

en·coun·ter

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

[*spirituality*]



Early life: St. Thérèse, also known as St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and St. Theresa of the Little Flower, was born on January 2nd, in France in 1873. She decided at a very early age that she wanted to be a saint. After petitioning Pope Leo XIII to enter Carmel at 15 years old, she was told that if it was God's will she would. It was God's will and she was finally accepted at 15 years on April 8, 1888 to join her two sisters who were already nuns there.

Carmel life: St. Thérèse spent her last nine years at the convent and took her final vows at 17. Her life there was ordinary and she sometimes struggled with the community life. She loved to pray but often fell asleep during long prayer times. Finally, she said that just as parents love their children as much while asleep as

awake, so God loved her even though she often slept during the time for prayers.

St. Thérèse Develops Her "Little Way": During this time with the Carmelites, Thérèse began to develop her philosophy of the "Little Way." Because Thérèse knew that being in a cloistered convent she could not accomplish heroic acts, she worried about how she could achieve holiness and to be a saint. She said, "I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short and totally new." She felt that God did not demand great things of her, but she felt incapable of the tiniest charity, the smallest expression of concern and patience and understanding.

So she surrendered her life to Christ with the hope that he would act through her. With the words of St. Paul, she prayed, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." To her "all things" consisted of almost everything she was called upon to do in the daily grind of life. She began to understand that what matters is not great deeds, but great love, and that anyone can achieve the heights of holiness by doing even the smallest things well for love of God. "All is well," she wrote, "when one seeks only the will of Jesus." And so she abandoned herself to Jesus and her life became a continual acceptance of the will of the Lord.

This began the "little way" which Thérèse sought to follow. Her philosophy was this: what was important was not doing great works, but doing little things with the power of love. She said the only way she can prove her love is by scattering flowers and these flowers were every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and doing of the least actions for love. She took every chance to sacrifice, no matter how small it would seem. She believed that if we can maintain the right attitude, then nothing shall remain that can't be accomplished.

Final years: In 1895 in her twenty-third year, Thérèse was asked by her superior to write the story of her childhood and life at the convent. The next year, she became seriously sick with tuberculosis and died on September 30, 1897 at the age of 24 just a few weeks after she finished her writing.

Two years after her death, her autobiography, Story of a Soul, was published and became a best-seller around the world. She became one of only three females to be considered a doctor of the Catholic Church. In her, the

Church recognized a profound and valuable teaching in the “Little Way.” Her way of trusting in Jesus to make her holy and relying on small daily sacrifices instead of great deeds has appealed to thousands of Catholics and others who are trying to find holiness in their ordinary lives.

In her book, St. Thérèse promises that she “wants to spend her time in heaven doing good upon the earth,” and to “let fall from heaven a shower of roses.” Many have found comfort and strength in her intercession and often find roses during their prayers to her.

St. Thérèse was canonized by Pope Pius XI on May 17, 1925, only 26 years after her death. Her feast day is October 1. Pope Pius X called her “the greatest saint of modern times.”

Pope Francis has said St Thérèse is his favorite saint and keeps a picture of her on his bookcase. He tells us, “Do not be afraid to depend solely on the tenderness of God as Saint Thérèse did, who for this reason, is a beloved daughter of the Blessed Mother and a great missionary saint.” He has also remarked, “When I have a problem I ask the saint, not to solve it, but to take it in her hands and help me accept it.”

St. Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the patron saints of the missions, not because she ever went anywhere, but because of her special love of the missions, and the prayers and letters she gave in support of missionaries. This is a reminder to all of us who feel we can do nothing and that it is the little things that keep God's kingdom growing.