

Meditation 4: St Theresa of the Child Jesus

Dear pilgrims!

On this second day of walking, our goal is getting nearer, and our path is sure, traced by a long column following the cross. What about our lives? Is our goal clear to us? Do we have guides? Why not Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, laureate of Heaven at the age of 24?

Major ideas

Three stages in the life of Saint Thérèse:

- from childhood, Heaven is the object of ardent desire, the object of hope;
- from Christmas 1886, Thérèse opens herself to souls: out of love she wants to gain Heaven for others, free them from the threat of Hell and the pains of Purgatory. What charity!
- at the end of her life, Thérèse was strongly tested: Heaven was the object of her faith.

First step: desire Heaven in hope

Thérèse Martin was born on January 2, 1873. Her parents worked zealously to raise their children. Yet their gaze does not stop at things on earth. Zélie, her mother, has a deep desire for Heaven, which she communicates especially to her youngest. She died when Thérèse was only 4 years old. The child, surrounded by the affection of her father and her older sisters, then cultivates this hope of Heaven placed in her heart. How? She thinks about it in her heart. *“Without knowing what it was to meditate,”* she said, *“my soul immersed itself in real prayer [...] The earth seemed to me a place of exile and I dreamed of Heaven.”*

Thérèse weighs the realities of her earthly life against those of Heaven. Four brothers and sisters died prematurely, then her mother. Her sister Pauline, whom she had chosen as her substitute mother, entered Carmel when she was only 9 years old. She herself fell seriously ill at 10 years old. She is healed by a wonderful smile from the Blessed Virgin. Thérèse matures quickly and understands early on that only the good God can fill her soul. *“Soon,”* she writes, *“the good Lord made me feel that true glory is that which will last forever and that, to achieve it, it was not necessary to do brilliant works, but to hide oneself and practice virtue, so that the left hand does not know what the right is doing.”*

She makes resolutions that she will still remember at the end of her life. *“I resolved never to move my soul away from the gaze of Jesus so that it may sail in peace towards the Fatherland of Heaven.”*

Two books help Thérèse to progress a lot. First, *The Imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, which she knows almost by heart. This phrase in particular: *“O Jesus! ineffable sweetness, change for me into bitterness all the consolations of the earth!”* And, at 14, Thérèse read a series of conferences preached by Father Arminjon on eternal life: *“This reading was still one of the greatest graces of my life.”* Thanks to this book, her imagined desire for Heaven deepens, on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Fathers. She feeds on it, talks about it at length with her sister Céline. She copies passages in order to engrave them in herself.



In summary: dear pilgrims, we all carry within us the confused hope of great happiness. But only God promises us Heaven, perfect and eternal happiness, if we love Him here on earth.

In practice: like Thérèse, let us learn about what the good Lord promises us, through good reading, and by listening to good advice.

Then let us meditate on these realities in our hearts, to increase our hope of Heaven.

Finally, let's think about it "practically" in the concrete choices of each day and for the major directions of our life.

Second step: assault Heaven with charity

Conversion

As we have seen, Thérèse was fully inclined toward Heaven from her earliest years, but she suffered from an exaggerated fear of sin. She often cried. And yet she continued her efforts to move forward. Jesus Himself came to her aid on Christmas night 1886, shortly before her 14th birthday. She then receives the grace to bear with joy a very strong disappointment and, responding with generosity, she suddenly obtains very great strength of soul. What results? *"In an instant [...] Jesus made me a fisher of souls, I felt a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners... I felt, in a word, charity entering my heart, the need to forget myself so as to please others, and since then I have been happy."* Let's remember the last sentence!

One day, she looked at an image of Our Lord on the cross, and observed that blood fell from one of his hands to the ground. Then she resolves to collect this blood to pour it on the souls: *"I wanted to give my Beloved a drink and I myself felt devoured by the thirst of souls... It was not yet the souls of priests which attracted me, but those of great sinners, I burned with the desire to tear them away from the eternal flames..."*

She prays for Pranzini, a criminal condemned to death: *"I wanted at all costs to prevent him from falling into Hell."* And she obtains his sudden conversion! This new thirst frees her from her fears, scruples, tears...

Entering Carmel

Thérèse is inflamed with the desire to enter Carmel. But she's only 15! She goes to the Pope to request a waiver... And wins her case. She wrote the secret of her entry into Carmel: *"I came to save souls, and above all to pray for the priests."*

From April 9, 1888, until her death, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus led the life of a Carmelite. A life of prayer, very regular, penitent, hidden, practically without external events; the most beautiful thing happens inside. God will allow Thérèse's life to be very well known in order to give her as a guide, doctor, big sister to countless souls.

The Little Way

The Lord accepts Thérèse's offering. He allows multiple trials, she sees her smallness, so she entrusts herself entirely to Jesus. She fulfills her duty of state to perfection, practices charity on all occasions (small hidden services...), strives to remain humble (for example without

showing off) and, little by little, Sister Thérèse discovers her Little Way, a broad doctrine of spiritual life, which she will teach to novices when she is in charge.

Thérèse gives herself entirely to the merciful Love of the good God: *“O my God! Blessed Trinity, I desire to love You and make You loved, to work for the glorification of the holy Church by saving the souls who are on earth and delivering those who suffer in Purgatory, [...] I desire to be holy and I ask, O my God, that You be my holiness Yourself. [...] After exile from earth, I hope to go and enjoy You in the Homeland, but I do not want to amass merits for Heaven, I want to work for your Love alone, with the sole aim of pleasing you, to console your sacred Heart and to save souls who will love you eternally.”*

In summary: the little way can be summed up in three stages:

1. The God of Love gives us the ability to love Him and our brothers.
2. God the Father waits and collects our smallest gestures and thoughts of love.
3. Our Merciful God knows our good desires and our weaknesses. He loves to forgive us. He knows how to use our falls to serve our advancement through humility; our repentances obtain graces for others.

In practice: we can walk in Thérèse’s little path.

Let us believe in God’s love for us and for each person.

Let’s seize concrete opportunities to love: a smile, a kind word, a service...

Let us never be discouraged by our falls.

Third step: obtaining Heaven through faith

From Easter 1896, Thérèse fell seriously ill with tuberculosis and entered into a great inner ordeal which would last until her death: the night of faith. *“Jesus made me feel that there are truly souls who do not have faith [...]. He allowed my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness and the thought of Heaven, so sweet to me, to become nothing more than a subject of combat and torment.”*

How does the young Carmelite react? On the outside, she is more gentle and charitable than ever, revealing nothing of her interior suffering. Inside she fights vigorously through acts of faith: *“I believe I have made more acts of faith in the last year than in my entire life.”*

On the other hand, she is increasingly possessed by the love of God and fascinated by the spiritual communion between all souls. She sinks into selfless love: *“Let all those who are not enlightened by the luminous torch of Faith see it shine at last.... O Jesus, if the table soiled by them must be purified by a soul who loves you, I am willing to eat alone the bread of trial until it pleases you to introduce me into your luminous kingdom. The only grace I ask of you is that you never offend yourself!”*

Thanks to her trust in the Love of God, she completely overcomes the perspective of judgment. She doesn’t want to worry about herself: *“Oh! that I would be happy if, going to Purgatory, I could deliver other souls, suffer in their place, because then I would do good, I would deliver the captives.”* Finally she gives us her last desire in this famous sentence: *“I want to spend my Heaven doing good on earth.”*

Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus died on September 30, 1897, saying: “*My God, I love you*”

In summary: Thérèse continued to believe in Love right through the testing of her faith.

In practice: with Thérèse, let us persevere in faith until we reach our heavenly goal.

Let us always be joyful because of God who loves us.

Let us offer our sufferings which purify the soul more than the fire of Purgatory.

Let us esteem our brothers and forgive them: thus we will give birth to souls for Heaven.

Conclusion

The desire for Heaven was truly the common thread in the life of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. With this in mind, she educated herself, then she became involved in religious life. She moved forward relying ever more on God. The rain of graces that she continues to obtain proves her complete success.