

A Week with St. Therese: Prayer soars beyond place and time

Anna Rae-Kelly, OCDS



DAY ONE:

The world knows her as "Therese of Lisieux", as the "Little Flower", as "Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face". Pope Pius XI described her as the "guiding star" of his pontificate and "declared her the patroness of all the missions ". (Bishop A. A. Noser). Countless Churches across the world have been dedicated to her name. Numberless homes, rich and poor alike, have statues and photographs of her in their little alcoves and on their walls.

WHO IS THIS LITTLE FLOWER OF GOD? HOW COULD SHE POSSIBLY TOUCH MY DAILY CHALLENGES, MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, MY PRAYER LIFE, MY FEARS, MY FAMILY HURTS, MY MEMORIES, MY JOYS, MY HOPES?

HOW COULD SHE, A FRENCH NUN WHO LIVED OVER 100 YEARS AGO, GIVE MEANING TO MY SUFFERINGS TODAY?

We set out together in this short week ahead and we seek to silently observe some aspects of her life and allow her words to draw us into astonishing answers to those seemingly impossible questions we've posed. And we begin with her name which holds mystical depths.

Therese is often called simply, "St. Therese of the Child Jesus". In this abbreviated form of her name, we recognize her deep love for the innocence, vulnerability, total dependence of our Savior as Child of Mary. And we are led by St. Therese to curl into the arms of Our Mother to allow her to teach us humility, smallness, hiddenness, abandonment. Therese lived these. But, as Father John Clarke OCD reminds us, "a mutilation of her name leads necessarily to a mutilation of her message, her entire life.....her devotion to the Passion of Christ and her desire to use the merits of Christ to bring salvation to others."

Therese was gripped by the Image of the Holy Face described in Isaiah 53, "...despised, rejected, pierced, crushed, oppressed "...for the transgressions of his people he was punished,.... he bore the sins of many".

From her sickbed, St. Therese revealed to Mother Agnes the powerful and eternal mission within her name... "These words of Isaiah ... have been the whole foundation of my devotion to the Holy Face, or, to express it better, the foundation of my whole piety. I also have desired to be without beauty, to tread the winepress alone, unknown to every creature". (Father Guy Gaucher OCD).

A Week with St. Therese: Prayer soars beyond place and time

Anna Rae-Kelly, OCDS



We may wonder how the glorious message hidden within the name of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, how can that message be understood by us, made relevant, lead us gently into the mysteries and power of abandonment and of suffering. We may begin by asking, "What's in a name?"

On June 14th, 1884, Therese was confirmed. THE HOLY SPIRIT RUSHED INTO HER SOUL, and the seeds were sown for the mission hidden in the first part of her name, Therese OF THE CHILD JESUS. Through her name, the Spirit would teach the world again all about Christ's hiddenness, His abandonment to God's will, His humility and so much more. Through Therese's name, the Spirit would also now ready the world for that astonishing, accessible way to holiness.....we would be introduced to "THE LITTLE WAY".

What of, "Therese ...and the Holy Face"? What message would the Spirit of God reveal to us through Therese's deep attraction to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah?

The revelations are profound and without number but among them we come to understand something of the eternal merit of the joy in being united within the suffering love in the Savior's Passion, how in Him our suffering can purify our souls and through Him, become redemptive for others. The love in our prayer can become eternal because in Christ, our prayer soars beyond space and time...

" to live in love is to sail forever, spreading seeds of joy and peace in hearts." (St. Therese)

Therese's name revealed her message, her "science of love", her "entire piety". What's in a name? What about our name?

Like St. Therese, we made our Confirmation. The Holy Spirit of the Living God rushed into our souls, the same Spirit Who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2), the same Spirit Who raised Jesus from the tomb of the dead.

He inspired us to choose a name. Some choose John, others Bernadette, others Lucy, others Theresa, others Peter, others Thomas... and our saints smiled in Heaven. Therese would manifest mystical aspects of Christ's Presence through living Him in her name. What of us? What is our name chosen on entry into the religious life? What is our inspired Carmelite name? What is our name inspired too at Confirmation? What aspects of Christ's Presence do His Peters and Lucys and Bernadettes and Thomas and Therasas and Johns reveal in our families... Peter's staggering repentance and strength; Lucy's unbelievable courage in suffering; Bernadette's hiddenness in suffering; John's deep love of the Savior and faith into old age; Thomas' trust and faith restored after soul-destroying doubt. Have we allowed our name, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to

A Week with St. Therese: Prayer soars beyond place and time

Anna Rae-Kelly, OCDS



set us on our mission in life, to reveal God to our families and colleagues and communities, to live the virtues of the saints whose names God the Holy Spirit invited us to take, follow: their humility, faith, courage in suffering, abandonment to His Will especially when it is not at all comfortable?

This was Therese's inspired name.....THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE.

She asked to "borrow" the Savior's love, courage, faith to live the mission in the name He gave her and she would "run as a giant" on the way of perfection." (St. John Paul II)

We began by wondering how Therese could touch our lives after the passage of one hundred years since her death. We started with some mysteries that are hidden in even her name. And we are already discovering that here, her very name, could begin to reveal answers to our difficult questions posed earlier.

Could St. Peter help me when I'm spiritually challenged by my weakened faith in order to stand erect to proclaim the glory of God?

Could St. John teach me about mystical prayer, about constancy in love and so deepening my relationship with the God Who is Love?

Could St. Lucy guide me through destructive abuse?

Could St. Therese lead me into a "love that does not calculate" to bring about union with God?

Could St. Bernadette teach me about overcoming my fears and about humility?

Could St. Thomas show me the way back after a lifetime of doubting the death and resurrection of the Savior?

What's in that name, offered by the Holy Spirit, accepted by ourselves? It holds an eternal mission. Like St. Therese's name.

So we now set out to meet Therese, ready to ponder, perhaps for the first time in many years, the mystery of our own name, the one inspired in us at our Confirmation, our entry into religious life, our entry into Carmel; the name that holds our own spiritual mission to live and express our experience of faith and our desire to be led by the Holy Spirit. And because it was a name inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, it's our name of grace, part of the name that the Father will use when He calls our souls back to Himself at the end of our missionary lives. Our joy in eternity has already begun.

A Week with St. Therese: Prayer soars beyond place and time

Anna Rae-Kelly, OCDS



"... I WILL SPEND MY HEAVEN DOING GOOD UPON EARTH" (St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face)

We have only just crossed the threshold into the mysteries of Therese. Tomorrow, we will try to look at her name through the eyes of Our Queen of Carmel as she beholds us, her Carmelites, the family of Therese.