

THE COMPLETE  
THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX



*Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus*

PARACLETE  
GIANTS

*The* COMPLETE  
*L'hérésie*  
OF LISIEUX

*Translated and Edited by*  
*Robert J. Edmonson, CJ*



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*The Complete Thérèse of Lisieux*

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INTRODUCTION TO  
*The Complete Thérèse of Lisieux*

**W**hen in 1997 Pope John Paul II declared Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church, the number of saints with this title rose to thirty-three, of whom only three are women: Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and the humble saint whose story is told in these pages.

Thérèse would probably be surprised to find herself designated a Doctor, even though her life's aim was, as she told her father at an early age, to be "a great saint." Was she extraordinary? To be sure. But she taught us that ordinary people can have an extraordinary love for God if our hearts are turned to God as hers was.

No better explanation of Thérèse's contribution to all of Christendom can be given than that of Pope John Paul II, in his homily of October 19, 1997:

Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is the youngest of all the "doctors of the Church," but her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity, and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters. . . .

Thérèse of Lisieux did not only grasp and describe the profound truth of Love as the centre and heart of the Church, but in her short life she lived it intensely. It is precisely this convergence of doctrine and concrete experience, of truth and life, of teaching and practice, which shines with particular brightness in this saint, and which makes her an attractive model especially for young people and for those who are seeking true meaning for their life.

Before the emptiness of so many words, Thérèse offers another solution, the one Word of salvation which, understood and lived in silence, becomes a source of renewed life. She counters a rational culture, so often overcome by practical materialism, with the disarming simplicity of the "little way" which, by returning to the essentials, leads to the secret of all life: the divine Love that surrounds and penetrates every human venture.

In a time like ours, so frequently marked by an ephemeral and hedonistic culture, this new doctor of the Church proves to be remarkably effective in enlightening the mind and heart of those who hunger and thirst for truth and love.

## THE HISTORICAL SETTING

St. Thérèse of Lisieux was born on January 2, 1873, and baptized two days later as Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin. This was just two years after the Franco-Prussian War had ended with the collapse of the French armed forces, the ending of France's Second Empire, and the creation of the Third Republic. The nineteenth-century Church into which Thérèse was baptized had fallen greatly from its former glory. The leaders of the French Revolution ravaged the Church during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and even after the restoration of the French monarchy in 1814, other revolutions broke out in 1830 and 1848, creating conditions that would prevent the Church from ever regaining its pre-Revolutionary power. And yet, in 1815 the Carmelite order was reintroduced into France, and by 1880 there were 113 convents of Discalced Carmelite nuns.

The Carmelites take their name from Mount Carmel, a group of mountains in the Holy Land. Inspired by the prophet Elijah, who had defeated the prophets of Baal on these same mountains, a thirteenth-century group of men comprised of former Crusaders and pilgrims settled on Mount Carmel and took the name of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1206, Saint Albert of Jerusalem gave these hermits a Rule of Life, and the Church officially recognized them as an Order. In 1452, Blessed John Soreth, then Prior General of the Order, added a Second Order of Carmelites, comprised of women religious, and a Third Order of Carmelites, also called the Carmelite Order Secular, or Tertiaries, consisting of lay persons who felt called to live in harmony with Carmelite spirituality outside of convents or monasteries.

In the sixteenth century, the great Spanish Carmelite mystic St. Teresa of Avila was inspired to renew the fervor of the order and return it to



its spiritual beginnings. Aided by St. John of the Cross, she began a reform movement that spread to the friars as well. After her death, convents and monasteries of her reform were established in France and Belgium, and from these two countries daughter houses were founded in England, Scotland, and Wales. Today Carmelite convents and monasteries can be found in almost every country of the world.

Founded in 1838, the Carmel of Lisieux was based on the reformed rule of St. Teresa of Avila. Five nuns from the Carmel of Poitiers established the new Carmel, including two senior nuns, Mother Elizabeth of St. Louis, the Prioress; and Mother Geneviève of St. Teresa, the Sub-Prioress and Novice Mistress, who died in 1891, soon after Thérèse entered the convent.

In the mid-1890s, the Carmel of Lisieux was comprised of twenty-six nuns—twenty-two choir nuns and four lay Sisters. Its superior at the time of Thérèse's entrance, Mother Marie de Gonzague, was an educated woman, a refined member of the nobility. In 1893, Thérèse's elder sister Pauline, who had entered the community before Thérèse and had taken the name of Sister Agnes of Jesus, was elected prioress. Mother Marie and Mother Agnes were to alternate as prioress for a number of years.

## THE MARTIN FAMILY

Thérèse's father, Louis Martin (1823–94), was a successful watchmaker and the manager of his wife's lace-making business. Born into a military family, Louis spent his early years at various French army posts, where he was attracted to the military sense of order and discipline. Feeling drawn to the religious life, at the age of twenty-two Louis attempted to enter the monastery of the Augustinian Canons of the Great St. Bernard Hospice in the Alps. However, disappointed at finding himself unable to master the required Latin courses, Louis left the monastery and took up watchmaking, settling in Alençon.

Thérèse's mother, Zélie Guérin (1831–77), was also from a military family and was also drawn to the religious life. After an attempt to enter the order of Sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu was denied because of her delicate health, she took up the lace-making trade that had made Alençon lace famous throughout France. Talented and creative, she started her own business and soon became extremely successful.

When Louis and Zélie met in Alençon, they found they had much in common. Their similar backgrounds, their love of order and discipline, and their good business sense alone would have made them a good match for each other, but it was their common love of God that drew them into a union of spirit with spirit. They were married on July 13, 1858.

Over the next fifteen years, Louis and Zélie were to have nine children—seven girls and two boys. But as was all too common in the era before modern medicine, both of their boys and two of their girls died at a young age.

When the youngest Martin child was born, there were four surviving sisters: Marie, age twelve; Pauline, age eleven; Léonie, age nine; and Céline, age three. Thérèse was born weak and frail, and the doctors warned the family to prepare for yet another loss. Because Zélie was suffering from breast cancer, Thérèse was sent to a wet nurse, who fed and cared for her. The child survived her illness and grew strong.

### THÉRÈSE'S FIRST YEARS

The future saint had a nature that her mother found challenging. Zélie wrote this about her: “As for the little imp, it’s hard to know how she’ll turn out, she’s so little, so scatterbrained! She has more intelligence than Céline, but she’s not as sweet, and her hardheadedness is practically unshakable. When she says ‘no’ nothing can make her give it up. You could put her in the cellar for a whole day and she’d go to sleep there rather than to say ‘yes.’ Yet she has a heart of gold. She’s full of hugs and says exactly what she thinks.”

Despite her hardheadedness, from her earliest years the “little imp” had a heart turned toward God. “She would never lie for all the gold in the world,” wrote Zélie. “All she talks about is God; she wouldn’t miss saying her prayers for anything.”

Not only did Thérèse talk about God, but also she displayed keen discernment about Him. Zélie wrote, “She comes up with answers that are quite unusual at her age; she shows up Céline, who’s twice as old as she is. The other day Céline was saying, ‘How is it that God can be in such a little Communion host?’ Little Thérèse said, ‘That’s not so surprising since God is all-powerful.’ ‘What does that mean, “all-powerful”?’ ‘Well, it means He can do what He wants! . . .’”

Thérèse recalled one childhood event that revealed much about her character: “One day Léonie, thinking she was now too big to play with dolls, came and found us both with a basket full of dresses and pretty little pieces of cloth intended to make others; on top was sitting her doll. ‘Here, little sisters,’ she said, ‘you *choose*, I’m giving you all this.’ Céline stuck out her hand and took a little ball of yarn that she liked. After thinking about it for a moment, I in turn stuck out my hand and said, ‘*I choose all!*’ And I took the basket without further ceremony.”

## THE DEATH OF THÉRÈSE’S MOTHER

In August of 1877, after a long illness with breast cancer, Zélie Martin lay dying. Thérèse later wrote, “I was going to have to pass through the crucible of trials and to suffer, beginning in my childhood, in order to be able to be offered sooner to Jesus.”

Years later, after Thérèse had entered Carmel, she recounted an event that followed her mother’s funeral. Writing to her sister Pauline, who as Mother Agnes of Jesus was now superior of the convent, she recalled, “All five of us were together, looking at each other sadly. Louise [our maid] was there, too, and upon seeing Céline and me, she said, ‘Poor little girls, you don’t have a mother any more! . . .’ Then Céline jumped into Marie’s arms and said, ‘Well! You will be Mama now.’ Now, I was accustomed to

doing just as she did, but this time I turned toward you, Mother, and, as if the veil over the future had already been torn open, I threw myself into your arms and cried out, ‘Well, for me, Pauline will be Mama!’ ”

Thérèse found that her character had changed: “I, who had been so lively, so expansive, became timid and mild, sensitive to excess. . . . I couldn’t stand the company of strangers, and I resumed my accustomed high spirits only when I was with the intimate family.”

## PRESCHOOL

Shortly after Zélie’s death, Louis moved his family to Lisieux, where they would live close to relatives. Louis took special care of his youngest daughter, who had been deprived so early of her mother. “Every afternoon I would go on a little walk with Papa. We would go visit the Blessed Sacrament, visiting a different church each day, and that’s how I entered the chapel of the Carmelite convent for the first time. Papa showed me the grille in the choir and told me that there were nuns behind it. I certainly didn’t suspect that nine years later I would be one of them! . . .”

Louis had a special nickname for each of his daughters: For Thérèse it was “my little queen”—and she in turn affectionately called him “my dear king.” Thérèse blossomed under her father’s care: “Oh! How could I tell you all the tenderness that Papa showered on his little queen? There are things that the heart feels, but that words and even thoughts can’t manage to express.”

Every winter Thérèse would fall sick: “When little Thérèse was sick, something that happened every winter, it’s impossible to say with what motherly tenderness she was taken care of.” Pauline would care for her and serve as her teacher and confidante, just as she would, years later, at Carmel.

Sundays were special days in the Martin family, and Thérèse loved going to church services and sitting with her father. She learned as much from him as from the services themselves: “I used to look at Papa

more often than at the preacher; his beautiful face told me so many things! . . . Sometimes his eyes used to fill with *tears* that he would try in vain to hold back. He seemed already not to hold on to earth, so much did his soul love to plunge into eternal truths. . . .” As Sundays were ending, she would grow sad: “I used to think how the day of *rest* was going to end . . . and the next day I’d have to go back to life, work, and learning lessons, and my heart would feel the *exile* of the world. . . . I would long for the eternal rest of heaven, the *Sunday* where the sun never sets in the *Homeland!*”

### SCHOOL YEARS

When Thérèse was eight and a half, Louis sent her to join Céline as a day boarder at Lisieux’s Benedictine Abbey school of Notre-Dame du Pré. Thérèse was unhappy to be away from home: “I’ve often heard that time spent at school is the best and the sweetest time of life. That’s not how it was for me; the five years I spent there were the saddest of my life. If I hadn’t had my dear Céline with me, I wouldn’t have been able to stay a single month without falling sick. . . .”

The homeschooling that Thérèse had received from Marie and Pauline had prepared her well: “You had taught me so well, dear Mother [Pauline], that upon arriving at the school I was the most advanced of the children my age. I was placed in a class of pupils who were all bigger than I was.” But being with older children was a trial for Thérèse. “Fortunately, each night I would go home to my father, and there my heart would expand. I would jump into my king’s lap, telling him about the grades that had been given to me, and his kiss would make me forget all my troubles. . . .”

The years settled into a routine, with Céline watching out for her little sister at the Abbey boarding school, especially concerning her ever-precarious health.

The routine was shattered, however, when Thérèse learned of Pauline’s upcoming departure for Carmel. “I didn’t know what ‘Carmel’ was,

but I understood that Pauline was going to leave me to enter into a convent. . . . I felt as if a sword had been thrust into my heart.”

This was the moment when Thérèse became aware of her own vocation: “I will always remember, beloved Mother, with what tenderness you comforted me. . . . Then you explained to me about the life at Carmel that seemed so beautiful to me. As I was going over in my mind everything that you had told me, I felt that Carmel was *the desert* where God wanted me as well to go and hide. . . . I felt it with so much strength that there wasn’t the slightest doubt in my heart. This was not the dream of a child who lets herself be carried away, but the *certainty* of a Divine call. I wanted to go to Carmel, not for *Pauline*, but for *Jesus alone*.”

After Pauline’s entry into Carmel, once a week Louis and the other girls would go visit her at the convent. “Every Thursday we would go as a *family* to the convent, and I, who was used to speaking at length, heart to heart, with *Pauline*, obtained with great difficulty two or three minutes at the end of the meeting. Of course I spent them crying, and I went away with my heart broken. . . . [I]t didn’t take me long to fall sick.”

#### MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS AND OUR LADY’S SMILE

Around Easter 1883, Thérèse was struck with an undiagnosed illness. The family called in a doctor, who concurred that Thérèse was seriously ill. Later, Thérèse wrote, “for a long time after I got well I thought that I had become sick on purpose, and that was a *true martyrdom* for my soul.”

As the family lavished care on their littlest member, April gave way to Mary’s month—May—and it was to Mary that Thérèse turned for comfort: “All of nature was adorning itself with flowers and breathing gaiety. Only the ‘little flower’ was languishing and seemed to be forever wilted. . . . However, she had one Sun near her, and that Sun was the *miraculous Statue* of the Blessed Virgin that had spoken twice to Mama. And often, quite often, the little flower turned its petals toward that blessed Star. . . .

“Finding no help on earth, poor little Thérèse had turned toward her Heavenly Mother. . . . Suddenly the Blessed Virgin seemed *beautiful* to me, *so beautiful* that I had never seen anything so beautiful. Her face was breathing inexpressible goodness and tenderness, but what penetrated right to the depths of my soul was the ‘lovely smile of the Blessed Virgin.’ Then all my sufferings melted away, and two big tears burst from my eyelids and streaked silently down my cheeks—but these were tears of an unadulterated joy. . . . Oh! I thought, the Blessed Virgin smiled at me, how happy I am. . . .”

From that moment on, Thérèse began to get well.

## FIRST COMMUNION

Thérèse now immersed herself in preparations for receiving her first Communion. “The ‘beautiful day of days’ arrived at last. What indescribable memories have left in my soul the *slightest details* of this day from heaven! . . . The joyous waking at first light, the *respectful* and tender hugs of the teachers and the older classmates. . . . The big room filled with *snow-white garments* that each child in turn saw herself clothed with. Above all the entrance into the chapel and the *morning* singing of the beautiful hymn, ‘O holy Altar surrounded by Angels!’ ”

And then Thérèse received her first Communion. “Oh! How sweet was the first kiss of Jesus on my soul! . . . It was a kiss of *love*. . . . For a long time Jesus and poor little Thérèse had been *looking at* each other and understanding each other. . . . That day it was no longer a *look*, but a *fusion*. They were no longer *two*; Thérèse had disappeared, like a drop of water that disappears into the ocean. . . . After that Communion, my desire to receive God became greater and greater, and I obtained permission to receive it on all the principal feast days.”

## CONFIRMATION

“A short time after my first Communion, I went on retreat again for my Confirmation. I had prepared myself with great care to receive the visit of the Holy Spirit. . . . Ordinarily only one day of retreat was spent in preparation for Confirmation, but since the Bishop wasn’t able to come on the appointed day, I had the consolation of having two days of solitude. . . . Oh! How joyful my soul was. . . . Finally the happy moment came. I didn’t feel a violent wind at the moment of the coming down of the Holy Spirit, but rather that *gentle breeze* the murmur of which Elijah heard on Mount Horeb. . . .”

## ILLNESS OF SCRUPLES

After the mountaintop experiences of First Communion and Confirmation, Thérèse’s life returned to its normal rhythm: “I had to go back to the life of a boarding schoolgirl that was so painful to me.”

Unable to make earthly friends, Thérèse now found herself afraid of losing God’s favor as well. “It was during my retreat before my second Communion that I saw myself assailed by the terrible illness of scruples [excessive fear of having sinned]. . . . You would have to pass through that martyrdom in order to understand it well. It would be impossible for me to say what I suffered for a *year and a half*. . . .”

At the end of the school year Céline, having finished her studies, returned home. “Thérèse, who had to go back by herself, wasn’t long in getting sick. The only charm that had kept her in school was to live with her inseparable Céline. Without her, ‘her little daughter’ could never stay there. . . .” So Thérèse left the abbey school at the age of thirteen and continued her education through private lessons.

No longer physically ill, but still suffering from her excessive fear of having sinned, Thérèse confided continually in her godmother, Marie. But Thérèse was to receive one more blow: Marie announced her intention to follow Pauline into the Carmel of Lisieux.



Shortly after Marie's announcement, Léonie left precipitously to try out in the order of Poor Clares. When Marie entered Carmel in October, only Céline and Thérèse remained at home.

Deprived of her one earthly confidante, Thérèse now turned to her departed brothers and sisters for consolation: "When Marie entered Carmel, I was still excessively scrupulous. No longer being able to confide in her, I turned toward heaven. It was to the four little angels who had gone up there before me that I spoke. . . . The answer wasn't long in coming. Soon peace came and flooded my soul with its delicious waves, and I understood that if I was loved on earth, I also was loved in heaven. . . ."

By the time Léonie returned home after a two-month trial with the Poor Clares, Thérèse had been largely freed from her illness of scruples.

## CHRISTMAS CONVERSION

A little over two months after Marie's entrance into Carmel, a seemingly innocuous occurrence at Christmas brought about a turning point in Thérèse's life. "It was on December 25, 1886, that I received the grace to leave my childhood—in a word, the grace of my complete conversion."

The Martin family followed the French tradition of placing, in the children's shoes, presents for them to find after Midnight Mass. Thérèse described what happened on this special Christmas: "This traditional practice had caused us so much joy during our childhood that Céline wanted to continue to treat me like a baby, since I was the youngest in the family. . . . But Jesus, who wanted to show me that I needed to undo these childish shortcomings, also took away these innocent joys from me. He allowed Papa, who was tired from the Midnight Mass, to feel annoyed at seeing my shoes on the fireplace, and for him to say these words that pierced me to the heart: 'Well, fortunately this is the last year.' I then ran up the stairs to take off my hat.

“Céline, who knew how sensitive I was, saw the tears shining in my eyes; she also felt like crying, because she loved me a lot and understood my grief. ‘Oh, Thérèse,’ she said, ‘don’t go back down. It will hurt you too much to look in your shoes right away.’

“But Thérèse wasn’t the same any longer; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I ran quickly back down the stairs, and, restraining my pounding heart, I took my shoes, and, placing them in front of Papa, *joyously* I took out all the objects, looking happy as a queen. Papa was laughing. He had also become joyful again. . . . Little Thérèse had regained the strength of soul that she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to keep it forever! . . .

“On that *night of light* the third period of my life began, the most beautiful of them all, the most filled with graces from heaven. . . . In an instant, the work that I hadn’t been able to do in ten years—Jesus did it, being content with the *good will* that I had no shortage of. . . . I felt *charity* enter into my heart, the need to forget myself in order to please others, and ever afterward I was happy! . . .”

### THIRST FOR SOULS

Thérèse set out immediately to pray for the conversion of sinners. “I felt myself consumed with *thirst* for souls. . . . I was *burning* with the desire to snatch them from the everlasting flames. . . .”

Not content to pray for *ordinary* sinners, Thérèse learned about an unrepentant criminal, Henri Pranzini, who had been condemned to death for murder. Enlisting Céline’s help, Thérèse stormed heaven for Pranzini’s soul. “I told God that I was quite sure that He would forgive poor miserable Pranzini, and that I would believe this even if he *did not confess* and showed *no sign of repentance*, so much did I have confidence in Jesus’ infinite mercy, but that I asked Him only for ‘*a sign*’ of repentance simply for my consolation. . . .

“My prayer was granted to the letter! . . . The day after his execution I put my hand on the newspaper. . . . Pranzini had not confessed; he

had climbed up onto the scaffold . . . when suddenly, gripped with a sudden inspiration, he turned back, grabbed a *Crucifix* that the priest was holding up to him, and *kissed its sacred wounds three times!* . . . Then his soul went to receive the *merciful* judgment of the One who declares that in heaven there will be more joy for a single sinner who repents than for ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need for repentance!” Thérèse had gained her first soul for heaven.

That same year, Léonie applied for admission to the Visitation convent in Caen, and this time, she was accepted. A subsequent health crisis caused Léonie to return home, but for now there were three Martin daughters in religious orders. Then, at fourteen and a half, Thérèse found the courage to speak to her father about becoming the fourth.

### THÉRÈSE’S QUEST TO ENTER CARMEL

Thérèse struggled with how best to approach her father. “I found the opportunity to talk to my dear father. . . . Through my tears I confided in him my desire to enter Carmel. Then his tears began mingling with my own, but he didn’t say a word to turn me away from my vocation, being simply content to point out that I was still quite young to make such a serious determination. But I defended my cause so well, that with Papa’s simple and upright nature, he was soon convinced that my desire was that of God Himself, and in his deep faith he cried out that God was giving him a great honor to ask him for his children in this way.”

Having received her father’s permission, Thérèse thought her path to Carmel would be smooth. But she did not anticipate her Uncle Isidore’s firm refusal. However, seeing Thérèse’s determination, and recognizing that she truly had a vocation, her uncle relented.

Thérèse later recalled the next hurdles: “A few days after I obtained my uncle’s consent, I went to see you, beloved Mother [Pauline], and I told you about my joy that now my trials had passed. But how surprised and disappointed I was at hearing you tell me that the Superior would

not consent to my entrance before the age of twenty-one. No one had thought about that opposition, the most invincible of all.”

However, the little flower was determined. Thérèse went immediately with her father and Céline to visit their priest, who coldly refused to hear of such a young girl’s entrance into an austere religious order. “Finally he ended by adding that he was only the *bishop’s delegate*, and that if the bishop wanted to let me enter Carmel, he himself would have nothing more to say. . . .”

No sooner said than done! Thérèse and her father made their way to Bayeux for an appointment with Bishop Hugonin and his grand vicar, Fr. Révérony. “His Excellency, thinking that he was being kind to Papa, tried to make me stay a few more years with him. So he was not a little *surprised* and *edified* to see him stand up for me, interceding for me to obtain the permission to leave the nest at the age of fifteen. However, it was all of no use. He said that before he made a decision a meeting with *the Superior of Carmel* was absolutely necessary. I couldn’t have heard anything that would have given me greater suffering, because I knew about the total opposition of our rector.”

One last recourse remained open to Thérèse, and that was to ask permission from the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII himself.

#### APPEAL TO THE POPE

One week after the meeting with the bishop, Thérèse, Céline, and Louis Martin boarded a train for Rome in the company of a group of pilgrims who were journeying to the Eternal City to celebrate Pope Leo XIII’s Golden Jubilee as a priest.

The long-awaited audience with Pope Leo XIII came on November 20, 1887. “Leo XIII was seated on a great chair. . . . I was quite resolved *to speak*, but I felt my courage weaken when I saw, at the Holy Father’s right hand, Fr. *Révérony!* . . . Almost at the same moment we were told on *his behalf* that he *forbade us to speak* to Leo XIII, since the audience was going on too long. . . .

“I turned toward . . . Céline, in order to learn her opinion. ‘Speak,’ she told me. A moment later I was at the Holy Father’s feet and had kissed his slipper, and he was extending his hand out to me. But instead of kissing it, I joined my hands together and, lifting toward his face my eyes bathed in tears, I cried out, ‘Most Holy Father, I have a great grace to ask of you! . . . Most Holy Father,’ I said to him, ‘in honor of your jubilee, allow me to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen! . . .’

“Emotion had without a doubt made my voice tremble, so, turning around toward Fr. Révérony, who was looking at me with surprise and discontent, the Holy Father said, ‘I don’t understand very well.’ . . . ‘Most Holy Father,’ replied the Grand Vicar, ‘this is *a child* who wants to enter Carmel *at the age* of fifteen, but the superiors are examining the question right now.’ ‘Well, my child,’ the Holy Father continued as he looked at me kindly, ‘do what the superiors tell you.’ Then, placing my hands on his knees, I attempted one last effort, and I told him with a pleading voice, ‘Oh! Most Holy Father, if you were to say yes, everyone would be willing! . . .’ He looked at me fixedly and pronounced these words, emphasizing each syllable: ‘All right. . . All right. . . *You will enter if it is God’s will.*’

“The Holy Father’s kindness was so encouraging that I wanted to speak to him some more, but the two gentlemen of the Papal Guard *touched me politely* to make me stand. . . . The two Papal Guards carried me so to speak as far as the door.”

Thérèse had pleaded her case before the highest authority in the Church, and now the audience was over. The remainder of the pilgrimage passed in a blur, and the three Martins returned home.

## ENTRANCE INTO CARMEL

Immediately Thérèse went to visit Pauline at Carmel and told her every detail of the trip. Pauline told her to write His Excellency the bishop to remind him about his promise. Thérèse did so, and then waited. But Christmas came, and there was no response.

On the day before her fifteenth birthday, Thérèse received the news that her desire had been granted—but she would have to wait: “The first day of the year 1888 . . . a *letter from Pauline* [now Sr. Agnes of Jesus] arrived, letting me know that His Excellency the bishop’s reply had arrived on December 28, the feast day of the *Holy Innocents*, but that she hadn’t let me know about it, having decided that my entrance would not take place *until after Lent*.”

April 9, 1888, was chosen for Thérèse’s entrance. “After embracing all the members of my beloved family, I knelt before my incomparable father, asking for his blessing. In order to give it to me he *knelt as well* and blessed me while weeping. . . . A few moments later, the doors of the blessed ark [Carmel] closed on me, and there I received the welcoming embraces of the *dear Sisters*. . . . Finally my desires had been accomplished, and my soul felt such sweet and such deep PEACE that it would be impossible for me to express it.”

#### LIFE AT CARMEL

Despite her youth, Thérèse understood the sacrifice that was now required of her: “With what deep joy did I repeat these words, ‘It’s forever, forever that I’m here!’ This happiness wasn’t fleeting. It wasn’t to fly away with ‘the illusions of the first days.’ As for the *illusions*, God gave me the grace *not to have ANY* as I entered Carmel. I found the religious life to be as I had conceived it. No sacrifice surprised me, despite the fact that, as you know, my dear Mother, my first steps met with more thorns than roses! . . . Yes, suffering held out its arms to me, and I threw myself into those arms with love. . . .”

Thérèse’s life at Carmel was much more demanding than the picture she paints in her writing. Daily life was rigorous, from rising at 4:45 AM until bedtime at 11 PM. Prayer, occupying about seven hours, was the nuns’ most important duty. Work, occupying about five hours, was performed in solitude; it consisted of such tasks as doing laundry, washing dishes, baking, gardening, and caring for the

sick. The nuns slept for six hours in the summer and seven in the winter.

Thérèse followed a time-honored path in becoming a nun: Her postulancy of nine months ended with her taking the Carmelite habit on January 10, 1889. The next stage was her period as a Novice, lasting until she made her religious vows on the Blessed Virgin Mary's birthday, September 8, 1890, and took the veil on September 24.

A year later, Thérèse had the blessing of being present at the death of Mother Geneviève, the revered cofoundress of the convent. Soon afterward, Thérèse had a vivid dream: "One night after Mother Geneviève's death . . . I dreamed that she was making her testament, giving to each Sister one thing that had belonged to her. When my turn came, I thought I wouldn't receive anything, because she had nothing left. But standing up, she said three times with a penetrating accent, "To you, I leave my *heart*."

Mother Geneviève's saintly heart was evident in Thérèse's behavior during the epidemic of influenza that attacked the convent in the winter of 1890–91. "The day of my nineteenth birthday was celebrated by a death, followed soon by two others. At that time I was the only one in the sacristy. The head Sister for this duty being gravely ill, I was the one who had to prepare the burials, open the grilles of the choir at the time of Mass, etc. God had given me many graces of strength at that time. . . . Death was the rule everywhere. The sickest ones were cared for by those who could hardly walk. As soon as one Sister had given up her last breath, we were obliged to leave her alone."

When the surviving members of the community recovered, Thérèse had gained acceptance. Most of the members of the Carmel community saw Thérèse as a simple little girl who became a good nun, but nothing more. In her nine years in the convent, Sr. Thérèse worked in the sacristy, cleaned the refectory, painted pictures, wrote short plays with religious themes for the Sisters, and composed poems.

## THÉRÈSE'S LITTLE WAY

In a letter to her sister Marie, Thérèse described one of her best-known legacies—her “little way”:

“I want to seek the means of going to heaven by a little way that is very straight, very short, a completely new little way.

“We’re in an age of inventions. Now there’s no more need to climb the steps of a staircase. In rich homes there are elevators that replace stairs to great advantage. I would also like to find an elevator to lift me up to Jesus, because I’m too little to climb the rough staircase of perfection. So I sought in the holy books the indication of the elevator that is the object of my desire, and I read these words that come from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: ‘Let all who are *simple* come to my house.’ So I came, suspecting that I had found what I was looking for, and wanting to know, God, what You would do with the simple little one who would respond to Your call.

“I’ve continued my search, and here is what I’ve found: ‘As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. . . . [Y]ou will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees.’ Oh! Never have words more tender, more melodious, come to rejoice my soul. The elevator that must lift me up to heaven is Your arms, Jesus! For that I do not need to become big. On the contrary, I have to stay little—may I become little, more and more.”

## WRITING DOWN HER STORY

Were it not for the Holy Spirit’s leading her sister Pauline, who in 1893 was elected prioress of Carmel, Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face might have passed into obscurity. But in the winter of 1894, Pauline asked Thérèse to write the memoirs of her childhood. Over a period of time, Thérèse wrote the charming recollections that have come down to us as “Manuscript A,” comprising chapters one through eight of the traditional editions of *The Story of a Soul*, including this edition.



In September, 1896, a few months after Thérèse showed the first symptoms of tuberculosis, her sister Marie asked her to write a memoir of a retreat she had taken. Thérèse wrote some of her loftiest words in this treatise that she called “My Vocation: Love,” which has come down to us as “Manuscript B,” comprising chapter nine of *The Story of a Soul*.

As Thérèse’s illness worsened, she was finally confined to the infirmary. There, at Mother Marie de Gonzague’s direction, less than three months before her death, she penned her last writings, known as “Manuscript C,” comprising chapters ten and eleven of *The Story of a Soul*.

Sensing Thérèse’s impending death, her sister Marie told her she would be very sorry when Thérèse died. “Oh! No, you will see,” replied Thérèse. “It will be like a shower of roses. After my death, you will go to the mailbox, and you will find many consolations.” The advancing tuberculosis ravaged Thérèse’s frail body, and on September 30, 1897, her exile came to an end. At the young age of twenty-four, she had found what she so longed for as a child: “the eternal rest of heaven, the *Sunday* where the sun never sets in the *Homeland!*”

Yes, heaven would be a place of rest. But in another well-known passage, Thérèse presented a concept of eternity that shows the thinking of her mature years. She no longer saw heaven as a time of rest, but of action: “I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.” Millions bear testimony that Thérèse is continuing her mission to do good, to this day.

### PUBLISHING *The Story of a Soul*

Sensing the importance of the writings Thérèse had left behind, her sister Pauline, now Mother Agnes of Jesus, proposed to Mother Marie de Gonzague, who in 1896 had been reelected prioress, to publish them in place of the obituary that it was customary to send around to other Carmelite houses when a Sister died. Mother Marie agreed, and Mother Agnes set about organizing and editing the lengthy manuscripts. In March, 1898, Mother Marie sent the revised copy to

Dom Godefroid Madelaine, a longtime friend of the community who had preached retreats there. Dom Madelaine suggested a few changes, including dividing the work into chapters and giving it the title *The Story of a Soul*.

The original printing of two thousand copies of the book was completed in time for the anniversary of Thérèse's death on September 30, 1898. It was an instant success, and reprint after reprint was made. In 1901 the book was translated into English, and by 1906 it had been published in six languages. By the time Thérèse was canonized in 1925, over twenty million copies had been sold in France alone.

Widespread interest in the original, unedited text brought about the publication of a facsimile edition of Thérèse's manuscripts in 1956. The Centenary Edition—a critical edition of Thérèse's complete works—was published in 1988. Further research brought the publication in 1992 of the New Centenary Edition, a copy of which was presented to Pope John Paul II on February 18, 1993.

Much discussion has been conducted about Mother Agnes's contribution to the original text. Did she make excessive changes or edits to the original text? But when the edited book is compared to the unedited manuscripts, it becomes clear that it is Thérèse who speaks in *The Story of a Soul*, not Mother Agnes.

Cardinal Pizzardo, secretary of the Congregation of the Consistory, wrote on 18th June, 1956, to the Prioress of the Lisieux Carmel: "I am convinced that Mother Agnes was guided, not only by the authorized directives of the Congregation of Rites, but also by a clear inspiration from on high."

A study of the unedited manuscripts makes it clear that the value of her edition lies in its clarity and simplicity; it reveals Thérèse as she really was and makes her teaching available to all. Pope Saint Pius X did not hesitate to declare that "in this account of her life, which has now achieved a world-wide distribution, the virtues of the Maid of Lisieux shine so brightly that it is her very soul, as it were, that one breathes therein."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Story of a Soul*, tr. Michael Day (Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, UK: Anthony Clarke Books, 1973), back cover.

Still, the proof of the value of Mother Agnes's work lies in the millions of lives that have been touched by the book that resulted.

#### ABOUT PART ONE OF THIS EDITION

Many editions of the original French version of *The Story of a Soul* are in the public domain. For the original Paraclete Press edition, I obtained two of them. One was closer to Mother Agnes's edited version in that it did not contain Dom Madelaine's chapter divisions. The other contained the chapter divisions and subheadings that characterize most French editions. I compared the two editions word for word and found them nearly identical. In the very few cases where there were variants, I chose the variant that most closely followed the spirit of the rest of the text.

Out of respect for the writings of this Doctor of the Church, I have given the complete and unabridged text. Every word that appeared in Mother Agnes's edited version appears in this edition, including obscure references that many editions leave out. I retained the author's use of italics and her use of capitalization in places where current usage might call for lower case. I kept her frequent use of ellipsis points, an important aspect of her personal writing style that represents a transition in thought, not an omission from the text. I also retained the author's style of referring to herself in the first person and in the third person, often within the same paragraph. As much as is possible in a translation, I wanted this edition to retain the same feel as the original French version.

To make the text more understandable and pleasing to the eye, I retained Dom Madelaine's chapter divisions and the traditional subheadings. One area in which I exercised editorial discretion was in dividing very long paragraphs and very long sentences into shorter ones.

Since in manuscripts A (chapters one through eight) and C (chapters ten and eleven), Thérèse wrote in conversational style, I used the

English conversational convention of contracting words such as “I’m” and “can’t” instead of using the more formal “I am” and “cannot.” For manuscript B (chapter nine), which is written in a more formal style of French, I used a more formal style of English.

To avoid confusion between religious persons and Thérèse’s natural relatives, I used initial lower case when referring to her sisters, her mother, and her father. The convention in this edition is therefore that nuns and priests are Sisters, Mothers, and Fathers, with initial capitals. When “Sister” and “Father” are followed by a name, their titles are abbreviated as “Sr.” and “Fr.”—for example, “Sr. Marie,” “Fr. Pichon.”

Following the practice of many editions, the French sources contained numerous Scripture references, most of which I incorporated into the text within brackets. In many cases, I added additional references suggested by the text.

Thérèse knew the Bible intimately and made constant allusions to Scripture. The Bible she read was based on the Latin Vulgate text by St. Jerome. In most cases, modern Bible versions, translated from the original languages, read much the same as the Vulgate. In keeping with the flowing style of Thérèse’s writing, I have used *Today’s New International Version* to render most Scriptures into English, and the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) to render a few others. In a few cases, the Vulgate read differently enough from modern versions that to accurately convey the point Thérèse was making, I used the Douay-Rheims version (D-R), which was translated into English using the Vulgate.

Thérèse’s words were written to persons who would know the people she described, the events that occurred on dates she mentioned, and the religious terminology she used. To clarify passages that might not easily be understandable to today’s reader, I have added brief explanations in brackets within the text itself, rather than using footnotes or endnotes, with the exception of a few footnotes where longer notes within brackets would have interrupted the flow of the text.

ABOUT PARTS TWO THROUGH FIVE  
OF THIS EDITION

In the years that followed Thérèse's death, the nuns of the Lisieux Carmel gathered stories of her final days and published them as chapter twelve of *The Story of a Soul*. The editor is privileged to make this final chapter available to English-speaking readers. The nuns also gathered memories of her words of saintly counsel to them. Part two of this edition consists of chapter twelve and the Sisters' remembrances of Thérèse's words of advice and counsel, both of them unabridged.

In addition to the notebooks that have been published as *The Story of a Soul*, a number of prayers written by Thérèse have been preserved. Part three of this volume gives the complete prayers of Thérèse from the 1920 edition of Thérèse's writings.

While it is the aim of *The Complete Thérèse of Lisieux* to tell the story of the "Little Flower" through her words and the words of those who knew her personally, our story would not be complete without the prayers in part three and the selection of numerous letters and poems written by Thérèse that comprise parts four and five of this volume.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
ENGRAVINGS THAT APPEAR IN THIS EDITION

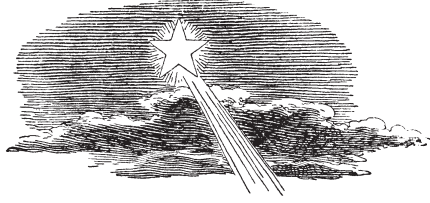
In 1920, the Carmel of Lisieux published a comprehensive edition of Thérèse's writings that included many photographs and engravings. Through an antiquarian book dealer, this editor obtained a copy of that edition, in such pristine condition that the bound pages had not been cut. We are now able to share many of the book's photographs and engravings with today's readers, nearly a century after the book was printed.

A SHOWER OF ROSES

For well over a hundred years, St. Thérèse of Lisieux's words have brought a spiritual shower of roses to all who have read them. It is to that aim that *The Complete Thérèse of Lisieux* is offered.

—ROBERT J. EDMONSON, CJ





# PART ONE

The Story of a Soul

*“I have come to bring fire on the earth,  
and how I wish it were already kindled!” —Luke 12:49*

Remember that this most gentle flame  
That You desired to kindle in hearts,  
That fire from heaven, You placed it in my soul;  
I also want to spread its warmth.  
A little spark, O mystery of life!  
Is enough to light an immense fire.  
How I desire, O dear God,  
To carry Your fire far and wide,  
Remember!





1  
 ALENÇON  
 1873-1877

*The song of the mercies of the Lord / Surrounded by love  
 Trip to Le Mans / My character / I choose all*



*Springtime story of a little white Flower  
 written by herself and dedicated to  
 the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus*  
 [my sister Pauline, the current Prioress of the  
 Carmelite Convent at Lisieux]

**I**t is to you, beloved Mother,  
 to you who are twice my  
 Mother, that I am coming to  
 entrust the story of my soul. . . .



The day you asked me to do this, it seemed to me that it would consume my heart needlessly by causing it to be engrossed with itself. But afterward Jesus made me feel that by simply obeying I would be pleasing to Him. Besides, I'm going to only do one thing: begin to sing of what I ought to repeat forever: "*The mercies of the Lord!!!*" [see Ps. 89:1] . . .

Before taking my pen in hand, I knelt before the statue of Mary (the one that gave us so many proofs of the Queen of Heaven's motherly partiality for our family), and I begged her to guide my hand so that I might not write a single line that would not be pleasing to her. Then, opening the Gospels, my eyes fell on these words: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him" [Mk. 3:13]. Now this is the mystery of my calling, of my whole life, and above all the mystery of Jesus' privileges over my soul. He doesn't call those who are worthy, but those He wants, or, as St. Paul puts it: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy" [Rom. 9:15–16].

For a long time I wondered why God showed partiality, why all souls don't receive the same amount of graces. I was astounded to see Him lavish extraordinary favors on the Saints who had offended Him, such as St. Paul and St. Augustine, and whom He so to speak forced to receive His graces. Or when I read the life of Saints whom Our Lord was pleased to embrace from the cradle to the grave, without leaving in their path any obstacles that might hinder them from rising toward Him, and granting these souls such favors that they were unable to tarnish the immaculate brightness of their baptismal robes, I wondered why poor primitive people, for example, were dying in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced. . . .

Jesus consented to teach me this mystery. He placed before my eyes the book of nature; I understood that all the flowers that He created are beautiful. The brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily don't take away the perfume of the lowly violet or the delightful simplicity

of the daisy. . . . I understood that if all the little flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose its springtime adornment, and the fields would no longer be sprinkled with little flowers. . . .

So it is in the world of souls, which is Jesus' garden. He wanted to create great Saints who could be compared to lilies and roses. But He also created little ones, and these ought to be content to be daisies or violets destined to gladden God's eyes when He glances down at His feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wants us to be. . . .

I understood that Our Lord's love is revealed as well in the simplest soul who doesn't resist His grace in anything, as in the most sublime of souls. In fact, since the essence of love is to bring oneself low, if every soul were like the souls of the holy Doctors who have shed light on the Church through the clarity of their doctrine, it seems that God wouldn't come down low enough by coming only as far as their great hearts. But He created the child who doesn't know anything and only cries weakly, He created poor primitive persons who only have natural law as a guide—and it is to their hearts that He consents to come down: Here are wildflowers whose simplicity delights Him. . . .

By bringing Himself low in this way, God shows His infinite greatness. Just as the sun shines at the same time on the tall cedars and on each little flower as if it were the only one on earth, in the same way Our Lord is concerned particularly for every soul as if there were none other like it. And just as in nature all the seasons are arranged in such a way as to cause the humblest daisy to open on the appointed day, in the same way all things correspond to the good of each soul.

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Doubtless, dear Mother, you're wondering with surprise where I'm going with all this, because until now I haven't said anything that looks like the story of my life. Yet you've asked me to write without holding back anything that might come to my thoughts. But it isn't about my life, properly speaking, that I'm going to write; it's about my thoughts concerning the graces that God has consented to grant me. I find myself

at a point in my life when I can take a look back at the past. My soul has matured in the crucible of outward and inward trials. Now, like a flower strengthened by the storm, I lift my head, and I see that the words of the twenty-third psalm are coming true in me. (“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. . . . Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”) Always the Lord has been for me “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” [Ps. 103:8].

So, Mother, it is with happiness that I come to sing near you of the mercies of the Lord. . . . It is for you alone that I’m going to write the story of the *little flower* picked by Jesus. So I’m going to talk without restraint, without worrying about the style or the many digressions that I’m going to make. A mother’s heart always understands her child, even when the child doesn’t know how to do anything but stammer, so I’m sure that I’ll be understood and read by you who formed my heart and offered it to Jesus! . . .

It seems to me that if a little flower could talk, it would tell simply what God has done for it, without trying to hide its blessings. Under the pretext of a false humility it wouldn’t say that it is unsightly and lacking in perfume, that the sun has taken away its beauty and its stem has been broken, while it recognizes just the opposite in itself.

The flower that is going to tell its story rejoices in having to publish abroad the completely undeserved kindness of Jesus. It recognizes that nothing in itself was capable of attracting His divine glance, and that His mercy alone has made everything that there is of good in it. . . . It is He who caused it to be born on holy ground and, as it were, completely imbued with a *virginal perfume*. It is He who caused it to be preceded by eight dazzlingly white Lilies [my older sisters and brothers]. In His love, He wanted to preserve His little flower from the poisoned breath of the world. Hardly had its petals begun to open when the divine Savior transplanted it onto the mountain of Carmel, where already the two Lilies who had surrounded it and gently rocked it in the springtime of

its life [my sisters Pauline and Marie] were spreading forth their sweet perfume. . . .

Seven years have passed since the little flower took root in the garden of the Bridegroom of virgins, and now *three* Lilies wave their scented petals around her [now that my sister Céline has also entered Carmel]. A little farther away one more lily [my sister Léonie] is blossoming under Jesus' gaze, and now the two blessed stalks who produced these flowers [Papa and Mama] are reunited for eternity in the heavenly Homeland. . . . There they have found once again the four lilies [my two brothers and two sisters who died at an early age] whom the earth did not see in bloom. . . . Oh! May Jesus consent not to leave long on the far shore the flowers who remain in exile; may the branch of lilies be soon complete in heaven!

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Mother, I have just summarized in a few words what the Good Lord has done for me. Now I'm going to enter into the details of my life as a child. I know that where another would only see a boring tale, your *motherly heart* will find charms. . . .

And then the memories that I'm going to bring up are also yours, since it is by your side that my childhood flowed, and I have the happiness of belonging to the incomparable parents who surrounded us with the same care and the same tenderness. Oh! May they consent to bless the littlest of their children and help her sing of the mercies of the Lord! . . .

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In the story of my soul up to my entrance into Carmel I distinguish three very different periods. The first, in spite of its shortness, is not the least fruitful in memories: It extends from the awakening of my reason, up to the departure of our dear mother for the Homeland of heaven. God gave me the grace to open my intelligence quite early and to engrave so deeply in my memory the remembrances of my childhood that it seems to me that the things that I'm going to tell

about happened yesterday. Without a doubt, Jesus wanted, in His love, to make me know the incomparable mother that He gave me, but whom His divine hand was hastening to crown in heaven! . . .

All my life it pleased the Good Lord to surround me with *love*. My earliest memories are imprinted with smiles and the most tender of embraces! . . . But if He had placed much *love* near me, He had also placed love into my little heart, creating it to be loving and sensitive. So I loved Papa and Mama very much, and showed them my tenderness in a thousand ways, because I was very expansive. Only the means that I used were sometimes strange, as a passage from a letter from Mama shows:

The baby is an unparalleled imp; she comes and gives me a hug and tells me she wants me to die: “Oh! How I wish that you would die, my poor little mother! . . .” She’s scolded, and she says, “But it’s so that you will go to heaven, since you say that you have to die to go there.” In the same way she wishes death for her father when she’s in the midst of her excesses of love.

On the twenty-fifth of June, 1874, when I was barely eighteen months old, here is what Mama said about me:

Your father has just installed a swing. Céline [three and a half years older than Thérèse] is an unparalleled joy, but you ought to see the little one swing—it makes me laugh. She holds herself like a big girl; there’s no danger that she’ll let go of the rope, but when it doesn’t go high enough, she cries out. We attach another rope onto her in front, but in spite of that I’m uneasy when I see her perched up there.

A funny adventure happened to me recently with the little one. I’m in the habit of going to Mass at 5:30 AM. In the early days I didn’t dare to leave her alone, but when I saw that she never woke up, I wound up deciding to leave her. I put her to bed in my own bed, and I pulled the cradle so close that it was impossible for her to fall out. One day I forgot to push the cradle into place. When I got home the little one wasn’t in my bed. At the same time I heard a cry, so I looked around, and I saw her sitting on a chair across from the head of my bed. Her little head was lying

on the cross bar, and she was asleep there—sleeping badly, because she was uncomfortable. I couldn't understand how she had fallen into that chair in a sitting position, because she'd been lying in bed. I thanked God that nothing had happened to her. This was really providential—she ought to have rolled off onto the floor. Her guardian Angel watched over her, and the souls in purgatory to whom I pray every day for the little one protected her. That's how I figure this . . . go figure it out for yourself! . . .

At the end of the letter, Mama added, "The little baby has just passed her little hand over my face and kissed me. This poor little one doesn't want to leave me, she's with me continually. She loves to go out in the garden, but if I'm not there she doesn't want to stay and cries until she's brought back to me. . . ." Here's a passage from another letter:

Little Thérèse was asking me the other day if she would go to heaven. I told her yes, if she was very good; she replied, "Yes, but if I weren't cute, I'd go to hell. . . . But I know what I'd do, I'd fly up to be with you who would be in heaven. How would God do to take me? . . . You would be holding me tight in your arms?" I saw in her eyes that she positively believed that God couldn't do anything to her if she were in her mother's arms. . . .

Marie [twelve years older than Thérèse] loves her little sister a lot—she finds her very cute. It would be very difficult for her not to, since the poor little one is very afraid of hurting her. Yesterday I wanted to give her a rose, knowing that that would make her happy, but she started begging me not to cut it, because Marie had told her not to. She was red in the face with emotion, but in spite of that, I gave her two of them. She didn't dare to appear in the house. It didn't matter that I told her the roses belonged to me. "No, no," she said, "they're Marie's."

She's a child who easily gets emotional. As soon as some little bad thing happens to her, the whole world has to know about it. Yesterday after she unwittingly dropped a little corner of the tapestry, she was in a pitiful state, and then her father had to be told right away. He came home four hours later. Nobody was thinking about it any more, but very quickly she went to Marie and told her, "Tell Papa that I tore the paper." She was like a criminal awaiting the judge's sentence, but she has in her little head that she's going to be forgiven more easily if she accuses herself.

I loved my dear *godmother* [my oldest sister, Marie] very much. Without looking like it, I paid a lot of attention to everything that was being done and said around me. It seems to me that I had as much discernment about things as I do now. I used to listen attentively to what Marie was teaching Céline so I could do as she did. After she left the Visitation school, in order to be granted the favor of being allowed in her room during the lessons that she was teaching Céline, I was very good and I did everything she asked. So she showered me with presents, which, in spite of their being of little value, gave me a great deal of pleasure.

I was quite proud of my two big sisters [Marie and Pauline], but the one who was my *ideal* as a child was Pauline. . . . When I started to talk and Mama asked me, “What are you thinking about?” the answer was an invariable, “Pauline! . . .” Another time, I was tracing my little finger over the floor tiles, and I said, “I’m writing ‘Pauline’! . . .” Often I used to hear that of course Pauline was going to be a *nun*. So, without knowing too much about what that was, I thought, *I’m going to be a nun, too*. That’s one of my earliest memories, and ever since, I’ve never changed my resolve! . . .

You were the one, dear Mother [Pauline], whom Jesus chose to engage me in marriage to Himself. You weren’t at my side then, but a link had already been formed between our souls. . . . You were my *ideal*, I wanted to be like you; and it was your example that, from the age of two, drew me to the Bridegroom of virgins. . . . Oh! What sweet thoughts I would like to confide in you! But I need to pursue the story of the little flower, its complete and general story, because if I wanted to talk in detail about my relationship with “Pauline,” I’d have to leave everything else out! . . .

Dear little Léonie [my middle sister, nine years older than I] also held a big place in my heart. She loved me a lot. In the evening she was the one who watched me when the whole family used to go for a walk. . . . It seems as if I can still hear the gentle songs that she used to sing in order to help me go to sleep. . . . In everything she looked for a way to please me, so I would have been very upset if I gave her trouble.



I remember her first Communion very well, especially the moment when she carried me in her arm to take me with her into the rectory. It seemed so beautiful to be carried by a big sister dressed all in white like me! . . . That night I was put to bed early because I was too little to stay at the big dinner, but I can still see Papa coming in, bringing his little darling some pieces of the dessert. . . .

The next day, or a few days later, we went with Mama to Léonie's little girlfriend's house. I think that that was the day our dear Mother took us behind a wall to give us some wine to drink after the dinner (that poor Mrs. Dagorau had served), because she didn't want to hurt the good woman, but she also didn't want us to miss out on anything. . . . Ah! How delicate is the heart of a mother! How it translates its tenderness into a thousand watchful caring acts that no one would think about!

Now it remains to me to talk about my dear Céline, my little childhood friend, but I have such an abundance of memories that I don't know which ones to choose. I'm going to excerpt a few passages from letters that Mama wrote you at the Visitation school, but I'm not going to copy everything—that would take too long. . . . On July 10th, 1873 (the year I was born), here is what she told you: "The wet nurse brought back little Thérèse on Thursday. All she does is laugh. She especially liked little Céline, and she burst into laughter with her. You might say that she already wants to play; that will come soon. She holds herself up on her little legs, stiff as a little post. I think she's going to walk early and that she will have a good character. She seems very intelligent and gives the appearance of having a good future. . . ."

But it was especially after I came home from the wet nurse's that I showed my affection for dear little Céline. We got along very well, only I was livelier and more naïve than she was. Although I was three and a half years younger, it seemed to me that we were the same age.

Here's a passage from one of Mama's letters that will show you how sweet Céline was and how naughty I was:

My little Céline is completely given over to virtue—it’s the innermost feeling of her being; she has a truthful soul and hates evil. As for the little imp, it’s hard to know how she’ll turn out, she’s so little, so scatterbrained! She has more intelligence than Céline, but she’s not as sweet, and her hardheadedness is practically unshakable. When she says “no” nothing can make her give it up. You could put her in the cellar for a whole day and she’d go to sleep there rather than to say “yes.”

Yet she has a heart of gold. She’s full of hugs and says exactly what she thinks. It’s curious to see her run after me and confess, “Mama, I pushed Céline just once, I hit her once, but I won’t do it again.” (It’s like that for everything she does.)

Thursday evening we were taking a walk near the train station when she absolutely wanted to enter the waiting room to look for Pauline. She ran ahead with a joy that pleased me, but when she saw that we had to go back home without getting on board the train to go get Pauline, she cried all the way home.

This last part of the letter reminds me of the happiness that I felt when I saw you come back from the Visitation school. You, Mother, took me in your arms, and Marie took Céline. Then I gave you lots of hugs and I bent over backward in order to admire your big pigtail. . . . Then you gave me a chocolate bar that you had been keeping for three months. You can imagine what a treasure this was for me! . . .

I also remember the trip that I took to Le Mans; this was the first time that I went on a train. What a joy it was to be traveling alone with Mama! . . . However, I don’t know why anymore, but I began to cry, and all our dear Mother could present to my aunt in Le Mans was a little *ugly duckling*, all red with the tears that she had shed on the way. . . .

I don’t remember anything about that visit, but only the moment when my aunt passed me a little white mouse and a little cardboard basket full of candies on which were *enthroned* two little sugar rings, just about the thickness of my finger. Immediately I cried out, “Such happiness! There will be a ring for Céline!”

But, such sadness! I took my basket by the handle, gave my other hand to Mama, and we left. After a few steps I looked at my basket and saw

that my candies were almost all strewn on the street, like Tom Thumb's stones. . . . I looked closer and saw that one of the precious rings had suffered the deadly fate of the candies . . . I didn't have one to give to Céline! . . . Then my sorrow burst out, and I asked to go back; Mama didn't seem to be paying attention to me. It was all too much—my *tears* were followed by my *cries*. . . . I couldn't understand why she didn't share my pain, and that very much increased my suffering. . . .

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Now I'll come back to the letters in which Mama talked to you about Céline and me. They're the best means I can use to let you know my character. Here's a passage in which my faults stick out like a sore thumb: "There's Céline, who plays a dice game with the little one. They argue from time to time, and Céline gives in, in order to have a pearl in her crown. I'm obliged to correct the little baby, who flies into terrible rages. When things don't go the way she wants them to, she rolls on the ground like a madwoman who thinks all is lost. There are times when it gets so strong that she loses her breath. She's quite a nervous child, but she's cute and very intelligent—she remembers everything." You see, Mother, how far I was from being a little girl with no faults!

Nobody could even say about me that "I was good when I was asleep," because at night I was even more wiggly than during the day. I would send the covers flying, and then (asleep all the while) I would crash against the wood of my little bed. The pain would wake me up, and I would say, "Mama, I've been *bumped*." My poor dear mother had to get up and establish that I did in fact have knots on my forehead, and that I had been *bumped*. She would cover me up securely and go back to bed. But after a short time I started *being bumped* again, so that they had to *tie me in* my bed. Every night, little Céline would come and tie the several cords that were intended to keep the little imp from getting *bumped* and waking up her mama. This method finally worked, so from then on I was *good* while I was *asleep*. . . .

Another fault I had (when I was awake) and which Mama didn't talk about in her letters, is that I was very conceited. I'm only going to give



*Thérèse as a Child and Her Mother*

I remember Mama's smile;  
Her deep gaze seemed to say,  
"Eternity delights me and draws me . . .  
I'm going to go into the blue heavens  
To see God!"

you two examples so as not to make my story too long. One day Mama told me, “Dear little Thérèse, if you want to kiss the ground, I’m going to give you a penny.” A penny was quite a lot of money for me. In order to get it I didn’t have to lower my *great* height, because my *little* height didn’t put a big distance between me and the ground. However, my pride revolted at the thought of *kissing the ground*, so, standing up very straight, I told Mama, “Oh! No, Mother, I’d rather not have a penny! . . .”

Another time we were supposed to go to Grogny to Mrs. Monnier’s. Mama told Marie to dress me in my pretty, sky-blue, lace-trimmed dress, but not to leave my arms bare so the sun wouldn’t burn them. I let myself be dressed with the indifference that children my age should have, but inside I was thinking that I would have been much nicer if my little arms were bare.

With a nature like mine, if I had been brought up by parents who lacked virtue, or even if like Céline I had been spoiled by Louise [our maid], I would have become bad and perhaps would have become lost. . . . But Jesus was watching over His little bride-to-be. He wanted everything to turn out for her good, even her faults, which, curbed early on, have been used for her growth in perfection. . . . Since I was full of *self-love* and also *love of good*, as soon as I began to think seriously (which I did when I was quite little) it was enough for someone to tell me that something wasn’t good, for me not to want to repeat it twice. . . .

I’m pleased to see in Mama’s letters that as I grew up I gave her more consolation. Since all I had around me were good examples, I naturally wanted to follow them. Here’s what Mama wrote in 1876: “Even Thérèse sometimes wants to get involved in religious practices. . . . She’s a charming child, fine as a shadow, very quick, but her heart is sensitive. Céline and she love each other a lot. They’re all each other needs to keep from getting bored. Every day right after dinner Céline goes and gets her little rooster doll. She suddenly catches Thérèse’s hen doll—I can’t get over it!—but she’s so quick that she grabs it on the first jump. Then they both take their animals and sit beside the fire and play nicely together for a long time.” (It was little Rose who had given me the hen and the rooster as a present, and I had given the rooster to Céline.)

The other day Céline was sleeping with me, and Thérèse was sleeping on the second floor in Céline's bed. She had begged Louise [our maid] to take her downstairs so they could dress her. Louise went up to look for her and found the bed empty. Thérèse had heard Céline and had gone down to be with her. Louise said to her, "So you don't want to go down and get dressed?" "Oh no, poor Louise, we're like the two little chickens, we can't be separated!" And when she said that, the two girls kissed and hugged each other. . . . Then that evening, Louise, Céline, and Léonie left for the Catholic circle and left poor Thérèse, who understood very well that she was too little to go. So she said, "If only they wanted to put me to bed in Céline's bed! . . ." But no, they didn't want to. . . . She didn't say anything and stayed alone with her little lamp, and fifteen minutes later she was fast asleep. . . .

Another day Mama wrote again: "Céline and Thérèse are inseparable; you can't imagine two children loving each other more. When Marie comes to get Céline to teach her her lesson, poor Thérèse dissolves into tears. Alas, what is going to become of her? Her little friend is going to go away! . . . Marie feels sorry for her, she takes her along, too, and the poor little one sits on a chair for two or three hours. They give her pearls to string or a rag to sew. She doesn't dare budge and often heaves great sighs. When her needle loses its thread she tries to rethread it. It's curious to see her, not managing to get it threaded and not daring to disturb Marie; soon you can see two big tears running down her cheeks. . . . Marie quickly comforts her, rethreads the needle, and the little angel smiles through her tears. . . ."

In fact I can remember that I couldn't be separated from Céline. I would rather leave the table before finishing my dessert than not follow her as soon as she got up to leave. I would turn in my high chair and ask to be put down, and then we would go play together. Sometimes we went with a little friend, which pleased me to no end because of the park and all the beautiful toys that she used to show us, but it was really to please Céline that I would go.

What I really preferred was to stay in our little yard to *scratch the walls*, because we would pull off all the little shiny flakes of stone that we

would find there, and then we would go *sell them* to Papa, who would buy them, looking very serious.

On Sundays, since I was too little to go to services, Mama stayed to watch me. I was very good, and I would only walk on tiptoe during the Mass. But as soon as I saw the door open, there was an unparalleled explosion of joy. I would rush in front of my *pretty* little sister, who was then *decked out like a chapel . . .* and I would say, “Oh, dear Céline, quick, give me some blessed bread!” Sometimes she didn’t have any, since she had arrived there too late. . . . What could I do now? It was impossible for me to go without it; it was *my Mass*. The answer was quick in coming: “You don’t have any blessed bread? Well, make some!” No sooner said than done. Céline would take a chair, open the cupboard, take out some bread, cut a mouthful, and very *seriously* recite a *Hail Mary* over it, then present it to me. And I, after making the sign of the Cross with it, would eat it with *great devotion*, claiming that it *tasted* exactly like *blessed bread*.

Often we would do *spiritual teachings*. Here’s one example that I’m borrowing from Mama’s letters: “Our two dear little ones, Céline and Thérèse, are angels of blessing, two little angelic natures. Thérèse is Marie’s joy, happiness, and glory; it’s unbelievable how proud she is of her. It’s true that she comes up with answers that are quite unusual at her age; she shows up Céline, who’s twice as old as she is. The other day Céline was saying, ‘How is it that God can be in such a little Communion host?’ Little Thérèse said, ‘That’s not so surprising since God is all-powerful.’ ‘What does that mean, “all-powerful”?’ ‘Well, it means He can do what He wants! . . .’”

One day Léonie, thinking she was now too big to play with dolls, came and found us both with a basket full of dresses and pretty little pieces of cloth intended to make others; on top was sitting her doll. “Here, little sisters,” she said, “you *choose*, I’m giving you all this.” Céline stuck out her hand and took a little ball of yarn that she liked. After thinking about it for a moment, I in turn stuck out my hand and said, “*I choose all!*” And I took the basket without further ceremony. Those who were watching the scene thought it was quite fair—Céline herself didn’t think to complain. (Besides, she had no lack of toys; her

godfather showered her with presents, and Louise found a way to get her anything she wanted.)

This childhood trait sums up my whole life. Later, when perfection made its appearance to me, I understood that in order to become *a Saint* you have to suffer a lot, always be in search of what is the most perfect, and forget yourself. I understood that there are many degrees of perfection, and that each soul is free to respond to Our Lord's advances, to do little or much for Him—in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices that He requires. Then, just as in the days of my childhood, I cried out, “Dear God, *I choose all*. I don't want to be a *halfway Saint*. It doesn't scare me to suffer for You; I'm afraid of only one thing, and that is to hold onto my *will*. Take it, because ‘*I choose all*,’ all that You want! . . .”

I have to stop here. I shouldn't talk yet about the time of my youth, but about the little four-year-old imp. I remember a dream that I must have had around that age and that is deeply engraved in my imagination. One night I dreamed that I was going out to take a walk alone in the garden. Arriving at the foot of the steps that I had to go up to get there, I stopped, paralyzed with fear. In front of me, near the arbor, stood a barrel of lime, and on that barrel two *horrible little devils* were dancing with surprising agility in spite of the clothing irons they had on their feet. Suddenly they cast their flaming eyes on me, but just at the same time, looking more scared than I was, they jumped off the barrel and went and hid in the laundry that was just across the way. When I saw how unbrave they were, I wanted to know what they were going to do, and I went up to the window. The poor little devils were there, running on the tables, not knowing what to do to escape my looks. Sometimes they would go up to the window, looking out with a troubled expression to see if I were still there. When they saw me still there, they started running around again like madmen.

No doubt this dream is nothing out of the ordinary, but nonetheless I think that God allowed 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 running away from a child's glance. . . .



Here's another passage that I found in Mama's letters: Poor Mother was already sensing that the end of her earthly exile was coming:

The two little ones don't worry me, they both get along so well. They are chosen natures; certainly they will be good. Marie and you will be perfectly able to raise them. Céline never commits the slightest voluntary fault. The little one will be good, too. She would never lie for all the gold in the world. She has a mind and a spirit like I've never seen in the rest of you.

The other day she was at the grocer's with Céline and Louise, and she was talking about her religious practices and was discussing this strongly with Céline. The lady said to Louise, "What does she mean, when she plays in the garden and all she hears about is religious practices? Mrs. Gaucherin sticks her head out her window to try to understand what this debate about religious practices is all about." . . .

This poor little one is our happiness, she will be good, you can already see it coming. All she talks about is God; she wouldn't miss saying her prayers for anything. I wish you could see her reciting little fables; I've never seen anything so nice. All by herself she finds the expression that she needs to give, and the tone, but it's especially when she says, "Little blond-haired child, where do you think God is?" When she comes to "He's up there in the blue sky," she turns her face upward with an angelic expression. We never get tired of having her do it, it's so beautiful. There's something so heavenly in her look that we're quite taken by it! . . .

Oh, Mother! How happy I was at that age. Already I was beginning to enjoy life. Virtue had its charms for me, and I was, it seems to me, already disposed in the same way I am now, already having great control over my actions. Ah! How quickly they passed by, those sunny years of my early childhood, but what a sweet imprint they left on my soul!

I remember with happiness the days when Papa took us to the *cottage* [Papa's little property at the entrance to the city]; the slightest details are engraved on my heart. . . . I especially remember the Sunday walks when Mama always went with us. . . . I can still feel the deep and *poetic* impressions that were born in my soul at the sight of the wheat fields spangled with *cornflowers* and wildflowers. Already I loved *faraway places*. . . . The spaces and the giant pine trees with branches touching

the ground left in my heart an impression like the one I still feel today at the sight of nature. . . .

Often during these long walks we used to meet poor people, and it was always little Thérèse whose duty it was to give them alms, and she was happy to do so. But also, Papa often would find that the route was too long for his little queen, so he would take her home earlier than the others (much to her great displeasure). So, to comfort her, Céline would fill her pretty little basket with daisies and give them to her when she got back home. But alas! The poor “granny” would find that her “granddaughter” had too many of them, so she would take a good part of them to [place in front of the statue of] the Blessed Virgin. . . . Little Thérèse didn’t like that, but she was careful not to say anything about it, having adopted the good habit of never complaining, even when something that belonged to her was taken away, or when she was unjustly accused. She preferred to hold her tongue and not excuse herself. This wasn’t merit on her part, but natural virtue. . . .

What a shame that this good disposition vanished! . . . Oh! truly, everything on earth was smiling at me: I found flowers under every one of my steps, and my happy character also contributed to making my life pleasant. But a new period was going to begin for my soul. I was going to have to pass through the crucible of trials and to suffer, beginning in my childhood, in order to be able to be offered sooner to Jesus. In the same way as the springtime flowers begin to germinate under the snow and begin to open at the first rays of the Sun, even so the little flower whose memories I’m writing about had to pass through the winter of trial. . . .

