same time they are the dynamic element that brings us closer to the sanctifying grace of God, which is decisive in the path of sanctification.

Such a discovery makes her want to share her little way with others.

“In spite of my littleness, I would like to enlighten souls as did the Prophets and the Doctors” (Ms B 3f).

Having thus an awareness of her impotence and littleness, but at the same time such a desire to enlighten, she finds the solution to such contrasting sentiments in the words of the Cantic of Canticles: “Draw me: we will run after thee” (Cantic of Canticles 1,3). She must be attracted and transformed by the Love of Jesus. This is the means that will in turn enable her to draw to His Love those entrusted to her.

This is how she describes it to Mother Marie de Gonzague:

“Since I have two brothers and my little Sisters, the novices, if I wanted to ask for each soul what each one needed and go into detail about it, the days would not be long enough, and I fear I would forget something important. For simple souls there must be no complicated ways;

as I am of their number, one morning during my thanksgiving, Jesus gave me a simple means of accomplishing my mission.

He made me understand these words of the Cantic of Canticles: "Draw me, we shall run after you in the odor of your ointments." O Jesus, it is not even necessary to say: "When drawing me, draw the souls whom I love!" This simple statement: "Draw me" suffices; I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by the odor of your ointments, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You. (Ms C33f-34r)

Dear Mother, this is my prayer. I ask Jesus to draw me into the flames of His love, to unite me so closely to Him that He live and act in me. I feel that the more the fire of love burns within my heart, the more I shall say: "Draw me," the more also the souls who will approach me (poor little piece of iron, useless if I withdraw from the divine furnace), the more these souls will run swiftly in the odor of the ointments of their Beloved (Ms C 36r).

Therese thus finds an original way of fulfilling the mission of praying for two missionaries and taking care of the novices: letting herself be attracted by Jesus so that, in union with Him, she might reflect His light and her testimony might attract others²¹.

We also know Therese's ardent desire to continue working so that Jesus be loved and known, even *going beyond the borders of death, time and space*. She wants to "be a missionary, not for a few years only but from the beginning of creation until the consummation of the ages..." (Ms B 2v). She had written to Fr. Bellière: "I shall desire in heaven the same thing as I do on earth: To love Jesus and to make him loved." (Lt 220, Feb.24, 1897, Cf. Lt 254).

This desire continues to be realized in our days, whether by her intercession, or by the dissemination of her doctrine and writings or even by her relics travelling around the world, which

²¹ Holy Mother Teresa had already notice that: cf The Way of Perfection 41,4-5. With respect to Therese de Lisieux, we have a confession of P. Youf, Chaplain of the Carmel of Lisieux. Speaking to Mother Inês about Therese, he recalled that when he entered the cloister to bring the Eucharist to Mother Genoveva and Therese as a sacristan accompanied him, he confessed: "When I see your sister close to me in the cloister, when I take the Most Holy Eucharist, she always reminds me of those holy candles that burn in the churches, looking at them we are prone to prayer and recollection".

Therese herself noticed that the most saintly sisters are the most loved in the community (Ms C 28f) and we willingly render them services. Certainly the witness and the coexistence with Mother Genoveva, considered holy by the community, contributed to this perception of Teresa.

in 2018 alone were in the Philippines, Rwanda, Burundi and Nordic countries²²; in this year it is in Spain and in Paris Diocese. We thus see that her desires are ongoing to this day. Therese is still carrying out her mission "of preaching the Gospel on all the five continents simultaneously and even to the most remote isles..." (Ms B 3f).

To conclude, I list some important points that emerge from the life and doctrine of Therese and that help us continue radiating gratitude and love around us.

"I SHALL DESIRE IN HEAVEN THE SAME THING AS I DO ON EARTH: TO LOVE JESUS AND TO MAKE HIM LOVED." (LT 229)

We begin from the central message of the life and doctrine of Therese, which was to remind the Church of the infinite and eternal Love of the Holy Trinity, to whom we are called to surrender ourselves. This is the essential attitude, synthesized in the little way proposed by her by which "everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in him, for the salvation of all, in a mystery of merciful love " (SDL 8). The little way " looks at the essential of things, the humble path of love, able to envelop and to give meaning and value to every human event."²³ This discovery of Therese invites us to abandon ourselves to this Love, the first motivation for mission, as Pope Francis recalled: "The first motivation to evangelize is love of Jesus, that love that we receive, that experience of being saved by Him, which moves us to love Him ever more"(EG 264).

Therese is a privileged witness of the *missionary power of intercessory prayer*, "which makes us seek the good of others, which makes us thank God for others and be attentive to others. It is a way of penetrating the Father's heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them", thanks to His infinite love, faithfulness and power (Cf. EG 281-283). Therese was faithful to the commitment of praying for others and she knows "that a Carmelite who would not be an apostle ... would cease to be a daughter of the Seraphic Saint Teresa " (Lt 198). She also affirms that "for a Carmelite to think of a person whom she loves is to pray for her. " (Lt 225, May 2, 1897). And the testimony of intercessory prayer and sacrifice made by Therese were made clear from an early age, for example, the episode of the conversion of

²² Cf. <https://www.therese-de-lisieux.catholique.fr/it/viaggi-delle-reliquie>.

²³ Benedict XVI, October 1,, 2009.

Pranzini, her "first son" (Ms A 45v-46f). The same can be said of her intercessory prayer for the priests, as we see in the letters to Fr. Bellière and Fr. Roulland.

She is well aware that "it is through prayer and sacrifice that we can help missionaries" (Ms C 32f; cf. Ms A 49v; UC July 8). A well-known example is when she is already very sick and walks with difficulty and offers this sacrifice for the missions. To Sr. Maria of the Sacred Heart who asks her why she does this, she responds:

"I walk for a missionary. I imagine that there, far away, one of them may be exhausted with his apostolic journeys and, in order to lessen his fatigue, I offer my own to God "(Testimony of Sr. Maria of the Holy Heart, Other Words, May 1897).

We can say that she incarnated what *Evangelii Gaudium* tells us about intercessory prayer, which "motivates us to seek the good of others" from the " deep faith which acknowledges what God is doing " in those for whom we intercede (EG 281, 282). This is because Therese believes firmly in the love of Jesus who wants to involve us in the work of salvation for others.

"Jesus has so incomprehensible a love for us that He wills that we have a share with Him in the salvation of souls. He wills to do nothing without us. The Creator of the universe awaits the prayer of a poor little soul to save other souls redeemed like it at the price of all His Blood". (Lt 135, August 15, 1892).

Consequently, she wants to remain seated at the table of sinners and atheists, in solidarity with them, to witness there the Light of divine Love.

A third way Therese radiated the Light of Love was through *community life*. She got close to the sisters, even those for whom she had no sympathy. It was not without great effort that she lived fraternal charity,²⁴ for even feeling antipathy for a certain person²⁵, she would treat her with a

²⁴ She wrote to Sr. Marie of the Trinity: "May the divine little Jesus find in your soul an abode all perfumed with the roses of Love, may He find there the burning lamp of fraternal charity, which will warm His little cold members and which will delight His little Heart by making Him forget the ingratitude of souls who do not love Him enough." (Lt June 13, 1897).

²⁵ In Ms C Therese refers to this fact with Sr. Teresa of St. Agostine: "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 Thérèse 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 did not add that this was from a spiritual

smile. She lives the New Commandment, to love like Jesus, not taking into account the natural qualities of people. She thus lives charity in concrete actions²⁶, refraining from judging when she sees the faults of some sisters, and seeking to look at their positive qualities and the efforts they make to practice the virtues (Ms C 12f; cf GE 72) donating her time, not complaining if someone takes something that belongs to her; lending without expecting anything in return, etc., (Cf Ms C 13f-19v). She testifies thus to the power of love lived in joy faithfully performing her daily occupations,

“ ... not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love. I desire to suffer for love and even to rejoice through love; and in this way I shall strew flowers before Your throne. I shall not come upon one without unpetalling it for You. While I am strewing my flowers, I shall sing” (Ms B 4f-v).

A fourth advice that comes from Therese motivates us to love the Scriptures and seek in them the Light of Jesus. Drawing wisdom from the Holy Scriptures, Therese was led and transformed by Love. This attitude motivates us to seek light in the Gospels so that the life and style of Jesus be embodied in us, for “in union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks, and we love what he loves” (EG 267). In our day and age we are immersed in an excess of empty and meaningless words; so we need to nourish our spiritual life with loving meditation on the "words of eternal life" of Jesus (John 6: 68-69). There we discover that Jesus is the one who sustains us and teaches us how to live the mission²⁷ and that his "word is a lamp for our feet, a light on our path." (Ps 119,105).

We certainly do not forget the importance of the people who witnessed the light of Christ in the life of Therese; first of all her holy parents, Louis and Zélia. They and others who, even

standpoint).” (Ms C 14f). In RP 5, 2v, Therese puts in the mouth of the Child Jesus the following words: “When you smile at your sisters/O my spouse, your Smile/Is enough to wipe away my tears.”; Cf. Ms C 14f; 28f; 29v.

²⁶ She writes to Celine: “I have experienced it; when I am feeling nothing, when I am INCAPABLE of praying, of practicing virtue, then is the moment for seeking opportunities, nothings, which please Jesus more than mastery of the world or even martyrdom suffered with generosity. For example, a smile, a friendly word, when I would want to say nothing, or put on a look of annoyance, etc., etc.....” (Lt July 18, 1893).

²⁷ Wrote Pope Francis in EG: “The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.” (EG 264). “A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise” (EG 266).

unintentionally made her suffer, helped her mature in Love, for Therese did not flee from living Love in the midst of difficulties (Cf. GE 134). She reminds us that we were created to love; that the love of God and the neighbor will fully fulfill the human being and make him happy.

To conclude we give thanks to the Triune God for having given to the Church such a person as Therese of Lisieux, who continues to this day radiating gratitude and love. May we, by means of her little way, confidently abandon ourselves to the Merciful Love of the Father; for in so doing we will receive in us that fire of Love and will be led to " love Jesus and make Him loved."

Thank you for your kind attention in listening to me.

Fr. Alzinir Francisco Debastiani OCD

Rome, February 14, 2019

Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius