



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

Team Notes For:

- **Chapter Eleven:
Those Whom You Have
Given Me
(1896 – 1897)**

**Thank You for
Joining our Book
Club!
Next week we'll
offer 'Bonus
Material'**

I go to Him with confidence and love

➤ **Love is charity; Charity is love**

- Thérèse often refers to 'charity'; we discussed what her intended focus was. The definition of charity *is love*. Charity is a word that has been nuanced away from its roots and as a result, we even see the theological virtues of 'faith, hope and charity' are now articulated as 'faith, hope and love'. The Catholic Catechism (1822): Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." [John 15:9,12]. (1826) Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: "So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But the greatest of these is charity." [1 Corinthians 13:13].
- Merriam-Webster definition #2: benevolent goodwill toward or love of humanity.
- Thérèse shares that (underline added): "*Love is nourished only by sacrifices*" (p 237). What are sacrifices but acts of self-denial for the betterment of someone else, to serve God. Think of parents' sacrifices for their children. When we sacrifice, we know and feel the power of true love.

➤ **Thoughts define actions; we must turn our thoughts toward God and then put them into action**

- Throughout her memoir, Thérèse has shared her innermost thoughts with us. We discussed that thoughts can be powerful agents – in those we allow to grow and that they can gather steam and spill out into external actions – both good and bad. Knowing and gaining control over our thoughts is so powerful that we address it in Mass through the Penitential Act (underline added): "I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do..." [Breaking Bread, p 4]
- Thérèse's has shared her innermost *thoughts* with us. These thoughts revealed her deep connection and attachment to God but also her humanity. A humanity that brings along bad habits and ways that she, and we, struggle to overcome. The Book Club strongly related to these, for example, not liking someone and dwelling on their faults and the many things that Thérèse touched on in Chapter Ten that are forms of persecution. That these thoughts also harm ourselves by pulling us from God. Thérèse shared that she was interested to learn tidbits about others that she had no business to know; again, we could relate. We know it's not right to probe for info that we don't need, but we still do. It's uncharitable (unloving) and creates an interior form of gossip within our own thoughts. So how does Thérèse tackle this? "...when I interview a novice, I try to do this as a mortification and I refrain from asking questions simply to satisfy my curiosity..." (p 252) We were reminded that bad thoughts spill out to bad actions; by curbing them, we begin to curb our actions.
- Some of the thoughts and feelings Thérèse had weren't pretty. They were shockingly honest. We discussed that we'd never put pen to paper with some of the things she shared – people she liked, those she didn't and why. She poured out her thoughts in obedience to her sister (the Mother of the Carmelites): "*Mother, I am trying to discover what use my poor work can have; since I am doing it under obedience.*" (p 252/3). Perhaps she shared her thoughts with such honesty due to both obedience and closeness to her sister. But we loved that she did. She helped us see that we're not alone and we can overcome our faults as well, if we try. We appreciated understanding that such a great saint had the same issues and shortcomings that we have. Through her candor she has helped show the way forward to so many – that we, too, can become saints! She has shown us how to, step by little step.
- Through the gift she gave us of writing down her thoughts, the ugly, embarrassing nature of our humanness that leads to impatience, unkindness, and lack of respect for others, she helped us to understand that we can find the resolve to fight the battle too. Thérèse sought to tackle unkind thoughts or difficult tasks by turning them into ways to serve God. (Examples throughout, e.g. p 246, 247, 249). She used this approach to mortify herself and to give herself strength. For Thérèse this plays out in many ways. In an unexpected example, Thérèse, a seemingly small flower, always willing to take it on the chin found strength to stand up for God, if not herself (underline added) – when referring to her role as a Novice Mistress, she describes herself as very strict with the novices out of duty to God: "...what cost me more than anything else was to observe the faults and lightest imperfections and to wage a war to the death on these..." "I know very well that your little lambs find me severe." (p 238/9)

- She gave us practical tools to overcome our faults and serve God. Thérèse doesn't stop at thinking about problems with "I should" or "I could" or "I will". She follows through. She actually seeks to implement charitable/loving thoughts: *"The most beautiful thoughts are nothing without good works."* (p 234) She reminded us that if we strive to overcome our faults and conquer our human nature by following the example of Jesus, to be charitable/loving to ourselves and others, we will serve God. We will become closer to God.

➤ Prayer is the lever with Jesus as the fulcrum

- Throughout her memoir, Thérèse referred to her prayer time. As a Carmelite, contemplation, meditation and prayer are integral to their way of life. In Chapter Eleven, Thérèse reveals how she struggled with prayer and also how she viewed the power of prayer. She shared that though she used formal prayers very much she also struggled too: *"I cannot recite them all and not knowing which to choose..."* (p 242). This included the Rosary – despite her deep devotion to Our Lady: *"For a long time I was desolate about this lack of devotion that astonished me, for I love the Blessed Virgin so much..."* (p 242/3). But she found great solace and power in her own personal dialogue with God: *"I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me. For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus"* (p 242). Prayer is a vital part of her faith journey.
- But she also explains, and we really loved this, that the 'Our Father' is her prayer rock, her anchor (underline added): *"Sometimes when my mind is in such a great aridity that it is impossible to draw forth one single thought to unite me with God, I very slowly recite an 'Our Father' and then the angelic salutation: then these prayers give me great delight; they nourish my soul..."* (p 243). She says it slowly which must have afforded time to meditate on its message; she prayed it like she meant it! The Our Father is jam-packed with truths and serves as a great guidepost and pathway for approaching and living our faith. One member in the discussion shared that after confession, if given Hail Mary(s) and/or Our Father(s) to pray, she doesn't leave the church until all are said straight through with focus, without distraction; it's difficult and can take time, but is rewarding.
- Beyond a personal dialogue with God, Thérèse sees prayer in a very powerful and beautiful way when combined and united with the love of Jesus: *"The Almighty has given them [the saints while living] as fulcrum: HIMSELF ALONE; as a lever: PRAYER which burns with a fire of love. And it is in this way that they have lifted the world; it is in this way that the saints still militant lift it, and that, until the end of time, the saints to come will lift it."* (p 258).

➤ We are to draw (call) forth souls to bring with us to heaven

- Thérèse is awesome: not only is she seeking to conform herself to the teachings of Jesus – to find a pathway to sainthood and spend eternity with God, she aimed to bring as many souls with her as possible. This was her stated goal throughout her memoir, starting with the criminal Pranzini, but here she makes the goal more vivid as she translates more clearly. She shares how she transforms her thoughts into action, all to serve God (underline added): *"He made me understand these words of the Canticle of Canticles: 'DRAW ME, WE SHALL RUN after you in the odor of your ointments'... When drawing me, draw the souls whom I love!... 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..." and "Lord, You know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased You to unite to mine; it is You who entrusted these treasures to me." (p 254). Thérèse sees that God calls her (draws her) to him and that she seeks to draw (attract and enable) others to come with her to heaven. We can only envision Thérèse marching to heaven with a long trail of souls accompanying her!*
- She was nearing the end of her ability to write the memoir and yet she was still pouring out amazing insights – the meaning of her reference to 'ointment' (see prior bullet point) – the perfumes of Jesus: *"...what I understand by the odor of the ointments of the Beloved. Since Jesus has reascended into heaven, I can follow Him only in the traces He has left; but how luminous these traces are! how perfumed! 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."* (p 258). She recalls Mary Magdalene: *"her astonishing or rather her loving audacity which charms the Heart of Jesus"* (p 259) referring to when Mary used the expensive ointment to wipe Jesus' feet. Others were disturbed by this but Jesus instructed, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." [John 12:1–8]
- Thérèse's focus and power was, and remains, to draw souls to heaven. In this manner, she has become a potent missionary. Though not able to become a missionary as she so desired (see Chapter Ten), *she did and does so through her prayers and acts – all of which continually strive to serve God.* She is the Patron Saint of Missions.

➤ Give, don't loan

- Thérèse brought depth to the concept that we should give vs. lend (p 225-227). That giving with the expectation of getting something back isn't giving at all, but rather lending. Giving is complete, it is a one way gesture for the other. It is not self-serving and doesn't seek or need repayment as lending does (in one form or another). We felt that Thérèse exemplified this, she followed Jesus' guidance to give – simply put, to love. She turns this into an unbelievable gift of love in her last days: she's incredibly ill yet it is she who is giving to her Sisters! From the Epilogue: "There existed in this 'sensitive and tender heart' an exquisite form of consideration for others; she tried to meet each one's needs... the Sisters came to the infirmary purposely to seek her advice or simply to receive a smile from her." (p 265)
- We noted that the Gospel reflection Thérèse mentions is our Gospel this Sunday. Perhaps God is asking us to pay attention! "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shall you be, because they have nothing to repay you with [Luke 14: 12-14], and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." [Matthew 6:4] (p 246)
- Thérèse is yet again brutally honest in revealing a source of irritation for her that we all struggle with: when someone else 'borrows' our ideas and thoughts and portrays them as their own, not giving credit for their source. This makes us angry and upset – we feel we our thoughts were stolen. But Thérèse explores how to deal with this from a perspective of allowing what God had given her to be embraced and spread further by others. Once again, Thérèse takes ownership of her irritation and casts a remedy for it through the eyes of serving God. "However, the goods which come directly from God, inspirations of the mind and heart, profound thoughts, all this forms a richness to which we are attached as to a proper good which no one has a right to touch. For example, if on a free day I tell a Sister about some light received during prayer and shortly afterward this same Sister, speaking to another, tells her what I confided to her as though it were her own thought, it seems as though she were taking what does not belong to her... without making known its source, this appears again as a theft from the owner who doesn't claim it, but would like to do so and will seize the first opportunity to make it known that her thoughts have been borrowed." "Above all I was forced to practice what I was teaching to others. And so now I can say that Jesus has given me the grace of not being any more attached to the goods of the mind and heart than to those of the earth. If it happens that I think or say something that is pleasing to my Sisters, I find it very natural that they take it as a good that belongs to them. This thought belongs to the Holy Spirit and not to me... He is therefore free to use me to give good thought to a soul; and if I think this inspiration belongs to me, I would be like 'the donkey carrying the relics' who believed the reverence paid to the saints was being directed to him." (p 233/4)
- Thérèse helped us to remember that we are but serving God and by doing so, we gain so much more than being recognized for our ideas and defending our pride: we are actually allowing God to speak through us!

➤ We are part of God's plan, each in our own way

- Thérèse noted many times that we are all part of God's plan in our own unique way, with our own unique capabilities. That each of us is important to the whole and so we must fulfill our part. Thérèse was seeking to do her part, her special role: "Mother, you are the precious brush that the hand of Jesus lovingly holds when He wishes to do a great work in the souls of your children, and I am a very small brush He deigns to use afterward for the smallest details." (p 235)
- And that we must fulfill our part at the right time: "At this time, God made me understand that there are souls for whom His mercy never tires of waiting and to whom He grants His light only by degrees; so I was careful not to advance His hour and waited patiently till it pleased Jesus to have this hour come." (p 236)
- This idea that though we are all different, we all have the capacity to be completely filled with God's glory. We recalled the example of the thimble that Thérèse was taught as a child: "Once I was surprised that God didn't give equal glory to all the Elect in heaven, and I was afraid all would not be perfectly happy. Then Pauline told me to fetch Papa's large tumbler and set it alongside my thimble and filled both to the brim with water. She asked me which one was fuller. I told her each was as full as the other and that it was impossible to put in more water than they could contain. My dear Mother helped me understand that in heaven God will grant His Elect as much glory as they can take, the last having nothing to envy in the first." (p 44/5)
- Similarly, Thérèse reminded us that we all struggle, no one avoids struggle – but each in our own unique ways: "I had learned very much when I was teaching others. I saw first of all that all souls have very much the same struggles to fight, but they differ so much from each other..." (p 239)
- Throughout all of her humanness, her illness, and faith trials, especially the trial of faith that lasted until her death, Thérèse sought to remain a happy warrior (underline added): "...I want to imitate St. Paul who rejoiced with those who rejoice, it is true he wept with the afflicted and tears must sometimes appear in the feast I wish to serve, but I shall always try to change these tears into joy, since the Lord loves a cheerful giver." (p 247)

➤ Thérèse's final written words: "... I go to Him with confidence and love." (p 259)