



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

Team Notes For:

- **Chapter Seven:
The First Years in Carmel
(1888 – 1890)**
- **Chapter Eight:
Profession and Offering to
Merciful Love (1890 – 1895)**

Next Week's Reading:

- **Chapter Nine
Pgs 187 – 200**
- **Chapter Ten
Pgs 205 – 229**

“love which is no longer I but You”

- **Thérèse shares the struggles of her journey with God – we share them in our own journey; Allow our souls to expand**
- Though she faced difficult struggles (examples below), she didn't give up. She relied on the authentic peace and joy that God offers. God does help us through the turbulence of life if we let him (underline added): *“...my soul experienced a PEACE so sweet, so deep, it would be impossible to express it. For seven years and a half that inner peace has remained my lot, and has not abandoned me in the midst of the greatest trials.”* (p 148)
 - Her journey, like ours, is filled with ups and downs; joys are often met with struggles. It is an ongoing journey. After the joy of entering the convent she remarked: *“...my first steps met with more thorns than roses!”* (p 149)
 - She learned to accept these trials as part of her cross, that with each struggle God was slowly preparing her for life's next trial. This served her well; she was not defeated by struggles, including the severe illness at the end of her life. The reminder to us: God is with us on our journey: *“He doesn't like pointing everything out at once to souls. He generally gives His light little by little.”* (p 158) We have to seek that light and be strengthened by it. *“And so in this exterior darkness, I was interiorly illumined!”* (p 159) She found joy in untethering herself from worldly issues, things, and criticisms: *“...while still in the world, were no longer of it.”* (p 157)
 - Despite her strong faith, she still faced trials of faith. She drew upon the peace and joy of God to see her through: *“Spiritual aridity was my daily bread and, deprived of all consolation, I was still the happiest of all creatures since all my desires had been satisfied.”* (p 157; see reference above from p 148) This brought St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta to mind – another example of a strong interior faith in God even while struggling through years of spiritual aridity and darkness. Mother Teresa persevered; she could have turned away and served self, but she didn't. Look at what she achieved as a result. As did St. Thérèse. They show us that we will face our own ups and downs on our spiritual journey; it's OK if we trust that God is with us.
 - We saw that like any of us, she's not beyond experiencing serious doubts! We learn from Thérèse's experience that we can't second guess ourselves, particularly if we're participating in God's work with love. Even she was tempted relative to her life's vocation and depth of faith, for example, the evening before entering the Carmel community (underline added): *“The darkness was so great that I could see and understand one thing only: I didn't have a vocation.”* *“...it was a temptation from the devil”.* (p 166 the full paragraph is rich with the challenge of doubt and temptation to turn away from God.) And later, *“...I was having great interior trials of all kinds, even to the point of asking myself whether heaven really existed.”* (p 173)
 - Thérèse even fears revealing all her struggles in confession! But she reminds us of its beauty: *“...felt disposed to say nothing of my interior dispositions since I didn't know how to express them, but I had hardly entered the confessional when I felt my soul expand. After speaking only a few words, I was understood in a marvelous way...”* (p 173)
 - Despite all her progress to separate from worldly distractions, she's still dealing with her humanness and shares with brutal honesty her less-than-pure intents, for example: *“I understood that my intense desire to make Profession was mixed with great self-love”.* She recognizes the issue: *“...but what I don't want to be is the cause of my separation from You through my fault.”* And she increasingly recognizes the depth of faith itself: *“the more one advances, the more one sees the goal is still far off.”* (p 158)
 - We were reminded of St. Paul's words of advice for our own faith journey: *“...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* [Philippians 2:12b–13]
- **Seek simplicity**
- The Novice Mistress guides Thérèse, and us, to see that we should strive for simplicity via her profound view of a simple soul: *“My child, it seems to me you don't have very much to tell your Superiors.’ ‘Why do you say that, Mother?’ ‘Because your soul is extremely simple, but when you will be perfect, you will be even more simple; the closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes.”* (p 151) For us, this related to not getting caught up in complexity – truth and love are simple, not complex. We also can't get caught up in worldly things – the latest gadget, décor item, car, clothes and housefuls of things that don't bring true happiness but distract us from God's mission for us: love of others and God. It's true that we can't take our worldly stuff, views and habits with us when

we die... better to shed them now and build up what we can take: love for God. We discussed the freedom of being unburdened and uncomplicated by the world and not seeking the world's praise. *"He whose Kingdom is not of this world showed me that true wisdom consists in 'desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing'."* (p 152) – Thérèse seeks to die of self and find happiness in helping in God's mission.

- To understand Thérèse in a nutshell, please read p 275 (referenced in footnote on p 167; it will be provided in a packet of Bonus Materials when we finish the book). This letter is nothing short of beautiful and perhaps a prayer we should all say.

➤ The gift of pardoning; the grace of love

- Marie, Thérèse's sister, approached her on the eve of Thérèse's entrance into Carmel and *"asked pardon for the troubles she thought she caused me."* (p 147). This struck us from different perspectives partly because we've not been informed of the possible transgressions that Marie might have made – What were they? Were they really pardonable offenses? Clearly Marie thought so, but we're not so sure Thérèse did. But does that matter? The beauty of seeking forgiveness is in the outreach which is an expression of love. Whether a wrong was done or not. Regardless of what happened or who caused it, being regretful of a situation is a recognition of disharmony (for one or both involved) and a desire for harmony. Requesting pardon is equally as valuable as giving pardon. Marie was seeking harmony – for her own soul? for Thérèse's? for the harmony between them? We don't know – but Marie thought it important to address. And we know this gesture was something Thérèse remembered.
- On love (underline added): *"How sweet is the way of love, dear Mother. True, one can fall or commit infidelities, but, knowing how to draw profit from everything, love quickly consumes everything that can be displeasing to Jesus; it leaves nothing but a humble and profound peace in the depths of the heart."* (p 179)
- Thérèse sought to offer kindness to her fellow sisters (underline added): *"... to render them all sorts of little services. Love for mortification was given me, and this love was all the greater because I was allowed nothing by way of satisfying it."* (p 159) Thérèse understood well the desire to serve God in secret, to be unknown but by God. This reminded us of Scripture when we are to fast in private and not display it for all to see. We are to serve God, for God, not to win acclaim by others.
- *"...I recognized from EXPERIENCE that happiness consists in hiding oneself, in remaining ignorant of created things. I understood that without love all works are nothing, even the most dazzling, such as raising the dead to life and converting peoples."* (p 175) We discussed that God knows our true intent, that we are called to do God's will with love, not to check the box. For example, do we serve the poor to check the box that we helped someone else or do we do it because we love our fellow man and want to help him? Do we go to Mass to check the box or do we go to hear what God is saying to us in Scripture and to receive Jesus in the Eucharist? What is our intent?
- When we serve God in love, our soul expands. This is how we can become saints. See p 178-9 from the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross poem on acts of love.

➤ Move past the unjust; God knows us in a way the world can't; trust in the love God offers

- Thérèse understands that God sees us in secret, in the quiet of our own heart; he knows us completely. We are known by God and so we shouldn't be concerned with what others think. She trusts that the truth of our faith will be revealed at the Last Judgment. This is her solace when she suffers quietly: *"...nothing revealed my suffering, which was all the more painful since I alone was aware of it. Ah! what a surprise we shall have at the end of the world when we shall read the story of souls!"* (p 149) or when she is falsely accused: *"... our Mistress, thinking it was my fault [it was not her fault], showed it to me and told me to be more careful in the future. Without a word, I kissed the floor, promised to be more careful in the future. Because of my lack of virtue these little practices cost me very much and I had to console myself with the thought that at the Last Judgment everything would be revealed."* (p 159) Wow, we felt she had a lot more virtue than we... possessing the strength to be silent. Here we discussed the true difficulty to keep silent, to withhold body language, etc. in the face of injustice (when wronged, severely treated) or facing trials. Thérèse is exemplary in holding back her will and thereby not causing even more disruption. There is much grace in giving love and dispensing with anger. It shows a maturity in taking the long view of what's really important. Thérèse trusts completely in the grace of God, not the judgment of man. Wow.
- On the Last Judgment: She trusts that God knows all and the truth will be revealed – false accusations and hurts will eventually be understood by all at the Last Judgment. This shouldn't cause us embarrassment but rather joy and inspiration to work through our transgressions and sins. We shouldn't expect a time of shame but of celebration of the trials and sins we overcame in order to spend eternity with God. Consider the joy we felt when the criminal

Pranzini accepted Jesus prior to his death! All in heaven will rejoice in the struggles each of us overcomes in order to spend eternity with God! So while it is difficult in the short-run to put aside self, we'll see and celebrate the reward in the long-run. Remember the joy of the father in the story of the prodigal son when his son returns!

- God understands us so much – we took consolation in how Thérèse explained another facet of God's justice (underline added): *"What a sweet joy it is to think that God is Just, i.e., that He takes into account our weakness, that He is perfectly aware of our fragile nature. What should I fear then? Ah! must not the infinitely just God, who deigns to pardon the faults of the prodigal son with so much kindness, be just also toward me who am with Him always?"* (p 180) God knows our frailty – aren't we fortunate? We should approach him grateful of the mercy he offers.

➤ Saving souls and praying for priests

- Thérèse's reaffirmed her mission to save souls and underscored her growing appreciation for the need to pray for priests (first realized on her trip to Rome). *"...what I had come to Carmel for: 'I came to save souls and especially to pray for priests'."* (p 149). This engaged a lot of conversation. It is very easy for us to see those in religious life as very holy and such good people (most are) – it seems they have it so easy. Yet the truth of it is that only Jesus was perfect, the rest of us struggle including priests – they're human too. We agreed that our priests need extra prayers – there are fewer priests and yet there are so many to shepherd – in an increasingly challenging world. And, priests have their own trials; they are in great need of our daily support and prayers.
- *"...I wanted to deliver all the souls from purgatory and convert all sinners."* (p 167) Thérèse never strays from the importance to pray for souls – not losing sight that this is what Jesus asked of her: to help save souls. Through her writings that are shared with us, Thérèse invites us to help in this mission.

➤ Studying the face of Jesus, finding true love

- Thérèse continues with her focus on the Passion of Jesus through deep meditation of his face while on the cross. She dedicated much contemplation to absorb Jesus in that moment: his tears, the blood he shed, the painful crown of thorns he wore, the anguish, the wounds – she studied suffering and found his love for us. *"The tears and blood of Jesus were to be her [Thérèse's] dew, and her Sun was His adorable Face veiled with tears. Until my coming to Carmel, I had never fathomed the depths of the treasures hidden in the Holy Face. ... I learned to know these treasures... the mysteries of love hidden in the Face of our Spouse... I understood that real glory was."* (p 152) Memo: "she first signed her name as 'Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face' the day she received the habit." (footnote, p 152)

➤ The Catholic Church is different now; Many graces flow from times of trial

- Thérèse has benefited from many who acted as spiritual directors for her. She comes to understand an important truth: *"I have said that Jesus was 'my Director'... the Director of directors"* (p 151) We discussed how Thérèse was brought up in a different time, surrounded by faith. This most certainly helped to form her. We lamented the shrinking trust in God in today's world, the shrinking of the Church. We were forced to ask ourselves: what are we doing to help?
- We discussed that we (those in the Church) needed more instruction on our faith. Again, we had to ask ourselves: are we taking ownership of this gap; what are we doing to help? We debated how this could occur and that there are many ways (homilies at Mass, Bible Study, Faith Programs, Book Clubs, Faith Groups, etc.). Most have a common denominator – we own the responsibility for understanding our faith and can't blame a lack thereof on someone else. Yes, someone else could have been more helpful but if they weren't or aren't, then we need to take the lead: listen to the Scripture readings at Mass, get more out of Mass! If the point of the reading isn't clear, get a study Bible and read just those Scripture selections before Mass (daily readings available at www.usccb.org (under the Bible tab). A helpful study Bible: *The Didache Bible with commentaries based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church – Ignatius Bible Edition – Ignatius Press*)
- It's OK to follow God, we should not worry about what others think. "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light." [Luke 11:33 – read through 36]
- We noted that the Holy Spirit seems to be on the move – more and more are joining lay ministries, more are following the call to religious vocation. We all agreed: in times of great trial, graces do abound. Let's help – pray the *Come, Holy Spirit* prayer (back cover of *Breaking Bread 2019*)
- We must have faith in our Church, the Church that Jesus started: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." [Matthew 16: 18]

- **Death = Birth:** Thérèse refers to her Sister's passing not as the moment of death, but as the moment of her birth in heaven. Beautiful.