



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

Team Notes For:

- **Chapter Five:
After The Grace of
Christmas (1886 – 1887)**
- **Chapter Six: The Trip
to Rome (1887)**

Next Week's

Reading:

- **Chapter Seven
Pgs 147 – 161**
- **Chapter Eight
Pgs 165 – 182**

Following Christ's Passion

➤ **The Christmas Surrender; Thérèse finds her strength**

- Thérèse, just about 14 years old, begins to understand that she can no longer pursue dual paths – she must commit to one – to pursue her vocation she needs help from God: *“I really don't know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel when I was still in the swaddling clothes of a child!” “God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day.”* In her conversion on that Christmas day, she finally breaks away from her childish ways and realizes that nothing is impossible with God.
- *“He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me, He made me strong and courageous, arming me with His weapons.”* (p 97; her conversion is on p 98). This is the first of several powerful references to the Passion of Jesus within these chapters.
- In her conversion, Thérèse finds her true self that had been hidden away since her mother's death: *“Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever!”* (p 98) We will see how this renewed confidence yields so much during her trip to Rome.
- Throughout the trip, Thérèse is now comfortable with others, not timid. She starts to flourish when in her element, when she is surrounded by others strong in their faith.
- Thérèse shares the spirit and fortitude she has to connect with her faith, going so far as to break from norms in order to pursue a closer connection to God. She was rewarded *“I saw some very beautiful things; I contemplated all the marvels of art and religion; above all, I trod the same soil as did the holy apostles, the soil bedewed with the blood of martyrs. And my soul grew through contact with holy things”* (p 121). (She makes great effort to have contact with holy items – this is mentioned throughout Chapter 6.)
- We noted that even though Thérèse breaks with protocols and seeks to put only God above herself, she manages to do so while still respecting her elders.

➤ **Thérèse receives her calling: A fisher of souls.**

- Thérèse takes us deeper on her journey, causing us to be more thoughtful about Jesus and his teachings that we might be, too routinely, glossing over. As one group member noted, *“We're swimming in deep water with Thérèse.”* It is taking time to read and absorb all she is sharing with us.
- *“More merciful to me than He was to His disciples, Jesus took the net Himself, cast it, and drew it in filled with fish. He made me a fisher of souls.” “I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I've been happy!”* (p 99) We are reminded of our role to help bring people to Christ.
- The Passion speaks to her – have we considered this view of the Passion in our own lives? How much of Jesus' blood has flowed without someone to receive it? Aren't we called to help Jesus and not allow his Passion to be lost? *“One Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling to the ground without anyone's hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew. I understood I was then to pour it out upon souls. The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my hear: “I thirst!” These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved a drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls. As yet, it was not the souls of priests that attracted me, but those of great sinners; I burned with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames.”* (p 99)
- We recalled that St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta's was guided by Jesus' words: *“I thirst.”*

➤ **Thérèse puts her mission into action... and is rewarded**

- Thérèse sets her focus on a hardened criminal, Pranzini, who appears impenitent and is destined for the death penalty. *“I wanted at all costs to prevent him from falling into hell, and to attain my purpose I employed every means imaginable... I offered to God all the infinite merits of Our Lord, the treasures of the Church, and finally I begged Céline to have a Mass offered for my intentions.”* (p 99)

- “I was absolutely confident in the mercy of Jesus.” “Pranzini had not gone to confession.... he mounted the scaffold... he turned, took hold of the crucifix the priest was holding out to him and kissed the sacred wounds three times! Then his soul went to receive the merciful sentence of Him who declares that in heaven there will be more joy over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance!” [Luke 15:7] (p 100)
- We discussed Thérèse focus on and concern for Pranzini and were reminded that it is natural and *important* to pray for the victims of crimes – for many reasons which we won’t list here. However, we were reminded by Thérèse how important it also is to pray for those who inflict harm on others, that they must be turned away from evil and drawn to Christ instead. Our prayers must seek to have the criminal healed as well. We reflected on the profound impact of doing so: that their soul might then be able to find eternity with God. We also imagined the ripple effect on others that bringing a criminal to Christ could have – the harm that might not be done to the next person and rippling positive effect that might then have on many. By healing one, we have the opportunity to avoid hurt and hate cast on others. Our prayers for conversion of those who do harm can have incredible impact.
- We also should not overlook how Thérèse taps the opportunity for ‘prayer magnified’ by offering a Mass for her intention of the conversion of Pranzini. She recognized that she must call on the prayers of many, not just on her own.
- Please read p 99 – 102. From this time, Thérèse draws from the Passion to help quench the Jesus’ thirst. She seeks knowledge and applies herself to learn. She draws often from *The Imitation of Christ*, nearly memorizing it.

➤ Proofs and spiritual direction

- Thérèse wanted deeply to be able to show Jesus her love (underline added): “I wanted to love, to love Jesus with a passion, giving Him a thousand proofs of my love while it was possible.” “I copied out several passages on perfect love, on the reception God will give His Elect at the moment He becomes their Reward, great and eternal...” (p 102-103)
- She and her sister Céline became very close (p 103). Sharing, learning, relying on each other. Céline becomes, in essence, her spiritual director. We noted that one by one, in their own time and manner, each of her family takes a role in Thérèse’s spiritual direction. Thérèse is open to, receives and accepts spiritual direction from many sources such as the spiritual books, the Bible, art, nature. Thérèse and Céline are called to the words of St. John of the Cross (see below). “Yes, it was very lightly we followed in Jesus’ footprints. The sparks of love He sowed so generously in our souls, and the delicious and strong wine He gave us to drink made all passing things disappear before our eyes...” (p 103). They understand that the journey starts lightly and then we just need to let the sparks of His love start to burn in us. The reference to the “delicious and strong wine” which should fill us called to mind the Anima Christi prayer (below):

From the Canticle of St John of the Cross (p 103)

Following Your footsteps
Maidens run lightly along the way;
The touch of a spark,
The special wine,
Cause flowings in them from the
balsam of God.

Anima Christi (Latin for ‘Soul of Christ’) Find in *Breaking Bread* 2019, p 239

Soul of Christ, sanctify me;	Separated from you, let me never be;
Body of Christ, save me;	For the evil one protect me;
Blood of Christ, wash me;	At the hour of my death, call me;
Passion of Christ, strengthen me;	And close to you bid me;
O good Jesus, hear me;	That with your saints, I may be,
Within your wounds hide me;	Praising you forever and ever. Amen.

- Thérèse relies on her spiritual advisors and bears fruit because of it. In this example, both Céline and the Pope offer her good counsel: She is about to meet Pope Leo XIII and desires to speak with him; she knows, however, that it’s not proper to do so. She seeks Céline’s advise. Céline offers simple but powerful encouragement, “*Speak!*”. In doing so, Thérèse receives important words of wisdom from the pope, (underline added) “Go... go... You will enter if God wills it!” “... so penetrating and so convincing, it seems to me I still hear it.” (p 134–135)
- She also is inspired through the beauty and power of God’s hand in nature. She reminds us to see, take in and thank God for what we experience through nature each day: “... opportunity of contemplating many marvels... mountains... clouds... waterfalls... valleys... ferns... heather... how much good these beauties of nature, poured out in such profusion, did my soul.” “When I saw all these beauties very profound thoughts came to life in my soul. I seemed to understand already the grandeur of God and the marvels of heaven.” (p 125). Thérèse later expresses that “I shall remember what my eyes have seen today.” knowing that after she enters the convent, these sights will not be available to her, so she captures them in her mind, always available to draw upon. The Psalms routinely sing praises to God to all that he has created in nature.

➤ The practice of virtue; how far would you go for God?

- We noted that virtue does not come overnight. It takes determination, practice and will. In time, step by step, the virtue we're practicing comes more easily: *"Graces as great as this were not to be without fruit and it was abundant. The practice of virtue became sweet and natural to us. At the beginning, it is true, my face betrayed the struggle, but little by little this vanished..."* (p 104)
- By the end of Chapter 6, we see that Thérèse knew her weakness and was determined to overcome it: how to get control of and hold back her will, her actions and let God's come forward. *"My mortifications consisted in breaking my will, always so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a reply, in rendering little services without any recognition..."* (p 143). We discussed that this is hard, hard to do. It is a daily struggle. Her recognition of her weakness and persistence to overcome it offers us inspiration and guidance. It is not about making our will prevail but making our will serve God. This called to mind Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "... yet not what I will but what you will" [Mark 14:36].
- *"This trial was very great for my faith, but the One whose heart watches even when he sleeps made me understand that to those whose faith is like that of mustard seed He grants miracles and moves mountains in order to strengthen this faith which is still small."* (p 142)
- She also reminded us that we must receive Jesus to aid us in our journey (underline added): *"...the attraction she [Thérèse] feels to receive her God. It* is not to remain in a golden ciborium** that He comes to us each day from heaven."* (p 104) *Jesus; **the vessel that holds the Blessed Sacrament.
- We were taken by her intense desire to love Jesus; her reflection and concern that *"He would never receive a single act of love from hell"* Yet in her desire that Jesus be loved and glorified everywhere, she proposes: *"...then I said to God that to please Him I would consent to see myself plunged into hell so that He would be loved eternally in that place of blasphemy."* Thérèse would go to hell so that love would be there to give glory to God! We reflected on just how far would we go? We asked ourselves – would we have ever thought to ask to be plunged to hell to bring God's love and glory there? Wow. Would we sacrifice that much to ensure the presence God's love and to give glory to God in the darkest of places? It was a hard reality check. Thérèse continued, recognizing that God wants only our eternal happiness, *"I realized this [spending time in hell] could not give Him glory since He desires only our happiness..."*. But we might ask, what can we offer to bring God's love and glory to others? To show God how true our love for him is?

➤ The beauty of purity and trust. The need to guard both; trust as an access point of evil

- We discussed the family, particularly the parents, role in forming young children. Having spent a day with some young girls, Thérèse reflected, *"Seeing innocent souls at such close range, I understood what a misfortune it was when they were not formed in their early years, when they are soft as wax upon which one can imprint either virtue or vice."* (p 113)
- Thérèse notes that *"little birds learn to sing by listening to their parents, so children learn the science of the virtues, the sublime song of Divine Love from souls responsible for forming them."* (p 113)
- She offers a story of a little linnet bird who had lost its mother and so was kept with a canary. The canary made joyful tunes, the linnet couldn't sing the same way but so wanted to imitate the canary. After much effort, *"His song, though much softer, was absolutely the same as that of the canary."* (p 113–114). Thérèse recalls fondly that her sister, Pauline (her first stand-in mother) taught her to sing. And, how in turn, each family member participated in each other's spiritual growth. It is also true that what is easy for one (the canary) may be difficult for another (the linnet) so we must aid those who face a difficulty; encourage and help them if we're able.
- We discussed that today, as in the past, we should protect our children as they don't know how to identify evil or how to recognize the small ways evil begins to take up residence and pull us from virtue (underline added): *"I prayed to Our Lady of Victories to keep far from me everything that could tarnish my purity... I was still unacquainted with evil and so was apprehensive about making its discovery. I had not yet experienced that to the pure all things are pure..."* (p 123)
- She reminded us that we are all called to help in Jesus' mission: *"Jesus wills to be helped in His divine cultivation of souls."* (p 113)