
AN EXTRAORDINARY CHILD NAMED THERESA



Whether we talk of Saint Theresa Martin, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, or St. Theresa of Lisieux, we all refer to the person who was born in Alençon, France, January 2, 1873, and who died September 30, 1897, at the Carmelite monastery of Lisieux in Normandy, at the age of 24. Beatified on April 29, 1923, she was declared a saint May 17, 1925. Patroness of missions, patroness of France, Doctor of the Church, she still amazes us. After having gone through nearly all the dioceses of France, her relics will shortly be in our own Diocese of Edmundston, at the Cathedral, and in Grand Falls, December 5 to 7. Canada is the twenty-second country to receive the relics of this great saint. What follows are quotes from some of her writings.

HER DESIRE

«I have always wanted to be a saint. I have always noticed, when I compared myself to the saints, that there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is hidden in the clouds, and the tiny grain of sand which is trampled underfoot. Rather than be discouraged at this, I tell myself: God in his goodness could not inspire desires that cannot be fulfilled, so I can, despite my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible to add to my height, I must accept my lot and its imperfections, but I want to find the means of getting to heaven by a small but straight path, small, new path. We live in a century of inventions, and we no longer have to climb stairs step by step; rich people have elevators. So, I would like to find an elevator to take me up to Jesus, because I am too small to climb the rugged stairway of perfection.»

HER ELEVATOR

«So I searched the holy books for this elevator, object of my desire; and I read these words from the mouth of everlasting Wisdom: "Let whoever is little enter" (Proverbs 9:4). So I came, with the idea that I had found what I was seeking, and wanting to know, Oh my God, what you would do to the littlest one who answered your call, I continued searching, and this is what I found: "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). Never were there words so gentle, so melodic to rejoice my heart, the elevator which must raise me to heaven, they are your arms, Jesus! I do not need to grow, for this, quite the opposite: I must remain little, and more and more so. The elevator is the mercy of God who looks down kindly on the powerlessness of the human being.»

HER FATHER

The gist of St. Theresa's message is the central message of the Gospel: to discover anew that God is our Father. Saint Paul writes: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, 'Abba!' that is, 'Father!'" (Romans 8:14-15) It is difficult to find more succinct or compelling words to describe Theresa Martin's special charism. God's very special gift of spiritual childhood has become, through her, a special gift to the Church, a unique path of universal growth and simplicity. Of Theresa of Lisieux we can firmly say that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the world of our day the basic mystery of the Gospel, namely: God is our Father, and we are His children!

TRUST AND LOVE

«My path is full of trust and love. I do not understand those who are afraid of such a kind friend. Sometimes, when I read certain spiritual books where perfection is glimpsed only through countless obstacles, surrounded by a host of fantasies, my poor little mind tires very fast. I close the learned book which hurts my head and dries up my heart, and I go to the Bible! How everything looks bright, then! One simple word reveals infinite horizons to my heart, and perfection seems easy to me then. I see that all that is needed is to recognise one's nothingness and surrender like child to the arms of God.»

A SECRET

«To remain a little child is to recognise one's nothingness, to expect everything from God like a small child expects everything from its father; it is to worry about nothing and to win no fortune. To be little is not to credit one's virtues to oneself, believing that we can do something; rather, it is to recognise that God hands this treasure to His child for the child to use it as needed, but it always remains God's gift. To be little means not to be discouraged with one's faults, because children often stumble, but they are too small to be hurt seriously. »

EXPANSION

A short time before her death, Theresa wrote: *« I feel that I shall be entering into rest... but I feel especially that my mission is just about to begin, my mission to have people love God as I do, to lend my small voice to souls. If God answers my wishes, my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of time. Yes, I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth. I do not want to rest as long as there are souls to be saved. After my death, I shall send a shower of roses. »*

A GIFT FROM GOD

God has sent a child to our civilisation which suffers from having lost the path of love. She repeats the message of God's goodness and tenderness. *His love is from age to age!* He created us in love and His love is everlasting. What He expects of us and hopes from us is that we love Him like children and that we let ourselves be loved by Him like tiny little children. Come, Theresa, tell us once more about your secret, as you visit us! Come and help us find His presence in our lives!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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