



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

### **Team Notes For:**

- Prologue
- Chapter One:  
Alençon  
(1873 – 1877)

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

- Epilogue  
(this may help those who have or are suffering to connect with *Thérèse* as we read her memoir.)
- Chapter Two

*It can be hard to relate to someone who, from so early in life, is 'so good'.  
Yet there's much to learn – we found Chapter One packed with insights.*

- **Thérèse's first four years** – clearly a bright star from early in life, but as we unpacked her very early years, we came to appreciate more than was at the surface.
- **What can we learn from a child? As it turns out, a lot.** The Old Testament and New Testament frequently call on us to be like little children (see references in Introduction, p xii). **What does it mean to be 'child like'?**
  - **Trusting** {trust in God}
  - **Full of love – pure love – not conditional – no criteria** {love God}
  - **Innocent, not calculating** {receive God's love as it is}
  - **Speak from the heart, not the head** {speak to God from your heart}
  - **'Do' from the heart** {act with love of and for God}
  - **Humble** {it's not all about us}
  - **Obedient** {follow the teachings of God the Father and his Son, Jesus}
  - **"Just be"** {slow down and just be in God, in God's presence; it's not about the 'next thing to be done', the 'next goal' that consumes much of our daily lives}
  - **Little children beam in their parent's love** {we should beam in the love that God has for us!}
- **We all have flaws, but God is with us throughout:**
  - "There was another fault I had... and this was an excessive self-love" (p 24).
  - "But Jesus was watching over His little fiancée; He had willed that all turn out for her good, even her faults that, corrected very early, stood her in good stead to make her grow in perfection" (p 24–25).
  - Jesus and God our Father have our backs. They whisper for us to come to them and help us to learn from and use our weaknesses and trials.
  - The lamb that strayed: Jesus left the ninety-nine to find the one that strayed; he doesn't want to lose *even one* of his little lambs.
  - It's not our failures that we should focus on, but rather we should focus on understanding his mercy, his love. As in the story of the prodigal son, the father didn't wait for the son to arrive at the house, but seeing him in the distance *ran* to meet his son. If we but seek God, he will be there ready to pour his graces on us – we are his beloved.
  - St. Paul – 2 Corinthians 12:10 "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong."
  - When we really listen to Jesus Christ and want to be a disciple, we will have a cross; there is a cost.
    - Thérèse witnesses her mother's illness for years and observed her carrying her cross (footnote 24 p 28) – yet, as of this point in the memoir, it doesn't seem to have taken away the joy from either's lives.
    - Thérèse closes Chapter One, "...so the little flower whose memories I am writing had to pass through the winter of trial".
  - Saints are like us and they turn their lives around.
  - "Saints are only sinners who keep trying." – St. Teresa of Calcutta / Mother Teresa.
- **We are all different and that's exactly God's plan.**
  - Please read page 14 fully from the second paragraph. "... all the flowers He has created are beautiful.... I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers. And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden.... He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at his feet. Perfection comes in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be." ... "Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it."

- It can be difficult to find a connection point with someone who seems to have it so easy, such good circumstances and a seemingly easy path to holiness. Our discussion group recalled Jesus' words (Luke 12:48): "Every one to whom much is given, of him, much will be required." – in short, we all have our own paths in Christ and we can't make assumptions about someone else's.

### ➤ We have a choice. Choose God.

- When a child, Thérèse was once offered to choose what she wanted from one of her sister's basket of play things. Her sibling chose a ball of yarn. Thérèse, well, she exclaimed "I choose all!" and then 'took the basket without any further ceremony.' She reflected later in life that it came to summarize her life: 'I understood, too, there were many degrees of perfection and each soul was free to respond to the advances of Our Lord, to do little or much for Him, in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices He was asking... I cried out, "My God 'I choose all!'" ... I fear only one thing: to keep my *own will*'. (p 27)
- We were reminded of the parable of The Rich Man (Mark 10:17 – 31) [and Mathew 19:16 – 30, Luke 18:18-30]... 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?... I have observed [your commandments]...' "And Jesus, looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.'  
From a study Bible: St. Augustin famously wrote in his Confessions, "Our hearts are restless, Lord, until we rest in you." Attachments to wealth or earthly possessions is incompatible with holiness... True happiness comes exclusively from giving ourselves totally in Christ and fulfilling God's will.
- By choosing God and accepting his graces, we leave no room for the cowardly devil. Reference *Thérèse's* description of her dream, p 28. "...The poor little devils were there, running on the tables, not knowing what to do to hide from my gaze. ...and I still believe God permitted me to remember it in order to prove to me that a soul in the state of grace has nothing to fear from demons who are cowards, capable of fleeing before the gaze of a little child!"
- St. Paul 2 Corinthians 12:9 "but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- We are never alone, the Holy Spirit is always with us, he can handle things – let him.

### ➤ Environment matters – family and God are first:

- "Family life held a privileged position. They were content only when together." (*Prologue – p 3*).
- Her mother and father played a pivotal role in her life, "With a nature such as my own, had I been reared by Parents without virtue or even if I had been spoiled by the maid, Louise, as Céline was, I would have become very bad and perhaps have even been lost." (p 24)
- "Having nothing but good example around me, I naturally wanted to follow it." (p 25)
- Prayer and Mass were important parts of their lives.
- We need to help foster a good environment for ourselves, our children and those around us.

### ➤ The importance of our mother (Mary)

- p 18, third paragraph – "... 'I will fly to you [Thérèse's mother] in Heaven, and what will God be able to do to take me away? You will be holding me so tightly in your arms!' I [her mother] could see in her eyes that she was really convinced that God could do nothing to her if she were in her mother's arms."
- Jesus gave us his mother from the cross. Mary intercedes for us to Jesus. We should embrace her as our mother, for as Thérèse says, how could God tear us from her arms?

### ➤ CHAPTER ONE – The Church at a Glance:

- Trust Jesus; family and family time are vital; be childlike; honor thy father and mother; be grateful for our differences; perform works of mercy; don't focus on self; embrace our cross; don't give the devil a place to take up residence; the environment we surround ourselves with is so important (Act of Contrition – '... I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.'). Jesus gives us grace enough.

☐ **HOMEWORK:** What can we do to create an environment for our souls to grow in Christ, to accept our cross?