



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

Team Notes For:

- **Chapter Nine:**
My Vocation is Love
(1896)
- **Chapter Ten:**
The Trial of Faith
(1896 – 1897)

Next Week's

Reading:

- **Chapter Eleven**
Pgs 233 – 259
- **Appendices**
Pgs 275 – 278
- **Epilogue: re-read**

The Fruit of Love & Suffering

➤ **The new commandment -- Love like Jesus loves**

- Thérèse spent time reflecting on the commandments of love and came to see that the new commandment changed everything... and raised the bar. The second commandment: “... *is LIKE the first: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (P 219) [Matthew 22:39]. She considered loving others as we love ourselves: her observation was that we love ourselves imperfectly – we don’t always treat ourselves well (physically, mentally). If this is the case, how can we truly love someone else and treat them well? Jesus’ new commandment is thus put forward and is in fact, much harder: “...*He said to them with inexpressible tenderness: ‘A new commandment I give you that you love one another: THAT AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.’*” (p 220) [John 13:34-35] (Underline added): “...*He wills to die on the cross, for He said: ‘Greater love than this no man has than to lay down his life for his friends.’*” (p 220) [John 15:13]
- She recognized that each day, she would see herself more clearly “...I expect each day to discover new imperfections in myself” (p 224) and as she recognized this and sought to embrace the new commandment, she soon recognized that her love of others was thus imperfect and to understand how to love in spite of those imperfections (underline added): “*Dear Mother, when meditating upon these words of Jesus, I understood how imperfect was my love for my Sister. I saw I didn’t love them as God Loves them. Ah! I understand now that charity consist in bearing with the faults of others, in not being surprised at their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice.*” (p 220)
- Thérèse practiced the art loving those we struggle to like (underline added): “*There is in the Community a Sister who has the faculty of displeasing me in everything, in her ways, her words, her character, everything seems very disagreeable to me. And still, she is a holy religious who must be very pleasing to God.... I told myself that charity must not consist of feeling but in works; then I set myself to doing for this Sister what I would do for the person I love the most... I wasn’t content simply praying very much for this Sister who gave me so many struggles, but I took care to render her all the services possible and when I was tempted to answer back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile...*” (p 222-223) And Thérèse’s approach bore beautiful fruit: [the Sister approached Thérèse] “... ‘*what attracts you so much toward me; every time you look at me, I see you smile?’ Ah! what attracted me was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes sweet what is most bitter.*” (p 223)
- “...*the Church is composed of different members, and that the eye cannot be the hand at one and the same time*” (p 194)

➤ **Love enables action – The little way of day-to-day love**

- She appreciated the enormity of this commandment and yet understood that God works within each person uniquely, which gave her hope and solace: “*how different are the ways through which the Lord leads souls!... It seems to me... they are equally pleasing to Him, since all of them followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and since the Lord has said: ‘Tell the just man ALL is well.’*” (p 207)
- She began to see the bigger picture in that true love enables action (underline added): “*I understood that the Church had a body composed of different members... I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church’s members act...*” (p 194) “*I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES... IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!*” (P 194)
- Thérèse sought to spread love – even when the conditions were challenging. Her world was limited so she needed to work within that setting. To do so, she sought to reshape how love unfolded from her (underline added): “*But how will she [Thérèse] prove her love since love is proved by works?... I have no other means of proving my love for you other than... not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love.*” (p 196)... “*I shall sing even when I must gather my flowers in the midst of thorns.*” (p 196)

➤ Look for the reflection of God

- Chapter ten is full of examples of the day-to-day ways that Thérèse, and we, put others down, judge their ways, don't treat them well and think unkindly of them. She learned and shared, in a brutally honest way, that persecution exists in many forms – that our emotions which are fleeting and unreliable can propel us towards a hidden form of persecution (underline added): *“No doubt, we don't have any enemies in Carmel, but there are feelings. One feels attracted to this Sister, whereas with regard to another, one would make a long detour in order to avoid meeting her. And so, without even knowing it, she becomes the subject of persecution.”* (p 225)
- We began to see that Thérèse realized that avoidance only goes so far in seeking virtue and offering love; in fact, it doing so might allow unloving thoughts of others to persist. So, she challenged herself to have a change in attitude, a change in approach to engaging with others.
- Thérèse began to see that the quest for virtue goes beyond overcoming our faults, that we must also change our view of others; we won't succeed in our quest for virtue until we do this. She compels us to look for the reflection of God that is within each person (underline added): *“When I wish to increase this love in me, and when especially, the devil tries to place before the eyes of my soul the faults of such and such a Sister who is less attractive to me, I hasten to search out her virtues, her good intentions; I tell myself that even if I did see her fall once, she could have easily won a great number of victories which she is hiding through humility, and that even what appears to me as a fault can very easily be an act of virtue because of her intention.”* (p 221)
- Thérèse understood that all love comes from God. The more that we unite ourselves to God, the more capacity we have to love genuinely (underline added): *“Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters.”* (p 221) She reflected on the inherent goodness that comes forth from within us when love takes root: *“...when charity has buried its roots deeply within the soul, it show itself externally.”* (p 228)

➤ We face trials in believing all that God teaches, reflecting God to others and finding God within others

- She knew that she couldn't overcome her trial of a lack of belief in heaven on her own (this lasted for about a year). Thérèse prayed to 'want to believe' in heaven as her first step. *“When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE.”* (p 214). We discussed that if we don't believe in something, for example a teaching of the Church, it's OK to start from a distance away. Meaning that the first step may be to pray 'to want to want to believe the teaching' and the fruit of that prayer leads to the next step, to pray 'to want to believe' which, with the help of the Holy Spirit, brings us to pray 'to believe'.
- Again, Thérèse perseveres through this trial of faith rather than stepping away from her faith – and yields much from it: *“while I do not have the joy of faith, I am trying to carry out its works at least. I believe I have made more acts of faith in this past year than all through my whole life”* (p 213)
- We found many stories of her struggle to reflect God and to find God in others... pages 227-228 offer some good examples. On page 227 the other sisters are trying to keep her company and offer cheer – they're seeking to be charitable. Sometimes, those attempts fall short and she finds their gestures of kindness a burden and very distracting; she's very ill. She recognized and understood, though, that giving and receiving love can be very challenging.
- She discovered that true giving is in fact giving, not lending: *“Although it is difficult to give to one who asks, it is even more so to allow one to take what belongs to you, without asking it back. O Mother, I say it is difficult; I should have said that this seems difficult, for the yoke of the Lord is sweet and light.”* (p 225) *“...if anyone takes something which is for my use, I must not appear to be sorry about this but happy at being relieved of it.”* (p 227)
- She learned to appreciate the love others were seeking to give her as reflected in response to a dream about a Sister who had passed: *“And when I understood to what degree she loved me, how indifferent I had been toward her, my heart was filled with love and gratitude”* (p 192)

➤ The fruit of suffering

- We discussed that when we suffer and lament our suffering, rather than finding value in it, we are focused on self. We are called to focus on others, on Jesus. Further, we know that Jesus intends a greater good to result from our suffering. We may know or come to know what the benefit will be of our suffering *or we may not*. But how do we reconcile this with the sheer desolation of suffering? We must trust in Jesus and in God's larger plan. Consider Thérèse, she noted the fruits of her trial: *“Since the time he permitted me to suffer temptations against faith, He has greatly increased the spirit of faith in my heart”* (p 218).

- Interestingly, Thérèse believed her writings were of no significant value. She wrote them in an act of obedience; she suffered much in writing them – she was in the throes of the last months of her life. She often stated that she was rambling and she that didn't always understand how her writings would be helpful and it took her much effort to write. But look what her interior and exterior suffering has done to help so many souls! She could not have possibly understood it at the time.
- We learned that she showed us a way of responding to Jesus' call to love – in both thought and deed, seeking and struggling to put others first. She tackled this in the only way available to her – she prayed and did small gestures, as many as she could, one by one.
- Jesus himself suffered in order to bring us to God (underline added): *"You willed to suffer and to die in order to draw souls to the bosom of the Eternal Fire of the Blessed Trinity."* (p 199) Suffering is an opportunity for us too. We may not know who will be drawn to God because we accepted and embraced our suffering, but we must trust that if Jesus trusted God to do so, we should too. We also noted that when we suffer we better empathize with others and their struggles. Lastly we found that our need for God to give us strength and help see us through life is more vivid amidst suffering: we have an opportunity to open our hearts to God.

➤ Thérèse's martyrdom for us

- We reflected on the experience of her suffering in her final months (see Epilogue) and knew that the illness had taken hold of her much earlier than that. We noted the number of references she made to her daily struggle to write her memoirs in this time: *"my pen has lost its lightness"* (p 227), difficulty in writing 'with trembling hands', of the 'heaviness of her books'. We came to realize that she was writing the memoir not only out of obedience but out of martyrdom – it was very difficult and tiring work; she was often interrupted by the sisters seeking to offer her support; she was weak and very ill with Tuberculosis – yet she carried on. We could only marvel in the gift her suffering has brought to millions.
- Thérèse embraced the struggle of tackling and overcoming the day-to-day little things that become obstacles of love. She is known for this 'little way': she showed us that the little things can be hard but also powerfully impactful. That they are easy to say and much harder to do, if we're honest with ourselves. She reflects on the guidance of St. John of the Cross to do these acts with genuine love: *"the smallest act of PURE LOVE is of more value to her [the Church] than all other works together"* [St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle] (p 197). And Thérèse challenges herself, as we all should (underline added): *"But is PURE LOVE in my heart?"* (p 197)
- But, we found that St. Thérèse's teachings go far beyond her "little way". Thérèse persevered through a devastating illness to impart the graces that God had given her on us. A task that was difficult for her and made abundantly clear to us as we repeatedly read the effort it took for her to write. Then we noticed the dates that she was writing this memoir – in the months and weeks before her death. The effects of her illness must have been overwhelming by that time. She suffered much in writing her memoir. Our Book Club was blown away: not only by her 'little way' but a huge act of love that came from amidst her suffering.