

## THE “LITTLE WAY” OF SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

### SIMPLICITY

**Mt 10:16:** “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents & **simple** as doves.” The word that’s used there in the Greek text for “simple” is ἀμέγαλος [ah-care-ay-os] – it means “pure or innocent or harmless or unmixed”. It’s the same word that the Apostle Paul uses at the end of the letter to the Romans, when he says in **Rom 16:19:** “I want you to be wise as to what is good, & simple [ah-care-ay-os] as to what is evil”.

Typically **in creatures**, we say that **the more complex they are**, the more perfect they are – like a bird is more perfect than a plant, & person is more perfect than a rock or an animal, for example. **In the spiritual order, the reverse is true:** simplicity in the spiritual order is closer to perfection than complexity is. One of God’s attributes is that He’s perfectly simple. We explained that a little bit in a homily that we gave a few months ago.

In the **spiritual life**, simplicity is opposed to deceit, to double-dealing, to hypocrisy & to duplicity. When Our Lord said of Nathanael: “Here is a true Israelite. There’s no duplicity in him” (**Jn 1:47**), that was actually a compliment – it means that Nathanael was a man of integrity – he had a simplicity of soul that the patriarch Jacob lacked.

So if simplicity in the spiritual life is closer to perfection, than it’s no wonder that **simplicity characterized St. Therese’s spiritual life**. And, if you think about it, simplicity has to belong to the way of Spiritual Childhood ... why? b/c **children are simpler than adults** ... they’re simple in their thoughts & words & actions, they’re more straight-forward & pure & honest than adults are. That’s one of the reasons why little children are so precious to Our Lord: b/c of their innocence & simplicity. And that’s why **the corruption of children** – the corruption of their innocence, of their minds & of their hearts - is such a grave scandal.

Simplicity, from a Theresian point-of-view, first of all means **considering all things & all events in their relationship to ... what? To God** – essentially seeing everything from a supernatural perspective. Everything, in some form or fashion, comes from the hand of God, & so everything needs to be seen in that light & offered back to Him. Simplicity means **accepting** the joys & the reliefs & the difficulties & the hardships & the sufferings that come our way & **offering them up** to God as prayers of thanksgiving or petition. Our difficulties & struggles are important to God! St. Paul says to us **Rom 12:1:** “I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God, you spiritual worship”. God sends us some trial or suffering, & He wants us to send it back to Him in the form of a prayer, in the form of a sacrificial offering. In this way, we share in the joys & sufferings of Our Lord & of Our Lady & we do what St. Paul says in **Col 1:24**, [sometimes you’ll talk w/ Protestants who say “Jesus did it all” ... share w/ them this verse:]

“I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, & in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the Church”. So we help in the work of redemption when we offer back to God whatever trials or joys that He sends us.

We can think of the spiritual life like a **tennis match** ... we're on one side of the court, & the Lord's on the other side. He serves the ball, & we have to respond ... & there's a back & forth, there's a volley ... &, in that back & forth – the ball comes to us, we send it back to Him, He sends it back to us ... in that volley, **we grow in our skill at playing tennis**. In the spiritual life ... between what Our Lord sends us & our responses to that is how we grow spiritually. So, if you want to carry that image a bit further & **marianize it**, maybe we're more comfortable **playing doubles** ... so that's when we consecrate ourselves to Our Lady ... then we play doubles w/ Her. It's the Heavenly Father & Our Lord on the one side, & us & Our Lady on the other side. Between you & me, w/ Our Lady on our side, I'm confident that Our Lord will let us win! He has a weakness for His Mother!

**Regarding simplicity:** the soul that's **spiritually simple** – or **spiritually pure** - sees **the extraordinary in the ordinary** ... they appreciate simple things & don't have a need or much of a desire to fill themselves with pleasures & diversions. And, when they try to do those things – *meaning when they try to fill their time & their lives w/ pleasures & distractions* - they almost instantly regret it! Spiritually simple souls know that they aren't made for the world! Also, **the simple soul has a spiritual life that's simple** ... they go straight to God as a child would go to their loving parent ... they don't need to complicate things. **St. John Vianney** said that the best way to go to God is to go straight – like a cannon ball, he said! That's what simple souls do. Children who have loving parents know that they can go straight to them with things ... that's how we're supposed to be, spiritually. **St. Therese** said: **“I love only simplicity & have a dislike for what is contrary to it”**. And even her sisters said that **everything was simple & natural with her**.

For lay people, but also for religious & priests, **perfection** can be portrayed as a **high, complicated mountain** that only very few people can climb. **[book of Tanqueray!]** St. Therese didn't see it that way. She wrote: **“Perfection seems easy to me. I realize that it's sufficient that we acknowledge our nothingness & abandon ourselves like a child into the arms of our good Lord”**.

According to her, **in order to be a saint**, it's sufficient **1)** to be little, **2)** to do what's pleasing to Our Lord, & **3)** to have confidence in Him. Those are the main ingredients ... **the sacraments & prayer & the works of mercy** are, of course, part of that – they're part of “doing what's pleasing to God” ... **but in order to be a saint, the focus needs to be where?** It needs to be on the Lord, not on us – that's the key: “Focus on Him, not on me!”

Here's another quote from our saint: **“Holiness does not consist in this or that practice, but it is a certain disposition of the heart which makes us humble & small as we rest in God's arms ... which makes us realize our weakness but, at the same time, gives us confidence to the point of audacity in the goodness of God as our Father”**.

So let's look at how St. Therese practiced this simplicity in her spiritual life & in her day-to-day life.

## SIMPLICITY & PRAYER.

How did simplicity play out in her prayer life? **Listen to her describe her prayer life:** “I don’t have the energy to hunt for beautiful prayers that are found in books. Not knowing which ones I ought to choose, I act like children who cannot read. I say simply to the good Lord what I want to tell Him, w/o constructing nice sentences, & He always understands me. For me, prayer is a lifting up of my heart. It’s a simple glance heavenwards. It’s a cry of gratitude & of love, in the midst of trials as well as amidst joys. It’s something great, something supernatural which dilates the soul & unites me w/ Jesus.”

So prayer, for St. Therese, wasn’t, first & foremost, about **“duty”** or **“obligation”** – it was first & foremost about **“relationship”** ... having a living, breathing relationship w/ the One who truly loves us.

In general, it seems that St. Therese **avoided explaining to God in detail** her own intentions & the intentions that were recommended to her ... **why?** because having a **litany of intentions** was for her a way of complicating things. **“Simple souls don’t need complicated means,”** she said. So prayer shouldn’t always be a litany of intentions. If we were to **go to our parents always just asking them for things**, or telling them what we want ... **how would you describe that type of relationship?** Pretty superficial. Prayer is mainly about spending time with the One who loves us the most – sharing our lives & our heart w/ Him ... & He, in turn, does the same – He shares His life & His heart with us. That’s how good, intimate relationships work – both in the natural order & in the supernatural order. **So, for some of us, prayer is actually where we begin to learn how to have an intimate relationship w/ someone.** Some people never got that when they were growing up ... & God wants to give it to us through prayer, through learning to share our lives w/ Him.

**Regarding prayer intentions:** one suggestion for us might be to have a **book of intentions**, & we add names & intentions to that book, so that we don’t feel like we have to rattle them all off every time we pray. That’s just a suggestion. Or, if there’s an intention that’s really on our heart, it’s good to bring that to the Lord [He might be the One who put that intention on our heart] ... but we don’t need to feel that we have to go through an entire list of intentions every day.

One of St. Therese’s prayers was that she would ask the Lord to **“Draw her”** to Himself. She writes: **“To ask to be drawn means that we desire to be united intimately to the object which captivates our heart. I ask Jesus to draw me into the flames of His love, to unite me so intimately to Himself that He truly lives & acts in me”**.

Her thinking was that, if the Lord draws her closer to Himself, then all the those people whom she loved & desired to pray for would be drawn closer to Him at the same time ... it’s like a **spiritual, magnetic force**, if that imagery helps you. And **Therese’s thinking makes sense** ... when you think about it. **Wherever the parent goes, they bring their children with them.** “If I’m going to the grocery store, I’m bringing my son w/ me ... or if I’m at the Vatican, & I’m going to greet the Holy Father at his general audience, then my son’s going to be very close to the Pope that day because he’s coming w/ me.” If we go closer to God in our prayer life, we’re bringing w/ us all those people whom we want to pray for & who’ve asked for our prayers. This is essentially St. Therese’s approach ... that’s a big part of what it means to be

a spiritual mother or a spiritual father to someone: “I grow closer to Jesus & to Our Lady, & I bring with me all my spiritual children.”

Also, typically, **Therese didn't specify to whom she wanted the merits of her prayers & works to go to.** Here's what she says: “I cannot force myself to say, ‘My God, this is for the Church ... give this to Peter, give that to Paul,’ The good Lord knows well what to do w/ my merits. I have given Him everything in order to please Him.” “When I pray for my brother missionaries, I don't offer my sufferings, but say simply, ‘My God, give them what I myself would like to receive’.” So the merits of her prayers & works ... she didn't worry about who gets what ... like you have to do when **writing out a will**, for example – you have to think about “who gets what”. As far as merits go, St. Therese just gave it all to the Lord ... because the parent [in this case, God] knows better what to do with those things than the child [in this case, St. Therese] does.

Now, hearing some of these things, someone may be thinking to themselves: **“It can't all be this simple!?”** ... well, yes, it can. That's the whole point of the Little Way.

**[This is one of my favorites]** What about **distractions in prayer?** St. Therese didn't get bent out of shape about them. A wandering imagination, thoughts & images that come out of nowhere ... the sense perception of our environment ... Therese didn't get bent out of shape about these things. Fr. Jamart, in his book, says that “she accepted everything that came along, out of love for God, even outlandish thoughts”. On our part, we should make an effort **to not be willfully distracted** ... but involuntary & even habitual distractions shouldn't discourage us or worry us. To a novice who worried about her distractions, St. Therese said: “I, too, have many distractions, but as soon as I notice them, I pray for the persons who occupy my imagination & in that way they draw profit from my distractions.”

One of the sisters complained to her that **she wasn't able to direct her will often to God.** Here's the saint's response to that one: “That ‘direction’ is not necessary for those who are entirely dedicated to our Lord. No doubt, it's a good thing to recollect our mind, but we should do that gently, for constraint does not glorify the good Lord. He is well acquainted w/ the nice thoughts & the elegant expressions of love which we would like to address to Him, but He's satisfied w/ our desires. **Is He not our Father & are we not His little children?**”

I hear her say things like that, & I think to myself that St. Therese would have been **one of the greatest spiritual directors.** Supernatural, concrete, & practical all at once! Also ... **see how important it is to take to heart that God is a loving Father? It takes a lot of pressure off of us when we allow God to be the loving Father that He is!**

**What about “prayer” & “mystical experiences”?** St. Therese didn't have a desire for **great mystical experiences.** Sometimes the desire for extraordinary things or experiences is more of a sign of spiritual immaturity than of spiritual maturity. St. Therese said that she preferred **“the monotony of an obscure sacrifice”** to all the ecstasies she could experience. **Question: Why would she say that?** Because she

knew that holiness doesn't consist in great mystical gifts or experiences ... it consists in conforming your will & your actions to the will of God. **Holiness isn't flashy ... it's simple!**

On the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, a novice said that **if Therese were to die on that day**, after receiving Holy Communion, it would mean much less suffering for her. The saint replied: "Oh, that would not be like my Little Way at all. It would mean that I am abandoning that Way in my own death! To die of love after my Communion! **Little souls would then be unable to imitate me in this.** In my Little Way, all things are common & ordinary. It's necessary that all that I do, little souls should be able to do also".

One day sb commented to her about **the interior light** that certain souls receive concerning heaven. How do you think St. Therese responded to that observation? "As for myself," she answered, "I have only lights that **make me see my nothingness**, but this does me more good than the lights concerning matters of faith." "I have only lights that make me see my nothingness," she says. **It's good to see our own nothingness** ... it's humbling & freeing, & it gives God room to fill us with His grace. "Nothingness" means "in comparison to God". That's the quote we often give from **St. Catherine of Siena's Dialogue**, when the Lord says to her: "If you know these 2 things, you have beatitude in your grasp: You are she who is not, I am He who is". As for St. Therese, she only wanted to walk in **the darkness of faith** & this, also, is what she taught to "little souls". She said: "It is so sweet, to be able to serve the good Lord during the night of trial. We have only this present life on earth when we can live a life of faith."

With the "**darkness of faith**", she's talking about 1) not having extraordinary experiences, or visions or locutions or things of that nature, but she's also talking about what spiritual writers call "**the dark night of the senses**" & "**the dark night of soul**". So when St. Therese says that she was content to walk in the darkness of faith ... what a different approach that is from always seeking consolations & sensational experiences! **It's also a lot more prudent & wise to live the Christian life the way that she points out.** Also, when we seek consolations or sensational experiences, a lot of times we're really **seeking ourselves** more than seeking the Lord.

However obscure faith may be in itself, nevertheless, it is a true light that guides us on our journey here in this life. **St. John of the Cross** said: "*Faith contains God & gives Him to us. God is hidden in the obscurity of faith*". That's why St. Therese preferred not to "see God" in this life, but she preferred to remain in the night of faith ... in contrast w/ **those who are anxious to see & understand everything.** She said that not desiring to see anything is in conformity w/ the spirit of the Little Way ... why? because we walk by faith, not by sight, as St. Paul says in **2 Cor 5:7** ... & also **b/c not desiring to "see" or "understand everything" or to experience extraordinary things shows ... what?** It shows a greater trust in God.

**Little children are naturally trustworthy** ... that's one of their problems! You have to teach them to keep away from strangers b/c they don't know that not everyone is trustworthy. Trust has to be earned. That being said, **in the spiritual life, trust is essential** ... so the natural trust of a child needs to become a supernatural trust in God, who's completely trustworthy.

So, backing up for a minute regarding extraordinary experiences: **private revelations** can be true & helpful, but they shouldn't be a consuming focus of ours. We are called to walk in the light of the faith & also we're called to persevere in faith when **spiritual darkness** is inside of us or when it's outside of us, for that matter.

### **SIMPLICITY IN HER ACTIONS & IN THE PRACTICE OF RENUNCIATION & PENANCE.**

Therese's Way focuses mostly on actions that are ordinary & commonplace – things that won't be a source of envy for other people. Yes, **we give God the liberty to act in extraordinary ways** in our lives if He wants to ... & St. Therese would grant Him that freedom too ... but, again, the extraordinary or sensational things weren't her focus. When you read the biographies of some saints, like St. Veronica Giuliani or St. Pio, it seems as though extraordinary things were frequent for them [at least it seems that way]. Not so w/ St. Therese. [I think one of her **complaints about some of the lives of the saints** were that they were written in a way that didn't seem "real" enough or "accessible" enough to us. She would have preferred if the biographies also talked about the defects of the saints!]

She considered herself **"a very little soul, one who can only offer insignificant things to God"**. She said: **"God has no need for brilliant deeds, for beautiful thoughts ... It's neither intelligence nor talent He's looking for on earth. He loves simplicity. We would indeed deserve pity,"** she said, **"if we were required to do great things."**

So that's important to keep in mind: that **God looks for love** ... not talent or intelligence or wealth or external beauty ... **He looks for someone to love Him** ... just like we do!

**Some people are capable of doing great deeds** ... however, St. Therese would say that greatness in God's eyes generally comes in doing ordinary deeds with love - & even w/ great love - for God. So, as a **sidenote** to that, generally speaking, **it's the depth of our union w/ God that counts the most**. Someone asked me if it's more meritorious or more beneficial to pray to God on your knees in Church, or to pray to Him while you're feeding the cattle or sweeping up the house ... my answer was that it depends upon how strong, how intimate your relationship with the Lord is. So **sanctity is not based on external circumstances**; it's based on the internal working of grace in our minds & hearts, & our cooperation with that grace. When we do what Our Lord says, when we love God *"w/ all our heart, w/ all our soul, w/ all our strength, & w/ all our mind,"* as He says in **Lk 10:27** ... & we love our neighbor as ourselves ... that's greatness, in God's eyes ... that's when our prayers become very powerful.

Again, quoting her: **"I don't despise profound thoughts which nourish the soul and unite us to God, but I have understood for a long time that we do not need to build on such foundations, nor does perfection consist in receiving many lights. The most sublime thoughts are valueless without works."** So she's reiterating there what St. James says: *"Faith w/o works is dead"* (**Jas 2:20**) ... & what St. Paul says in **1 Cor 13:2**: *"If I have the gift of prophecy & comprehend all mysteries & all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing"*.

St. Therese says: **"God made me realize that in order to attain true glory we do not have to accomplish brilliant works, but we must hide ourselves and practice virtue in such a way that our left hand doesn't**

**know what our right hand does.” Q: What does that mean?** That phrase comes from the Gospel, when Jesus says, regarding good deeds: *“Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt 6:3)*. That means that we do good w/o telling others about it ... it could also mean to not even reflect upon the good deeds that we do ... or, that it should become so 2<sup>nd</sup> nature to us to good deeds that we don’t even think about it because it’s habitual.

In short, **having your left hand not know what your right hand is doing** is a way of saying that we need to forget ourselves – self-forgetfulness in the good that we’re doing. **The opposite of “self-focus” is “self-forgetfulness”**. We shouldn’t do good so that others will notice us or thank us ... we should do good spontaneously, like Jesus did ... or we should do good only so that Our Heavenly Father will notice us.

St. Therese did everything simply to please Jesus. She made acts of virtue & renunciations as circumstances dictated, & she offered to God the “little nothings” which alone remain to a soul that lives in spiritual dryness.

She wrote: *“I have no other way to prove my love than to **strew flowers**, that is, to use every opportunity for making little sacrifices, be they a look or a word ... to use all the most insignificant things & do them out of love ... Hence, I pluck every flower I find on my way, for Jesus. And then, as I strew my flowers [meaning her little sacrifices] before Him, I desire to sing, although I have had to pluck them among thorns. And the sharper & longer the thorns, the sweeter is my song.”* So, yes, she uses flowery, poetic language ... but she’s as tough as iron or steel ... she’s not afraid of suffering or of sacrifices.

**Note:** If you’re not sure about **what little sacrifices you** can make to the Lord ... ask Him! He’ll let you know, one way or another. And if you are sure about what kind of sacrifices you can make ... you should still ask Him! ... if, for no other reason, than the fact that He likes it when you ask Him questions. Then He feels like He’s more a part of your life!

**Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me ...” what must they do?** “they must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, & follow me” (Lk 9:23). [that verse is a summary of the 3 stages of the sp. life]

Talking about **little renunciations**, she says: *“Would **religious life** be meritorious w/o these sacrifices? No! On the contrary, these small crosses constitute all our joy. They are commonplace, but they prepare our hearts to accept the great crosses when such is the will of our good Master.”* **So the small crosses prepare us for the bigger ones.** And there she’s illustrating what Our Lord said: *“He who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; & he who is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much” (Lk 16:10)*.

We need to remember that **crosses are sanctifying** ... they are what help us be conformed to Christ.

To go back to something which we mentioned a few minutes ago ... we often neglect or underestimate **the little sacrifices & the small, ordinary acts of daily virtue**. We hold important works in esteem and we admire the big and the grandiose & the difficult tasks. Fr. Jamart says that, by **this somewhat artificial**

**standard of values** [esteeming the great things, not esteeming the small things], spiritually, we lose much and show but little love. Nothing is insignificant or negligible in the service of God; **the value of an action comes from 2 things: the intention** with which we perform it and **the love** that animates it. “Little things done out of love,” said Therese, “are those that charm the Heart of Christ. ...”. On the contrary, the most brilliant deeds, when done without love, are spiritually empty.

It’s true that **the greater importance and difficulty of a work**, the degree of renunciation it requires of us can be the occasion for greater merit. Nevertheless, the true value of such actions springs from the **quality of the love** that animates them.

**The Little Way is about sanctifying our ordinary life** – renouncing ourselves in little things, renouncing our wills, practicing the ordinary virtues: patience, kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness. One thing that St. Therese didn’t like about reading the lives of the saints [which we already mentioned] was that their stories were filled with extraordinary happenings ... so reading them can make holiness seem impossible. The Little Way stresses that holiness is for everyone & it can be achieved by being faithful to your normal, ordinary duties in life.

It’s no small thing to be virtuous & to remain faithful everyday to the simple actions that make up our daily duties ... to accept day in and day out the sacrifices that are constantly asked of us. Such an existence is often lived amidst **dryness of soul**, without a lot of spiritual consolations or great illuminations. **A lot of times, we can feel like the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years!** And sometimes we don’t even feel like we have anything to offer to the Lord. St. Therese said: “If I felt that I had nothing to offer to Jesus, I would offer Him that nothing.”

The little “nothings” that we offer to Jesus & the insignificant acts & sacrifices faithfully made, are a true martyrdom according to St. Therese. **But, of course, St. Therese’s life wasn’t all ordinary. Q: Can anyone remember any extraordinary things that happened to her?** *Christmas miracle, vision of her dad, Our Lady of the smile, meeting the Pope, a couple of special dreams ... also* → She underwent **extraordinary sufferings**, both in body and in soul, and her last years on earth were like a continuous ascent of Calvary. It remains true, nevertheless, that the texture of her life in the world and even in the cloister was woven of ordinary actions that are in the reach of all of us. So, if we don’t become saints, then it won’t be because we didn’t have the opportunity to become saints! The opportunity’s in front of us every day, every moment of the day.

#### **THERESE GREW IN SIMPLICITY.**

In her autobiography, St. Therese says that, at first, she didn’t understand the great value of simplicity. That makes sense ... **we learn through experience & God enlightens us progressively** as we go along. She wrote: “Jesus doesn’t like to show us everything all at once ... He ordinarily give light little by little”. **Q: Why doesn’t Our Lord show us or tells us everything all at once?** I think, in part, because He likes to surprise us.



Fr. Jamart says that **simplicity** holds the middle course b/t 2 extremes ... **Q: What would those 2 extremes be? b/t rigidity on the one hand & laxity on the other** – between destroying the flesh & catering to the flesh. Spiritual simplicity is the “via media” ... it’s really a gift of God, when you think about it.

Enlightened by the HS, Therese **changed her views regarding penance & mortification**. Reading of the lives of the saints, she was first inclined to imitate their example. **[That’s what many young, zealous religious do!]** Plus, a number of her religious sisters in the convent were devoted to the practice of extraordinary penances [so there’s a certain peer pressure there as well]. But **Therese actually fell ill** because she had worn too long a small cross which had sharp iron points on it ... & so she realized that the austerities of certain saints weren’t meant for her, nor for those who were to walk in the Way of Childhood. **Q: So if her focus was no longer going to be on extraordinary penances, what they of penances do you think she was going to focus on? Interior mortification** - mortification of the mind & of the heart – became her focus ... so she went to war against herself in the spiritual sphere by means of renunciation & hidden sacrifices. **[Q: What kind of examples might that be?]**

We were once visiting the **Visitation Sisters** in Massachusetts, near Stockbridge – those are the sisters founded by St. Jane Frances de Chantal & St. Francis de Sales ... exteriorly, they have a beautiful convent & very nice things. We commented on the nice things that they had their – furniture & silverware & all that stuff - & the sister serving us said that St. Francis de Sales wanted the sisters to have nice things, nice accommodations ... but interiorly, he wanted them to be stripped bare! – meaning that their interior was to belong entirely to God ... & that’s how St. Therese began to understand penance & mortification. In that spirit, instead of focusing on external penances, she practiced self-forgetfulness & avoided seeking herself in anything.

**So we ask ourselves: which is harder:** to wear a small, iron cross with sharp points on it, or to detach yourself from your own will, from your own way of wanting things done ... or detaching yourself from worrying about people-pleasing or worrying about what others think or say about you? My guess is that it’s easier to wear the iron cross!

In a letter to Father Belliere she wrote: “I know that there are saints who spent their lives practicing extraordinary mortifications . . . but, after all, there are many mansions in the house of our heavenly Father. Jesus has told us so and that is why I follow the way He has traced out for me. . . **In those extraordinary penances there easily creeps in that which is inspired by nature rather than by virtue, whereas, in the hidden struggle of interior renunciation, nature cannot get such a hold on us and we can more easily attain humility and peace.**”

**Fr. Jamart** says: “we know that our Saint here teaches sound doctrine. Are there not numbers of persons who imagine that they are mortified because they practice bodily penances, while they fail to renounce themselves in the ordinary things of daily life or in the life of a religious community? Such persons are often lacking in humility of mind and are unwilling to obey. They don’t practice self-forgetfulness nor do they practice charity towards their neighbor, but they seemingly try to lead a spiritual life. Some may even

be religious for many years and, yet, never succeed in renouncing their self-love; and they may never be able to make a serious resolution of forgetting themselves once and for all.”

**[Repeat]** Remember Our Lord’s words: *“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, & follow me” (Lk 9:23)*. So we have to deny ourselves ... spiritually, that’s key.

Therese tells us that at the beginning of her religious life, **wishing to mortify herself at meals**, she mingled bitter herbs with the foods she had a particular liking for, or she tried to think of things that would make her have a disgust for them while she was eating them. But **“Later”**, she said, **“I found that it was more in conformity with the virtue of simplicity to offer them to the good Lord and thank Him for the things which I found to my taste”**. She adds, however—**“but when something was lacking, I was much more satisfied, because I was then truly giving up something.”**

Therese also rejected mortifications that might **interfere with the attention she gave to God**. One day when someone spoke to her about a priest who suffered greatly from a skin irritation & yet refused to alleviate the pain, she remarked: **“I would not have been able to practice that sort of restraint. I prefer to practice mortification in a manner that leaves my mind more free (for God).”**

Mother Agnes [**her sister Pauline**] shared Therese’s approaches to sacrifices when she said: “The best rule is that we should follow what love inspires us to do from moment to moment, w/ the sole desire of pleasing the good Lord in everything He asks of us.”

**Nevertheless**, while accepting Therese’s rule of prudence which takes account of our weakness and makes us practice a simplicity that favors “little souls,” we must **avoid a softness** that would go counter to essential principles of the Little Way. **Discretion and simplicity must never lead us to spare our nature in a manner that would falsify the Little Way**. As Mother Agnes explains it, the supernatural spirit, the love of Jesus, must always remain the rule of all our conduct.

At the beginning of our supernatural life, and even later, some may not feel drawn to mortification nor have the courage to practice penance as it should be practiced ... even w/ our good dispositions. So, Fr. Jamart says, “with a heart turned towards God and docile to His inspirations, let us, in all simplicity, give what we are able to give Him.” **Think of the example of the widow w/ 2 mites (Mk 12 & Lk 21) ... she gave all she could**. If we’re generous and faithful, and if God expects more of us, He’ll give us the light and strength that are necessary to accomplish more as far as penances go.

#### **THERESE’S SIMPLICITY IN ILLNESS.**

It often happens in religious communities that the sick, **considering that they are a burden** to those who are taking care of them, **and a financial strain** to their community, yield to anxiety and fear that their illness might be prolonged. [Of course, that doesn’t just happen in religious communities!] Therese also experienced such thoughts and feelings. But when God had established her in the practice of **abandonment to His Divine Will**, she understood that it was more simple to accept whatever God sent her: **“I am willing to be ill all my life, if that pleases the good Lord,”** she wrote. **“I even consent to live a**

very long life (in this condition).” And regarding **medication**, she confessed: “I grieved much because I had to take medicine that was expensive, but now, that no longer bothers me. Quite the contrary, for I have read that those who are doing good to us benefit by their charity.” So, because of this, Therese asked in all simplicity for everything she needed but for nothing more. [So Therese realized that even the **benefactors for the sisters** benefited from having to pay for her expensive medication. It’s the same thing w/ us friars: our benefactors are the beneficiaries of our prayers & sacrifices – so God pays them back spiritually for the material help they give us.]

#### **THERESE’S SIMPLICITY IN ACCEPTANCE OF JOYS.**

In the Little Way, one has only God in view. All our actions are intended to give Him pleasure. [That’s how Therese said it.] We must lose sight of ourselves and refuse to become attached to anything whatsoever. [So we **detach** from things & persons & our own will & understanding, & we **attach** ourselves completely to God.] **It would seem to follow, then, that we wouldn’t be free to enjoy even legitimate pleasures.** No, that’s not true. That would be contrary to Therese’s teaching, particularly in the practice of simplicity.

Therese knew too well the Heart of our heavenly Father and the Heart of Christ, who Himself did not reject earthly pleasures ... she never thought that God wants to draw us away from the few small joys we meet in this valley of tears. “**The good Lord,**” she said on one occasion, “**Who loves us so much, already suffers enough because He sees himself obliged to leave us on earth to go through our time of trial, and He must be glad when He sees us smile.**” “It seems that if we can say that our sacrifices are like locks of hair that captivate the heart of Christ, we must likewise say that our joys affect Him in a like manner. In order that this may be so, it suffices that we refrain from indulging in a selfish sort of happiness, and offer to our Spouse the small joys He strews on the path of our life to delight our souls and raise them even to Himself.” So the only condition Therese demands of us when we accept joys is that we take no selfish complacency in them, but we use them as means to raise our hearts to God.

So the pleasing things in this life should be **like a ladder that helps us climb up to God**, the Source of all goodness.

Therese herself accepted with simplicity whatever joys God sent her, whether they were occasioned by **spiritual favors, by her family or by contemplating nature. She accepted pleasures “out of love” just as she accepted sufferings.** She would have considered it a fault against simplicity, if she had refused to enjoy the charms of **nature** or of **music** or of **art**, or of whatever moved her to thoughts of love and gratitude towards God.

Towards the end of her life, speaking about the joys of the heart, she explained that **she had mistakenly deprived herself of them at the beginning of her religious life**, but she no longer felt it necessary to refuse them “because her soul was strengthened by Him Who was truly her only love.” She said: “**I am glad to recognize that when we love God our heart expands, and we can give incomparably more tender love to those who are dear to us than when our love is selfish and barren. . . Love is fed by and develops from sacrifice. The more we deprive ourselves of natural satisfaction, the stronger & the more disinterested**

our love (for others) becomes”. So, in a word, the more we say “no” to our selfishness & self-centered ways of thinking & acting, the freer we become, & the more profound our love becomes as well. And then the joys of this life really will help us climb up to the good God. St. James says: *“Every good & perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”* (Jas 1:17).

#### SIMPLICITY IN REGARDS TO GOD’S GIFTS.

Therese was simple in the matter of Gods gifts. The humiliations to which He had subjected her had so deepened her humility that, as she said, **if all creatures stooped down to her, admired her and covered her with praise, all this could not add one bit of false joy to the true joy she felt when remembering that, in God’s eyes, she was but a poor little nothing – a poor, little, lovable nothing!**

Therese felt that she was too little to be vain & that she was **quite incapable of constructing nice sentences & phrases** to make others believe that she was very humble.

Someone asked me recently **if it’s prideful to acknowledge the good things** that God has done in our lives, or the gifts that He has given us. **Q: Can anyone guess what my response to that was? [hint: it was a biblical response]** – *“The Almighty has done great things in me, & holy is His name”* (Lk 1:49).

Therese herself preferred to admit in all simplicity that the Almighty had done great things in this child of His divine Mother and that **the greatest thing He had done for her was to show her her littleness, her incapacity.**

To acknowledge God’s gifts is not pride, but it is pride to attribute the merits to ourselves. On the other hand, Therese was fully conscious of the **obligations** that accompany the gift of graces. *“To whom much is given, much is required”* (Lk 12:48). She wrote to Father Belhere: **“Do not imagine that humility prevents me from acknowledging the gifts of God. I know He has done great things in me and I joyfully recall it in song every day. But I also remember that more love is required of those who have received more. Hence, I do my best to make my life one act of love. Instead of making me vain, the remembrance of God’s gifts to me leads me to Him.”**

Therese affirmed that **she was able to enjoy without trouble or fear the expressions of love and confidence which she received**, because she referred all these gifts of God to God. Moreover, she added, **“if it pleases Him to make me appear better than I am, that’s not my concern. He’s free to do what He likes.”** So Therese wasn’t interested in how she appeared in other people’s eyes ... only in how she appeared in God’s eyes ... &, in His eyes, she was very small & very lovable at the same time.

#### SIMPLICITY IN HOW SHE CORRECTED HER FAULTS.

Finally, she practiced simplicity in the way in which she acknowledged her defects and endeavored to correct them. *“How easy it is,”* she said to Celine, *“to please Jesus. We have merely to love Him without paying attention to ourselves, without examining too intently our defects. With one glance towards Jesus comes the realization of our own wretchedness, and then everything’s in order once more.”*

As her duties in religious life became more numerous, so, also, were there more occasions for imperfections, but she didn't worry about them because her will was centered on God. She even felt that she was growing closer to God in spite of her faults.

St. Therese doesn't say that we must not be on our guard against our faults - otherwise, we couldn't correct them. But she does maintain that **we mustn't psychoanalyze our conduct, weigh our imperfections with anxious care, nor lose time brooding over our wretchedness or beating ourselves up.** [Those are all unhealthy things ... & signs that we're focusing too much on ourselves.] Having recognized our faults, she advises, let us humbly regret them and, prompted by love, make reparation for them. Love is our best means for correcting our faults, & it's also our best safeguard against future failing.

#### **SIMPLICITY IN ORDINARY WORKS & EXTRAORDINARY SITUATIONS.**

Sometimes we are faced with extraordinary situations. Therese did perform both ordinary and extraordinary actions and she had the opportunity to make great sacrifices. So her Little Way is really practical for all situations and for all kinds of work. She said that if she should live to be 80 and should be burdened with great responsibilities, she would, nevertheless, remain as little as she was at the eve of her death. **Pius XII** declared that "the Little Way is as suitable for those who bear the heaviest responsibilities for souls, as for 'little ones,' " while **Pius XI** proclaimed "that there is no one who is not able and is not obliged to follow it."

Simplicity, then, extends to all circumstances of life, whether it requires great deeds or ordinary actions.

Therese had practiced the way of simplicity so perfectly that most of the sisters were unaware of the perfection she had attained. A few days before the death of our Saint, one of the sisters said: "Sister Therese of the Child Jesus will die soon and I wonder what our Mother will be able to say about her after her death. She will find it difficult, for this little sister, however friendly she was, has certainly not done anything that is worth re-telling."

Hearing that may astonish us, but it proves to what extent Therese's virtues had remained hidden and the sublimity of her life had remained unnoticed. Nevertheless, all the members of her community honored Therese with an esteem and a veneration which they gave to no others.

Therese had received enlightenment from above and had understood the excellence of the Way of Simplicity. This way, she knew, is not merely free from illusion, but it leads to a holiness that is in the reach of all. We know to what degree of sanctity it led her. We have every reason, therefore, to practice simplicity in our relations with God.