



SILENT HOMILIES

The Arms That Lift

*St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Way,
and why a priest still thanks her*



Silent Homilies

A book



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Saint Thérèse of Lisieux
15 April 1895

Dedication

*To Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, with gratitude
for her life, her teaching, and her quiet help.*

Preface

Why this book was written

This book is about Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

Most people already know a few things about her. They know the roses. They know the old photograph. They know that a young Carmelite died of tuberculosis. All of that is true. It is just not the whole story.

Behind those pictures there was a real girl from a small town in France. Her family had already buried several children. The moment she later called her conversion happened on a staircase after Midnight Mass. Years after her death, the Church judged her teaching deep enough to call her a Doctor.

On 19 October 1997, in Saint Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II named Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church. He did this in the apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*. Those Latin words mean "the science of divine love." Before Thérèse, the Church had given that title to a woman only twice. She had never given it to someone who died at twenty-four and had never been to a university. The title is not a prize for being popular. It means that her teaching is safe, deep, and useful for the whole Church.

She left three autobiographical notebooks, many letters, poems, and short plays written for recreation in her convent. Her sisters also wrote down some of her last words as she was dying. John Paul II said that the heart of this teaching is the Gospel way of holiness for everyone. She did not invent a special path for a few gifted souls. She described how an ordinary person can live the Gospel without waiting to become impressive.

The pages that follow have been checked against her own writings, the official acts of the Church, and the Carmelite witnesses who knew her. Where a pretty legend has grown over a real sentence, this book prefers the real sentence. She asked for that kind of honesty herself. Near the end of her life she said that lives of the saints should not contain improbable things. We must see their real lives, she said, and not their imagined ones.

I am a Catholic priest. I have loved Saint Thérèse for a long time. I have taken parish groups to places connected with her story, and I have said Mass with her teaching in my mind. I have also found, in tired weeks and in ordinary work, that she is still useful. That is why the subtitle is not only decoration. It is a promise I will try to keep before the last page.

This is not a booklet of little treasures. It is a full account of a woman, a teaching, and a friendship that still belongs inside the Church.

How to use this book

If you have never read *Story of a Soul*, begin at the beginning and do not skip the family chapters. The Little Way grew in a house, among real people.

If you already know her story and want the teaching, start with the chapters on the elevator, spiritual childhood, and the night of faith. Then come back to the earlier pages.

If you are tired, ill, ashamed of being ordinary, or unsure how a saint who died in 1897 can still help anyone, the later chapters and the last pages may be the best place to begin.

Each chapter is followed, on the next page, by a short reflection and a prayer. They are meant to help you stay with one thought. They are not a programme and they are not homework.

You do not need to finish the book before you begin to know her. Tell the truth about where you are, and then go to Christ. That is where she always sends people.

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Part One

The girl who was not a statue

Chapter 1

Alençon

A ninth child over a shop.

Marie Françoise-Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon on 2 January 1873. She was the ninth child of Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin. Four of the nine children had already died very young. That fact belongs at the beginning of the story. The Martin house was a place of faith. It was also a house that already knew grief.

Both parents had once hoped to enter religious life. Louis had thought of a monastery in the Alps. Zélie had hoped to join the Sisters of Charity in Alençon. Both were turned away. They met on a bridge in Alençon and married on 13 July 1858 in the church of Notre-Dame. He became a watchmaker and jeweller. She ran a lace business in the famous Alençon stitch. That work is slow and fine. It cannot be hurried. Their house was not a monastery. It was a workshop and a family home. In that home they spoke of God as someone present, not as a distant idea.

Thérèse was baptised two days after her birth in Notre-Dame in Alençon. Her eldest sister Marie stood as godmother. The date in the register is 4 January 1873. Two days of life, then water, a name, and a godmother. Nothing in that entry suggests a Doctor of the Church. The Church later gave the same child a title the register could not imagine. The register is still the first true page of her life.

Zélie could not nurse her. For the first months Thérèse lived with a wet-nurse, Rose Taillé, in the nearby village of Semallé. When she came home she bonded closely with her mother. The first years, she later wrote, were full of smiles. She was a strong-willed, affectionate child. She cried easily and loved easily. Zélie was already beginning to be ill. She

watched her youngest daughter with the attention of a mother who knows her own time may be short.

A letter Zélie wrote when Thérèse was three is still one of the most human sentences in the whole story. The little girl was intelligent, Zélie said, but she was not nearly so easy to manage as Céline. When she said no, nothing could make her change. You could keep her in the cellar all day without getting a yes out of her. She would rather sleep there.

That is not a holy card. That is a mother describing a real child. The later saint did not appear from nowhere. She grew out of a will that had to be trained. Her strong personality did not disappear when she grew in holiness. She gradually learned how to use that strength well.

Alençon was a provincial town. It was not a famous shrine. The girl who would later be called Doctor did not grow up under a well-known pulpit. She grew up over a shop and a workroom, among sisters, cousins, and the ordinary weather of Normandy. Holiness in her story does not begin with a vision. It begins with a family that prayed, worked, buried children, and still believed that God was not far away.

The Martin marriage is part of the teaching. It is not only a prelude to it. In 2015 the Church canonised Louis and Zélie together. That was not a sentimental afterthought. It was a recognition that the trust Thérèse later taught had already been lived in a marriage, in grief, and in daily work.

A Small Reflection

The cellar story is easy to smile at. It is also easy to skip. Zélie was not writing a spiritual treatise. She was telling the truth about a three-year-old who would rather stay in the dark than give in.

That matters because many people meet Thérèse first as a statue or a holy card. The child in the cellar will not fit that picture. She had a real will. She could be stubborn. Later she would offer that same will to God, but she did not start as a finished saint.

If you come from a family that has known loss, or from a house that is both prayerful and imperfect, her beginning may feel closer than the roses. God did not wait for a different kind of child. He began with the one who was already there, over a shop, in a baptismal register that nobody treated as history yet.

A short prayer

God our Father, thank you for the home in which Thérèse first learned your name. Teach us to tell the truth about our own beginnings, and to trust that you can work with a strong will as well as a gentle one. Amen.

Chapter 2

The house after Zélie

A second mother, and another goodbye.

Zélie died of breast cancer on 28 August 1877. Thérèse was four and a half. The loss marked her for the rest of her life. She later described how her happy, open childhood changed. She became more timid, more sensitive, more easily wounded.

In November 1877 Louis moved the five remaining daughters to Lisieux, to be near Zélie's brother Isidore Guérin and his family. They settled in a house called Les Buissonnets. It was quieter than the shop in Alençon. For Thérèse it was also the house of absence. The mother was gone. The father was kind and deeply loved, but the child needed someone close in a different way.

She chose Pauline as a second mother. That choice tells us something about her heart. She did not become independent in the modern sense. She attached herself again. When Pauline entered the Carmel of Lisieux in 1882, Thérèse felt the loss as another death. Soon afterwards she fell seriously ill. There were headaches, strange fears, and episodes that terrified the family. They prayed before a statue of Our Lady. On 13 May 1883 Thérèse believed she saw the Blessed Virgin smile at her. She recovered. She later treated that memory with care. She did not turn it into a performance.

At school with the Benedictines she was intelligent and often first in her class, but collective life was hard for her. She did not know the playground games. Her health and her nerves were fragile. Marie, the eldest, later entered the same Carmel. Each departure reopened the old wound.

It is important not to stand over her with modern labels. She was a grieving child in a devout nineteenth-century family. She used the language she had: heaven, Our Lady, the love of her father and sisters, and the fear of being left again. Those losses help explain her later hunger for a love that would not go away. They do not explain her away.

The house after Zélie was still a Catholic house. They prayed. They went to Mass. Louis took his daughters seriously. The tenderness of that home is part of why Thérèse could later speak of God as a Father without the word sounding thin. She had seen fatherhood. She had also seen it wounded by grief.

Les Buissonnets still stands. Visitors who go there sometimes expect a shrine and find a family home. That first impression is the right one. The Little Way began among ordinary furniture, a garden, and a house that had already known absence. Her later teaching about trust did not come from an easy childhood. She already knew what it was like to lose people she depended on.

A Small Reflection

People sometimes speak as if trust is what you have when nothing has gone wrong. Thérèse's story says otherwise. By the time she was a teenager she had already lost her mother, then the sister she had chosen as a second mother.

Her later teaching about remaining little was not a refusal to grow up. It was the faith of someone who knew that the people we lean on can be taken from us. She learned, slowly, to lean on God without pretending the losses had not happened.

If your own faith has had to continue after a death, a move, or a goodbye you did not choose, you are closer to her beginning than you may think. Grief in a believing family is still grief. The Martins prayed. They also had empty chairs.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, you stayed with a child who lost her mother. Stay with those who are still learning how to trust after goodbye. Give us the courage to keep loving, and the humility to need you. Amen.

Chapter 3

Christmas night 1886

The shoes, the stairs, the conversion.

On Christmas night 1886 Thérèse was almost fourteen. The family had been to Midnight Mass. At Les Buissonnets there was still a custom from her childhood. Shoes were left by the hearth, and small gifts were placed in them.

That night Louis, tired after Mass, looked at the shoes and said something that stung. He wondered aloud, in a sentence meant for Céline, when she would grow out of this. Céline saw her sister's face and expected the usual tears. Thérèse later wrote that she had been about to give in to them.

Something else happened. She later said that Jesus, who had made himself weak out of love, made her strong in that moment. She went down to the shoes. She opened the gifts in front of her father with joy. She did not display the hurt. She did not make the evening about herself. Céline could hardly believe it.

She called this her complete conversion. It was not a first confession. It was not a vision. It was the moment when charity entered her heart as a need to forget herself in order to make another person happy. From that night she dated the beginning of her adult will.

The scene does not need much decoration. A tired father makes a remark about shoes. A fourteen-year-old hears it. Part of her later life turns on whether she will make the evening about herself. She does not.

It would be a mistake to turn this into a general rule that people should hide their tears so that nobody else has to deal with them. That

can become unkind, and it can become unhealthy. Thérèse's act was particular. In that house, on that night, she chose not to wound a tired father who loved her. The generosity was real. It is not a law for every hurt.

She was not yet a nun when this happened. That matters for anyone who will never take a veil. The conversion of Christmas 1886 happened on a staircase in a family house. Many people wait for a large interior event before they will begin to be kind. They want a feeling that matches the decision. That night the old wound was still there. She went downstairs anyway.

After that night her inner life changed quickly. She wanted souls. She wanted Carmel. The girl who would rather have slept in the cellar than say yes had begun to spend her will on other people.

A Small Reflection

The shoes are almost comic until you remember what they cost her. She had been a child who cried easily. The family knew that. Céline was already waiting for the scene.

What changed was not the remark. What changed was her response. She received a small humiliation and did not turn it into a drama.

The later Little Way is already visible here, years before she had a name for it. Charity arrived as behaviour before it arrived as a theory. That is worth sitting with. A faith that can only begin after a perfect feeling will struggle with ordinary life. She began with the evening she actually had. The lesson is not “never let anyone see that you are hurt.” The lesson is that love sometimes chooses not to make another person carry a wound they did not mean to give.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, give us the strength you gave her on the stairs. When a small remark stings, help us to choose love without pretending we were not hurt, and without making another person carry more than they should. Amen.

Chapter 4

The first sinner she loved

Pranzini, a newspaper, and three kisses.

In 1887 a man named Henri Pranzini was condemned in Paris. The newspapers described a brutal murder. He was not a distant abstract sinner. He was a name, a crime, and an approaching execution.

Thérèse read the reports. She decided to pray and to have Masses offered for his conversion. She wanted a sign. She asked that he would give some mark of repentance. This was the first time she consciously took on this kind of apostolic prayer for a particular sinner. She had loved many people before him. Pranzini was the first for whom she undertook this work in such a deliberate way.

Pranzini was executed on 31 August 1887. The paper said that, at the last moment, he asked for the chaplain's crucifix and kissed it three times. Thérèse received that report as the sign she had asked for. She called him her first child. She believed God had heard her.

Catholic honesty has to hold two things together here. Thérèse believed the kisses were the sign she had asked for. We cannot treat those kisses as certain knowledge of another person's interior soul. Only God sees that. The Church does not ask us to turn a newspaper report into a final judgement on a man's eternity. What we can say is simpler. She prayed. She offered. She hoped. She read the last detail as mercy.

The story matters because it shows the direction of her heart before Carmel. She was not only a sensitive girl arranging flowers. She was already concerned with the salvation of souls. That language can embarrass modern readers. It did not embarrass her. She believed that a

man facing death needed God's mercy, and that her prayer could be joined to the Cross for his sake.

It also matters because of how she handled the sign. She did not make herself the heroine of the newspaper. She took the report as a reason to thank God and to keep praying for souls. The Little Way, even here, is not about collecting proofs. It is about remaining small while asking great things for other people.

A Small Reflection

Pranzini is an uncomfortable chapter, and that is why it belongs in the book. Popular pictures of Thérèse often stop at flowers. This story will not allow that.

A teenage girl reads a crime report and decides that the condemned man must not be left without prayer. She does not know his heart. She knows her own desire that mercy should reach him.

We should not pretend we can see what God saw in Pranzini's last seconds. We can notice what the story formed in her. Before she entered Carmel she already understood that love for souls is part of Christian life. That love is not curiosity about other people's sins. It is a refusal to treat anyone as beyond hope. The Church prays for sinners because Christ died for them.

A short prayer

Merciful Father, you alone see the heart. Teach us to pray for those who seem furthest from you, without curiosity and without despair. Give us Thérèse's hope in your mercy. Amen.

Chapter 5

Rome, and priests who were not crystal

A pilgrimage that corrected a childhood.

In November 1887 Louis took Thérèse and Céline on the diocesan pilgrimage to Rome. She was fourteen. She wanted permission to enter Carmel at fifteen. The local authorities were cautious. She hoped the Pope himself might help.

They travelled through France and Italy with a large group of pilgrims, including many priests. The journey was a correction as well as an adventure. Thérèse had grown up with a very high idea of the priesthood. She expected men set apart to shine in every personal way. On the road she saw something more ordinary. Priests could be tired, imperfect, even disappointing. The sacred office did not cancel human weakness.

She later wrote that she understood her vocation more clearly in Italy. If priests, who are the salt of the earth, needed prayer, then a Carmelite's hidden life had a purpose she had not fully seen. She did not lose respect for the priesthood. She lost a childhood illusion. That is a different thing.

On 20 November 1887 she was received with other pilgrims by Pope Leo XIII. The instruction had been not to speak. She spoke. She asked him to allow her to enter Carmel at fifteen. The Pope told her to do what the superiors said, and that if God willed it, she would enter. He blessed her. The answer was not the miracle she wanted. It was enough to keep her obedient and persistent.

Back in France the permissions were slowly given. The pilgrimage had done more than move a file forward. It had shown her that the Church is made of real people. Her later prayer for priests grew from that discovery. She did not pray for an idea. She prayed for men who carried a sacrament and still needed grace.

She also expressed, in those years and later in the convent, enormous desires. She wanted to be a priest, a missionary, a martyr, an apostle. The Church does not ordain women to the priesthood, and Thérèse did not treat her desire as a campaign. In Manuscript B she found that love in the heart of the Church could hold all those desires in another way. The priest offers sacrifice at the altar. She wanted her life to be consumed as love for the same Church. That is how she resolved it, inside Catholic teaching, without bitterness and without using the desire as a weapon.

As a priest I find this chapter strangely comforting. She loved the priesthood enough to see it clearly. She did not need us to be made of crystal. She needed us to be faithful, and she was willing to pray when we were not.

A Small Reflection

A pilgrimage is supposed to confirm faith. This one also stripped a dream. Thérèse needed that. A faith that can only survive perfect clergy will not survive the real Church.

She did not become cynical. That is the important part. Many people make the same discovery and then stop praying, or stop belonging. She made the discovery and began to pray more realistically.

If you have been hurt by the weakness of a priest, her response is not “pretend it did not happen.” It is “do not let the wound become a reason to abandon Christ or his Church.” She took the wound into prayer. That remains one of the most adult things she ever did as a girl. The sacrament is Christ’s. The man is a man. Prayer for priests is not flattery.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, eternal High Priest, bless those you have called to serve at your altar. Give them grace for their weakness. Give your people a love for the priesthood that is truthful, and a love for you that does not depend on any one man’s perfection. Amen.

Chapter 6

The door of Carmel

Fifteen years old, and a real house.

Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux on 9 April 1888. She was fifteen. The white ceremony and the later photographs can make the day look simple. The house she entered was not simple.

Carmel was cold. The timetable was exact. Work, prayer, silence, and recreation followed one another whether you felt ready or not. The sisters had personalities. Some were kind. Some were difficult. A few were both. Obedience was not a theory. It meant doing what the prioress asked, including the small humiliations that never appear on a holy card.

Three of her sisters would eventually live in the same enclosure: Pauline, Marie, and later Céline. Family love did not disappear at the door. It had to be purified. The convent was not a family annexe. It was a school of charity under a rule.

She received the habit on 10 January 1889. She made her profession on 8 September 1890, the feast of the Nativity of Mary. Her religious name was Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face. Both parts of that name would matter. People often remember only the first.

A sentimental picture of Carmel does not match the house that formed her. There was laundry, kitchen work, the garden, the choir, the cell, and the constant work of living with the same people every day. That is the setting of her sanctity. If we replace it with a soft mist, we will not understand her teaching.

Some later readers have wondered whether her teaching could be mistaken for quietism, the old error that says we should do nothing and

let God act as if our will did not matter. Thérèse herself insisted on small acts, fidelity, and love of neighbour. She did not teach passivity. She taught trust that still works.

She was young. The community knew it. Youth did not excuse her from the rule. In that sense Carmel was a mercy. It gave her a form strong enough to hold a strong nature. The girl who would have slept in the cellar rather than say yes now said yes inside a life she had chosen and could not rearrange at will.

Later readers sometimes treat Carmel as a backdrop. It was the material. The Little Way was learned between the bell and the wash-house, not above them.

A Small Reflection

Fifteen is very young to enter a cloister. The Church was cautious, and she was determined. Both facts can be true.

What I find most useful here is the unromantic detail. She wanted Carmel. Then she had to live Carmel. Wanting a vocation is not the same as becoming holy in it.

Most people will never enter a convent. Most people do know what it is to choose a life and then discover that the life includes cold mornings, awkward people, and work that does not feel like a calling every hour. Her door is particular. The lesson after the door is wider. If your own vocation feels less pretty than the photograph, you may be closer to her beginning than the people who only know the holy card.

A short prayer

Holy Spirit, bless those who enter a hidden life for you, and bless those who live an ordinary life with the same fidelity. Give us the courage to stay inside the life we have promised. Amen.

Chapter 7

Hidden years

Wash-house, choir, and ordinary work.

The years between her profession and her final illness were not filled with public events. That is the point. She lived the rule. She took her turn at the work. She learned how small a convent can feel when the same faces and the same faults return every day.

There was a sister who splashed her with dirty water in the wash-house. There were noises at prayer that she found almost unbearable. There was the temptation to notice, to score the slight, to tell someone later. She practised another way. She received the irritation and tried to make it an offering. She did not always find this easy. The stories only help if we remember that.

She read Scripture with a hunger that surprises people who think of her as only roses. The Imitation of Christ was dear to her. So was Saint John of the Cross, as far as a young Carmelite could receive him. She was not a university student. John Paul II made that point on purpose when he named her Doctor. The Church was saying that wisdom is not the same thing as a syllabus.

She also wrote poems and little plays for feast days. The community needed recreation. A Doctor who can write a pious play for her sisters is a different kind of teacher from a Doctor who only writes treatises. Both kinds have a place in the Church. She belongs to the first if we allow her to remain a nun in a real house.

Tuberculosis was already at work before the community fully understood it. Fatigue was not a metaphor. When she later wrote about

small sacrifices, she was describing the only material she had left: a smile she did not feel, a task she would rather pass to someone stronger, a sentence she swallowed so that a sister would not be wounded.

Parish life, family life, and hospital corridors have more in common with that wash-house than with a stage. Most of the work is unseen. Most of the people who need help will not write to thank you. The temptation is to invent extra dramas so that the day will feel important. Her hidden years refuse that invention. The day a person already has is enough.

A Small Reflection

Hiddenness is not the same as invisibility to God. That is the distinction her years inside Carmel make clear.

She did ordinary things in an enclosed house. The Church later read those years as a school of charity. At the time they were simply the days she had.

If your own work is unseen — in a kitchen, a ward, a sacristy, a night duty, a quiet office — her hidden years are closer to you than the basilica photographs. The question is not whether the work looks important. The question is whether love can be given there without an audience. She did not wait to be understood. She offered the next hour.

A short prayer

*Lord Jesus, bless the grey day in which nothing much seems to happen.
Receive the small work we will do, and keep us from needing to
advertise it. Amen.*

Chapter 8

Three copybooks

Manuscripts A, B and C.

In January 1895, during a conversation in the warming room, Thérèse told childhood stories. Pauline — Mother Agnes of Jesus, then prioress — told her to write them down. She wrote in ordinary school exercise books, in her cell, without special hours set aside. That text is Manuscript A. She finished it in January 1896 and handed it over. For a while the pages simply existed.

In September 1896 her sister Marie asked her to explain her little doctrine. In a few days Thérèse wrote Manuscript B. That letter contains some of the most important sentences she ever set down. In it she discovered that her vocation was love, in the heart of the Church.

In June 1897 she was already very ill. Mother Agnes and others arranged that she should write more, this time for the current prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague. They wanted material for the circular letter sent after a sister's death. That is Manuscript C. She wrote until she could not. The last lines were finished in pencil, because ink had become too heavy.

After her death Pauline edited the three manuscripts into *Story of a Soul*. She arranged them, smoothed the style, protected some names and details, and prepared a book the community could send out. The first edition appeared in 1898, in two thousand copies paid for by the family. Scholars later counted several thousand small changes in that edition. Most were matters of wording and discretion. Some passages were omitted. In the 1950s the original autographs were published, and readers could hear Thérèse more directly.

Both facts can be held together. The book that travelled around the world was a sister's edition. The voice underneath it is still Thérèse. Pauline did not invent her. She also did not leave the notebooks untouched. A serious reader should know that, without turning Pauline into a villain. Thérèse herself had given her sister freedom to prepare the pages.

Manuscript B is short. It is the doctrinal heart. If a person can read only one piece after this book, that letter is the one to choose. Manuscript C is the voice of a dying woman still teaching. Together they help explain why a memoir became a doctorate.

There is something very ordinary in the origin of these pages. No publisher asked for them. No bishop commissioned a treatise. A conversation in a warming room produced the first notebook. A sister's question produced the second. An obituary circular produced the third. World-changing spiritual writing began in school copybooks that were already in the house.

A Small Reflection

The copybooks are one of the most surprising details in her story. The Church's youngest Doctor wrote on stationery meant for lessons.

Obedience started the work. Illness did not stop it. The last pages were written in pencil because she had no strength for ink. That is not a pretty image. It is a true one.

If you have ever thought that important spiritual work requires the right conditions, her notebooks are a quiet answer. The conditions were a cell, a command, a question, and then a dying body. God used what was there. The lesson is not that every notebook becomes a doctorate. The lesson is simpler. Faithfulness in a small room can travel farther than anyone in the room expected.

A short prayer

Holy Spirit, you can work with ordinary pages. Bless the small work we have been asked to do. Help us to be faithful in it, even when it looks like nothing much. Amen.

Part Two

What she actually meant

Chapter 9

What the Little Way is

The elevator is his arms.

What is the Little Way?

Thérèse did not first invent a slogan and then try to live it. She described a path she was already walking. In May 1897 she wrote to Father Adolphe Roulland that her way was entirely one of trust and love. Pauline later spoke of the little way of spiritual childhood. The two phrases belong together. Trust and love are the words Thérèse reached for herself. The phrase “spiritual childhood” is more her sister’s summary, and it is a fair one if we do not make it childish.

She had wanted to be a great saint. She had also seen how steep the old picture of holiness could look. Virtue stacked on virtue. Effort added to effort. A person became tall enough for God. She found in Scripture the invitation that the little ones should come. “Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.” She also found the words of Isaiah about being carried and comforted like a child.

She imagined an elevator in a rich house. We live in an age of inventions, she wrote. The lift saves a child from the stairs. She wanted an elevator that would raise her to Jesus, because she was too small to climb the steep stairway of perfection. Then she said the sentence that gives this book its title. The elevator which must raise her to heaven is the arms of Jesus. She did not need to grow up in order to be holy. She needed to remain little, and even to become more little.

Remain little does not mean remain lazy, ignorant, or uneducated. It means stop building a career out of spiritual performance. It means let

yourself be carried for the stretches you cannot climb. It means receive salvation as a child receives food from a father.

This does not mean we do nothing. Catholic teaching is clear. God's grace comes first. We respond. We cooperate. We act. Holiness is not something we purchase. It is not something we sit back and wait for as if our will did not matter. Thérèse worked, obeyed, prayed, and loved. She also stopped pretending that the climb was her own achievement.

If the elevator image sounds modern, the older half of it is not. The arms of Jesus are in the Gospel long before a lift shaft existed. She only found a picture her own century would understand. A child who cannot manage a steep staircase is not told to pretend to be an adult. The child is picked up.

Pope Francis, writing on the 150th anniversary of her birth, returned to that confidence. *C'est la confiance* was the title he chose. He was not inventing a new Thérèse. He was reading the one who already knew that the arms do the lifting.

A Small Reflection

The Little Way has two errors waiting for it. One treats it as softness, as if the Gospel asked nothing. The other treats it as childishness, as if adulthood in the Church meant never needing to be carried.

Thérèse stands between those errors. She worked. She trusted. She let Jesus lift what she could not climb. That is the teaching the title of this book is trying to name.

The image is strong enough without being repeated on every page. Once you have heard it, the rest of her life becomes clearer. The shoes, the wash-house, the night of faith, even the last weeks in the infirmary: she is not trying to become tall. She is trying to remain small enough to be held. Grace comes first. Our part is real. It is not the whole story.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to trust You in the small things of today. Lift what I cannot climb, and keep me from pretending that I do not need You.

Amen.

Chapter 10

Spiritual childhood

Dependence that is not immaturity.

Spiritual childhood is not a personality type. It is not being cute. It is not remaining ignorant. It is the decision to live toward God as a child lives toward a father who is actually good.

A child knows that breakfast does not depend on the child's salary. That picture can help once. The point is dependence. Thérèse means that we do not hold our lives together by spiritual achievement. We receive them.

She also speaks of our nothingness. That word can frighten people. She does not mean that human beings are worthless. Catholic faith says we are created and loved. We have dignity because God made us and redeemed us. She means that, before God, we do not have an independent store of holiness. We are not self-sufficient. That is not an insult. It is the truth about creatures.

Adults sometimes prefer worry because worry feels like control. Sometimes it does. Anxiety can also be an illness, and it should not be treated as a moral failure. What Thérèse is touching is a different habit: the habit of trying to manage God by effort, as if love had to be earned before it could be received.

A child sleeps in a house the child did not build. Spiritual childhood is that kind of rest, lived on purpose, by someone who could otherwise spend the night checking every lock.

This is why her teaching is hard for high-achieving people, including priests. We are trained to be competent. Competence is a good servant.

It is a poor god. Thérèse does not ask us to become useless. She asks us to stop using usefulness as a way of being safe in front of God.

The child in the Gospel is not praised for being impressive. The child is praised for coming. That is the centre of her doctrine, and it is older than she is. She only made it visible again for people who had turned holiness into a staircase.

A Small Reflection

If spiritual childhood only meant temperament, most of us could ignore it. Thérèse is asking for something harder: to stop using holiness as a way of being in charge.

Dependence on God does not cancel adult responsibility. It places that responsibility inside a relationship. We work. We do not save ourselves.

This can be a relief to people who are tired of performing. It can also be a shock to people who have built their faith on being reliable. Both can be standing in the same pew. The same teaching reaches both. You are loved before you have managed the day. That is not an excuse to waste the day. It is the only honest place to begin it.

A short prayer

Merciful Father, teach me the trust of a child without taking away the duties of an adult. Amen.

Chapter 11

Trust when the feeling is gone

Good Friday 1896, and after.

On the night of 2 to 3 April 1896, which was Good Friday that year, Thérèse coughed blood. It was the first clear sign of the tuberculosis that would kill her the following year. Around the same time a different trial began. She called it a night, a fog, a table of sinners. The consolation she had known about heaven seemed to go dark. She continued to believe. She no longer felt the belief as warmth.

This was a spiritual trial. It should not be turned into a modern diagnosis. Clinical depression and mental illness are real, and they deserve proper care. They are not the same thing as what she described. We should not diagnose her from a distance. We should not romanticise the suffering either. She suffered in body and in soul. She remained faithful.

She sat, in her own image, at the table of those who have no faith, and she ate there without leaving the convent. She offered that darkness for people who cannot believe. This matters because her trust was tested when she could no longer feel the consolation she had known before. That is why her teaching is credible. It was not a mood that lasted while she was well.

She still wrote. She still smiled when she could. She still kept the rule. She still taught the novices. The feeling was gone. The fidelity was not.

People sometimes treat the Little Way as a spirituality for gentle days. Her last eighteen months will not allow that. If a way of trust can only survive while prayer feels sweet, it is not her way. She kept saying yes in

the dark. She also kept saying that she did not regret having abandoned herself to Love.

The night of faith does not make her teaching harder to believe. It makes it possible to believe. A saint who only trusted when heaven felt near would be less use to the rest of us.

A Small Reflection

People sometimes treat trust as a feeling that arrives when prayer is going well. Thérèse's last eighteen months will not allow that.

If prayer feels empty, her night does not give you a technique. It gives you company. She stayed. You can stay too, and you can tell God that you are staying.

This chapter is also a warning against a cruel kind of advice. Do not tell a suffering person that real faith always feels like consolation. Hers did not. Do not tell an anxious person that worry is simply pride. Sometimes worry is illness, and it needs help. What she offers is simpler and sterner than a slogan. Keep believing. Keep loving. Keep the next duty. The fog is not proof that God has gone.

A short prayer

Merciful Father, when prayer feels empty, keep me faithful. Teach me to trust You even when I cannot feel Your presence. Amen.

Chapter 12

Love in the heart of the Church

Manuscript B.

In September 1896 Thérèse wrote the pages that many people now know even if they have not read the rest. She had been reading Saint Paul on the Body of Christ. She wanted every vocation at once: priest, apostle, martyr, missionary, Doctor. The desires were too many for one small life. Then she saw that the Church has a heart, and that love keeps the other members moving.

“In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love.” That is the sentence. Love here is not a vague warmth. It is charity that offers itself for the whole Body. She could remain in a small cloister in Normandy and still belong to the missions, because the Church is one.

Saint Paul’s image is enough. The body has many members. Not every member is an eye or a hand. The hidden work still belongs to the life of the whole. Thérèse found herself in that hidden place and called it love.

The Church later named her patroness of the missions, with Saint Francis Xavier, on 14 December 1927. Pius XI was not ignoring the cloister. He was reading Manuscript B. Hidden love is not unemployment in the Church. It is one of the ways the Church actually lives.

She was given missionary brothers among the priests who wrote to Carmel, especially Maurice Bellière and Adolphe Roulland. She prayed for them and wrote to them. The heart of the Church, in her life, had names and addresses. It was not an idea only.

This is one of the most Catholic chapters in her teaching. She does not invent a private spirituality and then attach the Church as a decoration. She finds her vocation inside the Church, for the Church, as love. Anyone who takes the Little Way out of that setting has already changed it.

A Small Reflection

Some people feel useless because their work is small. Thérèse's answer is not that small work is secretly large. Her answer is that love in the Church has a place even when the work is hidden.

If you cannot go far, you can still belong to those who do. Prayer is one way. Faithful charity is another. Both are the heart doing what the heart does.

This is also why she can be patroness of the missions without leaving Lisieux. The Church is not a collection of separate careers. It is one Body. A cloistered nun and a missionary priest are not in competition. They are members of the same life. That thought can steady a parish as much as it steadies a convent.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, make us love in the heart of the Church, and keep us from thinking that only visible work counts. Amen.

Chapter 13

The Child and the Face

Why both names matter.

Her full religious name was Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face. The second half is easy to forget. Popular devotion often keeps the Child and loses the Face.

The Child Jesus meant, for her, smallness, trust, dependence, and the Incarnation. God came as a child. We do not have to become impressive before we may come near. Christmas is not a decoration at the edge of her teaching. It is one of its sources.

The Holy Face meant the Passion: Christ humiliated, hidden, rejected, spat upon, not recognised. She loved the Face of Jesus in the sorrow of the Passion as well as the Child in the crib. Her full religious name tells us something important about her spirituality. It holds Christmas and Good Friday together.

Devotion to the Holy Face was already alive in the nineteenth-century Church. Thérèse received it and made it personal. She wanted to console the Face that the world did not want to see. That desire kept her teaching from becoming sweet in the wrong way.

If we keep only the Child, we make her merely gentle. If we keep only the Face, we make her merely grim. She refused both reductions. Trust is learned at the crib. Trust is proved before the Face that suffering has marked.

This is one of the most important corrections this book can offer. A parish that only prints roses and a smiling child has not yet met the nun who contemplated the Passion. You do not need to choose. She did not

choose.

A Small Reflection

A statue of a young nun with flowers can be a true beginning. It cannot be the whole of her. Many people stop at the first image because it is lovable and easy to display.

The Child without the Face becomes sentiment. The Face without the Child becomes hardness. She held both because the Gospel holds both. God came small. God was also rejected.

If your devotion to her has been almost entirely gentle, this is the chapter to take into prayer. Look at a crucifix after you have looked at her statue. That is closer to her own name than another rose on the same shelf. The Child taught her to come. The Face taught her what love costs.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, Child and Crucified, teach us to trust You in both names she took. Amen.

Chapter 14

Victim of Merciful Love

The offering of 9 June 1895.

On 9 June 1895, Trinity Sunday, Thérèse made her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. She offered herself as a victim of holocaust to God's Merciful Love.

The language is strong and can be misunderstood. In her century some souls offered themselves as victims of divine justice, wishing to take punishment in other people's place. Thérèse knew that language. Her own text turns in another direction. She wanted to receive Merciful Love completely. She believed that love was not being welcomed, and she wanted her life to be a place where that love could be received.

She did not appoint herself as a rival saviour. There is one Saviour. She offered her life to be spent by love, not to replace the Cross. The Act should be read as she wrote it: an offering of trust, not a theory about punishment.

The words are hers and should be kept. Later summaries should stay close to them. She is not saying that God needed someone to absorb anger. She is saying that infinite Love is looking for somewhere to give itself, and that she does not want to refuse.

Later readers should not turn the Act into a slogan. It was a prayer. It belonged inside the Mass, the convent, and the rest of her hidden life. Mercy, for her, was not a mood. It was God Himself, coming toward the small.

You do not have to copy her exact formula in order to learn from it. You can ask for the same thing more simply: to receive God's love

instead of holding it at a distance, and to let that love shape the next ordinary hour.

A Small Reflection

People sometimes like the word mercy and dislike the word victim. Thérèse held them together because she thought love wanted to spend itself and was being refused.

The danger in this chapter is a beautiful sentence that replaces her actual prayer. Stay with what she did. She wrote an act of offering. She lived it in a real convent. She did not publish a theory.

If the word victim troubles you, do not throw the offering away. Ask what she was trying to give. She was trying to stop refusing Love. That is a prayer a parishioner can make without any special vocabulary.

A short prayer

*Merciful Father, I offer You this day. Receive it, and teach me to receive
Your love without argument. Amen.*

Chapter 15

The small hour

Flowers that were chores.

The Little Way becomes practical in the hour nobody would film.

Thérèse learned to take small irritations and small kindnesses as the real material of love. A sister who splashed her. A noise during prayer. A preference not spoken. A smile when she did not feel like smiling. She compared herself to a child who throws flowers. The flowers were the little sacrifices of the day. The image has been used so often on holy cards that it can sound decorative. In the convent it meant something simpler. Do not wait for a dramatic hour. Use the hour that is already here.

The point is not to collect irritations as if discomfort were holiness. The point is that the people in front of us are the people we are given to love. Hidden charity is still charity. If it needs an announcement, it has already changed shape. She practised a second sacrifice as well. She did not try to become interesting.

She was not trying to become efficient. She was trying to love God in the sister whom God had placed beside her. That is harder than a theory of smallness. It has a name and a habit and a tone of voice.

For a reader in a kitchen, an office, or a hospital ward, the translation is direct. The Little Way does not begin when life becomes quiet. It begins in the noise a person already has. Choose the person who uses up patience. Do one kind thing that will not be praised. Then do not spend a long time congratulating yourself.

The small hour is small on purpose. If holiness had to wait for a free weekend and a perfect mood, most of the Church would never begin.

A Small Reflection

If you want a test of the Little Way, do not look for a feeling. Look at the next difficult person in an ordinary hour.

You may not be able to fix them. You can refuse to add a little extra unkindness. Thérèse's wash-house is closer to most of our days than the basilica is.

Be careful with this thought. It is not a demand that you stay silent in every situation that hurts you. Some things need to be spoken for the sake of truth or safety. What she is teaching is the ordinary Christian refusal to make a theatre out of every slight. Hidden kindness is still kindness. Advertised kindness is often something else.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to love without needing to be noticed, especially in the next hour that looks too small to matter. Amen.

Chapter 16

What she did not teach

The corrections that keep the way clean.

The Little Way is easy to counterfeit.

She did not teach that effort is useless. She worked, obeyed, wrote when she was exhausted, and took her duties in the novitiate seriously.

She did not teach that sin is small. She taught that God is larger than sin.

She did not teach that every soul must enter Carmel. She taught a way that a mother, a clerk, a priest, and a prisoner can walk.

She did not teach that feelings are the measure of prayer. Her night of faith would be enough by itself to correct that error.

She did not teach a private religion. Everything she wrote assumes the Church, the Eucharist, the superiors, and the communion of saints.

She did not teach that hiddenness is an excuse for hiding from the people we are obliged to love.

She did not teach immaturity. Spiritual childhood is dependence on God, not the refusal to grow.

There is a way of invoking her that means: I will not bother. There is another way that means: I will bother about the small thing, and I will not make a speech about it. Only the second is hers.

Those corrections are not a manifesto. They are the edges of a path. If you remove them, you still have something that looks like Thérèse. You no longer have her. A version of the Little Way that leaves a person

gentler toward their own laziness and harder toward the people who still have to do the work is not her teaching.

A Small Reflection

Popular devotion can make her look easy. She is not easy. She is simple. Those are different things.

If a version of the Little Way leaves you less faithful, less truthful, or less willing to serve, it is not her way. Check the fruit. Then go back to her own pages.

This chapter exists because love of Thérèse can go wrong in polite ways. People use her name to avoid Confession, avoid work, avoid growing up, or avoid the Church. She would not recognise that use. Trust is not the refusal to tell the truth. Childhood is not an excuse. Love still has duties.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse, keep us from using your name as a cushion. Lead us back to Jesus, to the truth, and to the work in front of us. Amen.

Part Three

A friend in the Church

Chapter 17

Can a saint be a friend?

The communion of saints, without superstition.

Catholics say that the saints are alive in Christ. They intercede. They do not replace Him. Friendship with Thérèse is possible because the Church is one Body, not because she has become a second saviour.

The communion of saints includes the Church on earth, the souls undergoing purification, and the saints in heaven, all united in Christ. When we ask Thérèse to pray, we are asking a sister who sees more clearly than we do. We are not asking her to do what only God can do.

She said she wanted to spend her heaven doing good on earth. The Church judged that hope sound. She was beatified in 1923 and canonised on 17 May 1925. Millions have asked her help since then. That is not a blank cheque for every rose story. Signs are not required. They are not the foundation of faith. Some people receive them. Some people do not. Faith does not depend on the flower.

A friend in heaven is still a friend of Christ first. If devotion to her does not lead to Mass, Confession, charity, and trust in Jesus, it has drifted. She would be the first to send you back.

This part of the book exists because the subtitle promised a reason for gratitude. Friendship is part of that reason. I do not think of her as a mascot. I think of her as a sister who understands hidden work, tired faith, and the need to pray for priests. That kind of friendship is Catholic. It is also sober. She remains a creature. Christ remains Lord.

A Small Reflection

You can love her without collecting proofs. You can also receive a small mercy without building a religion out of it.

The safest test is simple. Does this friendship make you more faithful to Christ and kinder to the people in front of you? If it does, you are on her road.

Do not be dismissive of people who have been helped by a sign. Do not be dependent on the sign either. The communion of saints is larger than our private stories. It is the Church, alive in Christ, praying and being prayed for. That is enough to ask her help. It is also enough to keep the help in its proper place.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse, be a friend who always takes us to Jesus. Pray for us, and keep our devotion from becoming a hunt for signs. Amen.

Chapter 18

What she teaches at the altar

Hunger for a Host.

The Little Way belongs inside the sacramental life of the Church. It is not a replacement for it.

Thérèse loved Holy Communion. She prepared for it. She suffered when she could not receive. In her time daily Communion was less common than it later became. She longed for it with a hunger that her sisters remembered.

As illness increased, the effort of the rite became more than her body could bear. She received her last Communion on 19 August 1897. She died on 30 September. From that mid-August day she lived from what she had already received, and from the Mass offered near her. The gap was not indifference. It was physical impossibility.

As a priest I find this one of the reasons I still thank her. She will not let hidden holiness float free of the altar. Trust, childhood, small acts, even the night of faith: all of it is gathered around Christ present in the Eucharist.

If you take her as a teacher and leave the Mass to one side, you have taken a piece and left the table. The Little Way is not a nice method for daily life that happens to have a Catholic background. In her own life the background is the centre.

This is also why a parish can preach her without turning her into a technique. Bring people to the altar. Let her stand there with them. She would understand that far more quickly than a new set of spiritual exercises.

A Small Reflection

People sometimes treat the Little Way as a method for daily life with a Catholic flavour. In her own life the flavour is the food.

Go to Mass. Receive when you can. Sit before the tabernacle if you cannot. She would recognise that immediately.

Her last Communion is a hard detail. She wanted the Host and could no longer endure the ceremonial. God did not stop being present because the infirmity could no longer manage the rite. That thought has comforted more than one sick Catholic. It should not make anyone careless about the sacrament. It should make us honest about the body.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, feed us as You fed her, and keep our trust from wandering away from Your altar. Amen.

Chapter 19

Confession, hidden work, the difficult person

Why a priest still uses her.

Three ordinary priestly lessons sit close together in her life.

First, Confession. She knew the difference between scrupulosity and real sorrow. Trust does not mean pretending there is nothing to confess. It means taking the truth to mercy instead of carrying it as a private court. A Little Way that never kneels in the confessional is already a different religion.

Second, hidden work. Parish life is full of it. So is hospital chaplaincy. So is the hour after a funeral when the crowd has gone. So is the administration nobody wanted and the visit that will not be remembered. She makes that work meaningful without making it glamorous.

Third, the difficult person. Carmel gave her sisters she did not choose. A parish does the same. The Little Way is not a method for collecting favourite people. It is a way of loving the next actual person. That person may be irritating. That person may also be carrying more than we know.

I thank her for those three because they keep priesthood from becoming a performance. The work is given. The people are given. Christ is given. My job is not to look strong. It is to stay small enough to keep doing what was asked.

If you are not a priest, the same three lessons still hold. Tell the truth in Confession. Do the work that will not be seen. Love the person who is actually there. None of that requires a special temperament. It requires the grace she trusted.

A Small Reflection

This is one of the places where the subtitle of the book becomes concrete.

A priest can use Thérèse badly, as a decoration for sermons. He can also use her well, as a correction. She prayed for priests because she had seen that the office does not abolish weakness. She kept hidden work from feeling wasted. She made charity toward difficult people look like the Gospel instead of a personality test.

If you live in a family, a ward, or an office, you already know the difficult person. You do not need to go looking for one as an exercise. Love the one who is already there, as far as charity and truth allow. Then go to Confession when you fail. That is her way in ordinary clothes.

A short prayer

Lord, give us honest Confession, patience in hidden work, and charity toward the person we find difficult. Amen.

Chapter 20

Doing good on earth

What she promised about heaven.

Thérèse said she wanted to spend her heaven doing good upon earth. She also spoke of a shower of roses. Popular devotion later gathered many stories of roses arriving at useful moments.

Those stories should be handled calmly. She promised to pray and to help. She used the language of roses because it was her language. Not every rose in a hospital room is a miracle. Not every absence of a rose means she has not heard. God is not obliged to decorate our requests.

The deeper promise is simpler. She intended to keep working for souls after death. The Church allows us to ask her help. The good she does is Christ's good, shared with a sister who loved souls.

If a rose helps someone pray, let it. If no rose comes, pray anyway. She would not be offended.

This chapter is not an argument against popular devotion. Popular devotion is how most of the Church actually prays. The correction is only this. Roses are not the whole Thérèse. They are one of her images. The image is meant to lead to trust, charity, and Christ. If it does that, it is doing its work. If it replaces those things, it has become too small.

A Small Reflection

Popular devotion is not the enemy. Thin devotion is. A rose can be a mercy. It cannot be a proof that replaces faith, Confession, and charity.

Keep the roses if they lead you to her real teaching. Put them down if they have become the whole of her.

People who have received a rose at a hard moment should not be mocked. People who have received nothing visible should not feel abandoned. Heaven is not a vending machine. It is the life of God shared with the saints. She promised to spend that life doing good. That promise is larger than any single flower.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse, do good among us still. Send what God allows, and teach us to want souls more than signs. Amen.

Chapter 21

The pope who named her Doctor

1997, and what the title means.

On 19 October 1997 John Paul II declared Thérèse a Doctor of the Church. The apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia* called her teaching a science of divine love.

The title does not mean she replaced Thomas Aquinas. It means the Church judges her doctrine sound, deep, and useful for the whole people of God. She is the youngest Doctor. She never attended a university. That is part of why the title still surprises people.

Before her, the Church had given the title to a woman only twice. The point is not a comparison of prizes. The point is that a young cloistered nun was judged capable of teaching the universal Church about the love of God.

John Paul II, who knew darkness and hidden work in his own life, recognised in her the Gospel path for everyone. Later, on 15 October 2023, Pope Francis returned to her confidence in the exhortation *C'est la confiance*. The popes have not been collecting a mascot. They have been pointing to a teacher.

If you find Doctors intimidating, she is a good one to begin with. The teaching is demanding. The sentences are not. That combination is rare, and it is one reason she still reaches people who would never open a treatise.

A Small Reflection

A Doctor of the Church is not a celebrity with a better title. She is a safe guide.

If you only knew her as the saint of roses, the title is an invitation to read her. The Church would not have given it for a holy card.

It is also an invitation to take ordinary holiness seriously. The Church did not say that only scholars may teach. She said that this particular hidden life had understood the Gospel deeply enough to be offered to everyone. That should encourage anyone whose life looks too small to matter. It should also keep us from treating her as a mascot for sweetness.

A short prayer

Lord, thank you for the teachers You give the Church. Help us to learn from Thérèse without turning her into a decoration. Amen.

Chapter 22

For parishes that keep only the roses

Holiness that can be spoken in a kitchen.

Many parishes know Thérèse as roses, a young face, and 1 October. That is not nothing. It is not enough.

You do not need to scold people who love the roses. You can add the rest. The Holy Face. The night of faith. Prayer for priests. The wash-house. The Act of Oblation. The three notebooks. The parents. The condemned man.

A statue can stay. A statue that is never explained will shrink her. One good sermon, one page from Manuscript B, one mention of the Holy Face beside the Child: that is already more of her than a year of uninterpreted petals.

She is not against popular devotion. She is against being reduced.

This chapter is written with parish life in mind. Most people will not read a critical edition. They will hear a homily, see a statue, and take a leaflet. Those things can tell the truth or they can tell a quarter of it. A parish that keeps only the roses has not rejected her. It has simply not yet introduced her.

Holiness in her teaching can be spoken in a kitchen. That is one of her gifts to ordinary Catholic life. The kitchen still needs the rest of the house: the altar, the confessional, the Cross, and the communion of saints.

A Small Reflection

If your parish already loves her, you have a starting point. Add one true thing this year. Not a campaign. One true thing.

The people who bring roses are not the problem. The silence around everything else is the missed chance.

A feast day can carry more than flowers. Read a short passage from her. Mention Louis and Zélie. Mention the night of faith. Mention priests. Mention the copybooks. Any one of those details would already deepen the day. She can bear being loved. She can also bear being known.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse, bless the parishes that love you. Give them your whole name, not only the flowers. Amen.

Part Four

Walking it, and thank you

Chapter 23

Tomorrow morning

Begin before you improve yourself.

The Little Way does not need a new week. It needs the next morning.

Get up. Offer the day. Do the work that is there. Be kind without an announcement. Pray as you can. Go to Mass if you can. Tell the truth if you have sinned. Trust God with what you cannot manage.

That is not a programme of five steps. It is the shape of her day, reduced to an ordinary morning. She would recognise it. She would also tell you not to wait until you feel ready.

Tomorrow morning will be ordinary. That is an advantage. Her way was built for ordinary mornings.

People often postpone holiness until life is less crowded. Thérèse's life was crowded with illness, community, and hidden work. She did not wait for a clearer diary. She used the hour that arrived.

This chapter is shorter on purpose. The closer the book comes to the end, the less it should perform. The teaching is already in front of you. The only question left is whether tomorrow morning will be offered or merely endured.

A Small Reflection

Begin with what is already on the table. You do not need a better stage.

If you are ill, the morning may be smaller than other people's. Offer that morning. If you are busy, the morning may be noisy. Offer that morning. If you are ashamed, tell God the truth and go to Confession when you can.

Thérèse's conversion was a staircase after Mass. Her teaching was copybooks and a wash-house. Her last months were an infirmary. None of those settings was impressive. All of them were enough. Tomorrow morning will be enough as well, if it is given.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, I offer You tomorrow morning before I know what it will contain. Teach me to trust You there. Amen.

Chapter 24

If you go to Lisieux

The grille as well as the basilica.

If you visit Lisieux, make time for the Carmel and Les Buissonnets as well as the basilica. They help you understand the woman behind the devotion.

The basilica is large and later. It tells you what the Church and the pilgrims made of her. The Carmel tells you where she actually lived and died. Les Buissonnets tells you that the Little Way began in a family house with a garden.

Photographs are allowed. So is a candle. So is a tired day on a coach. None of that makes you a second-class pilgrim. People come as they can. God is not measuring the number of pictures.

If you can, sit still long enough to remember that she coughed in a real corridor and wrote in a real notebook. Then, if you have time, remember Alençon as well: the shop, the lace, the baptismal church, the house where a ninth child was born over a workroom.

Then go home and live the morning you have. Lisieux is not the test. The next hidden hour is.

A pilgrimage that only photographs the outside of a shrine has not wasted the ticket. It has simply not finished arriving. The invitation is to go a little further into the same story, not to feel spiritually inferior for having brought a camera.

A Small Reflection

A pilgrimage is not a competition in solemnity. It is a way of paying attention.

If you never go, you can still read her and pray. Geography is not a sacrament. If you go, let the three places correct one another: the public shrine, the hidden convent, and the house where a stubborn child once refused to say yes.

The point of the journey is not to collect a better photograph than the person beside you. The point is to come home less able to treat her as a statue. If that happens, the train fare has done its work.

A short prayer

Lord, bless those who travel to Lisieux and those who cannot. Give both the same gift: a clearer love of Saint Thérèse and a simpler trust in You.

Amen.

Chapter 25

A last word about roses

Keep them. Do not stop there.

Roses belong to her story. Removing them would be a different kind of untruth.

Keep them on the statue if they help people pray. Keep them out of the centre if they have blocked the Holy Face, the night of faith, and the ordinary hour.

She spoke of a shower of roses. Popular love ran with the image. That is understandable. It becomes a problem only when the flower replaces the teaching.

The rose is a sign of a life spent for others. If it still means that, it is doing its work. If it only means that she is nice, it needs the rest of this book beside it.

This is not a campaign against affection. Affection is how many people first meet a saint. The danger is stopping at the first meeting. Thérèse can bear being loved with flowers. She can also bear being read.

A last word should be quiet. Keep the roses. Read the notebooks. Go to Mass. Pray for a priest. Do the next small thing without announcing it. That is a more complete devotion than either the flower or the argument about the flower.

A Small Reflection

You do not have to choose between affection and seriousness. Thérèse had both.

A rose can be a thank you. Let it be that. Then read a page of hers that does not mention flowers.

If this book has sounded at times as if it were correcting popular devotion, hear the correction again more gently. The roses are not the enemy. A reduced Thérèse is the loss. People who bring flowers to her statue are already reaching toward a saint. The priest's task is not to embarrass them. It is to introduce the rest of her.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse, accept the roses we bring, and give us in return a little of your trust. Amen.

Chapter 26

Facts that still surprise

Copybooks, parents, a mission after death.

A few facts remain surprising even after the story is known.

She was the ninth child. Four siblings had already died. Her parents had both wanted religious life and were turned away. They married in 1858. She was born on 2 January 1873 and baptised two days later. Zélie described a three-year-old who would rather sleep in the cellar than say yes.

Zélie died in 1877. The family moved to Lisieux. Pauline became a second mother and then entered Carmel. The conversion of Christmas 1886 involved shoes after Midnight Mass. In 1887 she prayed for Pranzini. That same autumn she spoke to Leo XIII when pilgrims had been told to be silent.

She entered Carmel on 9 April 1888, at fifteen. She made profession on 8 September 1890. She wrote three notebooks: Manuscript A in 1895, Manuscript B in 1896, Manuscript C in 1897, the last of them partly in pencil. She made the Act of Oblation on 9 June 1895. The night of faith began around Easter 1896. She received her last Communion on 19 August 1897 and died on 30 September, saying that she loved God.

Story of a Soul appeared in 1898. Pius XI named her patroness of the missions in 1927. John Paul II named her Doctor in 1997. Francis wrote a whole letter on her confidence in 2023. Louis and Zélie were canonised together in 2015.

None of those facts is a trick. Together they keep her from becoming a statue.

A Small Reflection

If you remember only two facts, remember these. She was formed by loss as well as by love. And the Church judged a young, uneducated nun capable of teaching the whole world about divine love.

That combination is still surprising. It should remain surprising.

Lists can look dry. This one is meant as a safeguard. When devotion becomes vague, dates and names bring the woman back. She lived in particular rooms. She wrote on particular paper. She died on a particular evening. The Little Way is not a mist. It is a life.

A short prayer

Lord, thank you for a life that does not flatten. Keep us interested in what is true, not only in what is pretty. Amen.

Chapter 27

Thank you

Why a priest still thanks her.

I thank her because she has repeatedly reminded me that priesthood is not about appearing strong. It is about trusting Christ, doing the work that is given, and letting Him carry what I cannot.

I thank her for praying for priests without pretending they are perfect.

I thank her for making hidden parish work look like real work.

I thank her for the difficult person, the wash-house, the night when heaven felt closed, and the last Communion when the body could do no more.

I thank her for Louis and Zélie, who show that a family can be a school of trust.

I thank her because she understood weakness without turning it into an excuse. She loved souls without turning them into a project. She trusted God even when she could no longer feel that trust. She found that the smallest ordinary act could become an act of love.

I thank her because she always sends people to Jesus. A priest needs that reminder as much as anyone else.

The arms that lift are His. She only taught me to stop climbing as if they were not there.

If this book has done its work, you will not remember the author. You will remember a girl from Alençon, a pair of shoes, a condemned

man, three copybooks, and a young nun who kept faith when consolation failed. That is enough. The rest is prayer.

A Small Reflection

The subtitle promised a reason. This is it, said as plainly as I can say it.

I still thank her because she keeps me small enough for the work. Priesthood can tempt a man to look capable. She is unimpressed by that. She points back to Christ, to the altar, to the next hidden duty, and to the people who are actually there.

If you close the book and want her friendship too, you have understood it. Ask her to pray. Then do the next ordinary thing in the presence of God. She would recognise that at once.

A short prayer

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, thank you. Pray for us, and lead us to Jesus. Amen.

A letter to the reader

If she is already a favourite saint, you will know why a short booklet would not have been enough. If you only knew the roses, I hope these pages have given you more of her: the family, the stairs, the condemned man, the priests, the copybooks, the night when heaven felt closed, and the quiet work that still goes on.

I have tried to speak as I would after Mass, if someone asked who she really was. I have not tried to make her easier than she is. I have also not tried to make the sentences memorable for their own sake. If a line stays with you, I hope it is because the fact is true, not because the wording asked to be remembered.

If these pages make you want to read her own words, begin with *Story of a Soul*. If they make you want to pray for a priest, do that today. If they make you want to do one hidden kindness without telling anyone, she would recognise that at once.

She always sends people to Jesus. I am trying to do the same.

Sources and further reading

Her writings *Story of a Soul*, from Manuscripts A, B and C. Reliable English editions include those based on the critical text prepared from the original notebooks. Letters, poems, prayers, and *Last Conversations* — the notes gathered by her sisters, especially Mother Agnès of Jesus — complete the picture. Letter LT 94 to Céline is especially useful on prayer for priests.

Church documents Pope Pius XI, proclamation of Thérèse as patroness of the missions with Saint Francis Xavier, 14 December 1927. Pope John Paul II, apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*, 19 October 1997, naming her a Doctor of the Church. Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *C'est la confiance*, 15 October 2023, on her confidence in the merciful love of God. The canonisation of Louis and Zélie Martin, 18 October 2015. Catechism of the Catholic Church, on the communion of saints, holiness, and the prayer of intercession.

Useful secondary reading The official chronology of the Sanctuary of Lisieux and the Archives of the Carmel of Lisieux. The critical editions of the autobiographical manuscripts published from the 1950s, which allow readers to distinguish the 1898 community edition from Thérèse's own notebooks. Standard lives that stay close to the documents rather than to later legend, including the work of Bishop Guy Gaucher and the Carmelite editors of her texts.

Where memoirs or later devotion disagree with her own notebooks, this book follows the notebooks.



Silent Homilies

A word of thanks

If these pages have helped you know Saint Thérèse more clearly, thank you for reading.

There is no charge for the book. If you wish to support the writing of Silent Homilies, any gift is voluntary and received with thanks. Please give only if you wish, and only if you can.

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Printing tip

This book is designed in A5 format. For best results print double-sided on A5 paper, flipped on the short edge. Recommended paper: 80–100 gsm.