



## **Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux**

### **Team Notes For:**

- **Epilogue**  
(pgs 261 – 271)
- **Chapter Two:  
Les Buissonnets  
(1877 – 1881)**

### **Next Week's Reading:**

- **Chapter Three**  
Pgs 53 – 67
- **Chapter Four**  
Pgs 71 – 93

***“In the morning you used to come to me and ask me if I had raised my heart to God and then you dressed me.” Chapter Two, p 36***

➤ **God is first, then everything else. The grace of motherhood.**

- Faith was lived out in their family and saw them through difficult times. All shared in the role of motherhood after their mother passed, including her father who became enriched with “a truly maternal love” (p 34; p 35; throughout Ch. II).

➤ **Thérèse's came to learn, understand and embrace real agony but also the love that is born in suffering:**

- “How good God really is! How He parcels out trials only according to the strength He gives us. Never, as I’ve said already, would I have been able to bear even the thought of the bitter pains the future held in store for me.” (p 47) We were reminded that we don’t pick our cross, it is given to us. It can be very difficult to understand how we’ll manage our cross but God knows that we can. The cross we are given is the perfect fit for us; we simply need to trust in God that we will come to understand it.
- Thérèse understood that the only way to carry her cross was “... through confidence and love.” (p 261). These were the last words in her memoir. She wasn’t to know when, and thus what, her last words would be, yet there they are. How she handled her heavy cross was through confidence and love. This reminded us of the valuable last words that Mary gave to us, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5). Our lives are better, fuller, and filled with confidence when we *truly* let God be the boss.
- Her experience of suffering tested her faith *but because of her cross*, she came to realize her mission. Her mission has helped many bear their own crosses – from small daily crosses to deep, painful ones. “I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making others love God as I love Him, my mission of teaching my little way to souls. If God answers my requests, my heaven will be spent on earth up until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.” (p 263). It seems her request was granted.

➤ **Faith in the face of suffering, death and being a sinner. We found so much insight packed into her trials, beyond the physical challenges but how her faith was gravely tested yet she didn’t abandon God, she surrendered to him:**

- The exchange between her and Mother Agnes reveals her thoughts on death... excerpts (p 262–263): “Are you afraid now that death is close?”; “Ah, less and less!”... “How can I fear one whom I love?”
- In the next months her illness grew worse; Thérèse suffered even more: “she experienced much coughing, difficulties breathing, pains in her chest, and swollen limbs.” ““Tuberculosis”. This had attacked the intestines. Thérèse was suffering violently at each breath she took, and she felt as though she were stretched out on “iron spikes”. Then they began talking about the danger of gangrene.” (p 264).
- Her faith was ever-challenged. Like us, she was a sinner – contemplating thoughts that she shouldn’t. Just months before her death while very ill, Thérèse insisted upon sharing her story in hopes of helping others deal with sin and suffering: “Thérèse confided this work to Mother Agnes and strongly insisted that she complete her unfinished work by the addition of the story of the “*sinner who died of love.*”” (p 263). Later in the Epilogue light is shed on the battle that she fought with thoughts and temptations to pull her away from her faith: “The chaplain was frightened by his penitent’s temptations against faith: ‘Don’t dwell on them: it is dangerous!’ She remained reserved with her sisters regarding these things lest she make them suffer the same torments.” (p 266).
  - His advice was valuable and so was her response to these temptations: 1) Don’t focus on temptations; focusing on them makes it easier to succumb to them and 2) sharing temptations and sins with others only leads others to consider the temptations themselves and they may wrongly construe that it is OK. AKA, just because someone else does something wrong doesn’t make it OK for us to do something wrong. Consider if you don’t want to eat dessert but someone else does, so you think, “Well I guess I can too.” But that person’s eating dessert doesn’t lessen the impact of our eating it; we simply allowed ourselves to be drawn into doing something we didn’t want to do.

- Thérèse had her own 'dark night of the soul' while facing her trials. She wasn't sure if her prayers were being heard (p 269). But she didn't lose faith in God and she was grateful for the gift she was given: courage. We noted that her trust in God was vital to get her through those dark times. Thérèse came to realize how difficult suffering can truly be and the lonely, desperate place that suffering can bring us to. She was grateful for her faith:
  - (Underline added:) "... when she was in a state of exhaustion, she confided to Mother Agnes, *"What would become of me if God did not give me courage" ... "What a grace it is to have faith! If I had no faith, I would have inflicted death on myself without hesitating a moment!"* (p 264).
  - We discussed the lonely desperation that people reach when they seek the *false mercy* of Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) or Euthanasia and how quickly it is permeating the US (>10 states have legalized). Without God despair can take hold; we need to trust in God and God's will, a God who loves us *as we are*.
  - We discussed that, just as St. Thérèse was brought to her limits, the faithful (we) are tested too and can find ourselves led astray, possibly unexpectedly 'falling far from our core beliefs'; perhaps becoming fearful that others will learn of our situation; perhaps believing that our sin is too great for God's forgiveness – there are many situations, but we agreed that God is waiting for us if we seek his forgiveness and if we remain open to receive his graces (confession is so helpful – we should rely on it as Thérèse did).
  - We are saddened by growing numbers of teens and young adults who don't know God. They have nothing to fall back on, nothing to lean on. The swelling numbers of suicides and attempted suicides are such that now many of us know of someone in this situation.
  - *We need to help bring others to Christ.*
- **The need for prayer, the need to hand-over/share or suffering to Jesus and Mary (p 266 – 270) and to trust God even when it seems our prayers are unanswered.**
  - Thérèse implores us to pray (underline added:) *"Pray for those who are sick and dying, little sisters. If you only knew what goes on! How little it takes to lose control of oneself! I would not have believed this before."* (p 265). *"When am I going to suffocate entirely? ... I can't stand any more! Ah! pray for me! Jesus! Mary!"* (p269).
    - We can't 'just pray' for the sick and dying, we need to really **PRAY**.
  - *"Oh, I prayed fervently to her [the Blessed Virgin]! But it is pure agony; there is no consolation!"* (p 269).
    - We discussed times when suffering is so great, we might find ourselves unable to pray or feel that our prayers are not being heard. Sometimes those close to a suffering person can struggle with prayer as well. So what to do in these time of dryness? Don't walk away. Do not abandon God. Just be. Just trust. The next time you are able to pray, you will.
    - Thérèse reminds us to hand our sufferings over to God and to experience the freedom that comes with it – through prayer and confession – she continually gives her sufferings to God; she confesses her thoughts and temptations; she receives the grace she needs to continue on. (p throughout the Epilogue.)
    - Thérèse recalls the Passion of Jesus Christ. How deeply he suffered, but how beautiful his sacrifice was. *"...Our Lord really died as a Victim of Love, and see what His agony was!" ... "Our Lord died on the Cross in anguish, and yet His was the most beautiful death of love."* (p 269)
    - We were reminded that Jesus suffered incredibly in human terms; he too, called on God for help. From a study Bible: "In the hours before his arrest and crucifixion, Christ prayed for strength to fulfill the divine plan of his Passion and Death. His apprehension was real as he asked his Father, "Let this cup pass," but he submitted completely to his Father's will, obedient even unto death. Prayer does not merely consist in "asking" things from God, but more importantly, obtaining the grace to identify with God's will and strength to bear our cross."
    - **God is Thérèse's medicine – a medication with no adverse side effects.** Thérèse received the Eucharist (the real body and blood of *Christ*) as a source of great grace as long as she was able to – a bit longer than a month before her death (p 266). She had cherished it from her First Holy Communion (p 38). And, until her death, Thérèse firmly holds onto her crucifix (p 271).
  - **New St. John Neumann Parish prayer opportunities are coming soon, stay tuned!**
    - **Rosary to pray for the well-being of teens and young adults:** Honor Jones will lead (est. Tue. 7:00 pm in church).
    - **Chaplet of Divine Mercy for relief to those who are suffering:** est. Fridays at 3:00 PM in church.
    - **Prayer team to pray for specific needs:** In development – if interested in joining this team, contact the Rectory.