

# CARMEL CLARION



OCDS NEWSLETTER  
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## SAINT THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS

Jessica Powers (1905-1988)

Let all who lovingly avow  
those gifts the Christ Child came to share  
acclaim Therese's virtue now  
and praise her name in song and prayer.

Her patroness and mother chose  
the lofty peaks of Carmel's height.  
And there Therese in fervor goes  
to follow Christ, her one delight.

Inspired by Jesus to convey  
amazing secrets of his grace,  
she taught the world the simple way  
of childhood that the Gospels trace.

More like an angel than a child  
she gathered virtue's flowers at will  
by whose sweet scent was God beguiled,  
whose tender fragrance charms us still.

Yet joy itself could not portray  
the surge of her immense desire,  
nor cloister walls have strength to stay  
a love that swept the world like fire.

All glory, Jesus, be to you  
this day revealed to little ones,  
to Father and blest Spirit, too,  
while age on age forever runs.

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## SAINT THERESE IS PROCLAIMED A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, is going to proclaim Little Therese a doctor of the Church on August 21st in Paris at the twelfth International Rally for Youth. Within thirty years of her death there had been a somewhat limited recognition of the possibility of her being considered a doctor of the Church. After another seventy years it is now becoming a reality. The feature article, "Back to the Gospel: The Message of Saint Therese of Lisieux," is a good summary of the current thinking of the two branches of the Carmelites on the appropriateness of proclaiming Therese a doctor of the Church at this particular time.



## LONG ISLAND CONGRESS SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON LITTLE SAINT THERESE

The Congress was a great success. We all celebrate this centenary of her death with great joy. No one present could recall her death last 1897, not even Kaye Garvey. This success of the Congress can be attributed to many factors. First of all it should be attributed to the patron, that Little Saint Therese. She said she was going to spend her heaven doing good on earth. Thank you, Little Therese.

The success on earth can also be attributed to the long range planning by Fr. Patrick Farrell OCD and the great generosity of the Secular Order members of the New York City area, under the leadership of Anne Engo. The long list of hard workers in the booklet was very impressive. Last but not least, we have to thank the membership of the Eastern Region for their prayers for the success of this Congress.

The conferences and workshops of light on Little Saint Therese are all available on audio tape and may be ordered by mail, see page 6. This issue also contains some reviews of the conferences and workshops by some of the members attending the Congress.

Satisfaction could be perceived on faces after the liturgies and the meals, but it did not seem to equal the gleam of those coming out of the Carmel Shop, laden with books, posters, video and audio tapes, jewelry, tee shirts and sweat shirts.

Fr. John Sullivan OCD bid us all a farewell as he completes six years as General Delegate of the Secular Order, and Councilor to Fr Camilo Maccise OCD, our Superior General. We will probably have the opportunity at the next Congress, in Pasadena California, in October 1-4, 1998, to welcome Fr. Aloysius Deeney OCD, our new General Delegate.



## OUR LADY OF THE ISLAND SHRINE

On Saturday, at the crack of dawn, we left on four buses for our Congress outing. This Montfort Missionaries shrine was located about an hour farther east and close to the southern shore, near where PAN AM Flight 800 exploded and fell into the ocean. Atop the largest rock formation on Long Island stands an 18 foot statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Fr Sam Anthony Morello OCD had the Mass and Fr Matthias Montgomery OCD shed some additional light on Little Saint Therese. We recall that she was fascinated by the ocean when she stayed at her aunt's cottage in Normandy. Long Island was the perfect location for the Congress.

**The National Secretariate of the Secular Order** met at the Hotel for two days before the Congress. The members present were: Ruby Alexander, Fr. Michael Buckley, Fr Ted Centala, Virginia Chromczak, Fr Jerome Earley, Fr Patrick Farrell, Sandra Malkovsky, Fr Sam Anthony Morello, Susan Muldoon, Peggy Wilkinson, and Penny Brown, the Secretary. We discussed many profound topics for better coordination between the six juridical areas of the Secular Order in our country. Details to follow after the notes are received.

Recently we heard that **Blessed Teresa Benedicta OCD** may be canonized in August in 1998.

**"The Little Way: Fire at the Heart of the Church,"** by Peggy Wilkinson, OCDS, with a review by Joan Murphy OCDS, Washington DC. See audio tape #6.

Divine love, not human achievement, will bring us to sanctity. Absolute confidence in God is the hallmark of our charism. In an age that preached fire and brimstone, Therese preached the love of God. She was aware of the power of invisible fire - of transforming love. Each of us carries the Divine spark.

Saints began as ordinary human beings like ourselves. Therese cooperated with the grace of God. She followed the same journey as St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, but without extraordinary experiences. There is an inner recognition spirit to spirit when meeting other Carmelites. St. Therese found a kindred spirit in St. John of the Cross. She could identify with his path of ever increasing love which did not depend on extraordinary spiritual experiences, but on love alone.

We must leave behind the need for attention, status and our own will. Therese had to give these up as the baby of the family. Even with a good family and friends, we might experience the type of spiritual loneliness St. Therese did. She was not on the same wavelength as other girls. When we have these experiences, we are homesick for heaven; but we usually do not realize this is part of our purification and our detachment from the world. Eventually the soul develops an interior solitude that is peaceful and delightful as it lives increasingly for God.

We want to avoid pain whenever possible. However our spiritual faculties are developed through the purification of our senses and spirit. Only then are our faculties adapted to God and our will connected to Him. Love resides in the will. We do not always have warm, affectionate feelings. When a mother gets up in the middle of the night, cooks and takes care of the duties of the family even when she doesn't feel like it, she is overcoming obstacles and developing virtue. Our everyday duties provide the same opportunities as a convent. Therese had many rebellious feelings, but she surrendered her will in spite of them.

Therese was in a family permeated with love. God and faith were the underlying motivation for every activity. Human beings must first receive love before they are in a position to give love. Then we become open to deeper love and deeper vulnerability. Therese's

losses helped form her soul. The experience of human love and suffering prepared her to surrender all to God's love. She suffered much through the loss of her mother, then Pauline, then Marie. She experienced feelings of abandonment and deep loneliness. She understood the sadness of life in its stark reality. She shed very bitter tears and suffered from head-aches, stomach pains, and rashes. The warm, affectionate atmosphere of her family was gone. She prayed to her dead brothers and sisters for help, for peace. She then knew she was loved in heaven as in her own family. Her scruples disappeared, but she still had extreme sensitivity. This changed when she experienced the Christmas Eve conversion, and she was to keep this strength until her death.

Many children experience losses. When we look underneath St. Therese's experiences we see that she is undergoing purification through this emptying and filling. While St. Teresa of Avila experienced this purification through unusual experiences and external signs, for Therese these occurred through natural causes. We might not be able to see our own purification and growth or the development of heroic virtues. These grow through our daily lives. It is the inner condition of our souls while performing our duties that is important. Therese focused her intense longings on God. No human love can fill this need. Therese was stubborn, independent and strong willed. She had to overcome these personality traits by accepting her weakness. "Heroic faith finds nothing impossible."

Spiritual gifts are given for the benefit of all. Therese became a missionary after all. She is missionary to the spiritually poor and homeless who do not know the cause of their suffering. Spiritual hunger requires spiritual nourishment.

We must help feed the spiritually empty. The fire of Divine love was brought to earth by Jesus. It must be tended and nourished so it will light all ages. St. John of the Cross described this fire as a living flame within the soul.

God made us human, not super-human. Therese will spend heaven doing good on earth. As more souls with living flames grow, the more grace will be multiplied and the more the world will be transformed to the greater honor and glory of God.



**"Our OCDS Promise: To Tend Toward-Perfection in the Spirit of the Beatitudes,"** by the Rev John Moran, MM, OCDS, with a review by Connie Bergh OCDS, Elmira NY. See audio tape #5.

In his talk on the beatitudes, Fr. Moran, made reference to the beatitudes being mentioned twice in the Gospels. Once in Luke, on a social aspect, and once in Matthew on a moral escatological aspect. He cites the first four as describing the coming of Jesus to us. The next three are a Christian response to God's mercy. In the final beatitude Jesus encourages Christians going through persecution. We all suffer persecution at one time or other by ourselves or by others.

In "The Sermon on the Mount" Jesus takes the place of Moses. He does not destroy the Old Law but brings it to perfection and fulfillment. The beatitudes are a summation of what Jesus continually preached. We see the face of Jesus in the beatitudes. In the Catechism they are an example of the charity of Jesus, a way to know Jesus as the disciples did. They are the heart of the Gospels. They explain the paradox of life through death. In Baptism we are willing to take up our cross and follow. This is the Carmelite way and the Christian way.

St. Thomas Aquinas claims that the beatitudes describe a person living under the direction of the Holy Spirit and that these gifts predominate our dependence on God. In "Blessed are the meek," we develop a poverty of spirit, piety and loyalty. In mourning we gain an understanding of what it means to be a child of God. Those who hunger for justice receive the gift of fortitude. The gift of counsel is given to those who are merciful. Understanding is given to those who are pure of heart, and wisdom to the peacemakers. All gifts are active in those who suffer persecution.

When we live according to the beatitudes we are in a sense living a kind of martyrdom and we are moving toward the vision of God promised to us. When we tend toward contemplation we best prepare for it by removing all distractions and dispose ourselves to the beatitudes.

In today's society, the beatitudes are counter-cultural. Everything in society is a negation of the beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are out of control. We tend to make decisions that are harmful to us. We give comfort to Jesus when we are not seeking

our own comfort. A saint is someone who experiences the goodness of God.

We need to surrender to God and accept life as it comes to us and reject everything else. To recognize our inadequacies, our weakness and mourn our shortcomings. "All pain is dear to me." Small sorrows are the (pinpricks). Our hearts are restless until we rest in the Lord. We need Divine Mercy. Mercy is an act of rescue. Live in the present with total commitment to God. Bring peace into the lives of others. We can become prophets to people in our own lives. Evil cannot stand the presence of good. God works in us and we can become witnesses and martyrs. The beatitudes are our roadmap to a Carmelite way life.

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**"St. Therese and St. John of the Cross,"** by Fr Kieran Kavanaugh OCD, with a summary by Fred Brush OCDS, Massena NY. See audio tape #3.

Fr. Kieran Kavanaugh discussed three main topics: a synopsis of her life, St. John of the Cross and his influence on Therese, and her doctrine of the "Little Way" and its sources.

The synopsis contained all the usual information known by her devotees, but Fr. Kieran also pointed out some unnoticed points of interest for us. One was a common misperception of her as being a spoiled child. He mentioned she had attempted to overcome her childhood shortcomings but found it only possible with God's help.

In her youth she evidenced a keen love of nature, a tendency toward the arts in her love of poetry and painting, along with a precocious affinity for interior prayer. Later when she entered Carmel her Sisters found to their surprise that she was more mature than expected for her 15 years. This was certainly no spoiled child!

Next Father explained the relationship between St. Therese and the mystical Doctor St. John of the Cross. In a writing exercise given at home in her youth Therese was taught St. John's reply to our Lord's request, "What would you ask of me." Therese and her family learned by heart the friar's response "Lord, to suffer and be despised for you." The themes of suffering and being despised were common threads in the lives of both saints.

St. John was little appreciated by many, even in the Order, from the time of his death because of several fac-

tors. First, was Berulle's wish to sever the ties of the French Carmel from its Spanish roots. And the second was a concern about Quietism and the effects of Jansenism in 19th century France. The tide began to turn when for the second centenary of the death of St. John of the Cross the Paris Carmel reprinted his works to commemorate this anniversary.

A copy of this book was purchased by the Lisieux Carmel where St. Therese came to know it. Our saint didn't use all of John's writings but had a preferential love for the Spiritual Cantic and the Living Flame of Love. It would seem that the soul of the poet in John and Therese Joined them in their pursuit of God. Some of her familiarity with St. John came also from a hand-written notebook of quotes made by her sister, Celine, which she brought into the Carmel with her. Father Kavanaugh said that Therese quotes St. John a prodigious 105 times in her writings. So her love for him was no mere passing acquaintance.

For his last subject Father spoke of the sources of the "Little Way" of confidence and trust. Therese not only used St. John for spiritual reading but she relied heavily on Sacred Scripture. Near the end of her life she continually found guidance in God's word. The little Way was constantly supported by her life experience too.

During her childhood crises of her mother's death, her sister's move to Carmel, sickness and personal scruples she turns to Jesus in simple trust that he will help her with his grace and He does. The theme of the Suffering Servant in the Old Testament is another source of this doctrine. It bespoke not only our Lord's experience but her own as well. Jesus trusted in the Father's love for him and so did Therese.

Even though St. Therese is seen as the originator of this doctrine its two fold sources are to be found in the Scriptures where the Lord will lift up the lowly and in the life experience of St. Therese before and in Carmel.

My evaluation of this presentation was that Fr. Kavanaugh masterfully presented St. Therese and her spiritual "brother" St. John of the Cross as interrelated examples of how both can guide us to abiding trust in God and confidence in his unlimited love for us.



**"Therese's Way And Our Way"**, by Fr. Anthony Haglof, OCD, with a review by Don Di Julio OCDS, Washington DC. See audio tape #4.

I believe that the central theme of The Story of a Soul is- "there are no accidents"; everything is affirmed in God's plan. Once we acknowledge that God's plan is at work in our lives, everything works to his will - every thing is grace.

St. Therese was a teenage, mystic who understood St. John of the Cross and could put his teachings to work in her own life. She understood our littleness before God and that our helplessness could be our strength. She is proof that one can ride the elevator up in the spiritual life, and that wisdom comes from littleness, not necessarily age. As we become more childlike and understand the ways of God, we can be moved quickly by God and our decisions can keep us moving on the way.

Therese prayed from within God's presence without methods and beyond books. She teaches us that there are no packets of ready answers to life and every day is new (one day at a time). Holiness for Therese does not come from our spiritual practices but from our disposition before God. We can't follow in Therese's footsteps since her time was so different from our own; we must live in the here and now with her inspiration - our own little way. We must take the meat she gives us and use it in our every day life.

Therese inspires us to enter into the mystery of the contemplative life. Silence, love for all without words, for her hidden life brought hoards of people to God. We are all on the Spiritual Inernet (not Internet) that connects us inwardly in faith - the mystical presence of the Spirit. We can grow and affirm one another by staying connected on the Inernet. Therese, who wanted to come down from heaven to do good has been a powerful connector of people of faith. Her presence enables us to give ourselves over to this process to be connectors for others. We must use this power or lose it.

In this process, we have to learn to let go of our way, We can even come to prefer the elevator because we know we can't go beyond our own circumstances and limitations. God's way within our daily lives becomes our "little way."

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## 1997 SECULAR ORDER DISCALCED CARMELITE EASTERN REGIONAL CONGRESS

Anticipated arrangement of titles and cassettes

### THURSDAY EVENING:

\_\_\_ #1 - WELCOME: Anne E. Engo, OCDS; ST. THERESE, HELP OF THE SECULAR CARMELITE  
AND ORDINARY CHRISTIAN: Rev. Patrick Farrell, OCD

### FRIDAY:

- \_\_\_ #2 - MEDITATION: Brenda Strand, OCDS; SOME SPECIAL PERSONAL FOCUSES OF THE  
LITTLE WAY! Rev. John Sullivan, OCD
- \_\_\_ #3 - ST. THERESE AND ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS: Rev. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD (Workshop)
- \_\_\_ #4 - THERESE'S WAY AND OUR WAY: Rev. Anthony Haglof, OCD (Workshop)
- \_\_\_ #5 - OUR OCDS PROMISE: TO TEND TOWARD PERFECTION IN THE SPIRIT OF THE BEAT-  
ITUDES: Rev. John Moran, MM, OCD (Workshop)
- \_\_\_ #6 - FIRE AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH.- Mrs. Peggy Wilkinson, OCDS (workshop)
- \_\_\_ #7 - ST. THERESE: SPIRITUAL GUIDE: Rev. Kevin Culligan, OCD
- \_\_\_ #12 - THURSDAY HOMILY: Rev. Sam Anthony Morello, OCD; FRIDAY HOMILY: Rev. Steven  
Payne, OCD
- \_\_\_ #8 - THE PRIMACY OF LOVE IN THERESE OF LISIEUX; Eida Maria Estrada

### SATURDAY:

- \_\_\_ #9 THE FINAL CONSUMMATION - WHAT MAKES A SAINT, Rev. Benedict J. Groeschal, CFR
- \_\_\_ #9A PRAYER: Fr. Patrick Farrell, OCD

### SUNDAY:

- \_\_\_ #13 - SATURDAY HOMILY: Rev. Matthias Montgomery, OCD; SUNDAY HOMILY: Rev.  
Theodore Centala, OCD
- \_\_\_ #10 - THE LITTLE WAY - A PERFECT ACT OF LOVE: Rev. Salvatore Scieurba, OCD
- \_\_\_ #11 - OUR MISSION HAS JUST BEGUN: Anne E. Engo, OCDS

**CASSETTES WILL BE AVAILABLE TODAY** at the cassette sales table, shortly after each talk is given. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, one or more of the presentations listed above will not be recorded. If this should happen, please accept our apologies in advance. On the other hand, sometimes elements not listed are recorded after all. The sales table will be informed of any additions or deletions.

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**"The Little Way - A Perfect Act of Love,"** by Fr Salvatore Sciorba OCD, with a review by Marie Poon OCDS, Barrington RI. See audio tape #10.

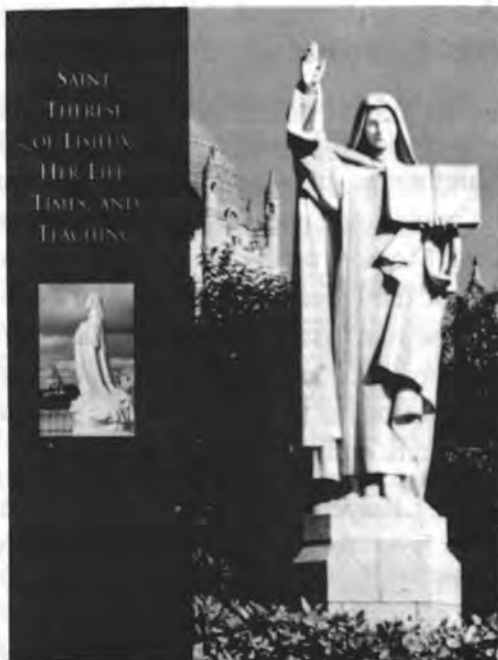
This was an insightful overview and synthesis of the major stages in the life of St. Therese seen through the three-fold lens of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. With forceful examples from Therese's own spiritual journey, Father illustrates that the "little way" is in actuality the concrete living out of these theological virtues and thus is "accessible to all."

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### AN ORIGINAL SCULPTURE

#### IN HONOR OF LITTLE SAINT THERESE

The Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco are offering an original sculpture of Saint Therese in honor of her centenary celebration. The statue is approximately eleven inches in diameter and ten inches high and is made of a marble aggregate. The color is either terracotta or bronze. See photo at top of the next column. The cost is \$65.00 plus packing and postage. Write: Carmelite Monastery, 5678 Mt. Carmel Rd, La Plata, MD 20646.



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**St. Therese of the Child Jesus, First Centenary OCDS Congress, "One Perfect Act of Love" The Little Way, June 12- 15, 1997, Melville, L.I., N.Y.**

Peggy Wilkinson, Secular Representative, East Coast

True to one of her promises, St. Therese let fall a shower of roses on Long Island, N.Y., the weekend of June 12th to the 15th. The efforts of the Congress Committee, headed by Anne Engo, OCDS, were evident in the results. The photos and posters of Therese, that greeted each arrival, set the mood. Each area of the country has its own flavor and New York, a nation unto itself, opened its heart.

Of course, whenever there is a positive action an opposite reaction arises. This is especially noticeable in Carmelite activities. There were many obstacles attempting to interfere with the Congress, but most Carmelites have learned to expect developments such as these, and take them in stride. Problems were minor compared to the abundance of spiritual blessings and joys which everyone shared.

Spiritual joy and laughter were very evident in the General Session talks and the Mass Homilies. (These talks were the only ones available to Workshop presenters, and I am looking forward to hearing the other Workshop tapes.) I would highly recommend ALL of the Congress tapes, especially to those who were unable to attend the Congress. Those who did participate will also find the tapes useful for reviewing the rich, spiritual content of the Congress talks, usually too much to absorb in one hearing.

Fr. John Sullivan, OCD, who recently returned from Rome, was the Celebrant for the Opening Liturgy, with Fr. Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, as Homilist. The Keynote Address was to be presented on Saturday by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, FFR. As the participants awaited this presentation, word came through that Fr. Benedict had been caught in a traffic tieup on a bridge for two hours. He was re-scheduled for that evening, one hour before dinner. Fr. Benedict's appearance was again delayed, but he was able to finally make an appearance during dinner. Because of the delay, and the fact that everyone was eating, Fr. Benedict gave only a brief talk instead of the planned Keynote Address.

On the spur of the moment, Fr. Patrick Farrell, OCD, was called to fill one of Fr. Benedict's absences and did extremely well. Fr. Patrick informed us of a saying which seemed appropriate, "If you want to make God laugh - make plans."

Fr. Steve Payne, OCD, was appointed to handle the Washington Province's Closing Celebration of the Therese Centenary in Washington, D.C. He already has a tentative schedule of events starting Friday, September 26 through Sunday, Sept. 28, 1997. Fr. Steve hopes for strong participation from the Secular members.

We were given an edifying example of our Carmelite Charism, as a number of Carmelites left the Congress for a short time to visit an Isolated Member who is in an iron lung. Natalie Wivczar, OCDS, one of the last young people to contract polio, has been a quadriplegic since 1956. By using a portable respirator, Natalie is able to sit in a wheelchair a maximum of two hours a day.

Natalie types slowly with one finger through the help of the wheelchair's overhead slings for her arms, which have springs to help her to move. In this manner she communicates with Isolate Formation Director, Virginia Chromized, OCDS, of the Utica, NY, Community.

Unable to attend meetings, Natalie greatly appreciated the various Secular members of the Utica, NY, and Huntington, LI, Communities who shared her joy as she made her Final Promise. They were joined by Natalie's Mother, family and friends. Fr. John Quinn, OCDS, of the Utica Community, and Fr. Sal Scirba, OCD, Spiritual Assistant for the Huntington Secular Community, also attended. The visitors brought Natalie a giant poster with prayers and well-wishes from her Carmelite family at the Congress.

Morning Prayer was recited, and Natalie was overjoyed to hear, for the first time, the "Salve Regina" sung. Fr. John brought Natalie the Holy Eucharist, and Fr. Sal received her Final Promise and gave her a Papal Cross. She has a great devotion to St. Therese, and took the name of "Natalie of the Annunciation and St. Therese." Brenda Strand, OCDS, of Huntington, LI,, plans to arrange periodic visits to Natalie by members of her Community.



## ANNUAL BOARD MEETING OF THE OCDS NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

The Provincial Delegate, a Secular Representative of each Jurisdiction, together with the Recording Secretary, Penny Brown, OCDS, make up the OCDS National Secretariat Board. Fr. Michael Buckley, OCD, Diane Lee Buzan, OCDS, and Doreen Glynn Pawski, OCDS, represented the Western Jurisdiction. Fr. Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, Fr. Jerome Earley, OCD, and Gerald Alford, OCDS, attended for the Central Jurisdiction. The two areas of the Eastern Jurisdiction were represented by Fr. Patrick, Farrell, OCD, and Ruby Alexander, OCDS; and Fr. Ted Centala, OCD, and Peggy Wilkinson, OCDS.

The Board meets the day before the start of each Congress and usually the following morning before Registration. All expenses of the Board are shared equally by the three Jurisdictions. The Formation Directors in charge of Isolated members for the host Jurisdiction also attend. Because of the rapid growth of interest in Carmelite Spirituality, Fr. Ted Centala, OCD, recently appointed three Formation Directors for Isolated Groups in the East Coast region. They are: Virginia Chromized, OCDS, for the Middle Atlantic States; Sandra Malkovsky, OCDS, for the South East; and Susan Muldoon, OCDS, for New England.

1. The Board was informed that, for the present, Fr. Patrick Farrell, OCD, would continue to minister to the OCDS Communities located within the recently designated Polish and Spanish Provinces of the USA.

2. Many prisons receive copies of Spiritual Life Magazine. It was brought to our attention that people in prison are becoming interested in Carmel through the Spiritual Life notices. Secular Members are advised to use a P.O. Box number, not their home address, either in these notices or other communications with prisoners.

3. Another topic brought up for discussion was lack of attendance at meetings. This is a widespread concern and OCDS Communities are urged to contact members, especially those habitually absent, to try and determine the cause.

4. Many questions raised by the Secular members were discussed, with the realization that most of these would require further meetings. Some of these in-

involved the "Regional Statutes for the United States of America." A Sub-committee was formed to review the Statutes for possible revision, mainly regarding updating and clarification.

5. A major concern is that some Carmelite Seculars do not see the significance of their vocation as lay people living in the world. As stated in the Statutes, the Brown Scapular was emphasized as the "Habit" of Secular Carmelites. It was hoped that clarification of the Statutes would discourage the misguided attempt of some Seculars to live as "imitation monks and nuns." This concern was also brought out in group discussions at the OCDS International Congress in Rome, October 1996, and is referred to in Dr. Maria Lupi's presentation.

6. The re-wording of other Articles of the Statutes will be considered, such as: Requirements for Canonical Establishment of a Community (12 professed members required in USA, 10 in Canada); Election of a council; Provisions for Council Actions; Acts of Devotion to Mary; Days and Forms of Penance (such as adding a day in honor of St. Therese); and Prayers for Deceased Members.

7. Every Secular Congress is eagerly anticipated as a time to renew old friendships and make new ones. We enjoy not only the social aspect, but also receive so many spiritual blessings. As our 1997 Congress ended, Penny Brown, OCDS, of the Western Jurisdiction, invited everyone to plan to attend the 1998 Congress. It will be held at the Holiday Inn, Pasadena, California, October 1 - 4, 1998.



# BACK TO THE GOSPEL: THE MESSAGE OF ST THERÈSE OF LISIEUX

Rome. 16 July 1996, Our Lady of Mount Carmel

A letter from the two Superiors General of the Carmelites: Father Joseph Chalmers, of the Ancient Observance of Carmelites, and Father Camilo Mac-cise, of the Discalced Carmelites, on the occasion of the first centenary of the death of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

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*The paragraphs were numbered to facilitate group discussion. The footnotes are at the end of the article. The photos may not be chronological according to her age. Some editing has been done to the text.*

## For Personal and group discussion.

1. Which aspects of Thérèse of Lisieux's experience and doctrine do you consider most important in your own social, cultural and ecclesial context? Why?
2. What is Thérèse of Lisieux's most important teaching for a creative spiritual and apostolic renewal?
3. How can we reinterpret Thérèse's teaching for today?

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## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Carmel,

1. We will shortly begin to celebrate the centenary of the death of our sister Thérèse of Lisieux. As this anniversary approaches, many are turning their eyes to this young Carmelite, who was a member of a Teresian convent in France and who, in her writings, shared her profound vision of the relationship between God and mankind -- the fruit of her personal experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. Thérèse' mission was to remind us of **the essence** of the Christian message: that God is love, and that God gives gratuitously to those who are evangelically poor; that holiness is not the fruit of our own efforts, but of divine action, which requires nothing more of us than loving surrender to God's saving grace. Thus her teachings have lost none of their relevance over the years; indeed, their influence has been so great that more than thirty Episcopal Conferences and thousands of Christians have requested that Thérèse be declared a Doctor of the Church.

## An evangelical and contemplative woman.

3. Although Thérèse of Lisieux spent her religious life in an enclosed Carmelite convent, she was declared Patron of the Missions, because in her, contemplative spirituality was united with its apostolic dimension. She communicated her evangelical experience in language that was both simple and vital, in words that could be understood and absorbed by believers from every country and every culture. Her return to the Gospel and to the Word of God, to the Jesus of history and to the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, anticipated the Second Vatican Council. She stressed the priority of love in the Church, the Body of Christ. She bore witness to the spirituality of ordinary life and to the universal call to holiness.

4. Thérèse' experience and doctrine acquire special meaning in our time, when new possibilities for presence and action in society and in the Church are opening to women. Women are called to be "a sign of God's tender love for the human race,"<sup>1</sup> and to enrich humanity through their "feminine genius." **By her life and her writings** our sister did both.

#### **A look at Thérèse's message.**

5. Rereading Thérèse's work **from our own social and ecclesial contexts, and from within our own cultural realities**, will help us to focus on what is truly essential: trusting openness to God our Father, who loves us and understands



us; allegiance to Jesus our brother, who is the way, the truth, and the life, always present and close to us; and obedience to the Holy Spirit, who guides history -- our own and that of our religious families. All of this must take place within the acceptance of our own poverty and weakness, with the certainty that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 8:37-39).

6. We hope that our reflections will help to keep alive the dynamic spirit of this celebration which must be a **time of special grace** for all Carmelites -- religious, priests and laity.

#### **Present importance of Thérèse to the Church**

7. During the Synod on Consecrated Life, several members of the Synod mentioned our sister as someone who has an important message for the Church at the dawning of the third millennium. Among those who spoke of her in their contributions was the Secretary General, Cardinal Schotte, who concluded his report with the following words: "In conclusion, may I recall a woman who was an excellent witness to the consecrated life in the mission of the Church. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus... This Carmelite nun of Lisieux distinguished herself by her humility, her evangelical simplicity and her trust in God... In her autobiography she wrote: 'As I desired martyrdom intensely, I found an answer in St. Paul's letters. The Apostle explains that the greatest charisms are of no avail without love, and that this very same love is the most certain path to God. And I found peace... I would be love in the heart of my Mother, the Church.'"

8. At an audience on 4 January 1995, Pope John Paul II spoke of the commitment to prayer in consecrated life, and pointed to the importance of prayer for evangelisation. He concluded thus:

"On this point, it seems right to conclude this catechesis with a word about St. Thérèse, who by her prayers and sacrifices contributed to evangelisation just as much as, and perhaps more than she would have, had she been involved in missionary activities -- so much so that she was proclaimed Patron of the Missions."<sup>2</sup>

9. The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, also mentions our sister: it speaks of her yearning to be love in the heart of the Church,<sup>3</sup> and her desire to be involved in a unique collaboration with missionary action. She repeatedly expressed her desire to love Jesus and to make him loved <sup>4</sup> through her own communion with him: "*To be your bride, O Jesus ... to be, in union with you, a mother of souls.*"<sup>5</sup>

#### **An invitation to focus on the essential**

10. In her religious name -- Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face -- our sister summarised her entire life's journey which took her to spiritual maturity through a process of kenosis, the self-emptying of the incarnation and the suffering of Jesus, who by his paschal mystery liberates us from every form of slavery. She was able to understand and to live out Jesus' plan of life, through which he transforms the entire world of our relationships and gives a new dimension to our relationships with God, with others and with all things. Against the plan of death which dominates and enslaves us in all these areas, the Gospel offers a plan of life which liberates and transforms us. Thérèse's mission was **to remind us of these truths, and to centre us again in what is essential.**

11. We shall look more carefully at Thérèse's message in the perspective of Jesus' plan of life, which we shall summarise briefly. Her message invites us to pass from the image of God-as-judge to that of God as Father; from lack of trust to self-abandoned trust in God; from the quest for perfection to the quest for communion with God; from complexity to simplicity; from laws that enslave us to the law of real and effective love which liberates us; from immaturity to maturity; from external asceticism to evangelical selflessness; from trying to earn God's love to standing before God empty-handed; from purely spiritual

considerations to the Word of God; from complicated prayer to a simple contemplative gaze; from an unreachable Mary to the Mary of the gospels, who is very near to us.

## I. JESUS' PLAN OF LIFE

12. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News he came to bring us, is the proclamation of *life* and of *freedom*. The freedom he brings is synonymous with love -- a love which forgets itself and gives itself for the good of others.



13. Both in his life on earth and in his teachings, Jesus fulfilled his commitment to life, even to the point of accepting the process of death which culminated in the cross. By his incarnation, Jesus assumed the human condition and gave it its full dignity. Out of this grew his respect for the life of each person and his will to struggle against all that oppresses or diminishes life. He was never insensitive or indifferent to suffering or death. By his attitude, he revealed God's plan, which is a plan of life. Even suffering is, within this plan, a path of life and of resurrection.

14. The God of life was present in Jesus of Nazareth. He, who was the Word of life (Jn 1:4), came to give us life in abundance (cf. Jh 10 10), and to transform us into the children of God (Jn 1:14). In the temple in Nazareth, when he began to proclaim the Good News of life, Jesus presented it as liberation (Lk 4:17-21). In this discourse, summing up his mission, he pointed out various forms of enslavement and oppression which control human existence and keep it in a state of death.

15. The plan of life which Jesus presented and initiated affects all three spheres of human relationships: relationships with God, with others, and with all things.

### 1. From fatalism to the responsibility of the children of God

16. To the plan of death, which presented God as the powerful and fearsome creator, Jesus opposed by his own plan of life, revealing God as the Father who, far from imposing a destiny on us, helps us to overcome fatalism and to cooperate with him freely and responsibly. According to Jesus, our relationship with the God of life is a relationship of love and trust.

17. Jesus revealed to us the face of the Father, and

this revelation is the core and the cornerstone of every believer's life, becoming the very centre of existence. The God that Jesus reveals to us is a God who respects our freedom. Our incomprehensible God who is revealed in the incarnated Son, and who, through the action of the Spirit, destroys our idols -- is a God who becomes, more and more fully, the one foundation of our existence.

18. Our commitment to life in all of its dimensions can become reality if it is rooted in this image of the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

### 2. From division to fraternal communion

19. In the plan of life presented and initiated by Jesus, relationships with others are summarized in the commandment to love our neighbour, based on the commandment to love God with all our hearts, our souls and our strength (cf. Mt 27:37-39).

20. Guided by this love, Jesus places himself on the side of the excluded and the marginalised, those condemned to various kinds of death: the poor, the sick, women, children, sinners, strangers. He offers life to them all. He struggles against all that opposes life, as he struggles against all that creates division -- between neighbour and stranger, between pagan and Jew, between man and woman.

21. Each human being is a synthesis of creation, accomplished in and by the Word (see Col 1:15-16; Jn 1:3). Because of this, human beings possess a sacred quality which comes to them from God. In the light of Christ, human beings appear in the universe as those who hear the Word of God and dialogue with God. By his incarnation, the son of God "*has in a certain way united himself with each human being.*"<sup>6</sup> As Matthew's Gospel tells us (Mt 25:31-46), Christ is very near to us, present in every human being, "and with particular tenderness he chose to identify himself with those who are poorest and weakest."<sup>7</sup>

22. This is a sacramental presence, which at once reveals and conceals. In the face of every human being we can see something of the face of Jesus, the Word of life. We first intuit the mystery of God within our own unique experience and within the autonomous and reciprocal reality of man and of woman. Pope John Paul II has emphasised the dignity of women and their "*specific contribution to the Church's life and to pastoral and missionary activity... The Church depends*

on ... women for new efforts ... especially in (fostering) everything that affects the dignity of women and respect for human life ... and promoting the fundamental values of life and peace."<sup>8</sup>

23. The discovery of God's presence in others brings about a change in human relationships. It motivates us to live our commitment to love that is real and effective. It demands an openness to universal fraternity in the Church and in society and it invites us to commit ourselves to all that implies life, communion and participation, from the perspective of a preferential option for the poor in whom the face of God is "dimmed and even defiled."<sup>9</sup>

### 3. From a selfish to a shared use of resources

24. In Jesus's plan of life, relationships with material things are transformed. We are invited to move from using things in a way which alienates and enslaves us - leading to the oppression of others, forcing them into various forms of death -- to using them with freedom, and, above all, to sharing them with others in a society which is just and human to everyone. For Jesus, material things are places of encounter with God and with our brothers and sisters, means of communication and of communion among people.

25. Jesus' religious message has social implications which result in a commitment to justice as a source of life. This is the expression of the social and communal dimension of his commandment to love. Jesus' plan of life, the Kingdom of God which he announced, has repercussions for the structures within which human beings live together. When these structures are founded on injustice and oppression, they become instruments of death. Christ's teachings question and challenge us powerfully on this point, and invite us to commit ourselves to a life of justice.

## II. SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX LIVED AND BORE WITNESS TO JESUS' PLAN



26. The celebration of our sister's centenary is a time to reread her life and her writings in the context of Jesus' project of life, from the perspective of our social, cultural and ecclesial environment. However,

reflection on her spiritual experience demands from us, above all, a deep renewal of our lives as Carmelites. **Thérèse reminds us of the fundamental values of the Gospel and invites us to centre our lives in them.** Reading and meditating the word of God, she discovered the essential aspects of our relationships with God, with others, and with all things; she lived these with great simplicity, deeply and spontaneously, and she communicated them by her life and in her writings.

### 1. A close and loving God

#### Drinking from the living source of the Word of God

27. Thérèse of Lisieux nourished her life and her spirituality from the pure source of the Word of God. At a time when reading the Bible was seldom encouraged, she did what the Second Vatican Council would later ask of all believers, and in particular of religious: she acquired "the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures." "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."<sup>10</sup>

28. Faithful to the Rule, Thérèse "meditated day and night on the Law of the Lord, and kept watch in prayer."<sup>11</sup> Like her spiritual mother Teresa of Jesus, she "found in Jesus a living book;"<sup>12</sup> and in imitation of St. John of the Cross, she "fixed her eyes on Christ."<sup>13</sup> She herself tells us how, little by little, she left spiritual books, which - especially St. John of the Cross - had been of great assistance to her on her journey, and focused on the Scriptures, in particular on the gospels:

"Later on, however, all books left me in aridity.... if I open a book composed by a spiritual author..., I feel my heart contract immediately and I read without understanding. Or if I do understand, my mind comes to a standstill without the capacity of meditating. In this helplessness, **Holy Scripture** and the Imitation 'come to my aid; in them I discover a solid and very pure nourishment. But it is especially the Gospels which sustain me during my hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul. I am constantly discovering in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings. I understand and I know from experience that 'The kingdom of God is within us.'<sup>14</sup>

29. Reading and reflecting on the Word of God, Thérèse discovered the essence of Jesus' message in ordinary daily life. This link between the Word of God and concrete everyday life led her "to find, just when I

need them, certain lights which I had not seen until then... in the midst of my daily occupations."15 But it is primarily in his liberating Word that Jesus made himself present to Therese: "Never have I heard him speak but I feel that he is within me at each moment, guiding me, and inspiring what I must say and do."16

30. In her efforts to remind us of the essential, Thérèse presents the Word of God as a lamp which sheds light on our paths (cf. Ps 119, 105).17 She reminds us that in order to understand God's message, we must have the hearts of children open and available to whatever the Spirit is saying to us and asking of us in our vocations and in our mission in the Church.

31. We need to be constantly attentive to the Word of God, "the source of all Christian spirituality."18 The Church recommends communal meditation on the Bible, not only for consecrated people, but for all members of the People of God. "From familiarity with God's Word, they draw the light needed for the individual and communal discernment which helps them to seek the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times."19

32. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose devotion to the Scriptures was so great that she wanted to learn the biblical languages in order to enjoy the Word of God better, was not in contact with the recent Church approach to the Scriptures. Nor did her environment give her the opportunities we have today to acquire better knowledge and understanding of the biblical message.

Nonetheless, she practised the Carmelite Rule's recommendation to keep the Word of God abundantly on her lips, and in her heart, so that all that she did might always be in agreement with the word.20 Let us read and meditate the Word of God, as our sister did, and let us put its demands into practice, using the new means that God offers us, at this particular time in the history of the Church, to assist us in deepening our understanding of God's Word.

### **Rediscovering the paternal-maternal face of God**

33. Thérèse lived in an era characterised by a Jansenist spirituality which deformed the face of God, presenting God exclusively as a severe judge who could even ask us to offer ourselves as victims in an effort to appease God's wrath.

34. In reading and meditating upon the Word of God, Thérèse of Lisieux opened her heart to Jesus, who re-

vealed to her the true face of God: the merciful father-mother who invites us to live as the sons and daughters of God, in trust and in self-abandonment, surrendering ourselves to divine love, assuming with responsibility -- as Christ did -- the mission to proclaim God's plan for humanity. She understood "how Jesus wants to be loved", and she offered herself as a sacrifice to his all-merciful Love, which wishes to communicate itself to all people."21

### **Prayer as simple filial dialogue**

35. Like her spiritual mother Teresa of Avila, 22 Thérèse of Lisieux experienced prayer as a trusting and loving dialogue with God the Father."23 The strength which comes from:

prayer opened her to the evangelical abnegation necessary for authentic prayer, and was transformed into vital experience. "It is prayer, it is sacrifice which give me all my strength; these are the invincible weapons which Jesus has given me. They can touch souls much better than words."24

Her prayer became increasingly simple, placing her at the very source of the living water, in the divine fire which purifies and transforms. "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart, it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy; it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me with Jesus."25

### **From holiness as "perfection" to holiness as "communion"**

36. For Thérèse, the rediscovery of the paternal and maternal face of God marked the beginning of a new path towards holiness. She followed this path most fully after the onset of her illness in 1894. As she tells us in her writings, Jesus showed her that the way to holiness lies in the trust and self-abandonment of a child who falls asleep without fear in the arms of his Father:

"Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.' So speaks the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Solomon. This same Spirit of Love also says: For to him that is little, mercy will be shown.' The prophet Isaiah reveals in His name that on the last day... as a mother comforts her child so I will comfort you; I shall carry you at my breasts, and caress you on my knees'... Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simply surrender and gratitude."26



37. This is the transition from fear to trust. We stand before God as children before a father and a mother. God makes everything, even our faults and our mistakes, work for our good:



"It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love... What pleases him is that he sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in his mercy... To love Jesus, to be his victim of love - the weaker one is, without desires or virtues, the more suited one is for the workings of this consuming and transforming Love."<sup>27</sup>

38. At the root of our vocation to consecrated life in Carmel is the Lord's initiative. In responding to God's invitation, those who have been called entrust themselves to God's love, dedicating their lives unconditionally to God, "consecrating to God all things present and future, and placing them in God's hands."<sup>28</sup> Like Thérèse of Lisieux, we are called to live profoundly the experience of the paternal and maternal face of God; to experience prayer as a loving dialogue with God and as a contemplative look at reality, an attentive ear turned to God as we commit ourselves to our brothers and sisters; to look at holiness not as "perfection" but as communion with God in faith, hope, and love - the sanctity of the theological virtues laid out in the Rule and St. John of the Cross, who through his writings was Thérèse's teacher and spiritual father.

#### **Fidelity to our mission and purification of our faith**

39. The gratuitous experience of the paternal and maternal face of God, revealed in Jesus, and fidelity to one's own vocation and mission, responsibility assumed as sons and daughters of God, enter into the dynamic of the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. They are subject to purification and to the test of faith. Thérèse of Lisieux expressed this by adding to her name, in an inseparable unity'. "the Child Jesus" and 'the Holy Face'. The incarnated Word who, in the mystery of his childhood, invites us to trust, to love and to abandonment, is the same suffering servant who introduces us to the mysterious path which he himself trod before us -- a suffering arising from fidelity to the Father's mission'.

40. Thérèse discovered and understood her vocation through a process of purification of her faith in God. Her apostolic yearning to proclaim the Good News of salvation became a martyrdom of love, as she could see no way to combine or realise all of her desires. God led her to understand, in the light of Chapters 12 and 13 of the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, that the Church is like a body, and that in this body love is the heart which sets in motion all the other parts and which, for this reason, encompasses all vocations, regardless of age and place. When Thérèse understood this, she exclaimed: "*My vocation - at last I have found it - my vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my mother, I shall be love!*" Thus *I shall be everything, and this my dream will be realised!*"<sup>29</sup>

41. What has been described as "Thérèse of Lisieux's passion"<sup>30</sup> can be seen powerfully in her *Last Conversations*. This passion was an experience of purifying darkness, of illness, shadow, doubts and pangs of death. In her efforts to be faithful to her contemplative vocation, she followed the path to Calvary: "*At that time I had many great interior trials of all sorts (I even wondered at times whether heaven existed.)*"<sup>31</sup> In the last months of her life, this purifying darkness became particularly dense. Thérèse drank the cup of pain to its very dregs. Like Jesus, she offered her life for others.

42. The paschal dimension of consecrated life also includes the cross and suffering, in fidelity to the fulfilment of the commitment to the Church's mission; <sup>32</sup> for "*a sense of mission is essential to every Institute, not only those dedicated to the active apostolic life, but also those dedicated to the contemplative life. Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness.*"<sup>33</sup>

In the fulfilment of our mission, we are called, like Thérèse of Lisieux, to experience the purification of our faith -- the shield that protects us from the temptations of evil.<sup>34</sup> In times of hardship, including persecution and martyrdom, we are called to assume the cross as "*the superabundance of God's love poured out upon this world ... the great sign of Christ's saving presence, especially in the midst of difficulties and trials.*"<sup>35</sup>

## 2. A God who builds community

### The evangelical dimensions of fraternal love

43. The second aspect of Jesus' plan is overcoming hatred and division, in order to achieve love and communion with all those to whom he calls us. This call is closely linked to the discovery of the paternal and maternal face of God which, in Christ, has transformed us into brothers and sisters. This is the second part of the one commandment of love: to love our neighbour as we love ourself.

44. In Thérèse of Lisieux's experience and doctrine, we find the conviction that the authenticity of our love for God is manifested in the quality of our love for our neighbour. The dimension of fraternal love gradually expands to encompass wider and wider horizons, in a series of concentric circles -- an expansion which has its source in the love of God.

The first circle hold those who are closest to us; the largest one encompasses the entire human race. For Thérèse, trust and abandonment to God the Father-Mother, and the knowledge of being loved by him, are the source of fraternal charity and of apostolate, -- the expression of love for all human beings in the desire to share with them the good news of salvation.

### Fraternal love and life in community

45. We live the evangelical dimensions of fraternal love through the concrete realities of our human existence: family, religious community, Christian communities, Church, various groups and associations, society as a whole. In each of these we encounter light and darkness, positive and negative aspects. Thérèse teaches us to be a living part of this reality and to begin living evangelical love wherever God has placed us.

46. When Thérèse entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux it was, in the words of her sister Marie, a small and poor convent. There were 26 religious; the average age was 47. It was a poor community in human terms, and spiritually it was influenced both by the rigorous attitudes of the time and by fear of an avenging God, the legacy of Jansenism. All this created a continual obstacle to the dynamism of love and balance which St Teresa of Jesus sought to protect by her spiritual and human realism. In this environment, among real people -- people with names, qualities and faults -- Thérèse of Lisieux lived out fraternal

love and responded to its demands.

47. Many passages in *Manuscript C*, addressed to Mother Marie de Gonzaga, Prioress of the convent, describe Thérèse's gradual progress in understanding and living Jesus' commandment to love others as he loved us. She learned to tolerate the faults of others; not to be alienated by their weaknesses, to learn from small signs of virtue; to judge everyone with understanding and kindness. The manuscript also describes a few specific incidents which put her love for others to the test and set obstacles in the path of communion. 36 In the small efforts, services and sacrifices of fraternal life in community, Thérèse lived the precept of love.

48. The dimension of communion which is an integral part of the vocation to consecrated life, stressed also in our Rule, has been recently emphasised by *Vita Consecrata* in the second part, "*Signum fraternitatis: Consecrated life as a sign of communion in the Church.*"<sup>37</sup>

The paschal mystery helps us to understand that without renunciation, without the cross, without generous devotion, openness and forgiveness, we cannot love others as Jesus did. Thérèse of Lisieux teaches and inspires us to live the new communion and fraternity in Christ within the concrete circumstances of our communities, in the midst of all our difficulties.

**3. A God who asks us  
to announce the Good  
News. The missionary  
dimension: to love  
Jesus and to make  
him loved.**



49. Commitment to evangelisation is an expression of universal love. To witness to others the new life in Christ and to proclaim Christ's message of hope, is to love them. In her life as a contemplative nun, Thérèse never ceased to live the missionary and apostolic dynamic of the Christian vocation. From her particular vocation to Carmel, she wanted to cooperate with Christ in the redemption of the world -- not only until the end of her life, but until the end of time.<sup>38</sup>

In her letters to her missionary brothers, she emphasised in many ways the apostolic and missionary dimen-



sion of the contemplative Carmelite life. Among other things, she stated: "You know that a Carmelite who would not be an apostle would separate herself from the goal of her vocation and would cease to be a daughter of the Seraphic Saint Teresa, who desired to give a thousand lives to save a single soul."<sup>39</sup> She therefore wanted to live every vocation,<sup>40</sup> but the effectiveness of evangelisation required her simply to fulfill the task of love; and she begged the saints to obtain for her twice their capacity for love.<sup>41</sup>

50. We have been called to Carmel, and therefore have been consecrated for mission. We have "the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God's providential action in history. This is the plan for the salvation and reconciliation of humanity."<sup>42</sup> From our sister Thérèse, we must learn the apostolic orientation of our Christian love; faith in the evangelising power of prayer; and the need for a spirituality that is incarnated in the realities of everyday life. Evangelisation is not merely information.

As children of God, we grow in love and in solidarity; evangelisation is the manifestation of this. We are called to experience, and to assume from this perspective, the pain and the anguish of our brothers and sisters. Thérèse accepted the trial of experiencing the doubts of unbelievers in order to obtain for them the grace of overcoming these doubts. She sat at the table of sinners and of those who refuse faith, and she suffered with them in their emptiness and in their darkness: "Your child begs pardon for her brothers. She accepts to eat the bread of sorrow as long as you desire it,- she does not wish to rise from this table filled with bitterness, at which poor sinners are eating, until the day set by you."<sup>43</sup> This, too, is a way of offering a spiritual response to the search for the sacred and to the longing for God which is always present in the human heart.<sup>44</sup>

51. This love also has a social dimension which obliges us, in the many ways that are specific to each vocation within the Carmelite family, to a service of integral promotion, fostering justice and peace throughout the world by means of the authentic human development of all people. To be effective, love for others must be expressed, in a way that is coherent with the needs of the contemporary world. Thus we are called to have a social aspect in our love because each

day the means of expressing individual love are shrinking. Our neighbour in need, is not the isolated individual, but rather the masses oppressed by unjust and dehumanising structures.

There is an urgent need for the presence of Christian love in the work of transforming and changing structures. Charity is stronger than divisions. In the struggle for a more just world, it helps us to overcome hatred which would in the end turn the oppressed into the oppressor. Only the love of Jesus, and the testimony of his life and of his doctrine, can lead to true fraternal reconciliation. The doctrine of the path of spiritual childhood is a tremendous force for social change in the face of the abuses of power in society.

### **Close to Mary of Nazareth**

52. Mary is the model of consecration and of discipleship, reminding us of the primacy of God's initiative and teaching us to accept grace. She teaches us "unconditional discipleship and diligent service."<sup>45</sup> In keeping with



the purest Carmelite tradition, Thérèse lived in the close presence of the Mother of Jesus. Before Vatican II she discovered the simple woman of Nazareth, pilgrim of faith and hope, Mother and model. She can be said to have lived her life by Mary's side.

53. Thérèse rejected those images of Mary which exalt her greatness without taking her earthly life into account: "For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to please me and do me any good, I must see her real life, not her invigined life. I am sure that her real life was very simple. Preachers show her to us as unapproachable, but they should present her as imitable, bringing out her virtues, saying that she lived by faith just like ourselves.. She is more Mother than Queen." <sup>46</sup>

Thérèse's last poem, dedicated to Mary, is titled "Why I love you, Mary". It is a journey through the pages of the gospel, where Thérèse discovered Mary's love for God and for others, her poverty, her contemplative silence, her simplicity, her faith, her hope, her receptivity and obedience in accepting the will of God. The gospel tells us who Mary was, and Therese's heart revealed to her, in her experience of daily life in communion with the Virgin, Mary's true personality.<sup>47</sup>

54. In the teachings of Thérèse of Lisieux, we find a path which leads us to a deepened and renewed Marian life, in the light of the gospel and of intimacy with Mary. The rediscovery of Mary, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, gives a more solid base to our devotion, our witness and our preaching. The entire history of our Order, from its earliest days on Mount Carmel, is imbued with Mary's presence.

Above all, Mary is the model of discipleship in faith and contemplation. As Thérèse experienced, Mary teaches us, most of all, the attitudes of Prayer: discernment, availability (the Annunciation); praise and gratitude for an that God does throughout history for the poor and the simple (the Magnificat); faith (the wedding at Cana); patient and contemplative expectation, keeping all things in her heart without the need to understand, until light dawns (finding Jesus in the temple); fidelity in times of trial (at the foot of the cross); communion and a sense of Church (praying with disciples).

#### **Prophetic witness in the face of challenge.**

55. Christians, and especially those in consecrated life, are called to give prophetic witness by proclaiming the gospel values and denouncing all that is



opposed to them. Pope John Paul II, highlighting the prophetic character of consecrated life "as a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God recalled the figure of Elijah, 'courageous prophet and friend of God,' as a model of the authentic prophet. In his description of Elijah, John Paul II says that Elijah lived in the presence of the Lord, "and contemplated his passing-by in silence; he interceded for the people and boldly announced God's will; he ... came to the defence of the poor against the powerful of the world."<sup>48</sup>

56. Seen from this perspective, Thérèse can be called a prophet of the new times. She has been described, and with good reason, as the "prophet of youth"; a "sign of hope; the "prophet of holiness as a vocation offered to everyone"; a "prophet of the actuality of redemption", emphasising the invisible power of love.<sup>49</sup> Thérèse, whose powerful desires marked her paschal

journey, has much to say to a searching and dissatisfied humanity.

In keeping with Carmelite tradition, Thérèse saw the prophet Elijah as a model for life. Not only was she drawn by the prophet's experience of God in the 'gentle breeze,<sup>50</sup> but also by his struggle against the prophets of Baal: 'After having shown us the illustrious origins of our Holy Order, after having compared us to the Prophet Elijah fighting against the priests of Baal, he declared, 'Times similar to those of Achab's persecution are about to begin again.' We seem to be flying already to martyrdom."<sup>51</sup>

57. In fidelity to our Carmelite vocation, we are called to bear prophetic witness, through lives that emphasise the primacy of God in the experience of God's presence at the heart of the world. We are called to an openness which enables us to discover God's presence in ways that are always new and surprising -- as Elijah did in the gentle wind -- and which will motivate us to commit ourselves to the service of our brothers and sisters to help them in their struggle for integral liberation. Fraternal life is itself prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realising it has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders. Moreover, "prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from consistency between proclamation and life."<sup>52</sup>

#### **A living and guiding presence**

58. The evangelical quality of Thérèse of Lisieux' experience and doctrine gives them permanent relevance. The simplicity, the trust, and the abandonment to God which Thérèse lived and proclaimed are capable of inspiring a commitment to justice and peace in the world."<sup>53</sup>

59. Thérèse's influence on the Church and on the world of today cannot be doubted. She knew this intuitively when she affirmed before dying, "I feel, especially, that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love him, of giving my little way to souls. If God answers my desires, my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth."<sup>54</sup>

#### **Conclusion Renewing our contemplative and apostolic life with our sister Thérèse.**

60. The centenary of our sister Thérèse's death is an

Our sister Thérèse points to the path that we must follow -- the path of going back to the gospel as the only way to live in true creative fidelity to our charism.



61. Thérèse teaches us the central importance of love, which simplifies and communicates the genuine freedom and liberation which lead to a mature Christian, religious and Carmelite identity. In a world filled with anguish and fear, she guides us towards trust and abandonment in the Lord who overcomes all difficulties. To our disembodied idealisms, she opposes a spiritual and evangelical realism, so that we may be true prophets of a God who is present, near and liberating.

As has been pointed out not only by those consecrated to contemplation, but also by those who work in the field of an evangelisation committed to human growth, development and liberation.<sup>56</sup> Thérèse's message is a challenge to the spirituality of today's Church. Spiritual childhood is an evangelical concept, which implies both awareness of the gift we have received of being sons and daughters of God, and the response that lead us to communion.

62. Brothers and sisters in Carmel, let us give thanks to the Lord for the gift of our sister Thérèse of Lisieux to the Church, to the world, and to Carmel. Let us experience her presence and her nearness as we celebrate the centenary of her death and as we continue witnessing to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. □

### Footnotes

1. VC 57. The following abbreviations are used in the text: VC = *Vita Consecrata*; GS = *Gaudium et Spes*; DV = *Dei Verbum*; R = *The Carmelite Rule* (article numbers refer to the O.Carm numeration followed by the OCD numeration in brackets).

2. L'Osservatore Romano, 5 January 1995, p.4.

3. VC 46.

4. VC 77.

5. VC, footnote 72.

6. S 22.

7. PUEBLA Document 196.

8. VC 57-58.

9. PUEBLA Document 1142

10. DV 25.

11. cf. R7 (8).

12. See *The Book of Her Life* 26:5.

13. *Ascent* 11 Ch 22.-5.

14. *Story of a Soul VIII (Manuscript A, 83V)*; cr. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 127.

15. Same as 14.

16. Same as 14.

17. cf. *Story of a Soul, X (Manuscript C 4r)*.

18. VC 94.

19. Same as 18.

20. cf. *Rule 14 (16)*.

21. *Story Of A Soul VIII (Manuscript A 83v)*.

22. See *The Book of her Life, Ch. 8:5*: 'For mental prayer, in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.'

23. Cf. *St. Teresa, The Book of Her Life, Ch. 8:5; The Way, Ch. 31:9*.

24. *Story of A Soul XI (Manuscript C 24v)*.

25. *Story of A Soul )a (Manuscript C 25rmv)*. -This definition of prayer opens the section on Prayer in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2559.

26. *Story Of A Soul IX (Manuscript B lr-v)*.

27. Letter 197, to Sr Marie of the Sacred Heart, 17-9-1896.

28. VC 17.

29. *Story of A Soul IX (manuscript B 3v)*.

30. Title of a book by Guy Gaucher.

31. *Story of A Soul VIII (manuscript A 80v)*.

32. cf. VC 24.

33. Id. 72.

34. cf. R 14 (16).

35. VC 24.

36. cf. *Story of a Soul X-XI (manuscript C llv-22v)*.

37. Earlier, in February 1994, the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* published a document on 'Fraternal Life in Community, which contains concrete and realistic directions for growth and development, as families gathered in the name of the Lord.'

38. cf. *Story of a Soul IX (Manuscript B 3r)*

39. Letter 198 to the Abbe Maurice Belliere, 21-10-1896.

40. cf. *Story of A Soul IX (Manuscript B 2v)*.

41. d. *Story of A Soul IX (Manuscript B 4r)*.

42. VC 73.

43. *Story of A Soul X (Manuscript C 6r)*.

44. cf. VC 103.

**The Washington Province of Discalced Carmelites**  
 invites all Secular Carmelites of our Province to a  
**Closing Celebration for the**  
**Centenary of the Death of St. Thérèse of Lisieux**  
 September 26-28, 1997  
 Washington, DC

**Tentative Schedule of Events:**

**Friday**

4:00 PM: Lecture  
 5:30 PM: Solemn Vespers in National Shrine  
 8:00 PM: Opera "Dialogues of the Carmelites"

**Saturday**

9 AM to noon: Optional lectures, exhibits, touring, etc.  
 3 PM: Solemn closing liturgy in National Shrine  
*Celebrant: James Cardinal Hickey*  
*Homilist: Bishop Patrick Ahern*  
 8 PM: New centenary documentary on St. Thérèse

**Sunday:** Mass and brunch at OCD friars

For further information on the program and places to stay in the Washington area,  
 write: Thérèse Centenary, 2131 Lincoln Road, NE, Washington, DC 20002.



45. VC 28.  
 46. Last Conversations, 21-8-1897  
 47. Poems, 49 (p.152).  
 48. VC 84.  
 49. Cf. J.M. LUSTIGER, *La petite Thérèse, 'la plus grande sainte des temps modernes,' Homelie a Lisieux pour la fete de sainte Thérèse, 25 September 1983.*  
 50. Cf. *Story of a Soul IV and VIII (Manuscript A 36v; 76v).*  
 51. *Letter 192 to Mme Guerin, 16-7-1896.*  
 52. VC 85.  
 53. In connection with this, we have the testimony of a North American priest who was imprisoned for protesting against the fact that troops in El Salvador were being trained in the USA to kill their brothers and sisters. In 1985 he wrote, from his prison cell: 'As a modern soul, struggling for union with God, I feel that the spirituality of St Thérèse (of Lisieux) is as valid today as it was in 1897 A spirituality for all times, for all ages. I wonder what transformation would take place in my own heart, and in the heart of the world, if simplicity, trust and self-surrender to God were taken seriously. The more clearly this modern' soul (his own) sees the

- reality of the modern world he is living in today, the more convincing is St. Thérèse's way of seeking union with God and justice and peace in the world. '(ROY BOURGEOISE, Maryknoll priest letter from a federal cell, 1985. Quoted by C Ackerman and J. Haley, in *Reinterpreting Thérèse of Lisieux for Today*, in *Spiritual Life*, v.35, n.2, Summer 1989, pg.98.)  
 54. Last Conversations, 17-7-1897; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 956.  
 55. VC 110.  
 56. VC 110

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